



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 2 June 2016

*[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 12:00]*

## First Minister's Question Time

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is First Minister's question time. As members will know, having introduced a new format I would like to take as many contributions as possible. In that spirit, I ask all members to keep their questions short and their answers as succinct as possible.

### Engagements

**1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00011)

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

**Ruth Davidson:** This week, we learnt that a third of secondary 2 pupils are not meeting basic standards in numeracy; that, in the past four years, the percentage of primary 4 pupils performing well in numeracy has fallen by 10 per cent; and that the attainment gap between children from richer and poorer backgrounds has, under the Scottish National Party, got wider.

We have already had one ministerial apology in the chamber this week for the Government's performance. Are parents and pupils not due one, too?

**The First Minister:** I have made clear, as has the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills this week, that the findings of the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy are not acceptable. The duty of this Government—my duty as First Minister—working, of course, with local authorities and others, is to ensure that we have an education system in which standards are rising and the inequality gap is closing. That is what we are determined to bring about, which is why we have embarked on a major programme of reform and improvement in our education system.

A key part of that is making sure that, in future, we have much better data than the data provided for us in the SSLN. That survey is limited in its coverage—it is based on a sample that includes just four pupils per primary school and 12 pupils per secondary school. Crucially, although it gives us a snapshot of performance at national level, it does not enable us to tell—school by school—how schools are performing. That is why the national

improvement framework will lead to more comprehensive school-by-school data that will allow us to target our efforts more closely.

Of course, the survey predates any impact from the work that we have already started—work on the attainment challenge, focusing on literacy and numeracy, and additional resources through the attainment fund that are targeted on schools in our most deprived areas.

In the delivery plan that John Swinney will outline before the summer recess, we will set out plans for further reforms—a new funding formula, more resources going directly to schools and greater empowerment of headteachers and parents.

I have made clear on numerous occasions—I do so again today—how important this issue is to me and to this Government and we are determined to drive the improvements that all of us want to see.

**Ruth Davidson:** The view might be different from this side of the chamber, but the answers are still the same and they are just as long.

Let us turn to the First Minister's plan to make this right. She mentioned data. Last year, she said that she was frustrated that the Government did not know enough about standards for younger pupils and that she wanted more information about performance to be made available. The Deputy First Minister—now, of course, the education secretary—also admitted that there was a “weakness” because information was not collected nationally. In other words, no one was able to see what was going on. Their answer was standardised assessments. Will those assessments give all the information that the First Minister has said the country needs?

**The First Minister:** If Ruth Davidson had read the national improvement framework, and if she had listened closely to the debate over the previous weeks and months—as I am sure she did, to be fair to her—she would know the answers to those questions.

Standardised assessments will be introduced and work is on-going to ensure that they are introduced later this year. Standardised assessments will, for the first time, inform the judgments that teachers make about the number of pupils who are meeting the required levels of curriculum for excellence.

For the first time, we are going to publish—not just local authority by local authority, but school by school—the percentage of pupils who are and, crucially, who are not meeting the required levels of curriculum for excellence. That will give us data that allows us to target our efforts much more closely. It will also enable us, for the first time, to measure comprehensively what the attainment

gap is, because the information will also be broken down on a socioeconomic basis. It will allow us to set measurable and tangible targets for closing that attainment gap.

As I have said, I want to see us make significant progress in closing the attainment gap within the lifetime of this session of Parliament and substantially eliminate the gap over the next 10 years. I am very clear on what we are seeking to do and about the plans that we have to put in place and implement to do that. I hope that members on all sides of this chamber will get behind us. Other parties are very fond—rightly so, to be fair—of talking about the importance of this issue. Let us see whether they have the courage of their convictions when it comes to backing us in the action that we need to take.

**Ruth Davidson:** I am interested in the First Minister's reply, but I have to say that others have been an awful lot clearer than she has been on this. The Educational Institute of Scotland has just published an advice note, which I have here; it claims that her plans—the plans of her Government—have been watered down. It says that the Government's original idea was to assess young people and have the results of all those assessments published. However, the EIS now says that it has forced changes. It says that

“standardised test scores will not be collected ... nor published”.

Further, it adds that there is actually no need for all pupils to sit assessments in the first place.

The First Minister said that publishing more information and more data was vital if we are to improve our schools, but it now appears that she has backed off from her original plans. Why has she not stuck by them?

**The First Minister:** Firstly, and very clearly, I say that I have. If Ruth Davidson had listened to the comments that I made when I published the national improvement framework earlier this year and, indeed, looked at the detail of the national improvement framework, I think that she would have found the answers to those questions. The data that we will publish is comprehensive data that has never been published before about the percentage of children meeting the required levels of curriculum for excellence. It is not a snapshot survey and not a national survey but information that will be provided school by school and local authority by local authority, informed by the assessments that will be carried out. That was made clear in the national improvement framework and it will continue to be so.

On the point about whether or not all pupils will be required to sit assessments, let me make it absolutely clear: yes, they will be. That is my expectation and that is what I intend to see

happen. Clearly, there will be some pupils, for very particular reasons—special needs, for example—for whom there may be a different approach, but the general thrust is that the assessments will be carried out in our schools and they will inform the judgments that teachers make. That will lead to the publication of information that will give us for the first time a clear picture of what is happening in each of our schools and then we will be able to take action if any particular school or area is not performing in the way that we think necessary. That is a clear plan of action that is designed to deliver the very clear objectives that I am setting.

**Ruth Davidson:** The fact is this—this time last year, the First Minister said that she was “determined” to publish more information for parents and for the Government to see, school by school. She could not have been clearer. In fact, in January, when she was asked by *The Financial Times*

“Do you think you will make all the NIF data publicly available ... ?”

she answered “yes.” However, we now have the teachers’ union—the teachers themselves—saying that that is not what is happening.

We have an education secretary who has asked for more time. This Government has had nine years—nine years of SNP education failures. We need much more information on the state of our schools. Full publication, not just a sample, was the right answer six months ago and it is still the right answer today, but the Government is backing off from it. That is what it has told teachers across our country. The First Minister and I agree that this needs to be done. We will absolutely stick to our guns. Why is she not sticking to hers?

**The First Minister:** The leader of the main Opposition party may have changed, but there does not appear to be any greater ability on that leader's part to adapt her questions to the answers that she is actually given, so let me try to make it clearer. First, all the data that the national improvement framework says will be gathered and published will be gathered and published. That has not changed and it remains the case now in the way that it was when I published the national improvement framework—there is no change whatsoever to that.

Secondly, Ruth Davidson has just said that the data should not be a sample. Was she not listening to a single word that I said? The problem with the SSLN data that we are all talking about this week is that it is sample information. If we go to—I think—section 6 of the SSLN publication and see the methodology, we find that it is a sample drawn from information based on four pupils in every participating primary school and 12 pupils in every secondary school. That is a sample survey.

We are now talking about publishing information on the percentages of pupils—all pupils, not samples of pupils—and whether or not they meet the required levels of curriculum for excellence, local authority by local authority and school by school. That is detailed, comprehensive information that allows us to see not just a snapshot of how our education system is performing, but how each and every school across the country is performing. It means that, if we have to take action in particular areas or in particular schools, that should be done.

That is information that no previous Government has published. It will be published for the first time, which is a sign of our determination to deal with the problem that we are talking about. If Ruth Davidson is serious in saying that she wants to get behind the Government, she should stop trying to find manufactured differences and actually get behind us; she should put her money where her mouth is.

### **Scottish Trades Union Congress (Meetings)**

**2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister when she will next meet the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress. (S5F-00006)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I meet the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress on a regular basis—biannually. At our previous meeting, which took place on 9 March, we discussed matters including the economy, the Trade Union Act 2016 and the European Union referendum. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work will meet the general secretary of the STUC later today.

**Kezia Dugdale:** We have just heard the First Minister and the Tories dance around how they need to collaborate to test our pupils harder, but surely their priority must be to ensure that our children can learn better in our schools. There was one thing missing from that exchange: neither the Scottish National Party nor the Tories have faced up to the fact that Government cuts are devastating our schools.

This week, the Government's own figures have showed a scandalous decline in numeracy levels, with every stage getting worse. The gap between the richest and the rest is growing and just one in four children from the most deprived backgrounds has the maths skills that they need to get on in life. That is a disgrace.

Does the First Minister agree with the conclusion of one newspaper this week, which simply said:

"You have failed our kids"?

**The First Minister:** Interestingly, when the national improvement framework was published earlier this year, I seem to recall Kezia Dugdale—I am sure that she will correct me if I am wrong—and Iain Gray backing the approach that we are taking to assessment. Today, she appears to be jumping on the Liberal Democrat bandwagon in saying that it is all about testing our children. She really should make her mind up about which side of the debate she is on.

We have been very clear about the need to increase resources to tackle attainment. That is why the plans that we set out at the election—plans that were approved by the Scottish electorate, which is why I am standing here answering questions again today—are to increase funding by an extra £750 million over this session of Parliament, specifically targeted at attainment.

By the end of this session of Parliament, we will be spending an extra £0.5 billion on early years education and childcare, because all the evidence says that giving young people the best start to their education in life is key to solving the challenge. We are also getting more of that resource direct to headteachers.

We have said not just that we are going to increase the resource, but that we will have a new funding formula so that the resource gets to the places where it is needed most—places in which more children come from backgrounds of deprivation. Not only do we have the plans for the national improvement framework and the reform plans that will be set out in the delivery plan, but those plans are backed by substantial additional resources.

I say the same to Kezia Dugdale as I have just said to Ruth Davidson: if she is serious about wanting us to raise standards in education and close the equality gap, she should get behind us. Let us make a national effort on behalf of our children, rather than engage in another petty party-political point-scoring exercise.

**Kezia Dugdale:** If the First Minister is serious about tackling the attainment gap, she would not have waited nine years to get started.

Now—here goes. The First Minister tells us that tackling the attainment gap is her number 1 priority, but page 48 of her party's 2007 manifesto states:

"We will pay particular attention to raising the achievement of the poorest ... 20 per cent of school pupils, with increased early intervention and support."

How dare the First Minister come to Parliament after nine years and say that she is finally getting round to it? That is a disgrace.

These statistics are the reality of this Government cutting the education budget by 10

per cent: young people are left without the basic skills that they need to prosper, young working-class people are denied places in our universities, and real people are paying a real price for the real cuts that this SNP Government has made. The SNP Government has been in power for nearly a decade now. Surely the First Minister regrets cutting 10 per cent from the education and skills budget.

**The First Minister:** Let me talk about some of the progress that has been made during our time in office. I do not think that that progress is enough—that is why we are making the issue such a big priority. Let me look at what the situation was in terms of the gap between our 20 per cent most deprived and least deprived pupils achieving a qualification at level 5. When we took office, that gap was 36 percentage points. Today, it is still too big, but it is down to 22 percentage points. The number of pupils from the 20 per cent most deprived areas leaving school without any qualifications has more than halved since we took office in 2007. That is the progress that we have made. I do not think that that progress is far enough or fast enough, which is why we have made education such a priority, backed by the substantial extra resources about which I have spoken.

I have left no doubt about the scale of the challenge that I think rests on my shoulders and on the shoulders of this Government. However, I think that there is also a challenge here for the Parliament as a whole. If we are all serious about raising attainment and closing that equality gap, it is time to get behind the efforts of the Government so that, together, we can make the progress that we need. The question today is this: is the Opposition capable of rising to that challenge?

**Kezia Dugdale:** A 10 per cent cut, Presiding Officer. Let us put that in terms of real money. It is £850 million that the SNP Government has cut from education and training budgets since 2007. The First Minister stands there and tells us that she will put £750 million more in over the next five years, but she has taken £850 million out. I know that numeracy is not a strength for the First Minister this week, but surely she can work that one out. She is faced with a choice: she can work with parties on the left, to invest in education and skills, or she can side with the Tories and impose even deeper cuts on our schools.

The First Minister and I agree: the gap between the richest and the rest in our schools is shameful. However, there is an even bigger gap, and that is the one between the First Minister's ambition and the reality of her budgets. When will the First Minister do the math and accept that she cannot close the attainment gap while she is cutting school budgets?

**The First Minister:** In point of fact, between this Government taking office and 2014-15, which is the most recent year for which I have a figure, the money that was available for education and training rose by 7.8 per cent. That is just one particular fact to share with Parliament.

Kezia Dugdale asks me to pick sides in this chamber. On the question of education and raising attainment for children across Scotland, in particular for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, I make it very clear that I am on the side of Scotland's children and Scotland's young people, and nobody else's. I will do whatever it takes to make sure that we have an education system with rising standards, and with an equality gap that is closing, not growing.

As I have already said, there are signs of progress in key areas, but there are other areas where we need to do more and we need to do it faster. I am clear about the challenge that I face. I believe that I am up to that challenge. The question for the Opposition parties is this: are they?

**The Presiding Officer:** I will take a number of constituency questions, the first of which will be from Jenny Gilruth. Before I take her question, I make the chamber aware that it relates to the tragic case of Liam Fee. As members might be aware, the case is still active—sentence has not yet been passed—so there are a number of restrictions in place, both on the questioner and on the response.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** I know that the First Minister and every member in the chamber will join me in condemning the murder of Liam Fee in my constituency. I recognise that the Fife child protection committee has instructed a significant case review, but will the First Minister assure me that, once that review is concluded, all relevant facts pertaining to Liam's short life and untimely death will be placed in the public domain, and that any failings of the relevant organisations involved will be dealt with robustly?

**The First Minister:** I am sure that I speak on behalf of all of us in the chamber when I express my horror and sadness at the tragic death of Liam Fee. My deepest sympathies go to everyone affected by this horrific crime, including, of course, the two other young boys who also suffered appalling abuse and neglect.

I welcome the Fife child protection committee's announcement that a significant case review will be carried out. We fully support the publication of all appropriate findings of significant case reviews. The decision on whether to publish the report will ultimately be for the relevant child protection committee, and, of course, in cases like this there



will always be sensitive information that cannot be shared. Taking those things into account, we hope and expect that the committee will decide to publish as much of the information as they possibly can.

It is essential that any lessons that need to be learned from this appalling tragedy are learned and acted on swiftly. In order to ensure that learning gets into the system more quickly and consistently, we are reviewing key aspects of the child protection system, including significant case reviews, as part of our child protection improvement programme.

It is important to say—this is a fundamental point—that the only people who are responsible for the death of Liam Fee are the people who were convicted of his murder. They are to blame and no one else. However, questions are rightly being asked about whether there is any more that the system could or should have done to protect that little boy. Those questions must be examined in detail and answers must be given, and that is what will happen in the weeks and months that lie ahead.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what support the Scottish Government will provide to the 88 workers who are likely to be affected by the First bus proposal to cease operations in East Lothian and close its depots in Musselburgh and North Berwick.

**The First Minister:** I am concerned about the prospect of job losses at First, and I know that this will be a difficult time for all those who are affected and their families. The Minister for Transport has met First Scotland East's management to discuss its plans. The company has started a collective consultation process with trade unions to discuss potential redundancies and options for redeployment within the company. In parallel, East Lothian Council is in contact with other operators to consider how to mitigate the impact on passengers of First's withdrawal of bus services.

Of course, through our PACE—partnership action for continuing employment—initiative, we have already offered support for any employees who may be affected. The company has accepted that offer of support. We will continue to engage with the company to try to mitigate the impact of its plans and we will do everything that we can to help the employees who might be affected by them.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** The First Minister will know that the University of the Highlands and Islands is planning new student accommodation. Is she aware that the proposed development in Lerwick would mean the removal of an engineering business that employs 16 men

and women on that site? Will she speak to or contact the university and make sure that the timescale for the development gives the engineering business enough time to move to the new premises that it is planning?

**The First Minister:** I am aware of that. I believe that Tavish Scott is referring to HNP Ltd, which is an engineering business in Lerwick. I understand the concerns that he expressed and I understand that a number of local partners have already been involved in dialogue about the sale and future use of the land on the site. I will be very happy to ensure that officials make contact with all relevant colleagues in Shetland, including the University of the Highlands and Islands, to establish the current context and provide any advice and assistance that we can to help to secure a satisfactory outcome for all parties involved, including the company that Tavish Scott mentioned. I will also be happy to ask the minister concerned to meet Tavish Scott to discuss what more can be done.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final constituency question is from Mairi Evans.

**Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware of the Airbus Super Puma that crashed off Norway in April, killing 13 people, including Iain Stuart, an oil worker from Laurencekirk in my constituency. There is news today that Norway has added search and rescue flights to its ban on Airbus Super Puma H225 helicopters, due to signs of metal fatigue in the crashed helicopter's gearbox. What assurances can the First Minister provide that the Super Puma fleet in Scotland is held to the highest safety standards?

**The First Minister:** First, I take the opportunity to convey my sympathies and condolences—and, I am sure, those of the whole Parliament—to the family of Iain Stuart, who sadly died in this tragic accident.

The safety of workers in the North Sea and on search and rescue operations remains paramount. I give the assurance that the Scottish Government will continue to liaise closely with the oil and gas industry and with relevant regulators. In addition, industry body Oil & Gas UK has formed a helicopter resilience working group, which brings together platform operators to share information and develop further opportunities to safeguard workers' safety and to collaborate on maintaining and improving production.

We will continue to liaise with all interested parties to ensure that safety is absolutely at the top of everybody's agenda. I would be happy to ask the minister who is responsible for such issues to liaise with Mairi Evans and share with her any matters that are of interest to her constituents.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-00015)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Tuesday morning.

**Patrick Harvie:** Many of us had expected to hear, before the end of the previous parliamentary session, a formal response from the Government to the report and recommendations of its independent adviser on poverty and inequality. We did not get that response before the end of the session, but the First Minister gave us a commitment in her statement last week to implement all those recommendations. I very much welcome that commitment.

Recommendation 9 was that the Government should

“Be bold on local tax reform”.

The report recognised that the council tax is widely viewed as no longer fit for purpose. Does the First Minister agree, as she always used to, that the council tax is no longer fit for purpose?

**The First Minister:** I confirm again that, as we said in our manifesto and as I said in the chamber last week when I outlined our priorities for government, we accept and will take forward all the recommendations of the independent poverty adviser. The formal response to her report will be published shortly, and I will appoint another independent poverty adviser soon. The work that the adviser did was valuable and I want to continue to have such input.

It will not surprise Patrick Harvie to hear me say that the plans that we put forward in the election campaign—they seemed to meet with the approval of a significant proportion of the Scottish electorate—to reform local taxation in the short term and more fundamentally in the longer term, are bold. The plans are about making local taxation fairer and more progressive, and they ask those who live in the most expensive houses to pay more. Crucially—this goes back to issues that we discussed earlier—that will raise an additional £100 million every year for education. I intend that money to go directly to headteachers in our schools.

I believe that the plans are bold and far reaching. However, on this and a range of issues, as we go through the session and particularly as the finance minister starts to put together our budget for next year, we will liaise with, consult and talk to parties across the chamber, and we will be happy to listen to ideas about how we can further improve our plans.

**Patrick Harvie:** Surely tweaking the upper bands for the council tax does not sound to anybody like bold reform of local taxation. This is not a time for tinkering with a broken system. As the adviser’s report stated,

“this is a central moment of political decision, an opportunity to introduce a much more progressive system”.

What the First Minister has announced clearly falls well short of that.

The First Minister has the commission on local tax reform’s report on one hand and the report from the poverty adviser on the other. Following her commitment to the chamber last week to implement the adviser’s recommendation for bold local tax reform, this is a moment for much bolder action. If that is not enough, what on earth will it take to persuade the Government that it is time to kill off the council tax for good and adopt a modern, fair and flexible system for funding our local services?

**The First Minister:** We put forward our plans in the election campaign and I believe that they are bold. Patrick Harvie put forward his plans in the election campaign and the electorate cast their votes. It is fair to say that I am standing here as First Minister with a mandate to take forward the proposals that we were elected on. However, as I have always said and will continue to say, we will reach out across the chamber to try to build consensus on some of the big issues that confront us.

I am happy to confirm to Patrick Harvie that, as we head towards our budget, we will talk to him and his colleagues and to others in the Parliament, so that we hear other parties’ ideas on strengthening proposals. That is an open invitation to Patrick Harvie and others. I intend to be as collaborative as I possibly can be in taking forward the Government’s proposals and policies and doing the right thing for the country. However, I am mindful that I stood on a manifesto and that a significant proportion of the Scottish electorate voted for me to be First Minister on the strength of that manifesto, and I have a duty to be true to that, too.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-00004)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Matters of importance to the people of Scotland.

**Willie Rennie:** Can the First Minister give a guarantee that there will be no Scottish Government contracts with China Railway No 3 Engineering Group?

**The First Minister:** Any proposals for specific contracts involving specific projects would be subject to full and normal due diligence, and the Scottish Parliament would have the opportunity to scrutinise them and reach a view on their pros and cons and their merits. However, the fact is that there are no particular proposals at that stage, which means that, in a sense, Willie Rennie is asking me an entirely hypothetical question. I will continue to ensure that Parliament has a full opportunity to scrutinise any proposals.

**Willie Rennie:** I am referring not to an email chain between office juniors, but an official Government document that bears the signature of the First Minister of our country. It is a memorandum of understanding with one of the most powerful nations in the world and it is worth £10 billion. Why would the First Minister bother signing such an agreement if it did not mean anything? We are right to ask why she put her name to the agreement, given that Amnesty International condemned the company's human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of Congo and that the company is blacklisted by the Norwegian oil fund because of the risk of gross corruption. I cannot understand why she continues to defend that. Why does she?

**The First Minister:** Hold the front page: First Minister of Scotland seeks to explore opportunities for investment in jobs in Scotland—shock, horror!

That is part of the First Minister's job, and the fact that Willie Rennie does not recognise that that is one of the job's core responsibilities is probably part of the reason why he will never stand here as First Minister of this country.

The memorandum of understanding that was signed is—as anybody can see, because it is there to be read on the Scottish Government's website—an agreement to explore where there might be opportunities. Not a penny of investment has been agreed or released yet. If proposals for specific investment are brought forward, they will be subject to full due diligence, and all the issues that Willie Rennie has just cited will be fully examined and taken into account. That is the right and proper way to proceed.

As First Minister, I will always seek to act in the best interests of this country. That partly involves encouraging investment that will then support job creation in Scotland, and I will continue to do that to the best of my ability.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the First Minister join me in calling on the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee or the European and External Relations Committee to consider not only the China deal but the Qatar deal? Both contain elements that need real scrutiny.

**The First Minister:** I would be delighted for any committee of this Parliament that wished to consider any of those matters to do so. It is not for me to tell committees what they should look into, but I would be happy if they chose to do what the member suggests, and the Scottish Government would co-operate fully with that.

### **Air Weapons (Impact of Ban)**

**5. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what impact the introduction of a ban on air weapons has had. (S5F-00033)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015, which gained royal assent on 4 August last year, sets out a new licensing regime that will allow the police to issue certificates only to those who have a legitimate need or use for an air weapon. That will help to reduce gun crime and improve public safety. Advance applications for licences can be made to the police from 1 July this year, and, from 31 December, it will be an offence to use, possess, purchase or acquire an air weapon without the necessary certificate or permit, unless a person is exempt under the legislation.

Ahead of that, the police are running a three-week hand-in campaign, which runs until 12 June. There has been a good response so far, with more than 2,300 air weapons being surrendered in the first week alone.

**Gillian Martin:** In many areas, such as rural Aberdeenshire, which I represent, the use of air weapons is a part of life, particularly in land management. Can the First Minister assure me that the legislation will not change that, and will simply help to ensure that such weapons are only ever used in a safe and responsible way?

**The First Minister:** We have always acknowledged the important role that shooting plays in rural and agricultural life. In fact, the legislation makes specific provision to allow young people to continue to shoot to help protect crops and livestock, or to control pests. As in all other cases, if a person can satisfy the chief constable that they are a proper person to have an air weapon, that they have a legitimate reason for having one and that they can shoot in a safe environment, they should be able to apply for and obtain a certificate. I think that that takes account of the legitimate concerns that Gillian Martin has raised.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** Although over 2,000 air weapons have been handed in to the police already, it is estimated that there are 500,000 air guns in Scotland, and Police Scotland already faces a backlog of firearms and shotgun licences. What additional funding will the

Scottish Government put in place to help Police Scotland deal with the new air weapons regime?

**The First Minister:** As I understand it, the police are satisfied that they have the resources in place to deal with the implications of the legislation. I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to write to Oliver Mundell with the detail of the resource requirements and the resources that are available. I hope that all of us across the chamber recognise the objective of the legislation and the objective of the hand-in campaign, which is to get guns off our streets and make Scotland safer. The police have a crucial part to play in that and the Government has a crucial part to play in supporting the police to do that job.

### **“The Lockerbie Bombing”**

**6. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what discussions the Scottish Government has had with the former Cabinet Secretary for Justice prior to and since the publication of his recent book. (S5F-00018)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The content of the recently published book is a matter for the former justice secretary and his publishers. In line with the requirements of the ministerial code and what are called the Radcliffe principles, a draft of the manuscript was provided to the permanent secretary in February this year by Kenny MacAskill. In response—again, in line with the requirements of the code and the Radcliffe principles—it was made clear to Kenny MacAskill that ultimate responsibility for the content of the book was a matter for him. No discussions have taken place since publication.

**Douglas Ross:** In his book, the former cabinet secretary reopened old wounds, contested the judgment of three law lords and cast significant doubts over the Scottish judicial system, which he was responsible for. Will the First Minister ask the new Lord Advocate to investigate the former justice secretary and the claims made? Given that the First Minister sat at the same Cabinet table as Kenny MacAskill and that both were part of a Government that repeatedly stated that it did not doubt the safety of the conviction, will she make herself and all other ministers who served with Mr MacAskill available to an inquiry?

**The First Minister:** In fairness, I know that the member has not been in Parliament for long, but the First Minister does not direct the Lord Advocate when it comes to investigation—that is a pretty fundamental element of our constitution.

Much of the question is ludicrous in nature. I have not yet had the opportunity to read the book, so I am going on what has been printed in newspapers. I am sure that it is an interesting

read, but its content is a matter for Kenny MacAskill and his publishers.

The Lockerbie conviction stands. I say again—as the Crown Office has said in the past—that there is confidence in the safety of that conviction and for the conviction to be overturned there would require to be a successful appeal. That was the situation before the book was published, and it remains the situation today.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I declare an interest as a signatory of the Justice for Megrahi campaign.

Given that the former justice secretary and the former First Minister now both state that Megrahi was not the purchaser of the clothes in Malta, and having regard to the finding of the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission that, if Megrahi was not the purchaser, there was insufficient evidence to convict him, I ask the Government to reconsider its position that there is

“no reason to doubt the safety of the conviction”.

Surely now there is.

**The First Minister:** It is not for me, any First Minister or any member of the Government to decide that a conviction is unsafe; that is a matter for the courts of the land. That is the position in this case, as it is in any other criminal matter.

The situation is clear. It remains open for close relatives of Mr al-Megrahi to ask the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission to refer the case again to the appeal court. Ministers have repeatedly made it clear that they would be comfortable if that were to happen, but that is the process that must be undertaken if the case were to be looked at by the appeal court. Convictions are determined in courts; convictions can only be upheld or overturned in courts. That is how we do these things in this country; it is the right way to do them.

### **Rape Victims (Support during Police Investigation)**

**7. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that victims of rape are supported during a police investigation. (S5F-00014)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Government is committed to ensuring that the justice system responds sensitively and appropriately to those who report sexual offences. In line with our manifesto commitment, we have prioritised the allocation of resources to fund a review of how medical boards undertake forensic medical examinations. We have also legislated, through the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act

2014, to ensure that those who report sexual offences should be able to choose the gender of their police interviewer. Additionally, last year, we awarded just under £2 million to Rape Crisis Scotland to enhance the support available for survivors of sexual violence. Police Scotland's national rape task force, which was established in 2013, ensures that specifically trained officers are involved in the investigation of rape and sexual offence cases.

**Claire Baker:** I welcome the First Minister's answer. She will be aware of Glasgow Caledonian University's recent study into the treatment of rape victims. Medical examinations are still predominantly carried out by male specialists; examinations are often delayed due to the lack of an available doctor; and Police Scotland officers describe some victims' treatment as "despicable" and "horrendous".

I welcome the resources pledged by the Government over the next few years, but victims are reporting concerns now. When can we expect the much-needed improvements—including an increase in the number of female specialists—to be delivered?

**The First Minister:** I intend the improvements to be delivered on an on-going basis. I recognise the difficulties that Claire Baker has outlined. Some of the difficulties in implementing what is now in statute around allowing people to choose the gender of their examiner come down to a lack of female specialists. We are considering that matter. There are also issues around forensic examinations and we have allocated funding to deal specifically with that area.

The objective here is clear, and I know that it is one that Claire Baker will support. Victims should be offered an examination by someone of the gender of their choice at an appropriate location and within an appropriate timescale. I accept that that does not always happen right now for victims of rape. The purpose of all the work that is under way is to make sure that that happens in future.

Victims of rape have undergone horror and trauma that nobody should ever have to undergo. We must make sure that the justice system does not—however inadvertently—add to that trauma and horror through the way in which investigations are carried out. I am sure that there is a determination across not just the chamber but all the relevant services to make sure that the improvements happen quickly.

### Local Government Reform

**8. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's plans are for local government reform. (S5F-00023)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We will continue to work positively and collaboratively with local government. Our aim is to transform our democratic landscape while protecting and reforming our public services.

Our Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 will strengthen communities' voices in the decisions that affect them. In future, we will work with local authorities to review their roles and responsibilities and we will put more power into communities' hands. We will also consult on a bill that would require local authorities, where appropriate, to decentralise functions, budgets and democratic oversight to local communities. One size does not fit all, but enabling local control not on behalf of but by a local community should be the key guiding principle.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I thank the First Minister for her comprehensive answer.

This year, the United Kingdom Tory Government cut our resource budget by £371 million and similar cuts are to come in each of the next three years. Labour's only answer is to burden low-income Scots by hiking their income tax year on year.

The Scottish National Party manifesto pledges to

"review the roles and responsibilities of local authorities"

and their relationships with

"health boards."

When will that review begin? Will the protection and enhancement of front-line service delivery to minimise the impact of Westminster cuts be a key driver?

**The First Minister:** We have committed to work with local authorities to review their roles and responsibilities and their relationships with health boards. The purpose of all that is to get more powers into the hands of communities. We will outline the details of how we will take that forward in the forthcoming legislative programme at the start of the new term. I will shortly begin discussions with key stakeholders on the scope and timing of the review, and it will be under way before the end of the year.

12:45

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## **Taking Scotland Forward: Creating a Fairer Scotland**

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S5M-00280, in the name of Angela Constance, on taking Scotland forward: creating a fairer Scotland.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** I am delighted to open this debate on taking Scotland forward: creating a fairer Scotland.

I know that everyone across the chamber wants to make Scotland a more successful country. Our success as a nation very much depends on working together to deliver a stronger economy and a fairer society.

On that note, I welcome new and returning MSPs and all the newly appointed party spokespeople. I very much look forward to working with them all and, of course, to debating the issues at hand.

The Government believes that building a fairer society and a stronger and more resilient economy go hand in hand. As is reflected in Scotland's economic strategy, tackling inequality and boosting competitiveness are interdependent. Our focus is very much on inclusive growth—on combining increased prosperity with greater equity.

As we know, the Scottish economy has shown resilience over the past 12 months. In 2015, the economy grew by almost 2 per cent and employment reached record levels. However, we all know that there are issues that are holding Scotland back and holding our people back from reaching their full potential. For example, income inequality remains high relative to that of many of our European peers.

We know that tackling the deep-seated inequalities and poverty in our society is challenging—if doing that were easy, societies across the world would be poverty free—but we have to accept that poverty is not inevitable and that it is our job to overcome it.

In 2013-14 in Scotland, poverty affected 940,000 people after housing costs. That figure is made up of 210,000 children, 600,000 working adults and 120,000 pensioners. Despite the fact that we have consistently had lower poverty rates than the wider United Kingdom in recent years, we are absolutely clear that those numbers are unacceptable. That more than one in five of our

children lives in poverty in this country today is quite simply wrong.

We know that the cost of mitigating the effects of poverty is significant. In the past year alone, the Government has spent £104 million on mitigating the very worst aspects of the Tories' uncaring and unwanted cuts and changes to welfare. Those imposed cuts from a Tory Government have removed a safety net that thousands relied on to have a decent life, and time after time we have seen more cuts and more damage to our communities. The human cost of poverty and inequality—the destructive and corrosive consequences on the lives of individuals—must be addressed for individuals and the communities that they live in.

Organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group and citizens advice bureaux have provided examples of the damage that has been inflicted by six years of Westminster Tory Governments, ably supported by Cameron's best pal in Scotland, Ruth Davidson. We also know that the UK programme of welfare cuts has had a particular and negative impact on women, children and disabled people among others. It is imperative that equality is embedded across all our work and that we clearly recognise the relationship between equality and socioeconomic inequality and justice. My challenge is to ensure that those links are made and are acted on to the benefit of all our people. As we move forward with the implementation of the socioeconomic duty in the Equality Act 2010, that work is vital.

Yes, we are responding to the immediacy of poverty by mitigating the worst effects of the UK Government welfare cuts, but we want to go beyond just mitigation. We want to prevent poverty and create long-term, sustainable solutions to lift people out of poverty. We want to invest in pulling people out of poverty and we do not want to have to spend our resources on preventing the Tories from pushing people further and deeper into poverty.

Last Saturday was world hunger day. Although we think that malnutrition is confined to developing countries, it is a sad fact that hunger is also a growing symptom of poverty in Scotland. The Trussell Trust has reported that, in 2012-13, more than 14,000 people accessed a three-day food parcel but, by 2015-16, the figure had risen to well over 133,000. That is why we are working with a range of experts to develop a sustainable food strategy. I can announce today that we will establish a £1 million fair food fund, which will enable communities the length and breadth of Scotland to come together to develop empowering and sustainable solutions to food poverty. That will enable people to recognise the social value of food in helping them to rebuild their communities,

combat social isolation and provide opportunities to learn new skills. It is about helping to tackle the causes of poverty and not just its symptoms.

Our policies on key areas such as housing demonstrate the scale of our achievements and ambition. We know that communities flourish when people have good-quality warm and comfortable homes to live in, and that is why the Government's priority is to increase the scale and pace of the supply of the right homes in the right places, particularly in the affordable rented and private rented sectors.

We have an excellent track record. In the previous session of Parliament, we exceeded our target of delivering 30,000 affordable homes, and our bold and ambitious more homes Scotland approach will build on that achievement and deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes over the next five years, 70 per cent of which will be for social rent. We are backing that with a funding commitment of more than £3 billion, which will support an average of around 14,000 full-time equivalent jobs per year and generate around £1.8 billion in economic activity.

Since 2007, the Government has built more homes per head of population than have been built elsewhere in the UK. The higher per capita rate of house building in Scotland has enabled 41,000 more homes to be built than would have been built at England's lower per capita rate. That is the equivalent of a new town the size of Paisley, and it has been possible only because of our sustained high level of house building compared to that in England. However, we will go further. We are determined to increase and accelerate housing supply across all tenures and to support the industry and local authorities to deliver the housing priorities.

Of course, more than just Government action is needed. We believe that the best people to decide on the future of our communities are the people who live in those communities. Our ambition is for Scotland to be a country where every person, regardless of circumstances, has the right to take part in debating and shaping the society we live in and the decisions that we take. That ambition has informed our policy, and it will continue to do so as we move forward.

That is why we embarked on the fairer Scotland discussions, during which we heard the voices of more than 7,000 people from Dumfries to Stornoway on what matters to them. It is why the Government and the people who work for it are getting under the skin of the issues and fully understanding the needs of our citizens. It is why I, as cabinet secretary, am absolutely determined to hear, understand and learn from those experiences and ensure that, in partnership, the

Scottish Government oversees a step change so that all our people reach their full potential.

We also need to acknowledge the crucial and dynamic role that the third sector plays in Scotland, particularly in tackling inequalities and supporting people and communities. That is why we are working closely with the sector to develop a 10-year strategy and why we intend to lead by example by introducing three-year rolling funding where possible to give third sector organisations more financial certainty.

Finally, I would like to talk about the new powers that are coming to Scotland and the opportunities that they present. Implementing and delivering new social security powers is an exciting part of my new portfolio. However, I do not shy away from the challenge of just how difficult that will be. I am not sure that many of us could say that the current system is working for those who need it most. Given its scale and complexity, it is no exaggeration to say that this is one of the most challenging operations since devolution.

Like many members, I see the consequences at first hand in my local community: for the families struggling to make ends meet; for those anxious about the impact of disability changes; and for mums worried about how the cuts will impact on their kids' wellbeing. I know that through the Welfare Reform Committee—which I am glad has been renamed the Social Security Committee in this session—Parliament has heard some of those voices and some powerful personal testimonies. It makes me more determined that we can, and will, take a different path.

Like the rest of the Scottish Government, I am determined to be the strongest voice for those who have been mistreated and marginalised. I will never lose sight of the fact that social security is about helping people with differing needs and priorities to go about their day-to-day lives. At some point in our lives, almost all of us may need some form of social security. Almost one in four Scots may be impacted by the new powers. Around 10 per cent of people receive disability benefits. The transfer will be a huge scale of work that will involve delivering a range of sometimes complex benefits worth around £2.7 billion.

My priority is to put treating people with dignity and respect at the heart of everything we do. That ethos will underpin our approach to social security, including the development of the new agency.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I am sure that the cabinet secretary is sincere, but her track record and her Government's track record are not good. The Scottish welfare fund changed cash payments to around 80 per cent payments in kind. That is not dignity or respect. Can we be sure that she will not go down that path again?

**Angela Constance:** I remind Mr Gray of the action that I took in a previous post to protect school clothing grants to ensure that families and children received the benefit in money and not through some alternative source such as vouchers or donation of clothes.

**Iain Gray:** The welfare fund did the opposite.

**Angela Constance:** The welfare fund has made a huge contribution to Scotland. Of course, we will always work with our partners in local government to ensure that we deliver support in the right way and at the right time. I am proud of the record of this Government, which has delivered help to 116,000 people via the discretionary housing payments—that is 116,000 people who we have helped to pay the rent. We have also assisted nearly 200,000 people with crisis loan support—crises that were, in no small part, due to the sanctions and maladministration of the benefits system.

**Iain Gray** rose—

**Angela Constance:** Time is short, but I look forward to debating more of the substance and detail with Mr Gray and indeed colleagues from the other side of the chamber.

Scotland is a great country but we can make it an even better one. The guiding mission of this Government is to do more to create a fairer, stronger and more prosperous Scotland. That means taking the action that is necessary to create a better society, to tackle the poverty and inequality that continues to blight our society, and to secure better opportunities for everyone and for future generations.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to work together to create a fair and prosperous Scotland where people flourish and have equality in opportunities; recognises the cross-party ambition to tackle deep-seated socioeconomic inequalities and to use new devolved powers to do so, and supports proposals to have fairness, respect and dignity at the heart of Scotland's social security system, to build 50,000 affordable homes, empower communities and people, and reduce poverty and inequalities in Scotland and to build towards a stronger country.

14:44

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** I welcome Angela Constance to her role and congratulate Jeane Freeman on her appointment as Minister for Social Security.

Angela Constance's brief is broad indeed, covering communities and local government, housing, planning, equalities and social security. From these benches, Annie Wells will speak on equalities, Graham Simpson on local government, Maurice Corry on veterans and Alex Johnstone on housing and infrastructure. I am looking forward

very much to Maurice Corry's maiden speech later this afternoon.

Under the Scottish Parliament's powers, we have the opportunity and responsibility to make Scotland stronger, more prosperous and fairer. In my remarks, I will set out something of our approach to making Scotland a fairer nation. I will say something about fiscal fairness, fairness in welfare, and fairness in our communities.

I start with fiscal fairness. There is a close and direct relationship between our tax policies and our approach to welfare. We want to get people off welfare and into work, and once they are in work, we want to lift the low-paid out of paying tax. Those are not mere aspirations idly wished for on Opposition benches; it is what the Conservative Government is doing now for Scotland and for the whole of the United Kingdom. We have cut tax for more than 2.5 million people in Scotland, giving the average worker a tax cut of £905. By raising the personal allowance we have taken more than 300,000 Scots out of income tax altogether. Those are fair tax policies.

Moreover, they are progressive tax policies. A cleaner on £15,000 a year has had a tax cut of 7 per cent since 2010, and a manager on £45,000 a year has had a tax cut of 3 per cent. We have helped the poorest first and we have helped the poorest most.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Would the Conservative Party ever have done that if it had not been in coalition with Liberal Democrats during the past five years?

**Adam Tomkins:** We are not in coalition with the Liberal Democrats any more and we are still doing it.

Fairness dictates that it is not only the poor who should benefit from tax cuts. In the past five years, 140,000 more Scots have become higher-rate tax payers. One in 10 nurses pays income tax at 40 per cent, as does one in three police officers and a quarter of teachers. They, too, deserve a tax cut, which is why the threshold at which the higher rate of income tax becomes payable should be lifted in Scotland as it should be lifted in the rest of the United Kingdom. Otherwise, the Scottish Government will find it even harder to recruit nurses to our national health service and teachers to schools.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Adam Tomkins:** Let me finish my point.

Scotland will not benefit from becoming the highest-tax part of the United Kingdom. The Scottish NHS will not benefit from that and neither will Scottish schools. It will not make Scotland fairer; it will make life in Scotland harder. Our



policies, by contrast, are working. They are producing a fairer Scotland. Building a strong economy and creating jobs are helping people out of poverty.

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Mr Tomkins has said that the Conservatives want to see people get back into work. If that is the case, why have they cut the work programme by 87 per cent in cash terms?

**Adam Tomkins:** The fact is that 2.5 million jobs have been created in the United Kingdom since David Cameron became Prime Minister. The past year alone has seen 152,000 disabled people who were not working a year ago go into work.

As we all know, the Scottish Parliament will have significant welfare powers as well as fiscal powers. Welfare devolution is new, so it is important that we understand what is happening and why. It will be helpful if Parliament understands the welfare powers that are coming in three main groups.

The first of those groups is disability benefits. The entirety of the disability living allowance or personal independence payment is to be devolved in full. That amounts to about £1.5 billion of spend that will be the responsibility of this Parliament and not of Westminster. I look forward to the debate on disability benefits that we are having next week and I will have more to say on the topic on that occasion.

The second group is the cluster of other welfare benefits that are to be devolved in full: carers allowance, attendance allowance, winter fuel payments, and other aspects of the regulated social fund.

The third group—in some ways, they are the most eye-catching—are the powers to top up any UK social security benefits and to create new Scottish benefits in any area of devolved competence. Those powers, particularly the top-up power, will mean in effect that the United Kingdom will continue to set the floor but that it will be for this Parliament to set the ceiling of all working-age social security in Scotland. If at any point the Scottish Parliament considers that the United Kingdom has set a particular benefit too low, we will have the power to make whatever upward adjustment we want.

The Governments have not, as yet, set a date for when the powers will be transferred. The fiscal framework agreed dates for the transfer of tax powers, but not for welfare powers. Personally, I find that disappointing and I will press both Governments to secure the transfer of those powers at the earliest opportunity. I have written this week to the cabinet secretary and to David Mundell, the Secretary of State for Scotland, to

urge them to make progress on that as expeditiously as possible.

Deciding who should make the assessment that an individual is eligible for a benefit that they have claimed and who should make the assessment that an individual claimant is or is not fit for work can involve difficult and sometimes delicate judgments, but those judgments have to be made. No British Government of any political colour has operated a welfare system without sanctions. Can we do that better than it is done at the moment? I am sure that we can. However, we will not get there just by finger-pointing at Westminster and repeating a mantra of “dignity”, as if that word alone will fix everything. Keeping disabled people on benefits when they could work instead does not give them dignity. The dignity of the pay packet is much to be preferred—

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member give way?

**Adam Tomkins:** Let me finish the point.

The dignity of the pay packet is much to be preferred to the indignity of a system that assumes that someone is not fit for the workplace.

Of course assessments about a claimant's fitness for work must be made in a manner that fully respects the individuals involved. However, such assessments need to be made and claimants will not always get what they think that they are entitled to. Allowing the system to be taken advantage of by the unscrupulous few would accord dignity to no one.

**Kevin Stewart:** Mr Tomkins may want to read the testimony of some of the people who appeared in front of the previous Welfare Reform Committee. Many of those folks were in work, but one of the things that was preventing them from continuing to be in work was cuts to their DLA, which meant that they could not get to work.

The system that the Tories have put in place is a nonsense and if they truly believe in getting folk back to work, they should listen to those folks who are currently in receipt of benefit that allows them to get to work.

**Adam Tomkins:** That is why the entirety of the DLA or PIP is being devolved to this Parliament; that is why I want to see that devolution sooner rather than later; and that is why I have pressed the member's ministerial team for the early devolution of those powers to this Parliament—so that this Parliament can take ownership of those issues and deal with them.

We have two core aims when it comes to the benefits system. We want to be supportive of those who cannot work and we want to be effective at getting those who are able to work into employment. This is not an either/or situation. Both aims are equally important and neither

should be sacrificed in the name of the other. In short, we want a social security system that supports the most vulnerable, that is focused on giving those who can work the opportunities and support to do so and that is flexible and personalised.

That last point leads me to the final aspect of fairness that I want to touch on—fairness in our communities. A flexible and personalised welfare system is one in which decision making is effectively shared between ministers and local bodies, whether that is health boards or local government. If the Scottish National Party thinks that the Scottish social security system should be as centralised as Scottish policing has become under its stewardship, it will find opposition on these benches, not support.

The centralisation of power in Scotland has become a depressing hallmark of the SNP's period in office and, to my mind, it is a core aspect of the unfairness of modern Scotland. While Westminster has become a Parliament that devolves power and decentralises not only to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but to cities and city regions, this Parliament has hoarded power. We need to stop that—indeed, we need to reverse it.

As I said a moment ago, it is notable that Angela Constance's ministerial portfolio covers both communities and social security. Those should not be seen as discrete or unrelated aspects of Government policy but as closely entwined. It is unfair to deprive local people of a say in how the services that they use every day are funded and operated and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has made clear its belief that the lack of local decision making is a contributory factor to many of the inequalities that persist in Scotland. We should be learning lessons from across Europe, where councils are far more autonomous in their decision making and raise a much greater share of the money that they spend. The Scottish Government talks much of empowerment, but the reality needs to match the rhetoric.

At the beginning of this session of the Scottish Parliament there is much confidence in this chamber that we have both the powers and the political will to make Scotland a fairer nation. I share that confidence and I have sought to set out three ways in which we on these benches will make the case for fairness—fairness in the tax system; fairness in our welfare services; and fairness in our communities.

I move amendment S5M-00280.1, to leave out from “to do so” to end and insert:

“; supports proposals to have fairness, respect and dignity at the heart of Scotland's social security system; emphasises that such a system should help those who want to work find employment through ongoing support,

and further supports proposals to build 50,000 affordable homes as part of a broader all-tenure 100,000 housebuilding target, empower communities and people, reduce poverty and inequalities in Scotland and to build towards a stronger country.”

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Tomkins. Before I call Alex Rowley to speak, I invite members to press their request-to-speak buttons, if they wish to do so.

14:54

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I congratulate Angela Constance on her new role and Kevin Stewart and Jeane Freeman on their new roles.

When it comes to tackling the deep-rooted poverty and inequality that exist in far too many communities up and down our country, I like to think that there is a majority in this Parliament that want to do so. I also believe that there is a majority in our country that want us, here in this Parliament, to use the powers of their Scottish Parliament to create a more fair and just Scotland where all of Scotland's people can share in the wealth and prosperity of our country. As the Poverty Alliance has stated:

“Where you are born, where you live, or who you are should not stop you from reaching your full potential.”

However, the fact is that right now, here in Scotland, where you are born, where you live and who you are stop many people from reaching their full potential.

The communities, social security and equalities brief is very varied and wide, but if we are to create a fairer Scotland, we must join up all those parts and focus around a comprehensive antipoverty strategy. Indeed, it is not just that portfolio that needs to be joined up and to focus on an antipoverty strategy, but every portfolio across the Government, every department in local government and the growing and dynamic third sector that we have in Scotland. At the heart of any strategy must be communities and people.

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has commented:

“Many in our sector believe that the devolution of new powers to the Scottish Parliament offers the chance to take policy in a new, innovative and progressive direction.”

I agree. Labour in this Parliament and in the country will work with all partners and stakeholders to push for a more progressive and bolder approach than that which we have seen to date. We must use those powers over the next five years to move beyond the reasons for not doing things and create a society that can and will tackle the big issues that face communities and people every day of their lives. In the coming weeks and months, we will set out our approach to those

issues, and our starting point will be to prioritise, based on the state that we are in.

Energy Action Scotland has called for a discussion on how to eradicate fuel poverty in Scotland. Age Scotland has stated:

“Last winter 1,200 people died needlessly, because they lived in poorly insulated housing or in homes they could not afford to heat.”

Let us have that discussion, involve our partners and build a consensus around a warm homes bill that will move us towards the eradication of the blight of fuel poverty for all of Scotland's people.

Let us be bolder in our approach to tackling what Shelter Scotland has called “Scotland's housing crisis”. It cannot be right—it is not right—that in 21st century Scotland hundreds of thousands of people are desperately trying to get a social landlord to give them a house, and hundreds of thousands more are living in housing that is not suitable for their needs. The Government must be bolder; we must use the powers of this Parliament to build the houses that we need and work with all partners to get that programme going now.

We need a clear, measurable plan that sets out how we will address Scotland's housing crisis and how we will work with local authorities and house builders to ensure that the right kind of housing exists to meet the needs of people and communities. Alongside that, we need to know how we will ensure that the wider benefits that will come from a national house-building programme of job creation and skills development in local communities will be achieved.

Indeed, achieving full employment, decent employment and well-paid employment must be seen as a key tool for tackling inequality and poverty. Again, that will require joined-up government and joined-up working at every level. That is why we are clear that austerity will not work for Scotland. Austerity stops the investment that is needed at a local level in order to provide focused support to tackle the deep-rooted deprivation that is all too familiar in many communities up and down our country. It also stops the investment that is needed in early years and in education and skills.

Labour makes it clear today that we must use the powers of our Parliament to present an alternative to cutting Scotland's future. We should re-establish the principle that those who can afford to pay a bit more are asked to do so. The benefits of investing in Scotland's future will be shared across all sections of society. Poverty and deprivation impact on everyone. A Scotland that is free of poverty and deprivation will be a Scotland of true aspiration in which all the people share in the prosperity of our nation.

The Parliament has been given the opportunity to show leadership and direction, and to unite the whole country behind the goal of eradicating inequality, poverty and deprivation in 21st century Scotland. Nelson Mandela said:

“overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice ... Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

In our case, poverty can be overcome by the leadership and action of our Parliament and of the Government in Scotland. We have a great opportunity to bring about social justice for all of Scotland, and we must ensure that we grasp that opportunity.

I move amendment S5M-00280.2, to leave out from “, to build” to end and insert:

“; notes the importance of affordable housing in tackling inequality; supports building 60,000 affordable homes with 45,000 for social rent, and further recognises the need for a higher top rate of tax for the richest earners so that this can be redistributed to tackle wider inequalities.”

15:01

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** According to the Child Poverty Action Group,

“Child poverty is caused by a range of factors which work together and result in inadequate household resources.”

Factors that contribute to insufficient income include low wages, underemployment and worklessness. Households in Scotland in which no one is in paid employment are those that are most likely to experience poverty. There are also some common barriers to work, such as a lack of suitable employment opportunities; a lack of suitable childcare; caring responsibilities; ill health or disability; and employer discrimination.

Another aspect of poverty is inadequate social security benefits. Despite such benefits being intended as a safety net against poverty, many families in receipt of them are living below the poverty line. Approximately two thirds of households with children in which no one works experience poverty. Furthermore, as we have heard, on-going welfare reforms are a major contributing factor to the dramatic increase in child poverty that is projected for Scotland.

I will look at each of those issues in turn.

Low wages have long been recognised as a factor in dealing with levels of poverty in a nation, which is why the SNP Government has, for many years, backed the Scottish living wage campaign. More than 80 per cent of working people in Scotland are now paid the living wage, and we have overtaken our target of 500 accredited living

wage employers. I declare an interest as one of those employers.

The additional childcare that the Government proposes will enable parents to return to the workplace and start to contribute to the economy. It will also start to bring families out of poverty.

The Government will publish a fairer Scotland action plan that will bring together all the actions to tackle poverty and inequalities. The action plan will be informed by the poverty adviser's recommendations, which—as we have heard—the Scottish Government will implement in full. The plan will also include the work of the fair work convention, which I welcome.

When we talk about suitable employment opportunities, do we mean discredited workfare-type models, or a model that addresses the needs of long-term and generational unemployment? One excellent model in that respect is Remploy in Hamilton, in my constituency of Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse. It does a brilliant job in supporting people who experience barriers such as disability to get into work in a way that respects their needs and aspirations.

Remploy's aim is to transform society and the lives of disabled people by creating equality in employment, facilitating fair access to sustainable employment and careers and enabling people to achieve their ambitions and maximise their potential. Remploy runs a superb veterans project that has had significant success over the past few years. I urge the Government to look at that excellent example.

Financial poverty is a terrible burden not only on families attempting to get through each day but on the economy. If more people have more money in their pockets to spend, there will be an economic boost, too. That is another reason for having a living wage.

I very much welcome the Government's plans for a new programme of financial health check-ups to help pensioners and those on low incomes to make the most of their money. The check-ups will ensure that people are on the best energy tariffs and have access to appropriate bank accounts. It is absolutely horrifying that people are not able to access bank accounts.

There will also be a summit of utility companies, with a view to challenging them. We know that for some people the choice is to eat or to heat and that energy costs are one of the biggest spends in a family budget. That needs to be tackled head on.

When I think of social security, I think of social protection. The term "social security" implies that people ought to feel secure in the knowledge that we live in a land that protects, cares for and supports them at the hardest times in their lives—

the times of hardship, disability and unemployment. However, we have a system that penalises, condemns and undermines people who face those hardships and which asks women to prove that they have been raped before they can access child tax credits. What we want is a system that supports, protects, nurtures and cares—a system that, above all, treats our people with dignity and respect.

For some time now, I have been helping out at the Hamilton District Food Bank, which opened a few years ago. The kindness and dedication of the volunteers are awe inspiring. They would rather not be doing what they do every day, but some of our people need their support, usually because of benefit delays, mix-ups with lost files and sanctions—but mainly vicious Tory cuts to in-work benefits.

The food bank also supports a school uniform bank—can members imagine not being able to dress their child for school? Most heartbreaking of all, it has now started a baby bank—can members imagine not being able to supply even the basic essentials for everyday life to provide for a newborn baby with dignity? The baby box, which I have spoken about before in the chamber, is a very welcome measure indeed.

I welcome, with open arms, the Scottish Government's commitment to build a social security system that restores care, dignity and respect, and therefore confidence, to our people. I look forward to a system that does not make people with terminal illness go through multiple assessment procedures.

I will use the same quote that Alex Rowley used. Nelson Mandela once said:

"overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice ... Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made, and it can be overcome and eradicated by the action of human beings."

However, I will finish the quote:

"Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom."

Let us live up to that fantastic ideal.

15:08

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in today's debate, which is on a hugely important subject that is close to my heart. Creating a fairer Scotland is surely a challenging but vital goal, and it is one that I am whole-heartedly committed to.

I am pleased to note the consensual and co-operative tone of the Government's motion. It is important to recognise that there is cross-party support for ensuring that we have a fair society in Scotland, and although there will be some honest

differences on policy, it is important to remember that every member in the chamber surely aims to make Scotland a fairer place to live in.

We are all committed to tackling inequalities in order to build a fairer Scotland. As the Government motion makes clear, part of that will undoubtedly mean addressing deep-seated issues. Achieving genuine change will take time and will require a clear and shared vision of what a fair and equal Scotland should look like in the years to come.

The transfer of significant welfare powers to the Scottish Parliament begins a new phase of devolution. The Scottish Parliament will hold devolved powers over a range of areas, including many disability benefits, and will have new flexibilities in the main out-of-work benefits and for the topping up of reserved benefits. It will also be possible for a new social security system to be set up. It is clear that, with those new powers, blaming the UK Government is no longer an acceptable or appropriate answer. We can take a different path in Scotland if we choose to.

The devolution of those powers to Scotland allows us to have a rigorous discussion about how we support some of the most vulnerable people in our society. How can we ensure that the most vulnerable are protected while, at the same time, ensuring that those who want to work can work? The question goes to the very heart of the matter, and debates such as this are essential to the process of addressing this pressing issue.

Part of the reason why the issue is so important is that if we do not design the Scottish social security system properly, we will be letting down the most vulnerable. Indeed, we need to ensure that we use the powers responsibly and effectively to craft a Scottish social security system that promotes fairness and is able to help all those who need it.

**Neil Findlay:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Annie Wells:** Not at the moment.

We want to see a Scottish social security system with three basic principles at its heart. It should primarily support the most vulnerable in our society, it should be flexible and personalised, and it should give those who can and want to work the opportunities and support to do just that.

As I have suggested, it is important that our social security system should always have individual claimants in mind. To that end, it is necessary to take measures to ensure that Scotland's social security system is personalised, responsive and flexible. Extending flexibility to claimants means giving them choice over the

frequency of payments and the option of split payments.

My party's priorities for social security include our desire to align carers allowance with jobseekers allowance, to support more than 60,000 carers in Scotland. That would be a move towards giving carers greater recognition of their contribution and providing them with greater support. We also want the new welfare powers to be used to encourage people back into jobs, with a target to halve the disability employment gap.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Ms Wells tell us whether she agrees to the 87 per cent cut to the work programme that the UK Government has thrust upon us?

**Annie Wells:** Today, we are talking about the fairer Scotland that we are going to deliver in this Parliament, and looking at the powers that have been devolved here. That is what I am here to do.

The motion mentions numerous vital issues that relate to creating a fairer Scotland. Unfortunately, I do not have the opportunity to discuss each in full, but I would like to recognise their importance in passing. On affordable housing, our amendment makes it clear that we want to see 50,000 affordable homes as part of a broader all-tenure 100,000 house-building target.

As I said in my first speech, empowering communities is a priority for me, and I was glad to hear what the cabinet secretary announced in her opening speech.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Ms Wells give way on that point?

**Annie Wells:** I am sorry, but I do not have much time left.

By strengthening community engagement and promoting more localised participation in decision making, we can encourage more people from different backgrounds to take a lead in their community and make Scotland a better, fairer and more inclusive place to live in.

In the remainder of my time, I will focus on equality of opportunity. It seems clear to me that promoting equality of opportunity across Scotland will be essential in tackling deep-seated inequality. From child poverty to the attainment gap, we need to take robust action to ensure that we address the issues early on and give everyone an equal and fair chance to succeed and fulfil their potential. For those in later life, it is of paramount importance that we focus on improving and increasing opportunities for training and skills development. It is clear that opportunities to develop and learn new skills are vital in helping people back into work. Only by promoting such opportunities and ensuring that they are available to the broadest

possible range of people can we ensure that we fully promote a fairer Scotland.

One important aspect of promoting equality of opportunity is employability support. Of course, for those who cannot work, support must be provided, but for those who can and want to work, we should do more. It is essential that we ensure that all people in Scotland can access employment support services, but those services must remain flexible enough to meet the employability needs of each individual.

It is clear to me that we need to make the best use of resources to help unemployed people into work, focusing on people who want to work but who face the most barriers into work. We should aim to provide targeted help with job searching and coaching, and make sure that skills development is readily available to all who need to access it.

15:14

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** I congratulate Angela Constance on her new position. I also congratulate the first-time speakers we have had the pleasure of hearing from over this week and last week on their passionate and insightful contributions on a wide variety of subjects. It is heartening to realise that so many of the new members are committed to creating a fairer Scotland and a fairer society.

To create a fairer society for everyone, we must be willing to look at every aspect of how we can improve Scottish society, where and when that is required. The SNP's manifesto was brimming with ways in which to achieve a fairer and more equal Scotland. I was delighted to hear from the First Minister that the Scottish Government is keen to work with people from all parties to achieve fairness for all.

My constituency is in Glasgow, where poverty levels are higher than those anywhere else in Scotland. The fact that the number of children who live in poverty is rising indicates that the Scottish Government is right to use the newly devolved powers—no matter how limited those powers are—to target socioeconomic inequalities head on.

The Scottish Government's commitment to giving children the best start in life will positively affect babies even before they are born. It is great news that all pregnant women will now receive free prenatal vitamins—that is a universal move that parenting support groups and healthcare professionals have welcomed. When a baby is born, it will be further supported with the now-famous baby box of basic supplies, which is a signal of our Government's early commitment to every child.

Those measures will be a welcome addition to family life throughout my constituency and the rest of Scotland. They show that the Scottish Government recognises that, from the very start of life, every child is valuable, respected and full of potential.

The key to child development, growth and social fairness is education. It is clear that the Scottish Government recognises education as an investment in our children, our communities and our future, and there is no clearer sign of the determination to get it right than having the Deputy First Minister in charge of the education portfolio. The right to a high-quality education should not depend on the area in which someone lives or the social background into which they are born. Every child and every young adult should be afforded the best start to life and a firm foundation for growth. The doubling of free childcare provision to 30 hours per week continues the theme of supporting children from the very beginning of their lives.

**Alex Rowley:** Does Mr Dornan accept that there is deep-rooted and generational poverty and deprivation in his constituency, as in many constituencies across Scotland, and that the way to deal with that is to get resources in at the community level so that people can get the skills and the opportunities that give them the chance to gain employment? If he accepts that, do we need to put in resources?

**James Dornan:** I completely agree with an awful lot of what Alex Rowley said. It is only fair to say that the constituency that I represent is in a city that has been represented by Labour for more than 50 years. Many of the deep-rooted problems that Alex Rowley talked about were caused by the party that he represents.

Raising attainment throughout Scotland is a priority for the Scottish Government, and I welcome the many new initiatives that are being put in place to achieve it. Targeting the most problematic geographical areas on our educational map will be pivotal in establishing fairness throughout our education system and therefore fairness throughout society.

The attainment Scotland fund is absolutely necessary, as it focuses not only on the key areas of the curriculum where improvement is required but on areas across Scotland where families face the most challenges, which include parts of my Glasgow Cathcart constituency. I welcome wholeheartedly the Deputy First Minister's announcement back in February that the total available in the attainment Scotland fund will be doubled to £180 million in the next four years.

The addition of the national framework for Scottish education will play a vital role in narrowing the attainment gap between the least

deprived and the most deprived communities. Ensuring that each and every child is progressed at the level that they should be at and that their academic abilities are monitored will equate to better progression throughout the educational journey. Those measures are excellent practical examples of an investment in fairness.

To create a truly equal and fair society, we must recognise some of the many groups that are still at a much greater risk from poverty than others. For example, recognition should be given to those who are committed carers. Organisations such as Glasgow south-east carers are doing an incredible job of supporting carers, but we must do more. According to several charities, young carers are more susceptible to bullying and self-esteem issues. Young carers quite often have mental health issues, while being completely committed to those they care for. Those young people deserve the same support and rights as every other member of society. I was delighted that, to progress the rights of those young carers and build on the national strategy, the Scottish Government adopted the Green Party initiative of a young carers grant. I am sure that that move will be welcomed across the chamber.

Through my work with the Daisy Project and WAVES (Women Against Violent Environments), which are both based in Castlemilk in my constituency, I have learned that, despite all the good work that has been done, we still have much to do to ensure a fairer society for those who have faced domestic abuse.

Women who live in poverty or have a disability are at a heightened risk of experiencing a form of domestic abuse in their lifetime. However, sadly, there are still many women who feel that they cannot—or, indeed, should not—come forward to report those crimes. The Scottish Government's joint strategy with COSLA, equally safe, has made it clear that there is absolutely no place in Scotland for any abuse against women, and I am sure that there is no member of this Parliament who would disagree with that. Those involved with the project will continue to implement and develop the prevention and eradication strategy while educating people throughout Scotland. Every woman in Scotland should be able to live without fear. That is about not only fairness, but dignity and basic humanity.

To implement the changes that will be needed to make Scotland fairer, the relevant policies and objectives should filter right through to local government and beyond. We need to empower the people of Scotland to take local decisions into their own hands. Better working relationships will only benefit constituents—the integration of social care and health is an excellent example of positive change.

Importantly, those who live in a community should continue to gain more power, and I welcome local community councils that can demonstrate a strong democratic mandate being able to deliver some services. Holding community council elections on the same day across the country will fairly give them the recognition that they deserve. If fairness is truly the goal of this Parliament, it is right that we allow people in communities to help design and deliver it.

I look forward to being part of a fairer Scotland—a Scotland that is modelled on respect and social equality. My constituents, and the people of Scotland, deserve to live in a society that is designed to encourage people to flourish and prosper, regardless of the social surroundings or geographical areas of their birth—a Scotland that recognises their worth from before they were even born. For those reasons and many others I am not only happy but proud to support the motion.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** I am allowing members time to take interventions—I think that that is appropriate, but there will be an impact on later speakers, and I ask them to appreciate that that is what I am doing.

15:21

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** I begin by thanking many members across the parties for the warm welcome that I received on returning to this place after five years. It was unexpected in more ways than one.

This will be a wonderful Parliament to be part of, with 51 brand new members and with a strong minority Government and a strong Opposition, as envisaged by the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Indeed, there are so many new members that, last week, I accidentally found myself on the garden lobby stairs in the SNP group photo—the First Minister very kindly came over to show me the picture as she tweeted it to her followers. I have reassured my leader, Kezia Dugdale, that I have not had a change of heart. Indeed, I am proud to be part of a strong Labour team that will challenge the Scottish Government in many policy areas.

This is not technically a maiden speech, but it is my first speech in this session, so I will take the opportunity to set out how I intend to represent the people of Glasgow and how I think that a fairer Scotland can be achieved. However, before doing so, I want to pay tribute to my predecessors, Anne McTaggart, Hanzala Malik and Drew Smith, who is a certain loss to this place.

It is an honour to represent the city of Glasgow—the second city of the empire—not least

because my dad would be especially proud to see me return. It is a unique city and, as others have said, it demands a special focus from this place. Some 33 per cent of all children in Glasgow live in poverty—in some neighbourhoods, the figure is 55 per cent. Shockingly, figures from 2013 show that almost one fifth of households earn less than £10,000—the highest number of such households in any local authority.

I do not like to bandy figures around, because that can turn people off, but it is the hard statistical evidence that illustrates that Glasgow's high level of poverty and disadvantage must be tackled. I will use my term to challenge the Scottish Government on the local government settlement for Glasgow, and I ask for an early meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution, Derek Mackay.

This is a Parliament that can make a difference, if we choose to do so. In this fifth session of the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world, it is in this portfolio—I congratulate the new ministers—that there is the potential to make transformational changes to society and change the course of austerity: community empowerment, land redistribution, fairer benefit rules, trade union rights and the power to disrupt the vested interests of those who perpetually get the best out of our education system and of the political system generally. We must explore how we can use the new powers at our disposal to raise the living standards of Scotland's poorest and most disadvantaged, and create a modern Scotland that all Scots can thrive in.

There is a clear consensus—or so it seems—that addressing inequality of opportunity and education is a priority for us all. Whether that turns out to be rhetoric or reality is a matter for every elected member, but it is an obvious and necessary responsibility of the Scottish Government. Few Administrations have had such strong offers from opposition parties of shared policy positions to achieve their manifesto commitments. Arguably, no left-of-centre Government has had an offer to support a rise in taxation to fund shared objectives.

This institution must rise in stature. The committee system must be allowed to do its job and the committees should be harder on the Government when that will lead to better implementation of policies that will create a fairer Scotland. The voters demand it and I argue that the context demands it too.

Strange and worrying things have happened around the globe. Even the brilliant Stephen Hawking cannot explain the horror of the Trump phenomenon, but we had better try to understand it because, unfortunately, it might happen. In my opinion, we do not need to look too far beyond the

financial crash of 2008. Taxpayers might have been unaware of the hidden and real powers of the banks to affect and disrupt their lives, but they should be under no illusion now. It was the most significant event in the 21st century to date and is the narrative behind the austerity debate. The next generation, regardless of whether they come from a traditional working-class or middle-class background, will be likely to have a lower standard of living than their parents. People work longer, earn less, and will probably get less in their pensions, so we can never forget that important lesson in history. That is the main reason that voters across Europe and in the United States are looking for alternative political voices.

I humbly plead that we lift our eyes to the context of the austerity debate—whatever interpretation members wish to take. I happen to be of a similar mind to Paul Mason, the former Channel 4 economics editor, who thinks that capitalism is undergoing one of its periodic transformations. That is the context for the important decisions that we must take to achieve a fairer Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It is as if you have never been away, Ms McNeill. I call Clare Haughey.

15:28

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I congratulate you and your colleagues on your election to your new roles.

I am very pleased to have been selected to make my first speech on an issue that is close to my heart: building a fairer Scotland for all her citizens; a Scotland where everyone has the same opportunities to succeed in life regardless of their background, race, creed, age, gender or sexuality; a Scotland where a baby's basic needs are provided for at birth in the form of a baby box and where its parents have access to a named person who can support them when they need advice or assistance; a Scotland where nursery provision provides a good start in education for all children and allows parents to work without the financial burden of childcare; a Scotland where schools are supported to bridge the attainment gap and school communities play a key part in managing where the budget is spent; and a Scotland where college bursaries are higher than they are in the rest of the UK, where university is tuition-fee free and where access to further education is based on someone's ability to learn, not on their ability to pay.

As a nurse, I am particularly pleased that nursing and midwifery students will retain their bursaries. Those are essential, particularly to mature students who, without them, would not



even consider a career in nursing or who would not be able to complete their course. The Conservative Westminster Government plans to withdraw bursaries in England. I fear that that will inevitably lead to a reduction in the number of prospective students applying to train as nurses and midwives and that a recruitment crisis is inevitable if the Westminster Government continues with those plans.

A fairer Scotland extends beyond childhood and education. Under this Government, all will have access to an NHS that will remain safely in public hands, free at the point of need and without a tax on illness in the form of prescription charges. Our new powers will also allow us to establish a social security agency for Scotland that will have fairness and dignity at its core.

As a mental health nurse, I have seen the anguish and the terror that disability benefit reviews have caused to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Stress and anxiety are having an adverse effect on the mental health of those being assessed, reassessed and then reassessed again. Many people are being refused payments or are having their benefits cut or withdrawn, only to have them reinstated on appeal. In the interim, they have to try to make ends meet and, as a direct consequence, many are relying on food banks to survive.

For our workers, fairness means access to fair work for fair pay, and we will continue to work to extend the living wage. The biggest threat to worker's rights is the Westminster Government's Trade Union Bill. If passed, that legislation will make it almost impossible for trade unions to operate effectively. It will restrict unions' ability to recruit and to represent members, and how they use their resources; it will place restrictions on peaceful picketing and protests. Taken together, all that fundamentally undermines the rights of unions to organise and to negotiate on behalf of their members. The bill will, by placing draconian restrictions on carrying out strike ballots, also undermine the basic human right of workers to withdraw their labour. All that is being proposed at a time when industrial unrest is at an historic low.

I declare a vested interest in the bill. As an active trade unionist for many years, I have fought discrimination and unfair working practices. I have represented workers who have been accused of wrongdoing, and I have been on strike and manned picket lines to try to protect NHS pensions. This Government has pledged to do all that it can to mitigate the bill's effects. Some of those sitting in this Parliament should remember, when they voice their opposition to the legislation, that their parties had the power to devolve powers over employment and trade union law during the Smith commission negotiations. Their parties

chose not to do that, so their members should not criticise this Administration for not doing enough when they have left it to fight for Scotland's workers with one hand tied behind its back.

As this is my first speech, it is only correct that I pay tribute to James Kelly, the previous Rutherglen constituency MSP, and thank him for the service that he gave to my community over the past nine years. I am sure that the people of Rutherglen were grateful for the representation that he gave them here. James Kelly was elected on the Glasgow list, and so has returned to the Scottish Parliament. I look forward to working with him and all the Glasgow list MSPs from across the parties to ensure that the Rutherglen constituency thrives and grows over the next five years.

I am a Rutherglen girl. I grew up in the town, I spent my childhood playing in the local streets and parks, and I attended local schools. I returned to the area to raise my own family, knowing that it is an ideal place to live, to learn and to work.

Rutherglen, Cambuslang, Halfway and Blantyre have an industrial heritage of coal mining, steel works and manufacturing. All those industries played a key part in building up the constituency and the populations of the area. That local industry was decimated during the Thatcher era and we recently saw shadows of that past in the threat to the Liberty House steel works in Cambuslang. Through the Scottish Government and the steel task force's efforts, we were relieved to have that threat alleviated.

I am extremely proud and humbled to have been trusted by my local community to come to Parliament to represent them. I intend to do that to the best of my ability. A fairer Scotland can only benefit all the people of Scotland. My constituents have voted for a better future in which economic and social inequalities are addressed. My promise was that I would be a strong voice for them here, and I will use every opportunity to fulfil that promise. *[Applause.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I call Maurice Corry, to be followed by Clare Adamson.

15:34

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** Presiding Officer, I congratulate you and your colleagues on your appointments. I also congratulate the cabinet secretary on her new role.

This is my first speech in the chamber. I am delighted and honoured to be elected to the Scottish Parliament as a member for the West Scotland region and to represent its residents, businesses and organisations in Parliament.

I thank the Parliament's staff for the excellent induction and training they gave to new members. I also pay particular tribute to Baroness Goldie for all her work as an MSP for the West Scotland region.

I congratulate Jackson Carlaw on being returned as the member for the Eastwood constituency and I am pleased that he has maintained his excellent sense of humour.

My region represents many types of industry and business, such as shipbuilding, ship repairing, drinks, shipping, power generation, tourism—including the Loch Lomond and Trossachs national park—and other activities and sectors. Furthermore, Her Majesty's naval base Clyde is in my patch. It is the home of the UK submarine service, which is critical to the strategic defence of our nation. Along with the Cowlport and Glen Douglas establishments, the base at Faslane means that the Ministry of Defence is a significant employer in the region for residents on both sides of the Firth of Clyde and beyond.

Helensburgh is my birthplace, as the Vale of Leven hospital in Alexandria was for all our children. We received the most fantastic care there over the years. Two of my daughters are in the gallery. As I said many times in my election campaign, the Vale of Leven hospital has cared for many residents in Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire over the years and now it is our turn to care for it and nurse it back to providing full 24/7 accident and emergency services on the north side of the Clyde and within reach of the people who live and work in the area.

I am delighted that I was able to bring my family back to Helensburgh, having spent time in the Balkans—where I was stationed with NATO—Afghanistan and the middle east. That enabled my wife and me to bring the family up in a great area of Scotland on the banks of the Firth of Clyde.

I encourage our local authorities in the region to address job creation. They will get my full support in doing so.

I call on the Scottish Government to provide a more effective long-term solution for the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful. I will rest and be thankful only when the new Minister for Transport and the Islands has put such a solution in place.

On creating a fairer Scotland, I draw attention to the armed forces community covenant, which was established in 2011 as the main instrument for delivering the military covenant, which was signed between the UK Government and the Ministry of Defence. That was an act of duty by the people of the UK to ensure that society was fair to the men and women of our armed forces and veterans and that it cared for them in their hour of need, after

they had fought and cared for us in our hour of need.

I am pleased to say that Scotland has a 100 per cent record on the community covenant, as all 32 local authorities—from Shetland to Stranraer and from Banff to Berwick—have signed up to and implemented it. The covenant's key purpose is to encourage integration between the military and civilian communities, to break down the barriers between them and to enable them to work and live together.

The 100 per cent participation by our local authorities in Scotland in accepting the community covenant means that our armed forces servicemen and women are recognised by our civilian communities along with our veterans and that both communities work together. That is important when the father of the house—or, nowadays, the mother of the house—is deployed on operations and may be away for several months. Therefore, communities will come together to help one another and school staff will do likewise for the schoolchildren from such families.

The stigma of not being part of the community is disappearing and integration is on the increase. Fair treatment is now being shown on a much wider scale in Scotland in respect of accessing education, health services, housing, social security benefits, care and travel. I hope that that will continue apace.

There is a growing number of armed forces veterans in Scotland year on year. That is encouraging, as it shows that the communities are coming together and helping each other when people have served their country—many with distinction and bravery.

We have come a long way in Scotland since 2011, but we have some way to go yet. The armed forces community covenant has played an important role in creating a fairer Scotland for the men, women and families who serve in the armed forces and for veterans. That clearly demonstrates that communities are better together than apart. *[Applause.]*

15:38

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I welcome the cabinet secretary and ministerial team to their new roles in the subject area. I also congratulate the Presiding Officer and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body on heeding the calls of the Welfare Reform Committee last year to remove the term “welfare” from the work of the Parliament. I am very glad that there is now a Social Security Committee in the Parliament.

I commend Clare Haughey and Maurice Corry for their moving speeches, which were their first speeches in the Parliament. I look forward to the speeches that are yet to come.

On a day when we are talking about community empowerment, fairness, involvement and the need to provide our young people with the best opportunities, I must raise a local issue that is affecting many families in my area. On Friday, the one-stop shop for autism, which is a pan-Lanarkshire service, will close its doors to the families that it supports in North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire.

Far from there having been community involvement in the decision, the community has called out for the local authorities to work together to save the service. An individual service in either council area cannot hope to replicate what has been a welcome, effective and well-thought-of service, which has met the needs of service users with autism in my area and their families and carers. Even at this late stage, I encourage North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council to work together to save the service and to meet the needs and aspirations of the families who have made their views known to both councils.

We need to work together in Scotland to achieve our ambitions. We need our third sector to work with local authorities and we need our local authorities to work together, where appropriate, to meet the needs of Scotland's citizens.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** Does the member think that we could work together to ensure that local government is resourced properly, so that it does not have to implement cuts and can provide the services that we all value?

**Clare Adamson:** I know Ms Lamont's position on the matter, but I wonder how it would cost less for the two councils to provide equivalent services in two different areas than it would cost to fund an existing service. It is like building two houses to replace one that is already built—

**Johann Lamont:** Let me clarify that I was making no point about the specific case that the member mentioned; I was saying that perhaps in this Parliament we could work together to find a way of using the Parliament's powers to raise the resources that we need to fund local government properly and do the things that we want to do to tackle poverty and disadvantage.

**Clare Adamson:** I have always worked with people with whom I agree, but I do not agree that we should raise money off the backs of the poorest people in our communities, as the Labour Party proposed in its manifesto.

We face a challenge. The Scottish Government will have to work with Westminster because, for the first time, we will have a Department for Work and Pensions system that is delivered by both Parliaments, as we take over responsibility for the delivery of universal credit and for the function and administration of personal independence payments. That will require good relations between Governments and good delivery mechanisms, be they at local level or Scotland-wide. A lot of work will be needed, which will present a lot of challenges, and a coherent approach is important.

I want to talk about some of the work that the Welfare Reform Committee carried out last year, when it looked at the impact of welfare reform on women. The Tory approach to welfare and cuts has had a detrimental effect on women. The House of Commons library itself tells us that 85 per cent of the £26 billion cut has been taken from women's incomes.

We are aware of the challenges that women encounter in accessing good-quality childcare, we know about pink-collar jobs, with women being underemployed and earning less in the workplace, and we know that our society is overreliant on women for caring. Women have fewer financial assets and less access to occupational pensions than men do, and women are twice as likely to give up paid work to take on a caring role. In addition, 92 per cent of lone parents are women. Women are twice as dependent as men are on social security.

Those findings are supported by research that the Welfare Reform Committee commissioned from Sheffield Hallam University, which reported that lone parents are one of the hardest-hit groups, with individual lone parents standing to lose an average of £1,800 a year from their income as a result of changes to the welfare system. The committee's conclusions were supported by organisations such as Engender, Scottish Women's Aid, Close the Gap, the Fawcett Society and the Scottish Women's Budget Group, and by the many people who gave evidence to the committee on how hard it is for women to deal with the impact of welfare reform.

We know the challenges, and we know from the committee's work that women who are refugees, women who are carers and women who are in abusive relationships are particularly affected and face additional challenges in the new system.

I will finish with a quote from Belinda Phipps of the Fawcett Society. She said:

"Until we can get to the stage where our young boys and girls are brought up without the gender differentiation that pushes women into low-paid, lowly valued work and until we change the situation where carers are almost exclusively women while boys stay away from doing any of

the domestic support work, we have to design our system through a gendered lens.”—[*Official Report, Welfare Reform Committee*, 2 June 2015; c 4.]

I trust that, moving forward, the Government will look with new eyes and through a new lens.

15:45

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to this debate on creating a fairer Scotland.

A caring and confident Scottish Parliament is one that is not afraid to admit that, for too many people, Scotland is just not a fair place to live in. A courageous Scottish Parliament is one that is prepared to change that. Every single priority and choice that we make over the next five years must be designed to reduce poverty and inequality. That is my ambition.

I have enjoyed listening to new MSPs speak alongside returning members in the initial debates. Contributions have been good natured—a lot like the mood around the Parliament, as 51 newcomers find their feet. I am grateful to all the members and staff in the Parliament who have added to the welcoming atmosphere. I am also grateful to my constituents across Central Scotland, who have given me the opportunity to serve them.

As other members in the chamber have already highlighted, information that was published this week reconfirms that where a young person was born continues to determine their life chances. Growing up in one of Scotland’s most deprived communities is likely to put a person at the bottom of the class and, in too many instances, into an early grave. There is no time to waste in ending that injustice. We must use the powers of the Parliament to relentlessly target the causes of inequality in order to eradicate them.

Do any of us believe in our hearts that we are doing all that we possibly can to redistribute wealth and make Scotland fairer? If we are rooted in the reality of our communities, we will be only too aware of children and families who are living through poverty and inequality. If members have not lived through that themselves or cannot think of a young person in their community, they could perhaps keep in mind during the debate Kirsty, the “Holyrood baby” in *Holyrood* magazine.

Kirsty is a child who was born into one of Scotland’s poorest communities. Unless we change her course, she faces an uphill struggle and poor life chances. Another baby who was born at the same time in one of the wealthiest communities is expected to live a whole 10 years longer than Kirsty. A couple of miles can mean a decade of a difference in life expectancy.

Some people believe that, if Kirsty works hard enough as she grows, her talents and endeavours will overcome any adversity. The evidence proves that wrong.

The impacts will not be felt just by Kirsty and her family alone. For every door that closes on Kirsty, for every opportunity that is missed and for every hardship that she endures, our public services, our economy and the fabric of our communities will be worse off. By failing Kirsty and children like her, we fail ourselves.

When I was growing up in Lanarkshire, I was fortunate to have a good roof over my head—although my bedroom was always freezing until the council put central heating and double glazing in. I was fortunate that my turbulent teenage years did not prevent me from getting to university at 16 and unlocking a better future through education, but I could have found myself going off the rails.

My background is not unusual, but the anguish of alcohol harm and what it can do to families has influenced me. I know that any one of us could get sick or have poor mental health. That is not a mark of failure or a lifestyle choice; it is a reminder of our humanity. However, without support or a second chance, too many are left to sink.

I know that Scotland can do better to break the cycles of poverty and inequality and help everyone to reach their potential, but we need the Scottish Government to have courage and trust that progressives in the chamber along with the people in Scotland will back it to do what is right and just.

I believe that all of us care deeply about the communities that we represent, but we will never secure prosperity and opportunity for all if we refuse to properly invest in our public services and communities.

To make Scotland stronger and fairer, we need to convince more Scots that Kirsty’s future is not just someone else’s problem to fix. People take the Scottish Government seriously. If Nicola Sturgeon decided to use the summer to have a conversation with the people of Scotland about why tackling inequality matters, I am convinced that people would listen to our First Minister. The cabinet secretary, who I congratulate on her new post, is very welcome to visit Central Scotland to see the impacts of the cuts but also the positive results of targeted investment.

The commitments that we make to each other form the building blocks of a fairer Scotland and of our NHS, social security, schools and social housing. To build a fairer Scotland, we need to use the powers of the Scottish Parliament to make different choices and to stop the cuts to our public services. Fairness means that those who can most afford it contribute a little more, and then everyone will benefit from stronger public services. We will

create a more dynamic economy through harnessing the potential of all our people.

We have choices to make. We can choose a different path for our young people and we can chart a different future. On behalf of my constituents in Central Scotland, I look forward to playing my part. *[Applause.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I like you already, because you are on time—excellent.

I call Gail Ross, to be followed by Alison Johnstone.

15:51

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I warmly welcome you to your new role, and everyone else to theirs.

As many of my fellow new MSPs have done, I will begin by thanking the people of my constituency—Caithness, Sutherland and Ross. You have placed your trust in me and I will not let you down. You have told me about the main issues in your areas, communities and lives, and I thank you for your openness and hospitality. I reassure everyone in my constituency that I have been elected to represent every single one of you, and that is exactly what I intend to do.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Rob Gibson. Rob remains an unrelenting advocate for the far north and a tireless campaigner for Scottish independence. I know that he is missed in the Parliament. As convener of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, Rob helped to drive the land reform agenda, which will be vital in my constituency and indeed throughout Scotland. People have often told me that his are big shoes to fill and, yes, they are—they are more than two and a half times the size of mine. However, although I am not Rob Gibson and although I will tread my own path in my own stilettos, I have no doubt that Rob will be treading softly alongside me all the way. Thank you, Rob. *[Applause.]*

I learned from Rob that one of the privileges of being a member of the Parliament is the opportunity to bring issues to greater attention and to seek common ground across the chamber to make change. Our NHS is a remarkable institution and its staff provide care each and every day, from our first day to our last. I was proud to be elected on a manifesto that committed to implementing the new £100 million cancer strategy to better prevent, detect, treat and care for those who are affected by cancer.

On 5 September 2001, a man by the name of Raymond MacDonald died in Aberdeen royal infirmary. He left behind him a wife, four children,

four grandchildren, countless friends and a small town in Caithness that is much poorer for his passing. He was 65 years old and had not even enjoyed a full year of the retirement that he had worked so hard for. Raymond MacDonald was my dad, and he was taken by a brain tumour.

Fast forward eight years, and 32-year-old Mark Toshney had just returned from a holiday in Calgary when he felt ill on the flight home. He had four seizures and was put into a controlled coma in intensive care in Aberdeen royal infirmary. After seven days, he was diagnosed with a grade 3 brain tumour. He spent eight hours in surgery to remove a golf-ball-sized mass from his brain. Mark survived, but the tumour was cancerous and Mark spent the next six months undergoing intensive chemotherapy and radiotherapy. His wife Carolyn created a fundraising group to raise funds for brain tumour research because, although such tumours are a leading cancer killer of men under 35, women under 40 and children under two, the area receives only 2 per cent of the funding that is raised through cancer charities.

Carolyn has dedicated her life to raising funds. She has taken part in marathons, half marathons, 10Ks and tough mudders. She has organised charity balls and—perhaps the most famous of all her fundraising efforts—she produced the 2011 and 2012 bare all for brain tumours calendar. That turned out to be a source of great amusement at my party vetting in 2011. Unfortunately, John Finnie is not in the chamber, but he was at the vetting and he might tell members about it if they ask him nicely.

Carolyn truly is a remarkably driven and compassionate individual. Although Mark is classified as terminal and still has 10 per cent of the tumour left in his brain, he is, for now, cancer free. So why does she do it? She does it because Mark still has to go for scans every six months; because there is always the worry that the cancer will come back and, if so, it is guaranteed to be aggressive; because they have a six-year-old son who needs his dad; and because she feels as if she has to do something.

Early diagnosis of brain tumours is difficult and they are often initially misdiagnosed. Some people are treated for migraines and others for depression or stress. Depending on where the tumour is sited, early diagnosis can increase the chance of survival hugely. Mark was lucky. To date, Carolyn and her many helpers have raised more than £130,000 through her charities Bare All for Brain Tumours and Friends of the Neuro Ward Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. She is an inspiration and she deserves to be heard.

Earlier this year, Carolyn and others took the message to Westminster, and now I am helping her take the message to Holyrood. Through the

new cancer strategy, I look forward to working with the Government and others across the chamber to explore what more we can do.

For me, a fairer Scotland is one where everyone has a fighting chance if they fall ill, where diseases are adequately researched in our world-class facilities and where everyone can continue to have access to the world-class treatment that our hospitals and their excellent staff can provide. *[Applause.]*

15:57

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I congratulate you on your election, Presiding Officer.

I, too, congratulate new colleagues across the chamber on their very impressive first speeches. I look forward to working with them all during this session, whenever possible. I thank voters in Lothian for giving me the opportunity to carry on working with them on a wide range of issues and to represent them in Parliament, and I thank all the activists who worked to share our message across Scotland. I welcome, too, the cabinet secretary to her important new role, and the collaborative tone of the Government's motion.

Speaking of new members' contributions, I was struck by that of Maurice Golden yesterday. Mr Golden suggested that the Greens, Labour and the Lib Dems are a "cabal". A cabal is a small group of secret plotters. I am pleased that we are a larger group than we were, but I do not think that it is a secret that the Greens, Labour and the Lib Dems agree that more cash is required to fund the public services that we rely on, although our manifestos set out different ways to do that. The Greens will work with all parties who recognise the need, and the opportunity, to use the new powers optimally to support properly people in Scotland who rely, for a wide variety of reasons, on social security.

I am pleased that the Government and, I hope, Parliament, will use the words "social security" when we discuss such issues. How did the words "welfare" and "benefits" become associated with "skiving" and "scrounging"? We know that too many people who are eligible to claim for financial and other assistance that might make a real difference to their quality of life and their ability to live with dignity are not doing so. Much work has to be done to ensure that people are aware of their entitlements and that they are willing to claim them. We have to work hard as a Parliament to remove the stigma that too many people feel. Some people cannot claim—at least without assistance—because the form filling is an obstacle that they cannot overcome or because they do not

have access to information technology. Those people need help.

The healthier, wealthier children project in Glasgow has shown what can be done. It has helped parents, the majority of whom were lone parents, to gain an average of £3,000 in financial benefits over a year and a half. We can appreciate the difference that that kind of cash has made. We know that austerity is gendered, so that is the kind of project that could bring many preventative benefits, particularly to women and children.

UNICEF ranks child well-being in the UK worse than it ranks that of all our new near neighbours, yet the UK Government has cut pregnancy and child-related benefits across the UK by £1.5 billion a year, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies forecasts a massive increase in child poverty in Scotland, with up to 100,000 more children living in poverty in 2020 than in 2012.

The Greens welcome the Government's commitment to increased take-up of benefits, but we will work with all parties, organisations and individuals who are committed to a caring social security system that puts individuals at its heart—a system that has no place for the discredited sanctions regime. We know that almost half of all sanctions are overturned on appeal, and that sanctions are one of the main reasons why increasing numbers of people are attending food banks and applying for hardship loans.

Holyrood will control several important benefits, including support for carers and people with disabilities. We will be able to top up existing payments and create new benefits. With the devolution of those powers comes the need for greater collaboration between the Scottish Parliament and Westminster. When Jim McCormick of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation gave evidence to the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee in the previous session, he spoke of the need for much improved intergovernmental relations if we are to deliver the powers fairly and properly. We look forward to working together to increase the carers allowance to make sure that all those who work in social care have the living wage plus and—as James Dornan said earlier—to increase provision and financial assistance for young carers.

We also seek to work with all those who want to make primary care fair. Ninety per cent of patient contact with the health service is with general practitioners and other primary care professionals in our communities, but those services are not equally available to all who need them. Deep-end practices write to us about the inverse care law: the more that people need help, the less cash there is. They also tell us how challenging recruitment is in their practices.

We have to face the challenges of our ageing society. We would like there to be a commission to explore how Scotland can help our older people to live more independently and more healthily. We have to look at their low income and at the fact that 35 per cent of Scotland's households are experiencing fuel poverty. Robin Harper, my predecessor in Parliament, proposed a warm homes bill in 2003. We are 13 years on, but I am glad that there is a consensus that we have to act on that agenda. We need a real living wage, and we need to start investing in bricks and mortar, and not simply subsidise high rents.

A fairer Scotland also needs transport justice, so let us invest in fairer and affordable public transport, and put more emphasis on walking and cycling. They are the most affordable forms of transport; it is no secret that I think that the Government has continued to neglect them. I invited the previous minister, Mr Mackay, to champion those issues. Alas, it was not to be. Mr Yousaf is not in the chamber today, but perhaps he will be such a transport justice champion.

There are many issues around making Scotland a fairer place to live. In closing, I ask the Government to take action to protect children equally against assault in the law and action to reform the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

I look forward to working with colleagues across the chamber to ensure that, in a fairer Scotland, we all have access to truly equal opportunities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** I call Mairi Evans, to be followed by Alex Cole-Hamilton. I ask members to keep to a strict six minutes, please.

16:03

**Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I feel deeply humbled and privileged to be in the chamber today in this new parliamentary session, and to be representing the people of my home constituency of Angus North and Mearns. It feels a little bit like things have come full circle for me, because I was in the building when it was under construction, as part of a tour during my very first work experience in then First Minister Jack McConnell's office. That experience may or may not have had an influence on my political beliefs.

I start by paying tribute to my predecessor Nigel Don, who served Parliament as a list member and constituency MSP from 2007. Nigel carved a niche for himself with his work on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee, which he chaired during the previous session. He was dedicated to that work and served Parliament well.

I also had the pleasure of having John Swinney as my constituency MSP for a time, before the boundary changes in 2007. He has left a lasting legacy in the parts of the constituency that he once represented.

However, I have to start on something of a negative note, because I take exception to some claims that were made in debates earlier this week. Ruth Maguire claimed that she lives in the "greatest" constituency in Scotland, while Kate Forbes claimed that she has "the most beautiful constituency" not just in Scotland but "in Europe." I can beat them both hands down: I have the most talented constituency. We have Brechin—as well as being Scotland's eighth great city, it was home to Robert Watson-Watt, who developed the use of radar, which proved to be pivotal in the second world war. We have Arbutnott, which was home to James Leslie Mitchell—better known under the pseudonym Lewis Grassie Gibbon—who I believe to be Scotland's greatest author and who penned Scotland's greatest novel, "Sunset Song", which is based in the heart of my constituency, in the Mearns. Stonehaven was home to Robert William Thomson, inventor of the pneumatic tyre, and who can forget Forfar, which is home to that great culinary invention, the bridie? From coast to glen, I am truly blessed to live in the constituency and to represent all the diverse and unique communities across Angus North and Mearns.

However, I come to today's debate and the important theme of making Scotland fairer. I come from a local authority background, having been a councillor in Angus for the past nine years, and I believe that an integral part of the debate about a fairer Scotland is our local democracy and the relationship between our councils and our communities.

Some of the issues facing local government were highlighted in a March 2014 Council of Europe report on local and regional democracy in the UK. I have been fortunate enough to represent Scottish local government on the Council of Europe since 2012, alongside my colleague Christina McKelvie, and I was part of that discussion. If I learned anything from my work with that organisation, from the in-depth analysis and monitoring across the local governments of its 47 members, it is that although there are some examples of good practice that we can share, there is certainly a lot that we can learn from our neighbours.

I am sure that most of us are aware of the issues facing local government. We all know the statistics about our local authorities and their size—we have the largest local authorities in Europe, from the Highlands, which has a bigger landmass than Belgium, to Glasgow City Council, which serves a population of more than 600,000

people. Over the past 100 years, Scotland's councils have been consolidated at a faster and more dramatic rate than has happened anywhere else in Europe. From more than 1,000 councils in the 1900s, numbers gradually decreased to 65 in 1974 and then to our current 32.

There is a lack of equal representation on our councils: only 24 per cent of our councillors are women, and the average age of a councillor is the mid-fifties. We need also to look at council election turnout. For the level of government that is closest to the community that it serves, we had a turnout of only 39 per cent in the last election. In some wards, turnout barely reached double digits. It was also the lowest turnout since the wholesale restructuring of local government in 1974. There is a fundamental disconnect that we need to try to change.

The situation is exacerbated by there being other public bodies, including community planning partnerships and health boards. CPPs are great in theory, but in practice there is still a disconnect between community aspirations and strategic-level decision making. When we look at our health boards, one of the key issues in my constituency at the moment is the threat of closure of the Mulberry unit, which is a mental health in-patient facility at Stracathro hospital. Local elected representatives were not consulted or informed about what was coming, and with only one councillor from each of the three local authorities on the health board, it is simply not representative. There is a real lack of transparency and accountability, although I hope that integration of health and social care will start to address such issues.

We have started on the path of decentralisation of powers through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. We need to see that work go further, which is why I welcome the commitment to participatory budgeting: giving communities direct control of funding, as well as control over Crown Estate revenues; giving more power to schools, with their own budgets; giving more powers to community councils; and perhaps most important, giving local authorities more flexibility when it comes to finance. I look forward to seeing what develops.

In conclusion, I say that our local government is the level that is closest to our communities, but it often feels as though it is the opposite—that it is quite remote and distant from the people whom it serves. If we really want to reform local democracy and governance, we need to be bold, brave and ambitious. I am excited about seeing the plans for that reform emerge over this session of Parliament, because we have the power to make a real difference to our communities and we can do that best by empowering them. *[Applause.]*

16:10

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western)**

**(LD):** I start with my congratulations to Angela Constance and her ministerial team on their new role. I look forward to shadowing the range of briefs that they hold in their portfolio. Similarly, I look forward to shadowing the range of briefs that other cabinet secretaries hold in their portfolios.

The challenge of how to meet the social inequality in our society is the benighted task that falls to any Government and, at local level, to any parliamentarian. It is, arguably, why many of us chose a career in politics in the first place. Indeed, social inequality crosses the thresholds of our constituency offices with all-too-frequent regularity. Different fronts in the seemingly endless battle open with the ebb and flow of economic and social circumstance. No sooner is policy enacted or resource directed at a certain problem in order to close one gap, but another starts to appear with the publication of a report or set of statistics. In this agenda, above all others, our constituents look to us, as politicians, to work together, so we do them a profound disservice by trading blows here. I therefore congratulate the Government on lodging the motion so early in these first days of a Parliament that is newly empowered with the levers that can make a real difference in closing the gaps that still pepper our society.

The Liberal Democrats whole-heartedly welcome the commitment to build 50,000 new homes, and urge the Scottish Government to go further than its commitment to make 70 per cent available for social rent and instead to push that figure up to 80 per cent—40,000 homes—because that is how we will begin to tackle the growing crisis in our social rented sector.

We are also hugely gratified by the cross-party consensus that is emerging on the need for a warm homes act to address finally the Dickensian spectre of fuel poverty that currently blights over a third of households in modern Scotland. We also welcome the intention that has been expressed by the Scottish Government to use the new powers in social security with greater fairness, in particular by restoring disability living allowance to families whose children go to hospital for protracted hospital stays, and by protecting housing benefit for young people.

However, the challenge that is before us is still great, and we must accept that public policy has come adrift of the reality in which we find ourselves, and that we have failed to use the levers at our disposal to address that. That failure can be measured out in lives, including the lives of young men from deprived backgrounds, who are still 10 times more likely to take their own lives in suicide than are their counterparts in more affluent parts of the country; the lives of drug users, who



are now often unable to access avenues of support through alcohol and drug partnerships, which have lost funding because of a cut of £15 million in the most recent Scottish budget; and the lives of the 15,000 children who, on any given day in Scotland, are either looked after or accommodated and who are exponentially more likely to end up in prison than in university.

We have before us a blank canvas and an opportunity to build the structures of state support that will empower and protect the most vulnerable of our citizens, but our challenge extends beyond ensuring that that support is available. We have a job of work to do to ensure that those who live on the fringes of our society can even make it to the starting line to access state support.

Last week, I was contacted by a constituent named Elspeth, whose daughter Islay has been struggling to cope at school for some time. Following an assessment by an educational psychologist, she was referred to child and adolescent mental health services. After two months, Islay had an appointment where she and her family received the devastating news that her assessors felt that Islay was on the autistic spectrum but that a full autistic spectrum disorder assessment would be required before a diagnosis could be given. However, 10 months later, Islay is still waiting for that assessment. Without that assessment and diagnosis, not only have Islay and her family been left in a limbo of uncertainty, but they have been deprived of the benefits and state support that such a diagnosis would bring. We have failed Islay and her family, and many others like her. If we are truly to build a meaningful safety net with the new powers accorded to this Parliament, we must build and invest in the systems that feed into it.

The social inequality agenda is so often distilled into the simplistic parameters of cash and poverty. Those are central to both the cause and the solution, but we must use the levers of public policy that are available to Parliament to address the causes of inequality. We must lead by example—for example, by sending Government grants and assistance only to companies that pay the living wage. We need a whole-systems approach that empowers the third sector: a group of organisations that have for generations been working miracles using next to nothing, while on their knees themselves.

That whole-systems approach will address the poverty of opportunity, ambition and access that hobbles so many of our constituents in our communities. It requires a broad-reaching and selfless consensus across parties in the chamber, which is why members on the Liberal Democrat seats will support the Government motion this afternoon.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you for your brevity, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

16:16

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I asked to speak in this debate because I am passionate about fairness and equality. I believe that those things are the marks of a civilised society—in fact, that is the reason why I became involved in politics in the first place, as I suspect is true of most members in the chamber.

Fairness and equality are about making political choices. I left the Labour Party in the 1980s not because I had abandoned my socialist principles but because I realised that I could not raise my children in a fairer Scotland until we had control over running our own country. Like many other members, I fought my election campaign based on building a fairer, more equal Scotland, and I am pleased that our progressive programme for government outlines how we will do that.

Poverty is not inevitable, and tackling the root causes of poverty and deprivation is the SNP's choice. Indeed, it is the mark of a Government that is making the right choices for the people of Scotland and is moving ahead with the correct priorities. Closing the educational attainment gap, free university education, transformational changes in childcare, strengthening child protection, maintaining free prescriptions and building 50,000 affordable homes are all part of building a fairer Scotland.

In addition to the baby box of essential items to help all children to get the best start in life, all pregnant women will receive free vitamins by next spring as part of the Scottish Government's commitment to building a healthier Scotland. I welcome that, and I am proud that Scotland is once again leading the way on the issues that matter most.

However, I despair that for six years we have been dictated to by a Westminster Government that strips social security payments from a man who missed his jobcentre appointment because he was taking his father, who had suffered a heart attack, to hospital. It is a Government that sanctioned a woman for not turning up to her appointment on Christmas day at the request of a computer-generated letter. I know that everyone here would agree that that is ludicrous and unfair, but the Tories in the chamber have chosen to represent and support a party that implements such policies. Along with all the things that they like, such as austerity, low taxes, the free market and all the rest, they get the nasty bits too. Thankfully, as the cabinet secretary has outlined, our new powers over social security will be based

on dignity and respect, and that is the way forward to create a fairer Scotland.

We will put a stop to the indignity of continuous assessments and support the most vulnerable in society. How anyone can argue that spending £160 billion on a useless political weapon of mass destruction based on our shores is fair while the queues for food banks in Scotland are growing month by month is beyond my comprehension.

That money could be spent on closing the poverty gap and allowing older people to live in dignity. Last winter, 1,200 older people in Scotland died needlessly because they lived in poorly insulated homes that they could not afford to heat. More than half of single-pensioner households and nearly half of pensioner couples in Scotland live in fuel poverty. The choice between heating and eating is a daily reality for many, and it should not happen. Our Government's commitment to tackling poverty will lift people out of that reality and ensure that future generations do not have the same experience.

The Labour Party has nothing to crow about on the fairness and equality front either, given that Labour-led councils spent four decades paying women less for doing the same jobs as men. Many of those council administrations are still in power—although that will change next year—and many are still wrangling over pay-outs. Labour's failure to challenge the Tories' austerity agenda at Westminster has cost it dear, as we on the SNP side of the chamber have witnessed.

**Neil Findlay:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rona Mackay:** No.

I believe that the route to a fairer and more equal Scotland can be found only when we have full control over our own affairs in an independent Scotland. Until then, I am happy in the knowledge that we will make a difference by using the hard-fought-for powers that we are about to receive.

16:20

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I declare an interest as a councillor in South Lanarkshire. I also welcome the ministers to their new posts.

I would like to say how much I have enjoyed the contribution of members who made their first speeches today—in particular Gail Ross; Alison Johnstone, with whom I agree on cycling; and Mairi Evans, for providing some clear Tory thinking on local accountability,

The question, "How do you create a fairer Scotland?" is one of those nightmare questions that might be asked at a job interview. It is a trap

for the unwary, designed to snare them as they head down a blind alley, only to find that the turn they have taken is not the one the interviewer wanted.

That is because fairness—and, indeed, equality—can mean different things to different people. There is no right answer to the question. Fairness could take us off in the direction of those who want 50:50 gender representation on pretty much every body we could name. I tend to agree with my colleague Rachael Hamilton that giving someone a position based on their gender and nothing else is demeaning and hardly fair.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Mr Simpson give way?

**Graham Simpson:** No—I think that we have heard enough from Mr Stewart today.

I prefer to see fairness in terms of helping people achieve their potential—as individuals and not as men, women, able-bodied, disabled, black, white, straight, gay, religious, atheist or whatever. For me, the test is treating people and communities with respect.

As we go through the next five years, there is a danger that people will box themselves into fixed stances early on. However, if we are to achieve anything as parliamentarians in this session, we must genuinely learn to work together. As a councillor, I have put aside my huge differences with Labour to work together for the good of the people of South Lanarkshire for the past four years—and it has worked. We see councils made up of all sorts of alliances throughout Scotland. As MSPs, we should follow the lead shown by councillors. They are the people empowered to represent, to lead and to shape communities.

I should say that, despite my comments, I am genuinely looking forward to discussing how to take forward the local government agenda with Kevin Stewart, who I see has run off—perhaps someone can tell him when he gets back. I hope that he can set aside time in his diary for a get-together soon.

I hope that Mr Stewart would be able to reassure me more than the First Minister did earlier on today. Her announcement that the SNP Government will force councils to decentralise was something of a surprise, for surely the decentralising should be taking place from Holyrood to councils. Decentralisation is taking place from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament, but that seems to be where it stops—that is strange, is it not?

A centralising tendency was one of the tendencies of the previous SNP Administration, as Adam Tomkins said earlier. That led to it being—in my mind and in the minds of many others—almost disdainful of local government, and that is not fair

to communities. Whether that involved it imposing the council tax freeze, forcing local authorities to stick to teacher numbers, meddling in planning matters that would be best decided locally or driving a wedge between some councils and others, the theme was, "We're in charge, not you."

My party instinctively believes that decisions are best taken as close to those who are affected by them as possible. That means leaving councils to do what they do best and even—as I said earlier—giving them more powers.

Last year, four councils left COSLA and formed the Scottish Local Government Partnership. It just so happens that Glasgow, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and Aberdeen were all Labour run, so one might argue that a bit of party politics was involved. However, that would not tell the full story. Those councils left COSLA because they felt let down, and there was a strong feeling that COSLA—and therefore all of Scottish local government—was being routinely ignored by the Scottish Government. I share that view.

The new body accounts for 25 per cent of the Scottish population. It is surely a matter for councils whether they are members of this body or that, but thus far the Scottish Government's stance has been to refuse to engage with the partnership. That is tantamount to saying, "It's COSLA or nothing," and that is not respect. I urge Mr Stewart to think again on that—or I would if he were here.

**Kevin Stewart:** I am.

**Graham Simpson:** Oh, he has come back. That is good. Perhaps his colleagues can tell him what I have been saying. I would certainly be happy to assist him on the matters that I have mentioned.

This week, the independent report commissioned by ministers—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have to close, Mr Simpson.

**Graham Simpson:** Certainly. If empowering communities is to mean anything, we must give them the powers that they need through councils and stop the top-down approach of recent years.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give five minutes each to the last two speakers. I call Neil Findlay.

16:26

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** I am sure that members are devastated that my speech has been cut a minute, but the world is not a fair place. The economic system that operates across the globe is systematically designed to create inequality. It is not an accident. Neoliberal economics, no matter which Government administers them, are designed to create inequity

of power, influence and wealth. They promote a small-state, laissez-faire approach, with austerity and low taxes a central plank of economic policy. They are designed to see our economy and society owned and managed by a small, extremely powerful elite, while the rest are left to make do with what they are given. If we do not challenge that system, we will never address inequality.

Within that system sits Scotland, our country: a place in which we all take great pride but which is extremely unfair. It is not fair—indeed it is immoral—that people in our poorest communities are dying up to 20 and 30 years before their wealthier fellow citizens. That is a fundamental unfairness that is incompatible with any commitment to human rights and equality, and it is incompatible with the myth that somehow we are different. We have to challenge that, and I will suggest a number of proactive and positive ways in which, with the political will, we could.

We could make the ending of health and wealth inequality the overriding national objective of Government economic and social policy, with every other policy measured against that objective. We could hand responsibility for achieving that objective to the office of the First Minister, making she or he accountable for its success or failure. We could make a policy of full employment an economic priority, ending the abuse of low pay.

We could revisit public procurement to address the massive missed opportunities that it offers. We could end the granting of contracts, grants and loans to companies that exploit and abuse their workers, fail to recognise trade unions or fail to pay the taxes they owe. We could end the attack on our councils, which are the front line in fighting unfairness and inequality. We cannot claim to support a fairer Scotland when all the while we are starving our councils of essential funding, with jobs and services cut as a result. We could invest to address educational inequality. This week's attainment figures are stark evidence of the failure of Government policy in that area.

We could reinstate the £15 million that has been cut from drugs and alcohol funding, which Alex Cole-Hamilton rightly mentioned. There is huge concern among support organisations about that cut. They tell me that it will result in more blood-borne infections, higher hospital admissions, greater risk to vulnerable children, higher drug-related crime and more homelessness.

Through the withdrawal of financial support and outreach services, we are entrenching inequality among some of the most marginalised people in some of the most marginalised communities, while criminalising poverty. I appeal to the minister who replies to the debate—whoever that is—to address the point about the cut in the funding for drugs

services support. I am sure that Mr Cole-Hamilton will pursue that point, and so will I.

We have the powers in the Parliament to tackle some of the issues head on. We could raise the taxation rate for our wealthier citizens and redistribute the revenue to the people and communities who need it most. That would be a progressive and practical way to tackle poverty and inequality.

Warm words and rhetoric are all very well, but they do not heat houses, create jobs or feed families. If the Government fails to support progressive taxation to help to create a fairer Scotland, that will be evidence of it saying one thing and doing something completely different.

The political beliefs that I hold seek not to mitigate the damaging social impacts of prevailing economic orthodoxy but to replace that with a more democratic and more socialist way of doing things. Another world is possible, but only with political will can we challenge the status quo and the deep unfairness in Scotland. The Government will be held to account on the issues over the next five years.

When I heard Mr Tomkins talk about the unscrupulous taking advantage of the system, I thought for a minute that he was talking about corporate tax evasion and avoidance. I thought that he was talking about tax cuts for the rich and benefits cuts for the poor.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have to close, please.

**Neil Findlay:** I thought that Mr Tomkins was talking about Mr Cameron's daddy's Panama arrangements, but no—it was the same old Tories attacking the poor and the vulnerable.

16:31

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I agree with much of what Mr Findlay said towards the end of his speech but, rather strangely, I will start in a spirit of consensus by agreeing with something that the Conservatives said.

The Conservatives made much of dignity in relation to the payment of disability benefits. Adam Tomkins said that he wanted power and control over those benefits to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament as soon as possible, so that our Scottish Government could take control of such matters. Perhaps that was a tacit acknowledgement from the Conservatives in this Parliament that their Tory colleagues in Westminster have not acted in the best interests of Scotland's disabled citizens—and many more, too.

I am glad that we can agree that the Scottish Parliament will do a better job than London has done of bringing dignity, fairness and respect into the benefits system. Many of my constituents in Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn have felt victimised, demonised and excluded by Westminster's management of the benefits system. I welcome the fresh and more humane approach that our Scottish Government has signalled.

**Adam Tomkins:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Bob Doris:** A brief one, yes.

**Adam Tomkins:** Will Mr Doris acknowledge that the Scottish Conservatives brought to the Smith commission table the prospect of devolving such powers? We published the proposals in our Strathclyde commission report before the independence referendum. The devolution of welfare powers is a Conservative idea that has been legislated for in the Scotland Act 2016 by a Conservative Government.

**Bob Doris:** Jeez—I will not make that mistake again. Mr Tomkins must be in dreamland. The Conservative Party has had the most shameful record of denying Scotland power over its own affairs for generations, and we will take no lessons from the Conservatives in this place.

I will move on to talk a little about where I feel a difference can be made in tackling poverty and promoting social justice. Alex Rowley mentioned the scourge of intergenerational poverty, which is of great interest to me. Many communities do well in the good times and not so well in the bad times, but the communities of many of my constituents have never felt the good times. It is not boom and bust for many of them; it has always been a recession. That is social injustice, which relates to much of the intergenerational poverty that Mr Rowley referred to.

In some parts of my constituency that have suffered from that experience, however, good things are starting to happen. In Royston, for example, groups such as Royston Youth Action, Rosemount Development Trust, Rosemount Lifelong Learning and a variety of housing associations, as well as local elected representatives, have designed a community-led regeneration strategy for the area. They did that because the council did not have one. That community empowerment and that regeneration strategy have led to investment being attracted to the area.

Another example is that of Hamiltonhill, where there has been a huge number of demolitions and where 600 new homes are proposed. As soon as it heard about the proposal, Hamiltonhill community information group contacted me

because its members do not want only to be consulted about the new homes but to be co-producers and to have a say in what their community will look like.

I was inspired by Mairi Evans's excellent speech. As she said, we can do all that we can in relation to education, income maximisation, employment, childcare and a long list of other issues that are involved in lifting communities out of intergenerational poverty, but what underpins everything that we do is the issue of community empowerment.

Mention was made of participatory budgeting. Much was made of the flaws in the community planning process and of the new and historic Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. There must be a cultural change in society so that we can liberate our communities from the grassroots up and build the kind of society that we want. More than anything, that will tackle intergenerational poverty and deliver the fair and empowered Scotland that we all want.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to closing speeches. Everyone who has taken part in the debate should now be in the chamber.

16:36

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the cabinet secretary and her able deputies to their new roles. I look forward to working together constructively as we set the new course in social security that the cabinet secretary spoke about in her opening remarks.

I also congratulate those who have made their maiden speeches today. They have added a sense of realism to the debate and have brought their welcome wider experience to the chamber. Among the fantastic speeches today, Clare Haughey talked about the impact of assessments on the patients she treated in her previous job as a nurse; Maurice Corry talked about the issues around the integration of veterans and their families into civilian life; and Monica Lennon mentioned Kirsty the "Holyrood baby" and spoke about Scotland's children who live in poverty and face massive challenges to their ability to succeed and, indeed, survive.

"Dignity", "fairness" and "respect" are three words that I have thought a lot about over the past few days—three words that brought me into the Labour movement at a young age, that have been in every Scottish Government press release, that have permeated all the third sector press releases that I am grateful to have received, and that appear in the motion that we are debating today. They are also three words that simply cannot be used in rhythm with the dismantling of support for

our most vulnerable citizens that we have witnessed over the past six years.

We are in the early stages of what should be a wide-ranging conversation about how we support our most vulnerable people. Issues around powers, agencies, structure, tests, assessments and support, and the corporate language that is the sine qua non of welfare reform, will soon dominate discussions. However, I ask colleagues across the chamber to first consider those three words.

I say that it is not fair that someone should be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder through no fault of their own; that there is no dignity in leaving an assessment for personal independence payments shaking and crying; and that there will be no respect for a Government that does not act to rid us of that experience.

It is not fair that a person should die in such poverty that they or their family cannot cover the costs of the funeral; there is no dignity in having to ask for assistance to bury a loved one; and there will be no respect for a Government that does not ensure that that support comes with compassion and love.

It is not fair that, in 21st century Scotland, a child should be born into poverty; there is no dignity in visiting a food bank to ask for the essentials to feed our children; and there will be no respect for a Government that does not provide the necessary support to new mothers.

It is not fair that the work chances and independence of our disabled people are subject to the arbitrary decisions of Government cost cutting; there is no dignity in being put out of sight and out of mind, marginalised in society; and there will be no respect for a Government that just supports but does not enhance the lives of our disabled citizens.

It is not fair that our elderly relatives are playing roulette with the thermostat, anxious about their fuel bills; there is no dignity in our older loved ones, who have given us so much, shivering in their own homes; and there will be no respect for a Government that does not help to provide warm homes for our parents and grandparents.

Those realities of modern Scotland must sober our thoughts as we move forward. They demonstrate the challenges that we face as a nation and show us that the driver of the conversation must be vulnerable people themselves and their experiences.

I urge ministers to speak to those in our society who face the toughest barriers—those who face the most challenging circumstances and those who have faced the depths of unimaginable tragedy. They must be our partners moving

forward. Their voices must be heard above those of officials, policy makers and politicians. Their voices must be heard over the cacophony of stories in the media that repeatedly portray them as scroungers, skivers or frauds, as we have heard in the debate today.

I believe that, if we really consider the words of the motion—"fairness", "dignity" and "respect"—and if we really dig into the experiences and challenges of our most vulnerable, this Parliament can be the principle crucible of a new and compassionate approach—an approach that can be celebrated alongside the post-war settlement—and we can provide a sense of hope and opportunity for those who need it most.

16:42

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** My pride and honour in giving this, my maiden speech, to Parliament are as great as my surprise at finding, on the morning after the election, that I would be coming here to make it as a representative of North East Scotland. However, my surprise was not, it must be said, as great as that of my wife, whom I had left some 12 hours earlier with the words, "I'll be back in the morning. Don't worry—everything will be back to normal then." Contrary to popular myth among the Aberdeen association, she was delighted. She is born and bred of the north-east—it is a region that she loves dearly—and she realised that, for the next five years, her husband would be doing everything possible to promote and represent the people of the north-east. It is a region and a people that I, too, have come to know and love over the 11 years for which I have lived there, practising law with three different firms, representing companies and individuals alike, and acting as a non-executive director of local charities such as the Aberdeen Foyer.

The north-east is by far one of the most exciting, most vibrant areas in the country. Indeed, just last weekend I was on Aberdeen's Belmont Street at the Aberdeen country fair, sampling some of the fine produce of our local businesses. I went to see an art exhibition with works created by the service users of Penumbra, a mental health charity. The following day, I was delighted to accept an invitation to see the vintage buses at the Grampian transport museum before heading up to Peterhead for the sailing club open day in a port that remains the largest white-fish market in Europe. The next day, I cycled down the Deeside line in glorious sunshine to check on the progress of the western peripheral route and stopped by one—perhaps more than one—of the fine hostleries in Stonehaven harbour. All that in the region that has powered the Scottish economy for generations, be it through oil and gas, fishing,

farming, tourism, the universities or the creative and gaming industries. The region is, statistically, the most entrepreneurial place in Scotland.

And yet, the one thing that people told me time and again when I chapped their doors during the campaign, whether in Dundee, Montrose, Aberdeen, Banchory, the Broch or Inverurie, was that the voice of the north-east is not being heard. In a debate about a fairer Scotland, I would simply ask this on their behalf: where is the fairness in Aberdeen being the lowest-funded council? The council can no longer keep open two public pools. Furthermore, Aberdeenshire is the third lowest-funded council. Where is the fairness as we suffer a crisis that sees job losses running at tens of thousands? Sir Ian Wood has predicted that, in 2016, 45,000 jobs could be lost. Just yesterday, the chamber said to our highly skilled unemployed in the north-east that there should be no fracking here. Further, the Greens are committed to shutting down the industry altogether.

**Alison Johnstone:** Will the member give way?

**Members:** It is a maiden speech.

**Liam Kerr:** It is my maiden speech, I am afraid. I have clearly hit the mark, so I thank the member for that.

Where is the fairness in doubling the large business supplement? That supplement will hammer 27 per cent of business premises in Aberdeen city. We are already the second-highest contributor to the Scottish Government's coffers in non-domestic rates. Angela Constance talks about boosting competitiveness to tackle inequality, but her Government seeks to make us less competitive with that policy.

Where is the fairness, in an area with some of the most eye-watering house prices in the country—prices in Fraserburgh have soared by 139 per cent, and prices in Aberdeen are 24 per cent higher and prices in Aberdeenshire are 33 per cent higher than the Scottish average—in the Government putting up council tax on properties in bands E to H?

I understand that it is a convenient narrative to describe—as I have heard so many do in this chamber in the past three weeks, including the First Minister today—that those living in properties in bands E to H are wealthy or the better off. That is not necessarily the case in the north-east. We are talking about families who have worked hard and gone without in order to afford to live where they do. Furthermore, they are also the families who have often suffered job losses in the current crisis or who are facing hardship due to the farm payments fiasco. They are being hammered yet again while they struggle to afford houses that they can no longer even sell due to the impact of the land and buildings transaction tax.

Where is the fairness in the lack of investment in infrastructure? The A90 is not fit for purpose as a single carriageway and, as was pointed out yesterday, Peterhead and the Broch are the furthest towns from a railway station in the country. Not for us a Borders railway or an Airdrie to Bathgate loop; not for us a new M74 or an A8/M8 upgrade. That is not fairness but exploitation. We are the forgotten region.

As I have said, people have craved for their voice to be heard. They have sent down to Parliament Ross Thomson, Alex Johnstone, Alex Burnett, Peter Chapman and me in order to get their voice heard. I say to the people of the north-east that we will be your voice. To Penumbra, the Aberdeen Foyer and the third sector, which are facing budget cuts due to our underfunded councils and coping bravely with the impact of job losses, I say that we will be your voice. To our universities, which have announced staffing cuts due to funding shortfalls, and the Aberdeenshire colleges, which have seen a 22 per cent decrease in students due to a populist but misguided fees policy, I say that we will be your voice. To the businesses that are struggling as the oil price crisis filters into all sectors and are demanding a comprehensive review of business rates, I say that we will be your voice. To the people—the individuals and the families—who are struggling through, and desperate to keep the state out of their business as it takes yet more money in income tax, council tax and land and buildings transaction tax, or who simply want a party to continue to oppose the named person scheme, I say that we will be your voice.

Adam Tomkins made the point that, by the Government failing to pass on the lifting of the tax threshold, it will be even more difficult to recruit teachers and nurses. That massive issue in the north-east will remain so as a direct result of this Government's decisions.

I am persuaded by Annie Wells's point that it is no longer acceptable to blame the UK Government. That is never more apparent than in the Scottish Government's decisions in the north-east. Christina McKelvie constantly said, "We want to". Why does the SNP not do what it wants to do then? It has been in government for nine years. It should stop blaming and start doing.

I ask the chamber to support Adam Tomkins's amendment calling for the social security system to

"help those who want to work find employment through on-going support"

and to commit to building 50,000 affordable homes. That is absolutely what this Parliament should do. Is there really any MSP here who will

stand before the people and vote against an amendment with such laudable aims?

I am absolutely persuaded by today's speeches that the way to create a fairer Scotland is to remember that people, not Governments, make the best choices about their money, families and communities.

Graham Simpson talked about centralisation being the hallmark of this Parliament. Mairi Evans said that the SNP had started decentralisation. That is good—and not before time. If I may shamelessly paraphrase, big centralised Government is not the solution to our problems; it is the problem.

The way to create a fair and prosperous Scotland in which people flourish is to trust them. We should end the rampant centralisation, empower communities and people as the motion craves and create fairness in our tax system, our welfare system and our communities. That will deliver a stronger and fairer Scotland.

16:50

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Presiding Officer, I welcome you and your colleagues to your posts. I also congratulate all the front-bench teams on their appointments.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this crucial topic. The Scottish Government is fully committed to its vision of a fairer and more prosperous Scotland, in which people are healthier and happier and are treated with respect, and where opportunities, wealth and power are spread more equally.

We have heard some thoughtful speeches—and some that were a little less thoughtful, it has to be said. I look forward to working constructively together to deliver the fairer Scotland that I am certain all members want.

I have listened with interest to what colleagues around the chamber have said and I will come back to some of their points in more detail. However, I will be clear on one thing: tackling poverty remains a key priority for the Government. We will do all that we can within the powers that we have to continue to address and reduce the deep-seated inequalities that, unfortunately, still exist in our society.

I turn to some of the first speeches that we heard. Clare Haughey will make an excellent representative for Glasgow Rutherglen. One of the points that she made about fairness is that the Government will continue to pay bursaries to nurses and midwives in training, which is extremely important for our health service, which will always remain free at the point of delivery.

Maurice Corry talked of the armed forces covenant. I have dealt regularly with that as a constituency MSP. Some things annoy me: I wish that the Ministry of Defence would put more into helping folk who have mental health difficulties when they leave the armed forces. I sure that we can work together on that front. I am happy that we have throughout Scotland folk working in citizens advice bureaux helping to ensure that the armed forces covenant is lived up to because, unfortunately, the MOD is sometimes the body that fails—not the public services in Scotland.

Monica Lennon talked about Kirsty—the “Holyrood baby”—in an extremely well-thought-out speech. I hope that we can work across the parties to ensure that we eradicate poverty.

Gail Ross talked of the Toshney family. I sure that all members wish them very well indeed. I thank Carolyn Toshney for her fundraising efforts. I am sure that they will be appreciated by many people throughout the country.

Mairi Evans mentioned Lewis Grassie Gibbon—James Leslie Mitchell. I should probably not say this, but I will. A small person, whom I will not identify, used to pass that sign regularly and say, “I want to go and see the monkeys,” because he thought that there were lots of monkeys at the Grassie Gibbon centre. The Mearns will do well with Mairi Evans as its MSP, and I am pleased that she recognises the strides that we have made in empowering communities. The Government is determined to ensure that it gives more power to communities and builds upon the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which we passed.

To Liam Kerr, I say that with Mark McDonald as a minister, Maureen Watt as a minister and myself as a minister, folk in the north-east can be assured that we will be their voice in Government. I also say to Mr Kerr, who talked about the north-east of Scotland receiving more resource, that he could maybe join us in asking the UK Government to match the Scottish Government’s commitment to the Aberdeen city and shire city region deal. The Scottish Government has committed £379 million; the Westminster Government has committed only £125 million.

I say to the people of Fraserburgh, which Mr Kerr mentioned, that Paul Wheelhouse will be in the town on Monday to chair the Fraserburgh task force. Fergus Ewing did that previously and did it well, and I am sure that Mr Wheelhouse will do it equally well. In addition, Keith Brown and Mr Wheelhouse will meet representatives of the oil and gas industry in Aberdeen tomorrow. We will be the voice of folk in the north-east.

**Neil Findlay:** During my speech, I asked whether the minister who would sum up the

debate would address my point about the £15 million that has been cut from the drugs support budget. Drugs support organisations are extremely concerned about the impact of the cut on very vulnerable people. Will the minister address the issue with colleagues in the Government and report back to us, please?

**Kevin Stewart:** Members will find that this Government’s members will work across the board and co-operate with one another to tackle the difficulties in our society. Alex Rowley asked whether the Government’s poverty strategy would apply right across Government; I give him the commitment that we will be a cross-cutting Government and ensure that the poverty strategy is embedded throughout the Government.

Let me turn to Adam Tomkins’s unusual speech. We are looking at the transfer of powers and at the timescales. The cabinet secretary is due to have a meeting of the joint ministerial working group on welfare shortly, and the Scottish Government is committed to working with the UK Government to ensure that the transfer of powers goes as smoothly as possible, because we want to do the best for the people of Scotland. We welcome the Secretary of State for Scotland’s commitment to work with the Scottish Government and Parliament on the issue.

However, we must take a wee step back and consider the realities. Yes—we are gaining some powers, but £15 billion of welfare spending, including most of universal credit, stays with the UK Government. It would have been so much better if those powers had been transferred here, so that we could create a system that worked for all.

Let me respond to some other comments from Conservative members—in particular Graham Simpson, who questioned why we should have gender equality, with positive discrimination and a 50:50 balance on boards. He said that decisions about membership of bodies should not be based on gender. However, gender has dictated how folk get jobs throughout history; men have got jobs because of their gender. It is time to ensure that there is fairness and give women the opportunities that men have had throughout history.

Mr Rowley and Ms Johnstone asked for assurances from the Government about the warm homes bill. We will introduce a warm homes bill. I know that there is cross-party support for that, and we will ensure that that happens. We have to step beyond Parliament and look at some of the things that we do not control. We can act together to try to get regulation change. It really riles me that folks who pay some of the highest bills in this country are the poorest folks who use card meters. We should unite as a Parliament, look elsewhere,



and get people elsewhere to change laws to ensure that there is fairness in that regard, too.

I also say to Mr Rowley that house building is happening now. The more homes Scotland initiative is very worthy, and we will do all that we can to ensure that we meet our commitment to build 50,000 affordable houses, 35,000 of which will be for social rent.

I gently say to the Conservatives about their amendment, which talks about 100,000 houses, that, in the past five years, 53,000 houses were built in the private sector, and in the past year, 12,000 houses were built in the private sector. Therefore, the Conservatives' commitment would actually be to less than what is happening at the moment. They want to see a reduced number of houses in the private sector during the session. I find that rather strange. It is always best to check facts before lodging an amendment.

In conclusion, I reinforce the Government's strong record on taking action to create a fairer Scotland. Over the past three years, we have invested £296 million to mitigate the worst of the UK Government's welfare cuts in order to protect children and low-income households, but we want to go further than just mitigation: we will continue to strive for a Scotland that is fair, equal and prosperous.

I commend the motion to Parliament.

## Decision Time

17:02

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S5M-00280.1, in the name of Adam Tomkins, which seeks to amend motion S5M-00280, in the name of Angela Constance, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

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

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

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

(SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 30, Against 90, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-00280.2, in the name of Alex Rowley, which seeks to amend motion S5M-00280, in the name of Angela Constance, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)

Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 26, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-00280, in the name of Angela Constance, on taking Scotland forward, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 100, Against 20, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees to work together to create a fair and prosperous Scotland where people flourish and have equality in opportunities; recognises the cross-party ambition to tackle deep-seated socioeconomic inequalities and to use new devolved powers to do so, and supports proposals to have fairness, respect and dignity at the heart of Scotland's social security system, to build 50,000 affordable homes, empower communities and people, and reduce poverty and inequalities in Scotland and to build towards a stronger country.

*Meeting closed at 17:05.*

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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