



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 23 March 2016

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 23 March 2016

*[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 10:00]*

## Motion of Condolence

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The first item of business is a motion of condolence. A public book of condolence has been made available in the main hall of the Parliament for members, staff and the general public to sign. This morning I have written to Siegfried Bracke, President of the House of Representatives in the Belgian Parliament, to express all our condolences. Our flags have been flying at half-mast since yesterday afternoon and will remain so today as a further mark of respect.

10:00

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Presiding Officer, I am sure that the motion of condolence will be supported by every member of our Parliament.

The terror attacks on Brussels yesterday morning were appalling, devastating and cowardly. They follow the recent attacks in Ankara and Istanbul and come just four months after the dreadful attacks on Paris. Today, we mourn all those who died yesterday, we hope for a speedy recovery for those who were injured and we send our thoughts and best wishes to all those affected. In doing so, we show our solidarity with the people of Belgium and with victims of terrorism across the globe.

Yesterday afternoon, I spoke to the ambassador of Belgium to express Scotland's shock and sorrow over what had happened. I made it clear that Scotland stands in solidarity with the people of Belgium at this time of extreme sadness.

Attacks on our neighbours understandably provoke anxiety here at home. Yesterday, I chaired a meeting of the Scottish Government's resilience committee. An immediate priority is to help anyone who has been caught up in the attacks or who is concerned about loved ones. We are working closely with the United Kingdom Government, Police Scotland and other partners and agencies to ensure that those people have access to the advice, help and information that they need.

I can also tell the chamber that we are, as would be expected, monitoring the security situation in Scotland closely. Police Scotland and others are responding proportionately and have increased

patrols at key locations, such as airports and railway stations. However, it is important to remember that there is no specific threat in Scotland. Of course people should be vigilant, but they should go about their daily business without fear.

We are also seeking to provide reassurance to communities here who may feel particularly threatened. As news was breaking yesterday of the atrocities in Brussels, I was on my way to a conference in Glasgow dedicated to tackling hate crime. One of the points that we discussed was that, after terrorist atrocities, members of our Muslim community often feel a double burden: they feel the same shock and revulsion as everyone else does; but they also have to cope with knowing that there are some who would point the finger of blame at them. It is important that we provide reassurance and additional protection if necessary—we stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

In doing that, we will reaffirm a fundamental truth: that all of us benefit hugely from being a diverse, multicultural society. That diversity should be cherished and celebrated. It is a source not of weakness but of great strength for our society.

Terrorist attacks are intended to divide us; they are intended to undermine the freedoms and the way of life that we all value so highly. We must unite as a community here at home and in solidarity with those in Brussels to make clear that the terrorists will never succeed. The evidence from yesterday suggests that that is what is happening, and it was obvious that condemnation of terrorism is something that unites people of all faiths and none.

Today's motion gives all of us an opportunity to play our part in promoting that sense of unity. It enables us to put on record our deep sorrow for those who lost their lives yesterday, to show our solidarity with the Government and people of Belgium and to reaffirm once again our everlasting commitment to promoting an inclusive, tolerant, diverse society.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its heartfelt condolences, and those of the people of Scotland, to all those affected by the appalling terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016; stands in solidarity with the people of Belgium, and all those communities that have been the victims of terrorism in recent weeks, including the people of Turkey following the terrorist attacks in Ankara; reaffirms its commitment to a diverse and multicultural society, and calls on people across Scotland to unite as one community, both here at home and in solidarity with all those countries affected, to make clear that acts of terrorism will not succeed in dividing us or destroying the freedoms and way of life that we value so highly.

10:04

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** On behalf of my party and the communities that we represent, we offer our condolences to the loved ones of those who lost their lives in Belgium yesterday and say that we stand with the people of Brussels today.

As always in such tragedies, we watch with utter admiration the work of the emergency services and armed forces who choose to put themselves in harm's way, running against the flow and towards the danger, thinking only of how they might help others. We choose to remember their heroism, not the acts of cowardice that they were reacting to.

If the attacks in Paris felt so wrong, in a city that we associate with love and culture, the attacks in Brussels are against a city that represents peace and co-operation. For most of us, Brussels—the centre of political co-operation between European nations—is a city that we know well. It is where our party colleagues and friends live and work. We know it as a cosmopolitan and vibrant city.

There is another reason why yesterday's events felt familiar. There can be few of us in Scotland, watching the terrible footage from inside the airport terminal or outside metro stations, who did not immediately call to mind events at home—the thought that we were watching what could have been after the failed attack in Glasgow and the terrible loss when the underground was attacked in London.

We know from bitter experience that the evil that visited Brussels yesterday knows no borders and recognises no one as innocent. We also know this: the terrorists represent no religion and no moral cause; they represent only their own perverse and primitive anger against the modern world.

Let us also say loud and clear that we know that these attackers do not represent refugees. More than that, we understand that they represent the ideology of violence that the refugees are fleeing from. As we did after previous outrages—in Paris; London; Chibok in Nigeria, where the girls were taken; the Swat valley, in Pakistan, where Malala was shot; Madrid; Ankara; Istanbul; and New York—we resolve today to defy those who view difference with fear and anger. We defy them by celebrating our diversity, by living a life of freedom and tolerance, and by offering, in place of the fear and division that the terrorists seek, love and solidarity to everyone across the world who is affected by this pointless violence.

We stand with the people of Belgium and repeat the words of their national motto: *l'union fait la force*—unity makes strength.

10:07

**Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con):** I support today's motion and, in so doing, I extend my condolences and those of my party to the people of Brussels in the wake of yesterday's tragic attacks.

As with Paris four months ago, the Parliament stands united with the families of those who have been lost to another senseless act of murder, and with a city in mourning.

As with Paris, this will feel personal to many of us. Yesterday, I watched the TV bulletins as my colleague and friend Ian Duncan spoke from his office in the city. As always happens in such cases, there is a sense of unreality in seeing a familiar face in a familiar place now having faced up to this modern form of barbarism. For all our friends who work and live in Brussels, the coming days will be difficult and unsettling. I hope that they know that they are in our thoughts.

I also want to pay tribute today to our own police and security forces who once again face a period of heightened alert. It is only when incidents such as yesterday's happen that we remember their constant watch over us. I thank them for everything that they do.

The debate will now turn to our reaction. I hope that it is calm, steadfast and resolute. I hope that we remain united and that we remember that these people do not act in the name of religion. They are members of a millenarian cult that is already losing support.

As we mourn for the people of Brussels, I hope that we also keep Paris in mind. Yesterday, four months on from that terrible attack on the Bataclan theatre, the city was going about its business. The cafes were back in business, and people were back at work. The killers there wanted to halt our way of life and to bring a stop to our civilisation. The wounds in Paris will take years to heal for those who lost loved ones, but the killers' attempts failed. They did not win. Paris won. Brussels will win too. The killers are doomed to fail.

Let us extend our condolences to Brussels today, but let us also have confidence in our values, and redouble our determination never to be cowed.

10:09

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** A resident of Brussels said on the radio this morning:

"Are we going to stop going to the cinema, travelling on the train, shopping in the centres, flying on the planes? No, that is what we do. But am I afraid? Yes, I'm afraid."

As we witness the scenes of devastation in Brussels, it is only natural and only human to be

afraid but it is to be hoped that if this gathering and similar gatherings across the world provide anything, they provide some degree of solidarity with the victims and the families and friends of people who have lost their lives not only in Brussels but in Istanbul, Ankara, Baghdad and many cities and towns across the globe.

The people who set off the bombs in Brussels yesterday are the kind of people from whom the Syrian refugees are fleeing. That is why we must make it clear that those terrorists do not speak for the people of the Muslim faith. They speak only for their distorted, cruel ideology.

When we are afraid, there is a temptation to turn in, to blame, to generalise and never to trust others, but this is exactly the moment when we must reach out to strengthen our relationships with the good people throughout the world.

10:11

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** On behalf of the Green and independent group, I, too, offer my thoughts and the comfort that I can to all the families and friends of the people who were killed and those who were injured or affected by yesterday's terrible bombing in Brussels. It was a shocking event, perpetrated by criminals, but one to which people are demonstrating incredible resilience. Reports on the radio this morning talked of people going back to work, restarting the city after the shock and demonstrating a determination not to be cowed.

I am sure that many members have friends or family in Brussels. Colleagues from our Green office in Parliament who now work in Brussels have confirmed that they are okay. However, for too many other families, the news is devastating and their search has ended in grief. I can only imagine that it is a demented, confused grief that is filled with questions such as, "Why now, and why here?"

As MSPs, we are used to standing up to explain why things have happened and to dictate thoughts about what should happen, but at this point there is little that can help directly except for us to offer our solidarity.

Belgium and its neighbours—Scotland and the UK included—woke up today with hot memories of what happened yesterday, but also with memories of other attacks. They include Paris, of course, and my colleague Patrick Harvie spoke of others in November, reminding us of the global nature of violence and of the solidarity that we need.

To people in Brussels and across the world, we offer our commitment to overcome hate with human compassion, to overcome division that is based on prejudice or fear, to focus our actions on

criminals who seek to divide, and never to fall into the trap of mistrust based on religion or colour.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on the motion of condolence for Brussels. Before we move to the next item of business, we will have a very short break to allow members to get into position.

## Water Safety

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-15772, in the name of Alex Rowley, on water safety in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament congratulates what it considers the excellent, ongoing work of the Fife Water Safety initiative, which has brought together the fire and rescue and police services, the RNLI and the Royal Life Saving Society UK to educate young people about the importance of water safety in Fife; understands that, since the death of her son, Cameron Lancaster, at the abandoned Prestonhill Quarry and the second tragic death of John McKay at the same quarry less than a year after Cameron's accident, Cameron's mother has been working with partners to raise awareness of the dangers that water may pose to young people; acknowledges that the Fife Water Safety initiative, which was launched in Inverkeithing High School in the Cowdenbeath parliamentary constituency, has been touring west Fife secondary schools providing an interactive 50-minute presentation to each year group, hoping to encourage all Fife schools to adopt the education package including an age-appropriate programme for primary school children; understands that death by drowning is the third highest accidental cause of death in the UK and that, per head of population, there are twice as many accidental drownings in Scotland as in England; further understands that there are more limited rescue options for response and rescue services for inshore water accidents than at sea through the RNLI, which rescued 7,973 people and saved 348 lives in 2015, and notes that Cameron's mother is working with agencies across Scotland to explore the potential for creating an education programme aimed at teaching teenagers about the dangers of open waters, which may be used across Scotland.

10:15

**Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** I am grateful to the members who signed my motion, which has meant that we are able to have this debate to highlight water safety issues. The Fife water safety initiative has been driven by families who have, sadly, experienced the tragic loss of a young family member from accidental death in an abandoned quarry that is in Inverkeithing in my constituency. The initiative has brought together the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the police, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and the Royal Life Saving Society UK to educate young people about the importance of water safety in Fife and the dangers that water may pose to them.

I understand that a session is taking place in a Fife school this morning, as the campaign continues to tour Fife secondary schools to provide a 50-minute interactive presentation to each year group. The aim is to encourage all Fife schools to adopt the education package, which includes an age-appropriate programme for primary school children. The initiative is being supported by Fife Council.

Although I was aware of the tragic accidents at the abandoned Prestonhill quarry in Inverkeithing, it was only after meeting and speaking with affected families that I realised the extent of the threat of water and the number of lives that it takes. As the motion says,

"death by drowning is the third highest accidental cause of death in the UK and ... per head of population, there are twice as many accidental drownings in Scotland as in England".

I appreciate that this is the last day of the parliamentary session, but I hope that, as a result of this debate, the Parliament will be persuaded in the next session to look at the issue and to consider what more can be done to highlight the concerns.

We have a partnership called water safety Scotland that aims to consider and understand the key risks and engage with partners to develop a consistent approach to the prevention of drowning, water-related deaths and unintentional injuries in and around water. It is part of the national water safety forum, which has produced a United Kingdom drowning prevention strategy that applies to Scotland.

#### The forum states:

"Coordinated and lasting prevention programmes established by members of the NWSF and other organisations and individuals have had a proven effect, with many lives saved due to existing initiatives. However, in order to save even more lives a step-change in our approach is needed."

The forum also draws attention to a World Health Organization report that was published in November 2014, which

"highlighted that drowning is a serious and neglected global public health issue, claiming a shocking 372,000 lives each year. The report highlights 10 recommendations to prevent drowning."

One of those recommendations is that countries should develop and implement a national water safety strategy.

The work that is going on in Fife is very much in line with the national strategy and I hope that the education minister post-election will be prepared to look at it. The strategy states:

"Improved understanding of the events leading up to, during and after a drowning will enable us to understand individual behaviours and design relevant behavioural change messages, activity and interventions."

It also mentions

"Underestimating risks ... Lack of knowledge of the risks... Lack of competence ... Ill-informed thrill seeking".

Those and other key points are picked up through the Fife water safety initiative.

The UK strategy has a number of specific targets, some of which some local authorities



already work to, but it would be good to demonstrate wider support for those targets across Scotland. Specifically, the strategy states:

“Every child should have the opportunity to learn to swim and receive water safety education at primary school ... Every community with water risks should have a community-level water safety risk assessment and water safety plan ... Increase awareness of everyday risks in, on and around water ... All recreational activity organisations should have a clear strategic risk assessment and plans that address key risks”.

In this debate on the last day of the session, and moving forward, I aim to continue to press those issues and to support wherever I can the work that is going on in Fife and across Scotland. I am clear that words cannot bring about justice for the families who have lost loved ones. However, I am inspired by the way in which those families, in the face of adversity and grief, have focused on their determination to do all that they can to ensure that the same thing does not happen to others. I hope that members in the new session of Parliament, and the new Government, will look at what can be done to support those families and the campaign.

I have discussed the abandoned quarry in my constituency with the chief executive of Fife Council. He advises me that ownership of and responsibility for the quarry and surrounding land lie with Letham Bay Developments, which is registered in Scotland with a registered office in Glasgow. The council served an abatement notice on that company under the statutory nuisance provision of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Following the company's non-compliance with that notice, the council is in the process of reporting the breach to the procurator fiscal with a view to action being taken.

In terms of seeking action around ownership, the council understands that a number of loans over the quarry in favour of third parties remain in place, which gives rise to a complex financial background. The council's chief executive is clear that the council will continue to pursue the matter proactively. I make it clear that, if legislation is needed to support the council in its action, such legislation should be brought forth.

10:22

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I thank Alex Rowley for bringing to the chamber this important debate. As convener of the cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness, I extend my thanks to my colleagues from all sides of the chamber who have supported our efforts in the CPG, and to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents Scotland, which provides our secretariat.

ROSPA runs the water safety Scotland initiative, which in turn runs and supports the Fife water

safety awareness project. As Mr Rowley has said, that programme was set up following the tragic drowning in 2014 of Cameron Lancaster from Burntisland.

ROSPA has issued a call to action and it is keen for the Fife programme to be rolled out across Scotland. I look forward to hearing the minister's response to that call.

A lot of other work is going on in Scotland. The Royal Life Saving Society UK has launched a spring clean awareness campaign, which runs from 21 to 25 March, to warn parents about the dangers of water around the home. That follows the tragic death in Fife of Rhys and Shaun Scott, who drowned in a fish pond in their garden on 12 March. I am sure that all members will wish to extend their condolences to the Scott family, and also to the McGrotty and Daniels family, who suffered such a terrible tragedy at Buncrana pier in Donegal.

Every year the Royal Life Saving Society runs drowning prevention week, which runs from 18 to 26 June this year. It aims to reduce the number of drownings and similar incidents that occur in the UK by showing people how to be safe in and near water and how to recognise water danger.

I have learned from all the work that I have done on accident prevention over the years and from the experts in the field that brain development is not complete until young people are in their 20s. That is what leads to the risk-taking behaviour and the bad decision making to which Alex Rowley referred.

What is so important about all accident prevention initiatives, whether they are on water safety or road safety, is that they teach people transferable life skills. Any work that is done in that area can only contribute to increased safety for our young people as they grow up and start to drive and take part in life's adventures.

Our CPG conducted an evaluation of the group over the past five years and one of the comments was that it

“has been an ideal way to meet like-minded safety professionals, share information, highlight research and to both give and receive updates”.

That is nice to know, but we were also keen to find out what difference the CPG had made, so the evaluation asked participants what would not have happened if they had not attended the meetings. The response, in one area of water safety, was:

“Department of new ideas such as ‘Smart Signs’ (A Coastguard registered, uniformed approach to the design of all UK safety signage—with each sign carrying a unique location, identifying number, a grid reference and smart phone QR code ... )”.

Further, water safety Scotland would not have got started or been where it is now. I hope that, no matter what the make-up of the new Parliament is, the work of the CPG will continue in some form or other.

I thank Stuart McMillan, convener of the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism, because we had a good joint meeting between the two CPGs, which included presentations from the RNLI. All our presentations—on water safety and other areas of safety—are hosted on the ROSPA website.

I recommend that all members look at the national water safety forum's drowning prevention strategy for the UK, which Mr Rowley mentioned. I hope that we can develop a strategy specifically for Scotland.

10:26

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I congratulate Alex Rowley on securing this important debate and join him in thanking the Fife water safety initiative for its work.

Members have already spoken about the tragic deaths of John McKay and Cameron Lancaster. I echo the thoughts that have been expressed and add my condolences to both families. The deaths of both those young men have left huge holes in the lives of their families and friends. I hope that the Fife water safety initiative can help to ensure that no one else has to go through that trauma. The nature of those deaths shows that dangerous water is clearly a particular issue in Fife. I hope that raising awareness is the first step in preventing deaths under those circumstances.

We cannot and should not wrap up our youngsters in cotton wool, but we should ensure that they have the best information to make the safest possible choices. That is exactly what the Fife water safety initiative is trying to provide.

Although the motion mentions the proportionally higher death count in Scotland compared with the rest of the UK, quarry deaths are not a problem unique to our country. Communities in Northern Ireland, Stoke and Bedford have all been affected by high-profile quarry lake deaths.

We were all young once—contrary to popular belief—and I think that we can all understand the attraction, for young people, of cool water on a warm day. Many of these deaths are marked by the same chain of events. A swimmer enters the water, usually from a significant height or with a sudden plunge, which results in shortened breathing and a racing heartbeat. As a result of poor circulation, their co-ordination reduces, which increases their risk of drowning. That chain of events is particularly dangerous in quarries, where

the water temperature is far lower than one would expect it to be in shallower water or even in the sea. Educating youngsters about the dangers associated with quarry swimming is therefore extremely important.

The Fife water safety initiative follows other examples in the UK, notably Northern Ireland with its “Stay safe—stay out of quarries” educational campaign. The RNLI, the Royal Life Saving Society, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Fife Council and Police Scotland have combined to create a hard-hitting interactive video that highlights not only the dangers of quarry swimming but best practice for swimming in open water. By introducing the programme to primary and secondary pupils, the initiative aims to be fully immersive and accessible to pupils of all ages. As we have heard, Fife has a number of quarries, and it is extremely important to help children to make the right choices from the start.

If it is successful, I hope that other local authorities will use the materials and messages from the Fife water safety initiative to create their own tailor-made public awareness campaigns. This is a problem that occurs in other parts of Scotland and I hope that other councils will take up the template.

The motion mentions the tremendous work that is done by the RNLI in saving lives in coastal areas throughout the country. There are three lifeboat stations in Fife and I thank them for their hard work and determination to ensure that days at the beach do not end in tragedy. This summer, RNLI lifeguards will patrol beaches at St Andrews, Leven, Burntisland and Aberdour, and last year RNLI lifeguards responded to 17,000 incidents, rescuing 1,769 people and saving 92 lives across the UK. Having such high-calibre lifeguards on our beaches helps make Fife an extremely attractive draw for young families, who feel much safer swimming as a result.

It is important that the lives of both John and Cameron were not lost in vain and that both families can use their tragic deaths to help ensure that no other Fife family has to go through the same pain. I know that Cameron's family are actively involved in the Fife water safety initiative and I would like to thank them for their efforts. I call on local authorities throughout Scotland to consider following Fife's example and create their own educational campaigns.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call Drew Smith, I advise the Parliament that this is his valedictory speech. He was elected to the Parliament in 2011, having previously worked with an MSP. He has worked tirelessly since then, representing constituents and serving this Parliament in committees and the chamber, and I am sure that members would agree that he has

done that with humour and insight. On behalf of the Presiding Officers and the Parliament, I wish you well for the future.

10:31

**Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** Presiding Officer, thank you for the opportunity to take part in this short debate and for all the support, encouragement and occasional discipline that I have received from you and your colleagues over the past five years.

As other members have done, I thank Alex Rowley for securing this debate. It has been a privilege to get to know him since he came to this place in 2014, and indeed to get to know members across all parties, many of whom I have come to regard as friends, colleagues and, only occasionally, opponents.

I had not been looking for a debate in which to make a final speech, but the issue that Mr Rowley raises is important to me and I want to make a point that is related to it. Mr Rowley has highlighted the dangers of open water and he is right to do so, on behalf of his constituents and anyone who has been affected by the loss of a child or other loved one. I should declare a very old interest: I am a former member of the Royal Life Saving Society UK. I commend it and the other organisations that Alex Rowley listed for their efforts to reduce our high incidence of drowning. I also recognise the loss of Cameron Lancaster and John McKay at Prestonhill quarry and pay tribute to those for whom their memory is dearest.

The motion rightly highlights the differential rates of drowning that tragically occur in Scotland, which is an issue that I have sought to raise in a previous members' business debate. Entering or attempting to swim in open water can be dangerous. As we approach the warmer months, we should be clear to young people that quarries are not safe places, and we should be clear to those who own the quarries that they have responsibilities to make them safer.

The point that I want to add to this debate relates to water safety more widely. Promoting good water safety also requires an ambition that every child who would like to learn to swim leaves school able to do so. Teaching all our children to swim would have a myriad of benefits. In the context of this debate, I want to be clear that teaching children to swim also means teaching children when and where not to enter water.

A motion that I had hoped to have debated last summer drew attention to the Government's decision to withdraw its support for the swimming top up programme, which funded Scottish Swimming to reduce the 40 per cent of children

who leave primary school unable to swim. I found that to be a short-sighted cut, not least because it followed Glasgow's successful Commonwealth games. I strongly hope that the incoming Government will look again at that issue and recognise that swimming can be a lifelong health-enhancing form of physical activity. I hope that that will mean a proper evaluation of what was done and an audit of what the withdrawal of support, combined with local authority cuts, has meant for levels of swimming uptake.

I hope that members in the next parliamentary session will push for a commitment to put both swimming for life and water safety education at the heart of our vision for a healthier and more active nation. In so doing, they should recognise that swimming, although it is dangerous in the wrong places and when overconfidence is at play, is a key life skill. Indeed, it can be a lifesaving skill.

My name appears in the *Business Bulletin* for question time, so I do not wish to take up more of Parliament's time now. However, I want to say thank you to my city, my party, my staff, Sir Paul Grice's staff here in the Parliament and my family for the support that I have had to serve here. I assure you that they deserve my thanks and that I have certainly needed that support at times.

A few kind souls have said that they found my decision to leave the Parliament unexpected. All that I can say in response is that it was not half as unexpected as my coming here five years ago. I express my very best wishes to candidates and to other members who are leaving the Parliament. It has been many different things for me, but it has always been a privilege. The Scottish Parliament has seen us debate big causes but also those small changes that make the most difference to the lives of our people. Thanks for having me.

10:35

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate Alex Rowley on securing this important and timely debate, as the days lengthen and become warmer. I also congratulate—perhaps that is the wrong word—the mother of Cameron Lancaster on her campaign following the tragic death of her son.

I have a friend who lost a son who was a very strong swimmer who drowned while swimming across a loch on Islay that he knew well. It was a lovely summer's day and he was 17. Later, he was posthumously made dux of his school. Some months later, I visited his bedroom—I am getting upset, because I remember it to this day—in which mementos of him were everywhere. It was particularly heartbreaking because I had two sons

of the same age, and to this day I feel sadness because of that lost life and lost future.

This is a modest but extremely significant debate that impacts on the lives of many people. In my constituency, in the Pentland hills, we have reservoirs that are no longer functioning, although some are. As others have said, given that some people's brains have not developed until they are in their 20s, notices that say "Danger—don't enter the water" can act as a challenge rather than a warning. A danger sign may encourage a young man to rise to the occasion, and there have been drownings in the reservoirs of the Pentland hills. That also happens in the rivers Tweed and Teviot in my constituency. On a warm day, usually at the beginning of summer, in the heat, young people forget that the water in the reservoirs is freezing cold. The water in the rivers is also cold, and there are other dangers caused by currents and undergrowth. Harking back to the experience of my friend on Islay, it is important that people are warned that their being a strong swimmer does not mean that they should swim in those places.

I notice that the campaign to heighten awareness of the dangers of our waterways will take place in June. However, I think that it should take place before that, because it will be on the first warm day in May or the beginning of June that the water will be enticing to people and they will decide to take a wee swim in it—which may be the last time they swim anywhere.

I very much welcome the debate and congratulate the mother whose campaign has given rise to it. I say that also on behalf of my friend on Islay, who is, to this day, one son short.

10:37

**The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Paul Wheelhouse):** I offer my sincere condolences to the families of Cameron Lancaster and John McKay, and to the family of Rhys and Shaun Scott, whom Clare Adamson mentioned. We all recognise the tragedy and the deep sense of loss that those families must have suffered. I am a parent myself: it is hard to imagine the pain of losing a child, so to suffer such a tragic loss in such unexpected circumstances must be truly devastating.

As members including Christine Grahame and Alex Rowley have done, I congratulate Gillian Barclay and the families on raising this important issue, and I congratulate Mr Rowley on bringing to Parliament such an important subject for the session's final members' debate. As Christine Grahame movingly said, it

"is a modest but ... significant debate",

and it is an appropriate use of time today to raise the issue.

I pay tribute to the courage, determination and selflessness that Gillian Barclay—Cameron Lancaster's mother—has demonstrated in her work to raise awareness of the potential dangers of water, and in trying to prevent other parents experiencing the tragedy that she, along with, as we have heard, many others, has faced. My congratulations also go to the Fife water safety initiative on the successes of its education package. I wish it continued success in its endeavour to encourage all schools in Fife to adopt the package and to improve water safety awareness among children in the area.

Water safety in Scotland is complex with regard to legislation and responsibilities; inland and coastal waters are affected both by Scots common law and by statutory requirements, the majority of which come under the remit of the local authority. That situation is compounded by our geography—Scottish Natural Heritage estimates that there are more than 30,000 freshwater lochs in a country that is already surrounded by coastal water and has numerous waterways running through it. Although that contributes to our country's natural beauty, as others have said, and to the range of water-related leisure pursuits that are available to and enjoyed by many of us, it also brings with it a greater element of the risks that are associated with water, particularly when our climate ensures that our bodies of water can be surprisingly cold, even at the height of summer—when we have one. Cold water on the body can incapacitate even the strongest swimmers, as Christine Grahame has said. That is a key message in Fife water safety's programme.

I whole-heartedly agree with Drew Smith—who made an excellent final speech, if I may say so—that we can educate children about when not to go swimming. That is particularly important because—as others have said—although the water may look enticing, we do not know what lies below the surface, how cold it is and what other dangers, including rip tides and currents, affect them. I will say what I have said privately to Drew Smith: I very much respect him and his work in this Parliament. I wish him every success for the future. Good luck, Drew.

On water rescue, we are very fortunate to have the Royal National Lifeboat Institution at sea. The motion today mentions the impressive number of rescues that it has performed and lives that have been saved by it.

Inshore, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has a statutory responsibility to respond to serious flood incidents and has discretion to respond to "other eventualities". The SFRS has a number of water rescue units stationed at strategic locations

throughout the country. As well as rescuing people from flooded homes and vehicles during the storms earlier this year, the service has also been involved in a number of non-flood-related water rescues, including that of an 11-year-old boy who was trapped on an island in the River Almond, and the rescue of a man who had fallen down a ravine into the water at Blair Atholl. Scotland also benefits from a number of voluntary water rescue organisations, which work extremely hard to protect people in various parts of the country, including the Scottish Borders.

Our greatest chance of success will lie in an approach that is based on prevention through education and awareness, in order to ensure that people who go near or enter water are aware of the risks that are associated with it, which will in turn reduce the number of deaths by drowning.

The ability to swim is, of course, an important part of feeling confident to enter the water, but there are, as I have said, many other issues to be aware of, including depth, the presence of currents or other, often unseen, hazards below the surface and, as others have mentioned, cold and the immediate and longer-term effects that it can have on the body. Therefore, work such as that which is undertaken by Cameron Lancaster's mother and the participants of the Fife water safety initiative, including the RNLI, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Fife Council, is vital to the safety of individuals across the country.

In Scotland, decisions on content and delivery of education and the curriculum in Scotland are, of course, very much local decisions. However, the Scottish Government recognises the importance of raising awareness and of making available suitable resource materials to support water safety education, so we encourage local authorities to consider that very carefully for both primary and secondary school pupils.

In 2016-17, the Scottish Government will provide funding of £104,000 to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents to continue to deliver its annual home and water safety programme. I hope that the Presiding Officer will indulge me and allow me to mention the work of Clare Adamson. In the course of her time in Parliament since 2011 she has been working extremely hard to support ROSPA's work in and outwith Parliament. As the relevant minister, I am very grateful for that. I am sure that ROSPA, were it able to speak in the debate, would also praise her. I very much take on board her points about the need to develop a Scottish strategy for water safety.

The water safety element of ROSPA's programme aims to assist the UK national drowning prevention strategy to reduce accidental drowning rates in the UK by 50 per cent by 2026.

In 2014, ROSPA set up the water safety Scotland group, to which Mr Rowley referred. Its aim is to consider and understand the key risks and to engage with partners to develop a consistent approach to prevention of drowning, other water-related deaths and unintentional injuries in and around water. That is already happening. The group has facilitated partnership working on a number of initiatives, including the Fife water safety initiative, which we have heard about today; water safety for children and young people, which is a joint programme between Dumfries and Galloway Council education department, Nith Inshore Rescue and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in Dumfries and Galloway; and the "Don't drink and drown" campaign, which is a joint venture of the Royal Life Saving Society UK, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and is aimed at students.

As Murdo Fraser said, other parts of the UK, for example Northern Ireland, are developing their strategies; I wish them well in tackling the UK-wide problem of drowning incidents in quarries.

ROSPA has recently provided a framework for local authorities to formulate their own policies, and it will continue to promote the framework's use, as well as providing support to the newly formed Scotland's water safety reference group and any water-safety-related campaigns.

Go safe Scotland, which was launched by the SFRS and Glasgow City Council in September 2013, is another excellent example of partnership working. It includes Police Scotland, Scottish Water, ROSPA, the British Transport Police, the national health service, Scottish Power, Scotland Gas Networks, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and Network Rail. It provides a national interactive education resource to pupils across Scotland.

As the minister with responsibility for community safety, I would like to pay tribute to all the people who work hard to promote water safety, and to the emergency responders and voluntary organisations that rescue people who get into difficulties in water. As the grandson of an angler who drowned in Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland, I can assure Parliament and the parents and families of those who are no longer with us as a result of such incidents that I take such matters extremely seriously.

I congratulate everyone who is involved in the Fife water safety initiative on the production of its presentation and its successes in making young people in Fife aware of the importance of water safety and of the possible tragic consequences of not taking care in and around water. I thank my colleague Annabelle Ewing for engaging in regular correspondence on the Cameron Lancaster case and for raising the issue with me, and I thank Alex

Rowley for bringing forward an extremely important debate.

Finally, I will offer my support for the aims of the initiative by writing to all Scotland's local authorities to encourage them to raise awareness among school pupils across Scotland of the dangers in and around water, and to make them aware of the strong desire that exists across the political parties in Parliament for important work to be done to bring about improvements in water safety. I inform Parliament that following Ms Ewing's correspondence my officials are due to meet Cameron Lancaster's mother, Gillian Barclay, to discuss how the Scottish Government might further support that work, and I hope that that will be welcomed by colleagues across Parliament.

Water is one of Scotland's greatest natural resources and we want people to be able to enjoy it, but it is vital that we are informed about and aware of the potential hazards in and around water, and that we do all that we can to protect ourselves and our children from its dangers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the final members' business debate of the session.

10:47

*Meeting suspended.*

10:59

*On resuming—*

## **One Minute's Silence**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** Good morning. I invite everyone to stand to observe a minute's silence, as a mark of respect to those affected by the attack in Brussels yesterday.

## Portfolio Question Time

### Fair Work, Skills and Training

11:01

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** Question 1 has been withdrawn. An explanation has been provided in the name of Neil Findlay.

#### Apprenticeships (Government Support)

**2. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports apprenticeships. (S4O-05687)

**The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing):** The Scottish Government's highly successful modern apprenticeship programme is a key element of our approach to economic development and youth employment. We have supported more than 190,000 new apprenticeship opportunities since we came into office in 2007. We are on track to meet our commitment to deliver 30,000 new modern apprenticeship opportunities a year by 2020. Last month, the Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training announced that the target for 2016-17 will be 26,000 modern apprenticeship starts.

**Jamie McGrigor:** I have been contacted by representatives of Ardfarn Yacht Centre, in Argyll, who are keen to take on an apprentice boat builder to train with their experienced team. They have identified the young person, who is keen to fulfil the role, but they are experiencing problems accessing funding support from Skills Development Scotland, because the formal theory parts of the MA are delivered only at three specialist training colleges in the south of England.

Will the minister investigate the case and encourage SDS to be as flexible as possible, so that that business can take on an apprentice boat builder? After all, Scotland has a fair reputation for building boats and ships of all classes. Was not "Clydebuilt" once a byword for excellence?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I know that this is Mr McGrigor's last question time—or perhaps not quite, as he might have a few more questions to come this morning. I thank him for providing a copy of his supplementary question, which he tweeted yesterday. That was very helpful.

On the serious question that Mr McGrigor has raised, I will be happy to look into the specific case. SDS is always available to discuss options, and that applies to the member's constituent, as it applies to anybody else who is seeking to do their best to make young people their business.

Nonetheless, I undertake that we will look into the case to see where matters stand.

The last point that Mr McGrigor raised was about Clydebuilt ships. I hope that he is aware of the announcement a couple of weeks ago by Ferguson's at Port Glasgow that it will take on 150 new apprentices. That is very good news, and I am sure that Mr McGrigor would wish to welcome it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Many thanks. As ever, short questions and answers are appreciated.

#### Oil and Gas Sector (Training and Support)

**3. Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what training and support it provides to people no longer working in the oil and gas sector. (S4O-05688)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham):** The Scottish Government fully recognises the severe challenges that face the oil and gas sector at this time, and it is doing all that it can to support oil and gas workers. The First Minister established the energy jobs task force, which has achieved a great deal since January 2015, including three large partnership action for continuing employment events, which provided direct redundancy support for over 2,500 people.

We recently announced a £12 million transition training fund that will offer individuals grants to support their redeployment and help people with the costs of maintaining licences. We are also providing an extensive network of support through our economic development and skills agencies.

**Christian Allard:** I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer, but can she give us some more detail on how the training to work in tourism, food and drink, and life sciences is made accessible to people in order to create a sustainable, diverse economic future for the north-east?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** Aberdeen and the north-east are central to driving future growth and prosperity in Scotland, which is why we have invested so much money in the Aberdeen city region deal, with £125 million from the Government. Skills Development Scotland is working with industry on the development and refresh of the skills investment plans with the aim of attracting new entrants to life sciences, tourism, and food and drink, and SDS is extending that approach to include regional skills investment plans, which will recognise the diverse needs of the regional areas across Scotland such as, particularly, the north-east.

The successful modern apprenticeship programme also offers young people the opportunity to start a new career and to earn a wage while learning the skills that they will need throughout their chosen career.

If the member wants a specific example of the work that is happening, I direct him to the charity Springboard, which is working with SDS to deliver a range of initiatives to encourage and support more young people and adults into the hospitality sector and equip them with the skills that they will need to sustain employment and thrive within it. Springboard is engaged with eight schools in the area with regard to its future chef project, whereby all schools have been paired with a mentor chef from industry.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary said that 2,500 people have been supported through the three very welcome PACE events that have been held so far under the auspices of the energy jobs task force. Can she tell us how many of those 2,500 people have since secured employment?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I do not have information on how many people have gone on to secure employment out of that particular 2,500, but many will have. The fact that not everybody has been able to do that is why we have also introduced the transition training fund, which is a further specific £12 million that will give direct grants to individuals to support their redeployment. Opportunities are available for people to redeploy, and we hope that they will take them up where possible.

#### **Developing the Young Workforce Programme**

**4. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the developing the young workforce programme. (S4O-05689)

**The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing):** The first developing the young workforce annual report, which was published in December 2015, showed that we are making good progress on better preparing young people for the world of work. Key developments to date include the expansion of work-related skills and qualifications such as the new foundation apprenticeship, the introduction of new national standards and guidance for work placements and careers education, offering careers advice earlier in schools, and the development of closer partnerships between employers and education, with 14 new regional employer groups being set up across Scotland.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Can the minister outline what role businesses in the Highlands and Islands and

indeed across the rest of Scotland should play in supporting the programme?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I mentioned in my first answer one of the action points—the development of the regional developing the young workforce groups. They are industry led and they provide a fundamental bridge between education and business. They involve local businesses and they build on what was already there. We will support the setting up of the regional groups and we aim to have 21 groups across Scotland. There are 14 to date, including those in north Highland, Moray, Inverness and central Highland, and west Highland.

We hope that all members will rally round the regional groups as they are rolled out across Scotland so that we all do our best to bring on young people and ensure that they are ready for the world of work.

#### **Over-25s (Training)**

**5. Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what training opportunities it offers people over the age of 25. (S4O-05690)

**The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing):** We view Scotland's people as our greatest asset. The Government therefore recognises that responding to the skills and training needs of individuals enables them to meet their full potential and is a prerequisite of inclusive economic growth.

On training support for adults, there is a range of provision in colleges, universities, communities and workplaces, and through Skills Development Scotland, our national skills agency, which provides professional careers advice and training support to individuals of all ages. Specific initiatives include modern apprenticeships for those aged 25 and over in key growth sectors, direct support from the SDS individual learning account programme for low-paid, low-skilled and unemployed individuals and in-work support via the Scottish Trades Union Congress Scottish union learning programme.

**Cameron Buchanan:** The minister will be aware that the cutting of 152,000 college places by the Scottish Government has disproportionately affected older learners. Audit Scotland's report "Scotland's colleges 2015" shows that there are 41 per cent fewer students over 25 in our colleges than there were in 2008-09. Given that older learners are often the furthest removed from the labour market and other training opportunities, will the minister outline the steps that the Scottish Government has taken to help people over 25 to access training in Scotland?



**Annabelle Ewing:** On colleges, we have exceeded our undertaking to maintain full-time-equivalent places, and there are more than 119,000 FTE places. We make no bones about focusing on courses that will lead to progression to work and further educational opportunities to the benefit of the individuals concerned.

On opportunities for the over-25s, as I said, the MA programme is available to provide some support for over-25s in key growth sectors, such as the food and drink sector, in which 63 per cent of modern apprentices are 25 or over.

In relation to digital technologies, the transition training programme supports individuals to gain key skills that are required by information and communications technology employers in the Highlands and Islands. We expect some 40 per cent of the individuals who benefit from the transition training fund for people in the oil and gas sector to be over 25. The cabinet secretary referred to the programme, which will of course be available to the over-25s.

We are determined to ensure that we do the best that we can across the piece for people who seek work. Of course, the devolution of employment support services will happen shortly, but I am sad to say to Cameron Buchanan that the new powers came with, in effect, an 87 per cent cut from Westminster. Nonetheless, we will do our best to continue to help people who need a bit of help to get into work.

### **Commission on Widening Access (Recommendations)**

**6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recommendations in the final report of the commission on widening access regarding improving skills among the workforce. (S4O-05691)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham):** The commission highlighted the importance of teachers and early years practitioners being equipped with an understanding of the challenges that are faced by people from deprived communities and of how such a background impacts on learning. However, the report does not contain a formal recommendation on the matter. We warmly welcomed the report and moved swiftly to accept a number of key recommendations. We will give careful consideration to the remainder of the report. If we are re-elected, we will publish a formal response early in the new session of the Parliament.

**Liz Smith:** The cabinet secretary will be aware that, in recommendation 29, the Silver report makes clear that not nearly enough is being done

to make best use of the relevant data to track learners at colleges and universities and their progression into the workplace, and that such data could provide much more “insightful analyses” in relation to upskilling the labour force across all sectors. What plans does the Scottish Government have to address the issue to do with data?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I have raised the matter directly with my colleague Angela Constance. We always want to ensure that data that is available is used in the best possible way. If it emerges from the commission’s work that that has not been happening to best effect, the issue is likely to be a key one for consideration if we are re-elected and are looking to deliver a formal response to the commission.

### **Fair Work Convention**

**7. Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the fair work convention. (S4O-05692)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham):** The fair work convention developed and published its fair work framework on 21 March. The framework sets out the convention’s vision that

“by 2025, people in Scotland will have a world-leading working life where fair work drives success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses, organisations and society.”

The framework then sets out what is meant by “fair work”, why it is important and who the main players are in taking the agenda forward, acknowledging the challenges of doing so. It describes fair work as

“work that offers effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect”.

**Mark McDonald:** I welcome the recommendation by the fair work convention. Will the cabinet secretary highlight how that will be taken forward in promoting fair work across public and private sector employers to ensure that workers across Scotland can benefit from fair work in future?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** The convention has recognised that real progress will come only through businesses, organisations and trade unions working together to deliver change. It invites everyone in the workplace to become involved and has challenged itself to proactively support the implementation and evolution of the framework. The convention will take that work forward over the coming weeks and months by engaging with and bringing together stakeholders who have an important role to play in the fair work landscape. As with the commission on widening

access that I discussed in answer to an earlier question, if we are re-elected to Government, we will provide a formal response in due course.

### **Living Wage (Care Sector)**

**8. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to employers in the care sector to help them pay the living wage. (S4O-05693)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham):** As part of the 2016-17 budget, we have taken action to protect and grow our social care services and deliver our shared priorities by investing a further £250 million in health and social care partnerships. Part of that investment is to enable local authorities to pay a living wage to care workers supporting vulnerable adults, including in the independent and third sectors. It is an ambitious commitment, which we are currently working through with providers and councils. There has been a series of meetings to discuss the investment and we will continue to work in partnership with stakeholders between now and October to ensure effective implementation.

**Murdo Fraser:** I know that the additional money has been welcomed by many in the sector, but there are still concerns, for example that the issue of differentials will not be addressed by the money that is coming in. Given that the care sector is unusual in that so much of its income comes directly from public funds and therefore there is very little scope to raise additional funds from other sources, which means that if the living wage is paid the money for it has to come from that source, does the cabinet secretary agree that the Scottish Government—whoever it is following the election—needs to continue to work with employers to ensure that the funds coming in are sufficient to meet the ambition that all workers will get the living wage?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** Murdo Fraser is correct to say that partnership working is vital and has to continue for the proposal to work. I direct him to the fact that there are five care companies that are accredited living wage employers working in the adult care sector. It is worth flagging up that it is possible for care companies already to be paying the living wage.

The integration joint boards, which are key to taking the work forward, will direct local authorities to commission care from the independent and voluntary sectors on the basis that people will be paid £8.25 an hour. That will give thousands of care workers a pay rise. We would have preferred implementation to be earlier than 1 October, but we have given that extra time to allow the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to do the

preparatory work that will be required and is the kind of work that Murdo Fraser is referring to.

The main beneficiaries will be care workers in care homes and home care services provided by independent and voluntary sector providers. I hope that everyone in the Parliament will welcome that.

### **Pay (Hospitality Sector)**

**9. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve the pay of workers in the hospitality sector. (S4O-05694)

**The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing):** Although the Scottish Government is not able to set pay levels in the third and private sectors, or indeed in the wider public sector in Scotland where employees are not covered by our pay policy, we encourage every organisation, regardless of size or sector to ensure that all staff receive a fair level of pay and, where possible, to pay the living wage. Research suggests that the living wage can enhance productivity, reduce absenteeism and improve staff morale. Those are key advantages for an industry such as hospitality that recognises that excellent customer service impacts favourably on the bottom line.

**James Kelly:** Does the minister agree that paying the living wage remains a challenge in the hospitality and retail sectors? Greggs, which has a base in my constituency, has expressed opposition to the payment of the living wage. What action is the Scottish Government taking to enforce payment of the living wage in the hospitality and retail sectors in respect of companies with which they have contractual arrangements?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I hear what the member says and I encourage every member to take the opportunity to work with local employers of whatever kind in their constituencies and encourage them to pay the living wage.

I am not aware of the particular circumstances of the example that the member gives, and I am also not aware that the Government has any contractual relationship with that company.

In the broader view, if the Parliament had the powers over the minimum wage that the member's party did not seek in the Smith commission, we would be in a much better position to enforce payment of a decent wage for our workers in Scotland.

## Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights

### Affordable Housing (East Kilbride)

**1. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will increase affordable housing supply in East Kilbride. (S4O-05696)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** The Scottish Government works closely with housing providers throughout South Lanarkshire to increase the supply of affordable housing. In East Kilbride, 238 new affordable homes were built between 2011-12 and 2014-15. We expect to see a further 72 new homes completed in the town by 31 March 2016, another 191 new homes are currently on site and due to complete by 31 March 2017, and land has recently been acquired by a housing association with a Scottish Government grant to provide a further 34 new affordable homes.

**Linda Fabiani:** The minister will be aware that East Kilbride suffers from a particularly acute social housing shortage. In some measure, that is because of the aggressive right-to-buy policy that was applied when it was a new town. The current Government's record on affordable housing is certainly beyond that of the previous Administration.

Will the minister confirm that, if the current Government is returned after the election, particular discussion will take place about East Kilbride's social housing provision?

**Margaret Burgess:** If it is re-elected, the Government will certainly be willing to discuss with the member and South Lanarkshire Council their plans for affordable housing in East Kilbride. We have increased the resource planning assumption for South Lanarkshire from £10.16 million in 2015-16 to £16.938 million in 2016-17. That is a 66 per cent increase in committed funding in spite of the constraints of the United Kingdom budget cuts.

### Inequality

**2. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what policies it has instigated to achieve a greater degree of equality between the most and least wealthy areas of the country. (S4O-05697)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil):** Our commitment to tackling inequality and poverty across Scotland is made clear in the 2015 programme for government, and we have instigated a number of policies to achieve a greater degree of equality across the country during our time in office, including a commitment

to support people in Scotland who are affected by the United Kingdom Government's welfare cuts. The First Minister appointed an independent adviser on poverty and inequality, who has published a series of recommendations in her report "Shifting the Curve". We also launched a nationwide discussion last year in which we asked people across the country what a fairer Scotland means to them, and a report on the findings was published recently.

**Drew Smith:** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for his response and I welcome many of the initiatives that he highlights, particularly in relation to welfare. I must congratulate him on getting through that answer without once using the word "redistribution".

I recently heard it said that Scotland is becoming the best place in the world to be middle class. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, when the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities this week produced a manifesto claiming that Scotland's inequalities are in danger of overtaking countries with which we would not want to be compared—the First Minister's poverty adviser has said something similar—the real challenge for the next parliamentary session will be for Parliament to turn the rhetoric on inequality into action?

**Alex Neil:** The Government is taking action on a range of fronts. First, we have the highest level of employment in any part of the United Kingdom. Secondly, we are extending the living wage as much as we can. Thirdly, we have improved the social wage. Fourthly, we will use our new powers on social security to maximise equality and reduce poverty in Scotland.

I wish the member, who is not returning to Parliament, all the best. I look forward to working with him in some new capacity in the near future.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary assure us that, rather than concentrating exclusively on the redistribution of wealth through taxation, he will do something to improve labour mobility in Scotland so that the country's unemployed can move to the areas where the new jobs are created and take up the opportunities that George Osborne has generated through economic growth?

**Alex Neil:** Over the next six weeks, I think that what the Scottish electorate will be saying to the Scottish Tories is, "Get on your bike."

The Government is doing everything that it possibly can, which is why we have the highest level of employment of any part of the United Kingdom. If we were not burdened by the UK Government's rather hideous policies, we could do much more for the people of Scotland.

### Anti-Poverty Initiatives (Glasgow)

**3. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports anti-poverty initiatives in Glasgow. (S4O-05698)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil):** We fund a number of organisations to deliver anti-poverty initiatives in Glasgow. Those include advice services delivered by Macmillan Cancer Support, the citizens advice network and One Parent Families Scotland and a range of initiatives with the likes of Glasgow Disability Alliance, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, the Fair Share Trust, Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector that are aimed at helping people who are affected by poverty and welfare reform.

**Bob Doris:** I hope that the new maternity and early years allowance that the Scottish Government is rolling out will help some of the poorest families in the communities that I represent in Glasgow. I ask the cabinet secretary for some more details on the roll-out of that new allowance and on how many people are likely to benefit in Glasgow.

**Alex Neil:** For a family with two children, the maternity and early years allowance means £1,900-worth of support over the children's early years, compared with the £500 that is available now. Under the sure start maternity grant, the payment at birth for a first child will increase from £500 to £600 and, reversing the United Kingdom coalition Government's decision to restrict payments to the first child, we will introduce a £300 payment for second and subsequent children.

However, we also recognise that the disadvantages of poverty affect children not just at birth but at other key stages of their young lives. Therefore, we will make payments of £250 to support families through the transition when children start nursery and again at the start of school.

That is an example of the fairer social security system that we want to achieve in Scotland and of how we are redistributing resources in favour of the most vulnerable members of our society.

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):** I had thought that Mr Doris might declare an interest, given the recent happy birth of his son Cameron. I congratulate him and Mrs Doris on that.

Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the good work that Glasgow City Council does in tackling poverty in the city will be vastly affected by the cut of some £130 million as a result of his Government's funding settlement to the city?

**Alex Neil:** The overall cut to the local government budget is less than 1 per cent of the total revenue expenditure after taking account of the additional money that is being put into social care, so there will be no excuse for Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council to make Glasgow a less fair city than it is.

### Residential Care (Self-Funding Payments)

**4. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it complies with its social justice policy objectives for self-funding older people in residential care to pay more than local authorities for the same care. (S4O-05699)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil):** Free personal care is available for everyone aged 65 and over in Scotland who has been assessed by the local authority as needing it. Free nursing care is available for people of any age who have been assessed as requiring nursing care services.

We are committed to ensuring that people on the lowest incomes or with the lowest asset wealth continue to receive financial support from their local authorities for their residential care. Two thirds of people in residential care—around 24,000 people—are supported in that way in Scotland. The Scottish Government and the Royal Commission on Long Term Care for the Elderly have been clear that people who can afford to pay for their care should continue to do so while we support people who cannot afford to pay for theirs.

**Mary Scanlon:** I thank David McLaren in the chamber desk team for randomly selecting me for this question, given that I have been complaining about not being selected for the past year.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** And the question is?

**Mary Scanlon:** How can it be socially just when councils pay about £470 a week for a placement in a care home but a self-funding placement costs well over £1,000? As this is my final question, I will just say that I have been asking this question since 1999. The Labour Party's response used to refer to a 1951 act of Parliament that forbade it from applying charges equally. With the huge raft of powers that are being devolved to this Parliament, will the Government commit to reviewing the situation to bring about fairness and social justice for all elderly people?

**Alex Neil:** Having heard the supplementary, I am absolutely sure that Mary Scanlon was not randomly picked to ask that question because she has campaigned vigorously on the issue ever since 1999.

I draw Mary Scanlon's attention to the joint review of residential care services by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which was published about 18 months ago. The issue was among a number of issues that we intend to try to address.

Finally, since this is Mary Scanlon's last question, I pay tribute to her tremendous service to the Parliament, to the country and particularly to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. She will be sorely missed from this Parliament. *[Applause.]*

### **Support to Communities (Highlands and Islands)**

**5. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to communities in the Highlands and Islands. (S4O-05700)

**The Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment (Marco Biagi):** The Scottish Government and its public sector partners continue to make significant investment in our communities, including the Highlands and Islands. For example, yesterday we announced a £315 million Inverness and Highland city region deal, including a Scottish Government commitment of up to £135 million over 10 years. The deal, which also includes up to £53 million from the United Kingdom Government and up to £127 million from the Highland Council and its regional partners, contains a package of measures aimed at improving the regional economy. Those include better transport connectivity and digital networks, increases in innovation, more local housing and assisted living schemes.

**David Stewart:** Communities across the Highlands and Islands are on the front line of council cuts. In my home area, the Highland Council has made cuts of £30 million, with 341 staff facing redundancy. Is the minister aware that, in the Highlands, bereaved families face rocketing burial charges, with an increase of more than 50 per cent, bringing funeral poverty to the region's most vulnerable people at a time of acute grief?

The council leader places responsibility for the cuts squarely at the door of the Scottish Government settlement. Does the minister agree?

**Marco Biagi:** Highland Council is receiving £439 million from the Scottish Government and as my colleague the cabinet secretary has already said, the overall reduction nationally for local government is 1 per cent when the figures for health and social care are taken into account. That money is going towards achieving the living wage for health and social care staff and a further freeze on council tax bills and it is going to deliver great advantages for the whole of the country.

There are clearly challenges that each local authority will have to address in deciding how they want to deal with the financial circumstances. Those are the same financial circumstances and the same challenges that have been striking the entire public sector.

On the issue of funeral poverty in particular, the member will be aware of the work that has been done by the Scottish Government and Citizens Advice Scotland and that was launched by the cabinet secretary relatively recently. We will take forward action from that work.

### **New Homes**

**6. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many homes have been built per head of population since 2007. (S4O-05701)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** Under this Government, over the 2007-08 to 2014-15 period, an average of 336 new homes per 100,000 population have been built in Scotland per year across all tenures.

**Graeme Dey:** How does that figure compare to England and Wales?

**Margaret Burgess:** As I have said on a number of occasions, house building rates in Scotland have been consistently higher in each and every year since 2007. The 336 homes built per 100,000 population in Scotland compare with 237 built per 100,000 population in England and 207 homes per 100,000 population in Wales. In percentage terms, that means that over the 2007-08 to 2014-15 period, the rate of building in Scotland has been 42 per cent higher than in England and 62 per cent higher than in Wales.

### **People and Communities Fund**

**7. Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the people and communities fund and how it supports community organisations. (S4O-05702)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** On Monday I announced a budget of £10.755 million for the people and communities fund in 2016-17, which will support nearly 190 continuing community-led fund projects throughout Scotland with a further year of funding. An evaluation of the people and communities fund will be conducted in 2016 to explore its impact and to understand better how that type of funding supports and empowers communities.

**Richard Lyle:** I welcome the minister's update on the people and communities fund.

What advice could be given to help a local Bellshill group in my region, which requires funding for a traffic report that has been requested by North Lanarkshire Council in order to establish a sports hub, thereby ensuring that the project can gain the best for the local area?

**Margaret Burgess:** The Government recognises the importance of funding for our community groups to help to empower them to deliver the local priorities that matter most to them. That is why, despite our tight spending review, we have maintained a £20 million commitment to support the family of empowering communities funds in 2016-17.

Local authorities have a key role to play as partners in community groups to help them to realise their local ambitions. I encourage all community groups to use the helpful funding portal provided by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, which can be accessed at [www.fundingscotland.com](http://www.fundingscotland.com), to help to identify funds that are available in Scotland for their activities. I wish the local group in Richard Lyle's constituency good luck in facilitating that new enterprise in Bellshill.

#### Temporary Accommodation (Time Limit)

**8. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on introducing a time limit for temporary accommodation. (S4O-05703)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** Time limits already exist on the use of unsuitable accommodation for families with children and pregnant women. The provision of temporary accommodation is an important part of local authorities' duties for homeless households in Scotland and provides a vital safety net for those that require it.

The time that is spent in temporary accommodation should be as short as possible, while suitable and sustainable settled accommodation is found. Moving households through temporary accommodation as quickly as possible should be balanced with a person-centred approach that considers the particular needs and housing options of individual households.

**Anne McTaggart:** Local authorities report significant increases in the length of time that is spent in temporary accommodation. Typical stays in temporary accommodation are now more than seven months, and for some people it can be up to two years. Will the cabinet secretary support a reduction in the length of time that homeless people have to spend in unsuitable temporary accommodation to 14 days? Will she extend provisions on standards in the Homeless Persons

(Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 to include single homeless people and families without children?

**Margaret Burgess:** We are continually reviewing the use of temporary accommodation for all homeless people. From the end of March 2016, local authorities will begin the mandatory collection of information on the length of time that is spent in temporary accommodation. That will help to inform the Scottish Government, in consultation with our stakeholders, about any further steps that it may need to take.

As I said, the length of a temporary accommodation stay for anyone should be as short as possible.

#### Community Councils (Strengthening)

**9. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to strengthening community councils. (S4O-05704)

**The Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment (Marco Biagi):** Although local authorities have statutory oversight of community councils, the Government has been working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Improvement Service and Edinburgh Napier University to further enhance their role.

**John Mason:** Does the minister share my concern that, although we want to push power down to local communities below the city council level, it is difficult when many community councils are not active, or are kept going only by a very small band of people?

**Marco Biagi:** I share that concern. Community councils that do not feel listened to will not attract people and will struggle to recruit. Our work includes a website to support community councils; digital engagement workshops to support them in recruiting new people; and a fairer Scotland community council event that we are hosting, to which all community councils are invited.

Last year, I met the national body for English parish and town councils to learn more about their system. I would describe myself as actively interested, but any further work would be for the next Administration, of which I will clearly not be a part, to take forward.

## General Question Time

11:40

### Veterans (Accommodation)

#### 1. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands)

**(SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it provides to veterans seeking accommodation. (S4O-05706)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Keith Brown):** A wide range of help and support is available to veterans who are seeking accommodation. Through its affordable housing supply programme, the Scottish Government provides grant funding to veterans organisations to build homes to support ex-service personnel. Priority access is provided to veterans who are looking to buy a home with assistance from the Scottish Government's low-cost initiative for first-time buyers schemes.

We have produced a tailored housing guide for veterans and for support organisations that provide advice and support to veterans to help them to understand their housing options. In addition, the Scottish housing options guidance, which was published on 2 March, advises that local authority housing options services should ensure that appropriate plans, liaison and referral arrangements are in place to address the particular needs of people leaving the armed forces.

**Gordon MacDonald:** The latest information from the Ministry of Defence has revealed that 30 per cent of Scotland's service family accommodation is lying empty, and the Army is evicting veterans only three months after they have left the service. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is a disgrace that there are more than 1,000 empty service homes in Scotland, including those in my constituency of Edinburgh Pentlands?

**Keith Brown:** I agree with the member that it is in no one's interest for such large numbers of homes to be sitting vacant. While the Scottish Government recognises that that accommodation is aimed at meeting the needs of serving personnel and their families, we strongly urge the MOD to have the best possible use and maintenance of its service family accommodation.

I spoke to the Secretary of State for Defence about the issue very recently, and as recently as yesterday I spoke to Andrew Dunlop, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland. I encourage the MOD to look at what steps can be taken to reduce the number of such vacant properties throughout Scotland, including steps that involve those who have recently left the armed forces.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that some veterans—too many—end up in the criminal justice system, perhaps because of homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder or other issues. What is the Scottish Government, together with the United Kingdom Government and the MOD, doing to help veterans who are finding civilian life very difficult, which may end up with them coming before the courts?

**Keith Brown:** One example of that help is the community justice service support for ex-service personnel in North Lanarkshire. The criminal justice social work service's veterans mentoring project there responds to a growing need locally. The project provides a package of support to veterans who have difficulties in readjusting to civilian life and who can become involved in offending, which is often significantly linked to alcohol and drug misuse. As well as those on community payback orders, the group works with veterans who have been referred through social work and mental health services. That is just one example of the assistance that we provide to such veterans.

### Children

**2. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that children get the best start in life. (S4O-05707)

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell):** Ensuring that all children get the best possible start in life is a key priority for the Government. That is why we established the early years change fund in 2012, with local government and the health service, to invest £274 million to deliver transformational change in early years services. That has included establishing the early years collaborative, which is encouraging agencies to work together and intervene early and is building on Scotland's first-ever early years framework.

We have also invested about £500 million to expand free early learning and childcare to 475 hours for all three and four-year-olds and disadvantaged two-year-olds. We are recruiting 500 additional health visitors by 2018 to support parents in their children's earliest years.

**Stewart Stevenson:** I am sure that parents and children throughout Scotland very much welcome the more than £0.5 billion of investment that the minister refers to. We are all aware of the impact that poverty can have in early years, but what more can we do in the next Parliament, which we are about to elect?

**Aileen Campbell:** We fundamentally disagree with the changes that the United Kingdom Government currently proposes and we will continue to develop a Scottish approach to tackle and mitigate the impact of poverty. We are investing £14 million in 2016-17 through our new third sector fund to tackle inequality and help thousands of children, families and communities. We have fully funded free school meals for all primary 1 to P3 pupils, which will deliver a saving for families of at least £380 per child per year and benefit 130,000 children throughout Scotland.

As the First Minister recently announced, we will also extend universal free school meals to all two, three and four-year-olds in early learning and childcare when we expand provision to 30 hours a week. Moreover, if re-elected in May, we will replace the sure start maternity grant with a new and extended maternity and early years allowance, which will increase the amount for the first child, reinstate payments for subsequent children and make payments to low-income families when their children start nursery and school. I could list more that will contribute to a package of measures to give children the very best possible start in life.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The Scottish Government has argued firmly that the named person policy is part of the programme to give children the best start in life. Will the minister confirm whether that scheme is mandatory?

**Aileen Campbell:** As Liz Smith clearly knows well, the named person scheme is an entitlement for all families across the country. It is designed to help families who have told us that they are fed up being passed from pillar to post. It is about co-ordinating services and putting children at the heart of service design and delivery. Liz Smith would do well to look again at her notes on when we passed this unanimously through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

### Superfast Broadband

**3. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress digital Scotland has made in providing 95 per cent superfast broadband coverage to communities by 2017. (S4O-05708)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney):** The digital Scotland superfast broadband programme has delivered fibre broadband to more than 530,000 homes and businesses in Scotland and has met the initial coverage target of 85 per cent six months early. The programme remains on track to meet the 95 per cent target by the end of 2017.

**James Dornan:** If the Scottish Government is re-elected in May, what action will be taken to deliver superfast broadband to 100 per cent of Scotland's communities, including those in urban areas such as my constituency of Glasgow Cathcart?

**John Swinney:** The Scottish Government has given the commitment that, if we are returned to office in May, we will deliver 100 per cent superfast broadband coverage in the course of the next parliamentary session. Digital connectivity is essential to the ability of individuals and businesses to participate in our 21st century society. We have made significant progress, with the 85 per cent target being reached six months early, and we will work during the next session to ensure that every citizen in Scotland has access to the level of connectivity that is appropriate for 21st century Scotland.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** How soon will the cabinet secretary be able to deal with the continuing problem of exchange-only lines upgrades?

**John Swinney:** The problem of exchange-only lines is being addressed as part of the roll-out of the superfast broadband programme. In countless communities around the country, the challenge of exchange-only lines has been addressed and the services have been delivered. They require a more complex solution that involves more complex engineering and is more resource intensive. That solution has been delivered across countless communities and is part of the Government's ongoing commitment to delivering the programme.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I welcome the decision to ensure that there is 100 per cent superfast broadband coverage by 2021. As the cabinet secretary will know, 97 per cent of Arran will have superfast broadband by the end of this summer. When will it be installed in Machrie, which makes up the remaining 3 per cent? Surely it makes sense for BT to cover the entire island in one go.

**John Swinney:** I am not surprised to hear that superfast broadband coverage in Arran will be at 97 per cent by the summer, given the tenacious efforts of the member of Parliament for Cunninghame North in pursuing the issue on his constituents' behalf. I cannot give him a specific timetable for the community of Machrie, but I assure him that the challenges that must be overcome to deliver the service will be overcome as part of the roll-out of the Government's programme.

### Scottish Pork

**4. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what



information it has on the percentage of pork in Scottish supermarkets that is reared in Scotland. (S4O-05709)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead):** Annual pigmeat production in Scotland totalled about 24,000 tonnes in 2015, and it has been estimated that Scottish consumers buy about 10,000 tonnes of fresh pork, most of which is believed to come from Scotland-reared pigs. Each supermarket has its own sourcing and labelling policies, with most Scottish supermarkets offering and identifying specially selected Scotch pork, which is vigorously promoted by Quality Meat Scotland. Other fresh pork products that are sourced from Scotland may be available under own-label, organic or outdoor-reared packaging. I have asked Quality Meat Scotland to investigate the extent to which domestically sourced pork is available in Scottish supermarkets.

**Dennis Robertson:** What else can the Government do to ensure that customers are not misled on supermarket labelling? Can we praise Aldi and Lidl for having 100 per cent Scotland-reared pork in their supermarkets? The other supermarkets should take that as good practice.

**Richard Lochhead:** I praise Aldi and Lidl for sourcing 100 per cent Scottish fresh pork and urge other retailers to follow in their footsteps. We are in constant discussions with the food service sector and retailers about sourcing Scottish produce, be that pork or other produce. We also support clear labelling to highlight the provenance of products that are on sale. I continually remind retailers and other major purchasers of food products to ensure that they label in such a way and that they source locally where that is possible.

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** What financial support has been given to the expansion of pork abattoir capacity in Scotland over the past five years? What percentage of Scotland-farmed pigs were exported last year to England for killing and were subsequently branded as British pork as opposed to Scottish pork, and what was the consequent loss in the QMS levy to Scotland?

**Richard Lochhead:** In the past five years, the food processing grants scheme has supported seven abattoir projects totalling £3.28 million. The records from 2014 show that just over 500,000 pigs moved south from Scotland to abattoirs and other premises in England, while 29,000 pigs came in the other direction, which equated to a net loss of just under £500,000 in the levy paid. We have been putting maximum pressure on the United Kingdom Government to change the form that is used for allocating the red meat levy so that we can keep Scottish levy in Scotland to promote Scottish produce and not lose it over the border.

## E-Commerce Sales

**5. Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what the estimated value of e-commerce sales was in 2014 and 2015. (S4O-05710)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney):** Scottish Enterprise uses data published by the Office for National Statistics to estimate the value of e-commerce sales in Scotland. The latest data, which were published by ONS in November last year, mean that we can estimate the value of e-commerce sales in Scotland in 2014 at £49 billion. That is made up of £18 billion over websites and £31 billion through electronic data interchange sales. That represents an increase of £9 billion from £40 billion in 2012. Those data are published every two years, and the next figures will be available in 2016.

**Gavin Brown:** Does the Scottish Government welcome the e-commerce excellence initiative that is led by the chambers of commerce? Can the Scottish Government do anything specific to engage with that initiative?

**John Swinney:** That goes back to the question about digital connectivity that I answered a moment ago. We acknowledge the importance of the availability of digital connectivity, which allows many companies in Scotland—particularly small and medium-sized enterprises—to access new markets. We very much welcome that initiative from the chambers of commerce and look forward to working with them, through the established structures of company development support, to ensure that SMEs take up the opportunity. We will work closely with the chambers of commerce to ensure that that happens.

I recognise that the issue of e-commerce is one that Mr Brown has pursued with vigour during his time as a member of Parliament, and I wish him well in the future.

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (Engagement with Survivors)

**6. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to engage with survivors on contested issues relating to the Scottish child abuse inquiry. (S4O-05711)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** On Monday, following a meeting earlier this year, I met survivors to discuss a range of issues and, in particular, to consider a more structured approach for survivors' engagement with ministers throughout the lifetime of the inquiry. If it is re-

elected, this Government will immediately put that approach in place.

As Mr Pearson knows, many survivors have been campaigning for the inquiry for a very long time. Their views, ambitions and needs are vital to the work of the inquiry, and it is important to continually recognise that those are varied, considered and powerful views. That makes it all the more important that we continue to listen to them, to act on them where we can and to ensure that survivors' needs and interests remain at the heart of the inquiry process and any other actions.

**Graeme Pearson:** Since the meeting on Monday, survivors and our representatives have told me of their profound disappointment and anger because they do not feel that they are being listened to. They want an inquiry that covers all survivors, regardless of where the abuse took place, and a system of redress that covers all survivors. Will the Government work hard to deliver the promised survivor-centred response that they demand?

**Angela Constance:** I acknowledge that this is probably Mr Pearson's last contribution in the chamber. I know that he has been a great friend to survivors and to many organisations, which I appreciate.

Mr Pearson knows that it has been very challenging to reach a decision on the inquiry's scope given the wide range of views, even among survivors. However, the remit cannot be so wide that survivors lose hope of the inquiry ever reaching clear and specific conclusions. The definitions of "abuse" and "in care" for the purposes of the inquiry are very broad, and that was in response to the views expressed by survivors to me and to other ministers.

Mr Pearson has attended meetings with survivors that I have participated in, so he is very much aware that there are clear issues about the time-bar legislation and it not applying to pre-1964 cases. I gave a commitment in this chamber, which acknowledged those issues, that we would nonetheless have a dialogue with partners. I am pleased to say that Jamie Hepburn has announced the successful tender for the consortium for the survivor support fund and that this Government will be prioritising the needs of older survivors within that support fund to ensure that their needs are assessed and that they have access to the service and the fund by June this year.

### City Deal (Dundee)

**7. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making with a city deal for Dundee. (S4O-05712)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Keith Brown):** The Scottish Government is very supportive of city deals—cities and the regions are the engines of our economy. We are aware that Dundee, together with Perth and Kinross, Angus and north Fife have signalled their intent to work together on a proposed Tay cities deal, and we look forward to engaging with them on the proposals.

The Scottish Government has recently committed to investing up to £63.8 million in Dundee through the growth accelerator model, which aims to deliver a range of central waterfront investments, including the station concourse, civic places, development of the V&A, world-class digital infrastructure and grade-A office space to support economic growth and increased tourism in the area.

**Jenny Marra:** Inverness got its city deal yesterday; Glasgow and Aberdeen have their city deals, and Edinburgh is on its way. Dundee is being left behind. [*Interruption.*] It is a whole year since Dundee City Council even discussed a city deal.

The United Kingdom Government says that it is waiting for an approach. Nicola Sturgeon confirmed to me in a letter that her Government has not even started talks about Dundee's city deal. Dundee is becoming Scotland's sold-out city. [*Interruption.*] When, and I want a commitment, will the Scottish National Party get a city deal moving for Dundee?

**Keith Brown:** I confirm that, contrary to what Jenny Marra has said, Dundee City Council has written to me and to the UK Government on the issue. I also confirm that, on yesterday's Inverness city deal announcement, the UK Government's contribution of £53 million was substantially less than what we have just awarded to Dundee through the growth accelerator model.

It is also true to say that Dundee has played a very astute game, if I may say so, by getting the growth accelerator model in first before many other cities; uniquely, it has also proposed a Tay cities deal, which will for the first time in the UK involve two cities working together on a city deal. I suggest that Jenny Marra gets behind the city council and makes sure that she wins that money in the long term.

### Public Sector Reform

**8. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its priorities are for public sector reform. (S4O-05713)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government is committed to maintaining its

approach to public service reform, guided by the Christie priorities of prevention, integration and empowerment. We will continue to invest in vital public services such as health and education, supported by ambitious reforms to ensure that those services remain sustainable and improve outcomes for the citizens of Scotland.

**Neil Bibby:** Given that the Government's police reforms have resulted in a chief constable and a deputy chief constable resigning, given that its college reforms have resulted in 150,000 fewer places and lecturers out on strike, given the shambolic implementation of curriculum for excellence and a series of information technology failures, how can people have confidence that the integration of health and social care will be different from those other botched reforms? Given that the bar has been set so low, what will the Government's version of success look like in that case?

**John Swinney:** It is well seen that Mr Bibby is closing this parliamentary session on the same cheerful note that he started it on five years ago.

Crime is at a 41-year low, college places have been preserved at more than 116,000, as we promised, and curriculum for excellence is delivering increased attainment for the young people of Scotland. Mr Bibby should get behind the citizens of Scotland and stop whingeing from the side.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Engagements

**1. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-03327)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Presiding Officer, as this is the last opportunity that we will have, I would like to offer Parliament a very brief update on our work to secure a future for Scotland's steel industry.

Negotiations between Liberty House, Tata Steel and the Scottish Government continue, as we speak, in order to secure the basis for an agreement that would see Liberty House buy and operate the Dalzell and Clydebridge steel plants. The final due diligence on that agreement is taking place at present. The agreement would be facilitated by the Scottish Government and would involve the Government buying the plants and then immediately selling them on to Liberty House for the same consideration. Fergus Ewing will attend the Scottish steel task force this afternoon and will provide further details at that point.

In the meantime, I want to thank the workforce, the unions and the companies for their patience and perseverance. We promised that we would leave no stone unturned in our efforts to secure the future of our steel industry, and that is what we continue to do. [*Applause.*]

**Kezia Dugdale:** That is indeed very encouraging news, First Minister. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Order.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I record my thanks to all members of the steel task force for their hard work and determination; I particularly thank Drew Smith, James Kelly and John Pentland from my party, and our trade union partners.

During the United Kingdom general election last year, Nicola Sturgeon said that she would reverse George Osborne's tax cut for the top 1 per cent. In pledging to reintroduce the 50p top rate of tax, the First Minister said:

"It is right that those with the broadest shoulders pay a little bit more."

Yesterday, she changed her mind. The Scottish National Party will now go into the election with a commitment to keep George Osborne's tax cut for those who earn more than £150,000 a year, even though we now have the power to make different choices from the Tories. Why does the First Minister no longer think that the richest 1 per cent should pay their fair share?

**The First Minister:** Raising the top rate of tax to 50p could

“raise zero because of the mechanisms by which people can avoid paying tax”.

Those are not my words—they are the words of Kezia Dugdale.

Let me say this, and say it very seriously, to the people of Scotland. Raising the top rate of tax would be politically easy because there are only 17,000 people in our country who pay it; there would be no political risk attached to doing it. However, to do it in the face of analysis that says that, right now, it could actually reduce the amount of money that we have to invest in our national health service and our public services would not be radical. It would be reckless. It would not be daring. It would be daft. Therefore, we will not do it straight away. Instead, we will continue to consider it in the light of our experience and analysis.

In the meantime, we will put forward fair, reasonable and progressive tax proposals. We will ask the better-off people in our society to shoulder a bit more of the burden. Over the life of the next session of Parliament, our proposals—local and national—will raise an additional £2 billion of revenue, which we can invest in our national health service and our public services and in mitigating the impacts of Tory austerity. That is why I will be proud to ask the people of Scotland to back our plans.

**Kezia Dugdale:** The First Minister really should pay attention, because since I made those remarks, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has made it harder for people to move their tax liabilities around the United Kingdom.

We have time and again heard excuses: the richest could avoid paying more taxes; there would be a mass exodus from Scotland. It is just that we normally hear them from the Tory party, not the First Minister. It was not just at the general election that the First Minister claimed to support the richest few paying their fair share; on the day of the Smith agreement to devolve the power over tax, she told Parliament:

“if I was taking that decision now, yes, I would raise the top rate of income tax to 50p.”—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2014; c 10.]

However, now that she has the power to reverse George Osborne's tax cut for the very richest and to stop the cuts, she refuses to use it. This is the First Minister who made her name as the anti-austerity champion; she went down to England and said that she would stand up to George Osborne's tax cuts, but the minute she gets the powers back home, the First Minister chooses not to act.

It is no surprise that the Scottish Trades Union Congress—the representative of Scotland's workers and trade unions—described the First Minister's tax plans as “timid” and “difficult to fathom”. I want to ask the First Minister the same question that the STUC posed yesterday: if the SNP cannot summon the courage to propose major progressive change at this moment in time, will it ever?

**The First Minister:** I will leave Labour—given that it remains in a battle for second place in the election—to indulge in political gestures. I will get on with putting forward the proposals—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** —that will see this country governed—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Wheesht!

**The First Minister:** —fairly and progressively.

HMRC cannot stop people moving house. If just 7 per cent of top taxpayers were to do that, we could lose £30 million a year in Scotland—there would be £30 million less for our national health service and public services. I will get on with doing the right thing, which is why we are asking people—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** That is why we are asking people in the top 10 per cent of income earners in our country to forgo the George Osborne tax cut, and it is why we are asking those who live in the biggest houses in our country—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** —to contribute a little bit more, so that over the next session of Parliament we can generate an extra £2 billion to invest in our national health service and our education system, and to mitigate Tory austerity. Those are the sound principles and sound policies that we are putting forward, which is why we know—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Let us hear the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** That is why we know that we go into the election with unprecedented trust among the people of Scotland.

**Kezia Dugdale:** And there we have it: a nationalist First Minister arguing that Scotland cannot go it alone on tax. That really takes the biscuit.

Why does this all matter? It matters because after nearly a decade under the SNP, there are 4,000 fewer teachers in our classrooms and 152,000 fewer college students, and the gap

between the richest and the rest in our schools is as wide as ever. The new tax powers mean that we can change that. Last week, the teachers' union, the Educational Institute of Scotland, called on all parties to protect all education spending in real terms over the next five years. Labour can make that commitment because of the tax plans that we have set out, but the SNP's tax plans will not raise anywhere near enough to do the same. Why will the First Minister not stop the cuts to education?

**The First Minister:** First of all, let me say this to Kezia Dugdale: we are going it alone on tax. We are rejecting the George Osborne tax cut that John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn are supporting. We are taking the decisions that are right for Scotland. We are also taking—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Let us hear the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** We are also taking decisions that will allow us to invest, over the next session of Parliament, three quarters of a billion pounds in tackling attainment in our schools.

I am proud of the record of this Government. We have more people working in our health service, with some of the best and fastest treatment anywhere in the UK. We have rebuilt or refurbished a quarter of all the schools in our country. We have the best school-leaver destinations on record, with young people going into training, education or work more than ever before. This Government has a record to be proud of, but there is much more to do. I am looking forward to persuading the people of our country that I and this Government are the people to get on and do that job.

**Kezia Dugdale:** Nicola Sturgeon will not raise the basic rate of tax, fully reverse the higher rate or increase the top rate, but she wants us to believe that she can find the money to protect education. That is utter nonsense.

The First Minister, who has campaigned for years using the mantra that more powers will mean fewer cuts, now refuses to use the powers to stop the cuts. She says that education is a priority, but she will not ask the richest 1 per cent to pay more to invest in our schools. The SNP says that it is anti-austerity, but it is content to use Parliament as a conveyor belt for Tory cuts. Faced with the choice between using the powers of the Scottish Parliament and passing on Tory austerity, Labour will use the powers. Why is the First Minister's choice always more cuts? *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** It will be a long time before the people of Scotland forget the grotesque sight

of Labour campaigning with the Tories to keep Scotland subject to Tory Governments now and in the future. That is why Labour is paying a price. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**The First Minister:** The tax proposals that we will be proud to put forward in the election will raise an additional £2 billion for our public services and enable us to mitigate Tory austerity.

We have, in the chamber, Tories telling us that we are taxing too much and Labour telling us that we are not taxing ordinary working people enough. I suspect that the people of Scotland will look at what the SNP is offering and say that it is right, proper, sensible and progressive. That is why they will choose us to continue to govern this country.

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

**2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the First Minister when she will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-03323)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** No immediate plans.

**Ruth Davidson:** The Scottish National Party Government wants to impose a named person on every child in Scotland over the heads of parents, against the wishes of the majority of this country, and against the concerns of many, including the police, who believe that that will take resource away from the most vulnerable families who need it most. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Ruth Davidson:** The First Minister now claims that the scheme, which is due to start in August, is somehow “not mandatory” or “not compulsory” and that parents can choose

“not to have anything to do with it”.

Will she make it absolutely clear whether parents who do not agree with that scheme are able to prevent their child from having a named person and to withdraw their child from all named person provisions?

**The First Minister:** As I have said—I will say it again—the named person scheme is an entitlement. I think that it is a good and sensible entitlement. It is not an obligation. It helps children and families to get the support that they need from services when they need it. It does not in any way, shape or form replace or change the role of the parent or carer or undermine families.

The fact of the matter—all of us should seek to remember this fact—is that it is not possible, however hard we might try, to predict in advance which children might become vulnerable. The named person service is intended to ensure or to

help to ensure that children do not fall through the net. It is not a state guardian. The legislation builds on the role that teachers and health visitors have long held in relation to children, and the approach is not new—it already operates across much of Scotland. The new legislation makes good practice standard across our country. When it comes to protecting our children, we should be prepared to ensure that the right support services are in place and that they are available if and when they are needed for every child.

**Ruth Davidson:** That was anything but clear. I remind members that the Scottish Conservatives lodged specific amendments to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill to allow parents to opt out of the named person scheme and that those amendments were voted down by the First Minister's party and shouted down by her minister, who said that such state guardians were to be a "universal service". Every child—from birth to when they are 18—will have a named person. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Ruth Davidson:** That named person will have access to private and sensitive information, all of which will be recorded on a database and will be accessible without the consent—or, in some cases, even the knowledge—of the parents.

Named person legislation is so sweeping and so unpopular that it is no wonder that the First Minister is trying to spin her way out of it. Is it not dishonest to suggest that a parent choosing not to engage with a named person is the same thing as being able to stop their child having one imposed on them in the first place?

**The First Minister:** The fact of the matter is that children and parents are not legally obliged to use the named person service, or to take up any of the advice or help that is offered to them. However, the service will be available to them if they need it at any point in the future. Families around the country—who may be coping very well, and for whom there are no issues—do not know what the future holds. None of us knows which children may fall into a position in which they are vulnerable or at risk. That is why it is right that the availability of the named person service is on a universal basis.

I repeat that parents are not legally obliged to use the named person service. It is an entitlement rather than an obligation. I think that that is sensible, as it makes sure that the service is available to everybody, if and when they need it, but does not oblige anybody to use it if they feel that they do not need it. That strikes me as a sensible way to ensure the protection of our children and, surely, the protection of our children

should be the one thing that unites us all across the chamber.

### **Cabinet (Meetings)**

#### **3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):**

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-03322)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The cabinet will not meet again until after the election, in the new parliamentary term. I will take nothing for granted, but I hope that I will chair that next meeting of the Scottish cabinet. It will discuss matters that are of importance to the people of Scotland.

**Willie Rennie:** The First Minister's big idea on tax is the status quo—to do literally nothing. Is she not a little bit disappointed that, after waiting for 80 years to get these powers, she has been so timid with them?

**The First Minister:** I remind Willie Rennie of a budget that took place in the previous Westminster Government. I seem to remember that a certain party was part of that Government. When George Osborne decided to reduce the top rate of tax, the then leader of that party—the Deputy Prime Minister—said that it was a budget that every liberal could be proud of. Willie Rennie may want to rewrite history, but I suspect that the memory of the people of Scotland will be a lot longer than his.

On the question of my party's policy, we will put forward—and are putting forward—fair, balanced and progressive tax policies that will raise additional revenue to invest in our public services, and we will do so without clobbering ordinary working people across our country.

**Willie Rennie:** The First Minister claims that those tax policies will raise perhaps £1 billion. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Willie Rennie:** The Scottish National Party's official press release yesterday referred to additional revenue of more than £1 billion. However, it also said:

"no taxpayer will see their bill increase".

If nobody pays any extra, then no Government can spend any more. That means that the opportunity to transform education will be missed; nursery education targets will be missed; the attainment gap in schools will continue to be missed; and the colleges that have been hammered by the SNP will stay on their knees.

Big change needs big, bold measures. That is why the Liberal Democrat penny for education works, and that is why the First Minister's plan does not deliver. Is the First Minister prepared to

say to Scotland's teachers, parents and pupils, that they are not worth a penny more?

**The First Minister:** In the course of that question, Willie Rennie displayed breathtaking ignorance of how the fiscal framework—negotiated between the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government—works. I suggest that he might want to read the framework before he goes any further.

The truth of the matter is that, over the life of the next Parliament, our proposals for income tax and local taxation will raise an additional £2 billion to invest in our public services—our health service and our education system. Of course, that extra revenue will also enable us to mitigate Tory austerity—austerity that first started while Willie Rennie's party was propping up a Tory Government.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move on to question 4. I call Kevin Stewart.

#### Fairer Scotland

**4. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, and aa the very best, quine.

To ask the First Minister what actions the Scottish Government can and will take to create a fairer Scotland, in light of recent United Kingdom Government decisions. (S4F-03326)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Just months after the tax credits fiasco, the United Kingdom chancellor has had to backtrack on his deeply misguided plans to cut benefits to disabled people. That cut would have seen a loss of thousands of pounds a year for 40,000 disabled people across Scotland. The decision to cut benefits was ill thought through, with a lack of any consultation or any evidence for change.

In contrast, the Scottish Government has had extensive consultation with users and organisations about the direction of new devolved powers, including on employability and social security, which will be underpinned by principles of dignity and respect. We have made it clear that boosting economic growth and tackling inequalities go hand in hand, and we will use the new powers to create a better and a fairer Scotland. That is what I hope to be able to continue to do in the next session of Parliament.

**Kevin Stewart:** The Tories have definitively shown themselves to be the nasty party, with continued attacks on disabled people and our social security system, which was of course designed to provide a safety net to protect our most vulnerable folk. Can the First Minister assure me and disabled people in Scotland that the

Scottish Government will continue to offer them the protection that they need and deserve?

**The First Minister:** When we have a situation where Tory policies are too cruel and a step too far for Iain Duncan Smith, I think we know how far adrift the Tories have gone. It is to the shame of the Scottish Conservative party that it did not speak up against the disability cuts before Iain Duncan Smith's resignation.

We are firmly committed to promoting and protecting equality and human rights for disabled people. That is why we are implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We have invested £50 million in the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 to give disabled people greater control over their lives, and when the Tories cut the independent living fund, we created our own fund and put extra money into it. We are also fully mitigating the bedroom tax to protect 72,000 households, 80 per cent of which have a disabled adult living in them, and as soon as we have the powers, we will make sure that we abolish the pernicious bedroom tax once and for all.

This is a Government that has shown by action and by deed that we will create a Scotland that is fair and inclusive for all our citizens.

#### Strengthening Local Democracy (Constitutional Convention)

**5. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the call from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities for a constitutional convention to restore and strengthen local democracy. (S4F-03332)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We welcome COSLA's 2014 commission on strengthening local democracy and the continuing contribution that it is making to the debate. Passing power to communities is at the heart of our community empowerment agenda. For example, through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, we have given communities much greater control in public decision making and a voice in the decisions that matter to them. We have also supported that increased democracy with our empowering communities fund.

Importantly, we have also enabled Scottish councils to reduce business rates to reflect their local economic development priorities, which will further help to strengthen local democracy.

**Drew Smith:** Presiding Officer, I thank the First Minister for that answer and wish her, you and all members well.

Would a fitting legacy of the debate that we have had in this Parliament about our powers not be to engage with the proposal for a constitutional convention and finally restore local government in Scotland rather than simply local administration?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I think that that is a fair point. I know that Drew Smith is standing down from Parliament. I praise him for the contribution that he has made and wish him every success for the future.

We have an opportunity in the next session of Parliament, as we take more powers, to decide which powers are best devolved to other parts of Scotland. I am sure that COSLA will be a constructive partner in that discussion and I very much look forward to having it.

### Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919

**6. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the modernisation of the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919. (S4F-03338)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919 was an attempt to address specific concerns 100 years ago. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which the Parliament passed last week, is a further step in this Government's journey towards a more equal and socially just Scotland for the 21st century. The provisions in the bill, including a new right to buy and the establishment of a Scottish land commission, build on our wider programme of land reform and plans for future action in the next session of Parliament.

Although we will consider all suggestions, we think that our continuing work in the area is the best way to ensure that those who wish to acquire land in Scotland have a range of opportunities to do so.

**Patrick Harvie:** I certainly recognise the value of the land reform legislation that we passed last week. Most of the Parliament united to support the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, and even those of us who wished at times that it could have gone further agreed that it was the right direction of travel.

In moving the motion on the bill at stage 3, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment said:

"The bill is not the end point of Scotland's land reform journey".—[*Official Report*, 16 March 2016; c 219.]

We still have hugely concentrated patterns of land ownership in Scotland, and that needs to change. Does the First Minister agree that a modernised land settlement act would be a natural next step in Scotland's land reform journey? Does she agree that such legislation could unlock the power of our

land and enable many more people to access land for productive use, for food, for homes, and for regeneration at a human scale, ensuring that Scotland's land is put to the use of Scotland's people—all our people—to serve the common good instead of the private interests of a tiny, entitled few?

**The First Minister:** If we are re-elected in a few weeks' time, I will be happy to consider whether a reformed land settlement act fits into our wider plans for further land reform.

I agree with the sentiment of Patrick Harvie's question. We have made huge strides forward in this parliamentary session, but, as the minister said last week, this is not the end of the journey. There is still work to be done on land reform and I hope that this Parliament, when it is re-elected, whatever its shape, form or balance after the elections in May, will take forward the journey with the same ambition and spirit that was shown in this session of the Parliament.

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** Will the First Minister ensure that the current review of the Scottish planning system helps and does not hinder the much more diverse pattern of land ownership that will assuredly flow from the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill?

**The First Minister:** The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill have increased opportunities for communities across Scotland to own land. The planning review is being undertaken by an independent panel, which will make recommendations in due course, and we will respond to the panel's recommendations when we have them. I assure members that land reform and community empowerment will be key drivers in any further planning reform that we undertake.

The Scottish Government will continue to do all that we can to encourage and support responsible and diverse land ownership. We have a target of 1 million acres in community ownership by 2020.

It is appropriate that Rob Gibson's final question in this Parliament was on land reform, which is an issue that he has championed for decades. Our new Land Reform (Scotland) Bill is, in large part, testament to his campaigning. I thank him for his work and I think that he will be a great loss to this Parliament. [*Applause.*]

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the First Minister promote community and co-operative forms of ownership as part of the land reform agenda in the next session of the Scottish Parliament? We have seen many community renewables projects across the country, and, with the opportunities in the new Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, let us see opportunities open up to



our urban communities, too, so that there is democratic accountability and so that value and community benefit are shared across our communities through the co-operative model.

**The First Minister:** I thank Sarah Boyack for her assumption that I will be in this seat when we return after the election. I certainly appreciate her vote of confidence in this Government. I, of course, take nothing for granted. I will be campaigning hard over the next few weeks to earn the right to be back here governing our country. If we persuade the people of Scotland that that is the right way forward, then yes, I will be keen to see us take forward land reform based on the kind of principles that Sarah Boyack has just outlined. I hope that many members, old and new, across the chamber will join us on the next phase of that journey.

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware of the situation of Lord Apetsi, who is a student at the University of Strathclyde, in my constituency—

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, Ms White, but this question is on land reform. I know how important your question is—

**Sandra White:** I have tried three times already to ask the question, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, Ms White, but members need to follow up the question.

That ends First Minister's question time.

## Motion of Thanks

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-16027, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on a motion of thanks to the Presiding Officer.

12:30

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I begin remarks by remembering and paying tribute to the four MSPs who were elected to Parliament in 2011 but who are no longer with us: Brian Adam, Helen Eadie, Margo MacDonald and David McLetchie. As we look back over the past five years, we remember how much they contributed and how much we continue to miss them.

I also want to acknowledge the 24 MSPs from across the chamber who will not be seeking re-election on 5 May. We thank them for their service and wish them all the very best for the future. All of them—each and every one—can be proud of the contribution that they have made to the Parliament and of their service to the people of our country.

Of course, 12 of the MSPs who are standing down today were elected to the very first session of Parliament in 1999, and they therefore merit special mention. They are Malcolm Chisholm, Alex Fergusson, Annabel Goldie, Hugh Henry, Adam Ingram, Kenny MacAskill, Jamie McGrigor, Fiona McLeod, Duncan McNeil, Alex Salmond, Mary Scanlon and Richard Simpson—and, of course, there is our Presiding Officer, Tricia Marwick.

All have been fine and dedicated MSPs. Five of them have served as ministers. Annabel Goldie was the first female party leader at Holyrood—in that she set an important and, in my view, highly desirable precedent. In the previous session, Alex Fergusson was a distinguished Presiding Officer. Alex Salmond was my predecessor as First Minister and my boss for the first seven and a half years of the Government. I owe him a particular debt of gratitude. He is leaving the Scottish Parliament for the second time—although whether or not it is for the last time remains to be seen.

I want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to someone else who has announced today that he is stepping down in May. He is not a member of the Scottish Parliament, but he regularly sits in the chamber. I refer to Scotland's Lord Advocate. Frank Mulholland has been an outstanding Lord Advocate. He has reformed the Crown Office, transformed the prosecution of sexual offences and domestic abuse cases, and been a source of thoughtful, reliable and at times robust advice to the Scottish Government. I take the opportunity on behalf of all of us to thank him for his service to Scotland. *[Applause.]*

The last of the class of 1999 standing down today is Tricia Marwick, who has served the Parliament as Presiding Officer for the last five years. Five years ago I was very proud to see a long-standing and great friend assume the office of Presiding Officer. Today, as the first female First Minister of Scotland, it is a pleasure as well as an honour for me to pay tribute to the Parliament's first female Presiding Officer.

Tricia Marwick's election as Presiding Officer was historic for that reason, but it broke new ground in other ways, too. Not just the first woman to hold the role, Tricia Marwick is also the first to have reached the office without a private school education or a university degree—something that our Presiding Officer and her family are rightly proud of, as they should be.

Even more important than any of that, of course, is the way in which Tricia Marwick has conducted herself in office: she has been an outstanding and a pioneering Presiding Officer. Tricia Marwick has been a true champion of the rights and standing of the Parliament as an institution. She has been willing to challenge all parties in this chamber, to hold us to account and, for the most part, to hold us in good order. At times that has been to the deep discomfort of all of us, in different ways and at different times.

Tricia Marwick has always been prepared to do things a little bit differently. At all times, she has shown wisdom, good sense, good humour and complete impartiality. While as Presiding Officer Tricia Marwick has shown huge commitment to the Parliament as an institution, she has never forgotten that her first and most important duty is to serve the people of her constituency. I know how proud Tricia Marwick has been to represent her home constituency of Mid Fife and Glenrothes and I am prepared to bet that the people of that constituency are also very proud of Tricia Marwick.

There is no doubt that our Presiding Officer will be a huge loss to the Parliament, although I know that our loss will be her beloved grandchildren's gain. Presiding Officer, for the final time, and on behalf of us all, I thank you for your service and I wish you and your family all the very best for the future. *[Applause.]*

The Parliament that will reconvene in this chamber in May will not just have new faces; it will have new powers and responsibilities. In many ways, that is a testament to the Parliament's success during the past 17 years. Since 1999, we have become the focus of Scottish public life—the chamber that people respect and trust to reflect their priorities, values and dreams. That has not come quickly, as those of us who were elected in 1999 can well recall; it has been earned during the past four parliamentary sessions and it is an

achievement that belongs to MSPs from all parties.

The growth in the chamber's status and responsibilities should inspire MSPs in the next session of Parliament to work even harder to serve the people of our country. It should be a source of pride for all 24 of the MSPs who are standing down today that they have contributed to making our Parliament what it is. It is fitting that Parliament should place its gratitude to them on the record, and it is very fitting that, today, the Parliament should record our thanks to our history-making Presiding Officer.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its thanks to its Presiding Officer, Tricia Marwick, for her dedicated service to the Parliament and pays tribute to all of those other Members who are standing down at the end of this session.

12:37

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** I rise to add my support to the motion in the First Minister's name.

When the story of this parliamentary session is written, what will it say? Might it say that this was the Parliament that righted many long-standing wrongs, that it gave same-sex couples the right to marry and the deaf community the recognition of an official language, and that it stood up to the shame of modern slavery and human trafficking?

Might it say that, despite the division bill ringing three times a week for the past five years, the most memorable division was on 18 September 2014 when the whole country divided between yes and no?

Might it remember the days when we united as one around motions of condolence, as we did this morning to reflect on the terrible events in Brussels, and as we did just four months ago for the very same thing in Paris?

Might it mark those sad and sorry days where we mourned the passing of one of our own? Losing Brian Adam, David McLetchie, Margo MacDonald and Helen Eadie touched each corner of the chamber, but it united us all together as one.

In happier news, might the history books say that this was the Parliament that shattered the glass ceiling when three parties shared no fewer than five female leaders? Might it say that this was the time when the Parliament came of age, demanding financial independence and more responsibility?

Although all that is up for debate, Tricia Marwick's place in the history books is guaranteed. She is the first female Presiding

Officer and the first publicly educated one. She is a working class champion, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to put my party's thanks on the record for all that she has done in that role.

Presiding Officer, I would like also to say a personal thanks for the good guidance you have offered me. It feels not like five years ago but a lifetime ago that I was sat in your office to receive a dressing-down for having broken the parliamentary rules. My crime was bringing a simulator baby into the chamber to demonstrate the problems of finding affordable childcare. The next day, the front page of my local newspaper splashed with "Baby MSP put on the naughty step", but I was not there for long as you guided me towards a smarter way to make my point and I grew up faster because of it.

From your trademark "wheesht" to the advice and guidance offered to so many new members, you will be remembered very fondly by those members you leave behind. However, you have left a lasting mark on the Parliament too. From reforming the parliamentary week to transforming the Parliament into a fantastic art space, you have innovated at every turn. Although you will be missed, there is a legacy to be proud of.

When you walk out of the chamber today, Presiding Officer, seven members of my group will retire with you: Drew Smith, Graeme Pearson, Margaret McDougall, Hugh Henry, Duncan McNeil, Malcolm Chisholm and Dr Richard Simpson. Collectively, they have served 79 years in the Parliament and it will be weaker in their absence. I pay tribute to every one of them.

To all the members who are stepping down today, I send sincere thanks on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party for their years of public service, and I wish them all a happy, prosperous and peaceful life beyond elected politics.

12:40

**Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con):** I, too, support the motion in the name of the First Minister and pay tribute to colleagues on all sides of the chamber who are standing down today.

From the Conservative benches, we bid a fond farewell to many of our most redoubtable characters: Annabel Goldie, our leader emeritus; the former Presiding Officer, Alex Fergusson; original members of the class of 1999 in Mary Scanlon and Jamie McGrigor; and Gavin Brown, Nanette Milne and Cameron Buchanan. Each has left their own mark on Parliament, and I thank all of them for their service to the Scottish Conservative Party and, more important, the people whom they have represented across Scotland.

I also remember those members lost to the Parliament from all corners of the chamber: Brian Adam, Helen Eadie, Margo MacDonald and David McLetchie. Their contributions enriched the Parliament.

This session has been a remarkable one for Parliament. Time and again, new ground has been broken: there have been greater powers, landmark legislation, a female First Minister and a female Presiding Officer. That has changed how the Parliament looks, sounds and functions.

Of course, Holyrood was not designed with majority government in mind but, over the past five years, that is what we have had. Colleagues on all sides will recognise that that has given rise to scenarios that were not present in previous sessions and generated important questions on accountability and structure. That issue is close to the Presiding Officer's heart, and her recent comments about strengthening Holyrood's committee system are worthy of serious reflection, especially as we contemplate future Scottish Governments with even greater legislative powers.

I turn to the motion and our Presiding Officer. When in the chair, Tricia Marwick has discharged her duties with consideration and good spirit. She is a principled and thoroughly decent person who has proven herself approachable to all members no matter which party they happen to represent. I thank her for that and for the personal kindness that she has shown to me over the years. As the Parliament matures, so too does the role of the Presiding Officer. Tricia Marwick has played an important part in that process and she leaves Parliament with our gratitude.

It is fair to say that my fellow Fifer has brought her own unique style to the post. I once had a foreign dignitary approach me and ask me one Thursday afternoon which part of parliamentary protocol was being referred to with the word "wheesht", which was again in evidence today. Exactly that down-to-earth nature has endeared Tricia Marwick to many and made her a key part of Parliament life.

Like other members, I thank Tricia Marwick for her service. She leaves Parliament with the best wishes of the entire Scottish Conservative family.

12:43

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** It is difficult to believe that it has been five years since I first stood in the Parliament to share my opinions. I thank colleagues across the chamber for listening—or at least pretending to listen. Although we may have been political foes, I have always been grateful for the personal friendships. It is important to remember the members whom we have lost; those losses are still felt in the

Parliament. I say to the members who retire today that we wish them well for the future.

We are grateful to Sir Paul Grice who, after 17 years as the chief executive of the Parliament, still leads a team of staff who serve all members with courtesy, discretion and diligence. We are grateful to the staff who support our committees and in the Scottish Parliament information centre, not least because we understand the enormous range of knowledge that they are expected to have at our immediate disposal. We wish them the best as they prepare for the new powers and responsibilities of this Parliament. Our thanks go to the business team, who are always able to assist and help members, and to the wider ancillary staff in every corner of the building who have helped us all every day.

Finally, Presiding Officer, I thank you for your service in the chair. You have remarked yourself how you could never have anticipated, when you grew up in a working-class community in Fife, that you would one day be our Parliament's voice and ambassador, the first woman to do that and the first Presiding Officer from a state school; a Fifer at the heart of our Parliament—I like that.

You have fulfilled the job with distinction. My colleagues and I have been pleased to support you in your work. The radical reforms that you enacted to make our Parliament stronger and more effective, not least on topical questions, will stand as a permanent legacy in this place. You can be proud of the path that you have taken and the change that you have brought. Thank you.

12:46

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Thank you for this opportunity to add my support for the motion and to echo the respect offered by others, in particular to those late members we all miss—Brian, David, Helen and Margo. Perhaps because of where she sat, I probably miss most of all the wit, wisdom and occasional barbed comment from Margo MacDonald just behind my left ear.

I echo Willie Rennie's thanks to the many members of the Parliament's wider staff team. None of us would be able to do our jobs without them doing their jobs to the high standard that they do.

The job of the person in the Presiding Officer's chair is not always an easy one. I have to admit that we do not always make it an easy one. Our current Presiding Officer has undertaken that role at a time when life beyond Parliament has brought its own challenges and she has the respect and gratitude of Parliament for her service during that period.

Each session of this Parliament has had its own distinctive character and it has posed different challenges for our Presiding Officers—the beginning of devolution, with a coalition Administration; the rainbow Parliament, with new voices to be heard; a minority Government and the question of how scrutiny operates then; and a single party majority and the question of how to make scrutiny the robust and challenging process that is needed.

In taking on the office of Presiding Officer, Tricia Marwick recognised that reform was needed and she recognises, too, that it is still needed. Whoever has the privilege of sitting in members' chairs in the chamber after 5 May must recognise the challenges that they will pose to whoever sits in that chair in allowing members to hold to account a more powerful Government with a wider range of responsibilities.

The voices of our previous Presiding Officers, including Tricia Marwick, will continue to inform us and we should allow our decisions about that on-going reform agenda to be informed by the experience that they have gained in each of those four previous sessions.

I offer my respect and thanks for the service of those members who are not standing for re-election. We have disagreed, sometimes robustly, but I think for the most part respectfully and the whole Parliament should be proud of that.

Thank you.

## Decision Time

12:48

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S4M-16030, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the motion of condolence for Brussels, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament expresses its heartfelt condolences, and those of the people of Scotland, to all those affected by the appalling terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016; stands in solidarity with the people of Belgium, and all those communities that have been the victims of terrorism in recent weeks, including the people of Turkey following the terrorist attacks in Ankara; reaffirms its commitment to a diverse and multicultural society, and calls on people across Scotland to unite as one community, both here at home and in solidarity with all those countries affected, to make clear that acts of terrorism will not succeed in dividing us or destroying the freedoms and way of life that we value so highly.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S4M-16027, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the motion of thanks to the Presiding Officer, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament expresses its thanks to its Presiding Officer, Tricia Marwick, for her dedicated service to the Parliament and pays tribute to all of those other Members who are standing down at the end of this session.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I invite the Presiding Officer to give her valedictory speech, on behalf of the Parliament's Deputy Presiding Officers, John Scott and me, I thank the Presiding Officer for her service to the Scottish Parliament over many years but particularly over this parliamentary session as Presiding Officer. Presiding Officer, both John and I have greatly enjoyed working with you and we wish you all the best for the future.

On behalf of the Deputy Presiding Officers, I thank Sir Paul Grice and all the parliamentary staff, as well as our own staff, who have helped us through this session.

## Presiding Officer's Closing Remarks

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

It gives me great pleasure to invite the Presiding Officer, Tricia Marwick, to make her closing remarks and to close this session of the Parliament.

12:50

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):**

Thank you. There is a rumour of a sweepstake on when I will start crying during this speech. I am determined that nobody is going to win that.

I thank you all for your very generous words, not just to me but to those who are leaving us, and to those who have sadly left us during this session.

I was honoured to be one of the 129 MSPs who walked together into our Parliament in 1999. When I joined the Scottish National Party in 1985, the prospects for a Scottish Parliament were not promising. Winning the Central Fife constituency seat in 2007, after 15 years of standing and being defeated in the same seat, perhaps showed something of my determination. To be the constituency MSP would have been enough for me, but the privilege of being the Presiding Officer of this Parliament has been the most fulfilling experience of my life.

I am passionate about this Parliament. I have been impartial in this Parliament, but I have never been impartial about this Parliament.

There are many people to thank. First, I thank my family: my husband, Frank, my children, Louise and Steven, and my sisters and brother, who have always been there for me and are here today. I thank my constituency staff throughout, and I thank Karen Newton, my parliamentary secretary from the beginning, for her friendship and for keeping my secrets.

I thank the wonderful, professional staff of this Parliament and all our contractors, many of whom have been with us since 1999 and who have become friends as well as colleagues. I thank Sir Paul Grice, who has led the Parliament throughout with distinction and has been a good friend to many of us.

My special thanks go to my principal private secretary, Billy McLaren, who has been a calming influence and who has, together with Paul Grice, given me wise advice and counsel. All the mistakes that I have made have been my own. My thanks also go to my current private office, Jen Bell and Lynsey Mackay, and their predecessors, and to those in the international relations office. My thanks go especially to Gail Grant, who helped

me and looked after me when I was so ill and kept me supplied with tea—I could not have got through it without you.

I thank my deputies, Elaine Smith and John Scott, who have worked hard on your behalf and have given me great support. I thank the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body members who have since 2011 taken brave and bold decisions in the interests of and on behalf of the Parliament and its members.

My constituents of Mid Fife and Glenrothes are wonderful people, and it has been a privilege to be their MSP. I am so proud to have represented the constituency that has been my home for over 40 years.

Seventeen years is but the blink of an eye but, in those short years, the Parliament has grown in stature and in the powers that it has acquired and the powers that it will gain in the future. The Parliament has in that period established itself at the centre of public life, and we have done that together.

The referendum campaign was without doubt the most exciting time in any of our political lives. More than that, it was about the sheer energy of the people and their determination to be central to decisions about their future and the future direction of their country and their Parliament. We owe it to them to make sure that they continue to be so.

There are many memories that I will treasure from my time here. As the former convener of the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill Committee, I will never forget the official opening journey on the Borders railway last year, particularly when we passed Stow station, which the committee added as an amendment to the bill. I claim Stow station as my own—Marwick station has a certain ring to it.

Votes for young people at 16, proportional representation for council elections, tolls removed from the Forth and Tay road bridges and the new Forth bridge—those are all issues that I campaigned passionately for.

Scotland has changed since 1999, and it has changed for the better. Who will ever forget the convulsions over the repeal of section 28 or the debates about civil partnerships? A measure of that change came in 2014 with the passing of the equal marriage bill and the joyous scenes in the public gallery and outside, as this Parliament placed itself firmly on the side of equality and what is now mainstream opinion.

Our Parliament has changed, too. It looks different, feels different and is different. In 1999, the Presiding Officer and all the party leaders were men. As I look out from here, I see the first female

First Minister, and female leaders of the two main opposition parties. That makes me proud and hopeful for the generations of young women to follow us.

One hundred and twenty-nine of us walked into the Parliament together on that momentous day in 1999 and, now, only 30 of us are seeking re-election to the next Parliament. The baton is being passed to new generations. My hope for them is that they, like us, reach across the party divides and find common ground and friendships.

It has been an honour to serve you and the Parliament as Presiding Officer for the past five years. I have cherished every moment. I promised, on my election as Presiding Officer, that I would do my best—that I would always put the Parliament first. I have.

Like Duncan McNeil, I am going to spend more time with my wonderful grandchildren, Róisín and Odhrán.

I can say that it is goodbye from me, for now. I will be back on 12 May to preside over the selection of your next Presiding Officer.

I close this meeting and the fourth session of the Scottish Parliament.

*Meeting closed at 12:57.*

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

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