



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Tuesday 13 September 2016**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 13 September 2016*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection, for which our leader is Pastor Andrew Smith from the Assemblies of God Champion Life church in the east end of Glasgow.

**Pastor Andrew Smith (Assemblies of God Champion Life Church, Glasgow):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, for your kind welcome and for the privilege of being here to address Parliament. I bring greetings and prayers from Assemblies of God, which is the Pentecostal denomination that I have the honour of leading, and from the church that I pastor—Champion Life church in the east end of Glasgow.

A couple of weeks ago, I sat down at the end of a busy day and switched on the television, as many of us do. Sky Sports News came on the screen and, because it was transfer deadline day, lots of frantic activity was taking place as football clubs tried to secure last-minute deals. This year, a staggering £1.165 billion was spent in the transfer window, and an incredible £155 million was spent on deadline day alone.

Football is big business these days. For many, it is a matter of life and death—and some say that it is even more than that. The church that I pastor is situated a third of a mile from the home of the Scottish Premiership champions, Glasgow Celtic. Football has come a long way since the 1960s, when a team of young Scottish guys who were all born within a 30-mile radius of Parkhead became the first British team to win the European cup.

Sadly, football is now big business and money has largely spoiled the game's natural beauty. Advertising and TV sponsorship are central to income, and companies are desperate at all times to showcase their products. Over the years, I have seen many adverts at sporting spectacles, but an advert that I saw a number of years ago when watching a world cup on TV has lived with me most. I saw a young man who was wearing a white T-shirt that had the words "John 3:16" marked clearly on it. That was an obvious reference to the Bible verse in St John's gospel in which Jesus said:

"For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life".

As a Christian minister, I think that that cuts right to the heart of the gospel message that I believe in, preach weekly and—I trust—live out daily. I want to share that quickly with Parliament.

The story is told that, at the end of world war two, an American soldier was making his way back to his army barracks in London. As he turned a corner in his Jeep, he saw a young boy who had his nose pressed against the window of a baker's shop and who was drooling at the selection of cakes and pastries that was on display.

The soldier pulled the Jeep over, got out and went over to the young boy. The soldier said, "Son, would you like some of these?" The boy was startled. "Sure, mister," he responded. The American walked in and bought a bag of doughnuts, then handed the bag to the boy. As the soldier walked away, he felt a tug on his jacket sleeve. The little boy said, "Mister, are you God?"

We are never more like God than when we give. John 3:16 says:

"For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son".

Thirty-three years ago, the love of God radically changed my life, my priorities and my value systems. The love of God propels me to do what I do today as a Christian minister of the gospel. My prayer for Parliament and for every MSP is that, as you go about your business in Parliament, you will experience more and more of the love of God in your lives. God bless you.

## Business Motion

14:04

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-01428, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for today.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 13 September 2016—

after

*followed by* Topical Questions

insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Launch of the Education Governance Review

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The motion has moved decision time to 5.30. I apologise to members for the lack of advance notice. The issue was raised and fully discussed at the bureau, and the inconvenience of the revision of business was balanced against the number of members who wish to speak in the housing debate, which would otherwise have been squeezed.

## Topical Question Time

### Homophobic Bullying (Schools)

1. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to tackle homophobic bullying in schools in light of the recent survey by the time for inclusive education group. (S5T-00059)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Bullying of any kind, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, is unacceptable and must be addressed swiftly and effectively whenever it arises. It is the responsibility of headteachers, teachers and other school staff and local authorities to decide on the specific actions to address cases of bullying in their schools.

The Scottish Government established and wholly funds respect me, a national anti-bullying service, to build confidence and capacity to address all bullying effectively, aligned to the national approach to anti-bullying in Scotland. Respect me provides direct support to local authorities, schools, youth groups and all those working with children and young people. It is jointly managed by the Scottish Association for Mental Health and LGBT Youth Scotland.

The national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people is being updated. It sets out a common vision and aims to make sure that work across all agencies and communities is consistently and coherently contributing to a whole-school approach to anti-bullying in Scotland. LGBT Youth Scotland and Stonewall Scotland are part of the working group, and the updated guidance will be published soon.

**Jamie Greene:** Clearly, there is broad consensus across this place on the need to tackle this issue. The survey paints a deeply worrying picture of homophobic and transphobic bullying. It reveals that 27 per cent of respondents have attempted suicide, that more than 90 per cent have experienced bullying and that only 4 per cent thought that the Scottish Government was doing enough. Will the Government accept that the current approach is simply not enough? Will it commit to a change of tack?

**John Swinney:** First things first—I agree with Mr Greene that any bullying, including homophobic bullying, is repugnant and must be tackled, addressed and confronted.

The Government has put in place a range of interventions, which I set out in my original answer, particularly around the establishment of respect me, which is designed to provide the

resources, the materials, the information and the capacity to equip schools to handle this issue.

The national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people has been in place since 2010. As part of the review work, it is being updated to make sure that it is effective. Obviously, we will consider carefully the issues raised by the time for inclusive education group's survey. I am meeting the group in the next few weeks, and I will listen carefully to the points that it advances. I assure Mr Greene that the Government has every intention of ensuring that the measures that we put in place are effective to address a situation that is clearly causing distress and anxiety to some young people in our society.

**Jamie Greene:** I thank the minister for his clarity on the matter and for telling us that he intends to meet the group that conducted the survey. The survey highlights that we are not getting it right for every child. The current postcode lottery means that some schools are training teachers while others are not. Given that the majority of teachers who were polled in the survey feel that they have not been adequately trained to tackle lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues in school, what specific plans does the Government have to address that teacher training issue?

**John Swinney:** We make a wide range of interventions to enhance the professional capabilities of teachers once they are through the teacher training qualification and are practising in our schools. The national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people is the framework within which various resources are put in place to enable work to happen. Education Scotland has specific materials available for teachers to access and utilise, to ensure that they can undertake the development that is necessary if they are to tackle the issues that we are talking about.

Of course, that fits into the wider wellbeing agenda. I am glad that Mr Greene referred to the importance of getting it right for every child, because, as I made clear to the Parliament last week, that will be my ethos and vision as I fulfil my responsibility as education secretary to ensure that every single child in our country, whatever their circumstances, has their needs met by our services, particularly our education services, as they are entitled to expect.

I hope that that reassures Mr Greene about the steps that the Government is taking. As I said, we have a framework in place, which is currently being updated. In due course, when the update is complete, I will of course be happy to discuss with the Parliament the further steps that we can take to ensure that the circumstances that are

highlighted in the survey are not experienced by young people in Scotland in future.

### Mountain Weather Forecasting

**2. Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to ensure the long-term future of mountain weather forecasting. (S5T-00064)

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell):** Our clear priority is to ensure the long-term provision of critical mountain weather forecasting and to ensure the future safety of all those who are active in Scotland's hills and mountains.

The mountain weather information service has delivered an excellent service over the years and has provided an accurate and essential service to all who use Scotland's mountains. Sportscotland has been involved in discussions with the Met Office and the MWIS about building a resilient mountain weather forecast provision for Scotland. We are committed to ensuring that everyone can continue to receive vital forecasts and to building on the skills and expertise in the MWIS.

In the short term, sportscotland and my officials will continue discussions with the MWIS about the provision of its service while we develop a sustainable mountain weather forecast. We recognise that that familiar and trusted forecast should be available to all who enjoy Scottish mountains and wild landscapes. This morning, my officials spoke to Geoff Monk, the lead forecaster at the MWIS, to ensure that we take account of the concerns that have been raised and find a long-term solution.

I will meet sportscotland to discuss developments and examine the provision of mountain weather forecasting, to ensure that the MWIS's concerns are fully addressed. As part of that, I will also formally meet the mountain weather information service, to ensure that it is part of the solution and that there is a long-term legacy of its fantastic service, which has undoubtedly saved lives and improved safety for everyone who has enjoyed Scotland's wild landscapes.

**Andy Wightman:** The minister is aware of the concerns that were expressed over the weekend at reports that sportscotland is to end its funding of the mountain weather information service. As she confirmed, the service has provided trusted, detailed forecasting for mountain users for 13 years, and sportscotland has funded it since 2007. The service is trusted and relied on by hundreds of thousands of users of Scotland's mountains every year.

There is confusion in the outdoor community about the MWIS's future, and there is concern at reports that the service will end just as winter

begins. Does the minister agree that the safety and enjoyment of people who use Scotland's mountains utterly depend on their having access to accurate, reliable and, above all, trusted weather forecasting sources? Will she confirm that sportscotland told the MWIS that its funding will end on 31 December 2016? Does she agree with her predecessor sports minister, Stewart Maxwell, who applauded Geoff Monk and his colleagues for their selfless work in helping to ensure the safety of all those who make use of our wonderful natural environment?

**Aileen Campbell:** I happily put on record my thanks to Geoff Monk for the dedication and commitment that he has shown over the past 13 years. He has been providing an excellent service, which has undoubtedly saved a number of lives. His work to forecast the weather accurately has enabled people to enjoy Scotland's mountains and wild landscapes.

We are in discussions about how we ensure that we have a sustainable mountain weather forecast, and Geoff Monk and the expertise that he brings from the MWIS will need to be part of those discussions. We have invested significantly to ensure that people can go out and safely enjoy Scotland's wild landscapes and mountains, with accurate weather forecasts, and we will continue the dialogue, so that people can continue to do so and are reassured in that regard. I think that that is what we all want. I will engage with the member on how the discussions are progressing.

**Andy Wightman:** Together with the Scottish avalanche information service, the MWIS has contributed to saving lives and providing more informed decision making among walkers, mountaineers and skiers. Does the minister agree with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, which on Sunday called for all parties to reconvene their dialogue to ensure that there is continuity, especially with the onset of winter? Does she agree there should be continuity in future for the daily production of Scottish mountain weather forecasts that are publicly funded and available free to users, and which provide at least the same range of forecast features as the MWIS does? Will she answer my previous question and confirm whether sportscotland told the MWIS that its funding would end on 31 December 2016? Will she engage with the outdoor community to keep it informed and commit to keeping Parliament informed of progress?

**Aileen Campbell:** I will absolutely ensure that members who have an expressed interest are kept informed. All of us will have an interest in the issue, because we all want people to go out and know that they can enjoy the outdoors as safely as they can. We want to make sure that, in future, there is a sustainable way of giving people daily

accurate reports about the condition of the weather so that they can go out and use the mountains safely, and we will continue to have discussions and dialogue about the investment that needs to be provided. The member mentioned the avalanche service. I will be happy to meet those people so that they can contribute their views to the on-going dialogue.

I again put on record my thanks to Geoff Monk, who has shown complete commitment in providing a service that has undoubtedly saved a number of lives across the country, and who has expertise and knowledge for which we should all be grateful. He and my officials are in discussions, and I will meet him and sportscotland to make sure that we find a sustainable solution for the future to ensure the continued safety of people who use Scotland's mountains.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** The past two winters have certainly proved the value of the MWIS, and to take it away would put tens of thousands of those of us who enjoy an active outdoor lifestyle in increased danger. The service is funded through sportscotland which, in turn, is funded through the Scottish Government, so it is within the scope and the power of the Government to safeguard this important service. Will it do that?

**Aileen Campbell:** I have said a number of times that we want to ensure that there is a sustainable way in which we can forecast the weather so that people can go out and enjoy the mountains safely. I have put on record my gratitude to Geoff Monk for the work, effort and dedication of the MWIS, and we will continue to work with him and others to find a sustainable way to continue to provide such forecasts in the future. It is in our best interests to make sure that we have that long-term vision.

In the meantime, as I said in answer to Andy Wightman, I will meet the MWIS and sportscotland to discuss the issue, and we will make sure that we find a solution to some of the concerns that have been raised by the MWIS.



## Education Governance Review

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on the launch of the education governance review. The Deputy First Minister will take questions at the end of his statement.

14:18

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Last week in the chamber, the First Minister spoke about the defining mission of this Government: delivering excellence and equity in education. In delivering excellence we will raise the bar for all, and in delivering equity we will close the attainment gap. We have put specific timescales against our work on the attainment gap. We will make significant progress within this session of Parliament, and we will substantially eliminate that gap by the end of the next session of Parliament.

We have set ourselves the task of ensuring that every child, no matter where they are from or how well-off their family is, has the same opportunities and an equal chance to succeed. Avis Glaze, the world-renowned educationist who now sits on our international council of education advisers, put it simply: "Poverty is not destiny." Our task is to make sure that that is the case in Scotland, and we have made a strong start.

We have expanded our attainment Scotland fund to £750 million over this session of Parliament, through which we are providing direct support to those schools with the biggest attainment gap challenge. We have also introduced the national improvement framework. Standardised assessment will be introduced to inform teacher judgment about the performance of young people, and new, transparent reporting on school performance will allow us to measure the attainment gap more accurately and to set clear targets for closing it. We have also moved decisively to free teachers to teach by removing unnecessary bureaucracy and workload. We have provided a definitive statement of priorities for Scotland's schools that sets out clearly and concisely what teachers should and should not be focusing on. It will empower them to spend their time teaching and giving our children the best possible opportunities to learn. Those are strong foundations for Scottish education.

In its review of Scottish education, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that Scotland is above the international average in reading and science; that attainment is improving; that Scottish schools are inclusive; and that our children are resilient and

have positive attitudes towards school. That is a testament to the bold reform of curriculum for excellence and the energy applied by many to ensure success for Scotland's young people.

However, the OECD also told us to continue to be bold. Andy Hargreaves of the OECD review team set out the challenge at the recent education summit, telling us

"not only to remain ahead of the global curve in education but actually become the curve that others will refer to around the world".

We accept that challenge. We will create the world-leading education system that our children and young people deserve. Our next step in that challenge is to ask ourselves how school education should be run, and our governance review will seek to answer that question over the coming months.

We do not ask that question in a vacuum, however. Today I will set out our vision for the most critically important part of our early years and school education system: our teachers and practitioners and their relationship with our children. That relationship is at the heart of every story of success. In every school that succeeds, we find great teachers who are able to reach out and touch the lives of the children in their classrooms. In every story of a child who has been lifted out of poverty by the power of education, we find teachers and the bond that they formed with that child. Nothing is more critical.

In the 118 days since becoming the education secretary, I have been deeply impressed by the excellent work that I have seen from teachers and early years practitioners across the country, but I have also heard about the barriers and challenges that they face in delivering great education. Our guiding principle for the way that our schools are run is simple: decisions should be taken at the school level. That will be our presumption, and we will place it at the heart of the review.

We want to empower our teachers and our early years workers to make the best decisions for children and young people. They have the expertise that we need and they are the professionals who are charged with using the power of education to change a child's destiny. We will place them at the heart of a system that makes decisions about children's learning and school life within the schools themselves, supported by parents and the local community.

This is a vision of empowerment and devolution: devolution from local authorities to schools—to include teachers, headteachers, parents and communities—and devolution from a national to a local or regional level. Let us ensure that decisions about a child's learning are taken as close to the child as possible.

Devolution of decision making must be allied to devolution of resources. We have begun that process with the allocation of £100 million from council tax reform directly to schools to support their work to close the equity gap, but we are committed to going much further. We are committed to establishing a fair and transparent needs-based funding formula for schools. We will consult on proposals for a funding formula in March 2017, but the review offers an opportunity to comment on how funding can be made fairer and can support decision making by teachers at a school level.

We know that improvement in education is driven by co-operation and collaboration, not competition or marketisation. The Scottish Government is committed to a publicly funded comprehensive education system that enables every child and young person to achieve. We will not—we will never—go down the route of the divisive academy model, and we will never allow children to be labelled as failures at the age of 11. There will be no policy of selection or grammar schools in Scotland; our reform will be based on evidence of what works, not right-wing ideological dogma.

The evidence shows that systematic collaborative engagement at every level of education is what builds capacity and delivers the best outcomes for children and young people. School clusters are a way in which schools can work together, and we want to hear how that type of collaboration, among others, can be encouraged so that it is supported and sustained. By working together, we can achieve more. We will not set school against school, parent against parent or pupil against pupil; we will bring people together to pursue the world-class education that every child deserves.

I have set out our presumption that decisions should be taken at the school level. That will inevitably lead to some elements of our system having to be the responsibility of other organisations. The questions that the review poses are what elements they will be and where those responsibilities should sit. Sometimes the answer will be obvious. For example, there will always be a need for a national examinations body. No one would suggest that schools should set their own highers, but some elements will be a matter of genuine debate.

Some of the support that schools need is best delivered at a local or regional level. Currently, many of those services are delivered by local authorities. Let me be clear: local authorities will continue to exercise democratic control over Scottish education at a local level but we must question how the role of local government can become more effective. Devolving responsibilities

to our schools means that we must question the support that is provided at every level of our education system to ensure that it delivers what teachers need.

Although there are some examples of partnership working across local authorities, the OECD highlighted the need for more effective partnership and collaboration between them. This Government will, therefore, introduce new educational regions to ensure that good practice is shared across education and that we deliver best value. The governance review offers the opportunity to shape that approach.

Local authorities are accountable to their electorates. I am accountable to the electorate and to the Parliament. Schools should primarily be accountable to parents and their local communities. We need a system of accountability and governance that is clear to parents, teachers and communities—to every one of us, whether we have a formal role in our education system or a stake in its success. The governance review is our opportunity to make that a reality.

In the weeks and months ahead, I want to hear views from across every part of Scotland. I want to hear from children and young people, parents, teachers, practitioners and the wider community. There will be opportunities to engage directly with the questions in the review and online, and we will publish on our website information about engagement events that will take place around the country. During the review, I will also meet monthly with my counterpart in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Councillor Stephanie Primrose, to share emerging findings and build consensus where possible.

I plan to spend a significant amount of time over the next three months in talking and listening to teachers, children and young people and partners about how education is run. I also want to hear from members of this Parliament, and I invite every member to engage with and contribute to the review.

Closing the attainment gap and raising standards for all—delivering excellence and equity for all our children and young people—is our national mission as a Government. We are ready to take the next steps in making Scotland's school education world class. I invite every member of the Parliament to join us in that effort.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, cabinet secretary. I call Liz Smith.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the Deputy First Minister for prior sight of the statement.

The announcement that is central to the statement is on page 6, where we learn that the

Government will introduce “new educational regions” that operate above local authorities. Does the cabinet secretary accept that that looks a little bit like centralisation of education, which seems to be at odds with the statement on page 3 that

“Decisions should be taken at school level”?

Secondly, on the crucial issue of the related funding, the Scottish Government appears to be suggesting that the £100 million attainment fund will be paid for by council tax and allocated to pupils according to whatever the Scottish Government sees as the appropriate measure of deprivation. Will the cabinet secretary clarify exactly whether that money to be raised from council tax will be spent in the particular local authority area, in the relevant region or by a free-for-all system overseen by the Scottish Government?

Finally, the cabinet secretary says that he wants schools that work and deliver good results. So do we. Does he intend to make legislative changes to allow more Jordanhill-type schools or schools where parents want state education but not provided by local authorities?

**John Swinney:** On Liz Smith's first question, the educational regions are a direct response from the Government to the OECD challenge to us to encourage more collaboration within the education system in Scotland. So when Liz Smith says that they will be regions operating above local authorities, I would encourage her to think of the concept as co-operation between local authorities.

I make it absolutely clear that I do not want to run every school in the country—that is not the purpose of the review. It is about discussing what are the right powers and responsibilities to be exercised at school level to ensure that our teaching leadership, in whom we are investing, frankly, our hopes as a country for educating our young people, are able to take the decisions that best suit the needs of the children in individual schools.

Our message about the collaboration that needs to exist between authorities is about encouraging joint working and collaboration between individual local authorities, as we see in certain parts of the country, to ensure that the direct teaching experience of pupils is enhanced by the adding of value and greater collaboration across the education service. I would therefore characterise the Government's agenda as being one that combines encouragement of decentralisation and encouragement of collaboration within education. Those are the values at the heart of the governance review that I am setting out today.

On the £100 million to be raised from council tax, the resources that are raised by each local authority by the changes that are made to the

council tax will of course be collected in their entirety in those local authority areas. However, clearly, there will be a distribution of those resources to ensure that the £100 million is allocated to support young people who are living in poverty and who require additional support to address the consequences of their background for closing the achievement gap. That was what the Government set out to the public in the election campaign and that is exactly what we will make provision for.

Finally—I suppose that this is a point of great debate within the review but there is also a measure of agreement on it—like Liz Smith, I of course want schools that work. I see much excellence in schools in Scotland today and it is right that that is acknowledged in today's statement—there is much excellence in our school system today. What I want to ensure is that every single school that the young people of Scotland enter is an excellent school, and I want to empower the schools of Scotland to enable that to be the case. So the debate that we are going to have is about how we take the necessary steps in reforming the governance of Scottish education to make sure that we create excellent schools in every single part of the country to guarantee that young people can fulfil their educational potential. That is the question at the heart of the review and that is what the Government will engage on in the course of the next few months.

**The Presiding Officer:** I encourage members to press their request-to-speak buttons. Iain Gray will be followed by Jenny Gilruth.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement.

Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education is a laudable aim and one that we share, but we recognise that we must have enough teachers and resources in our schools to pursue it properly. Today, we were told that councils might face cuts of £1 billion by the end of this session of Parliament. As I have asked often before, will the cabinet secretary commit to using the powers of this Parliament to protect the budgets of schools as he reviews their governance?

Mr Swinney has made it clear in his statement that local authorities will continue to exercise democratic control over Scottish education at a local level, which is very welcome. Welcome, also, is his ruling out of selection and the grammar school model, and his ruling out of the academy model here in Scotland. However, for clarity and completeness—which he failed to give in response to Ms Smith—will he rule out the idea that schools should be able to opt out from local authority control?

**John Swinney:** On Iain Gray's point about appropriate resources, he will of course have heard from the Government the position that we set out at the outset of the election campaign and the propositions that we would put to the people of Scotland. The Government is now fulfilling those commitments with the governance review and the agenda that I have set out in the Government's delivery plan.

We will ensure that new resources are allocated to education to support the achievement of the Government's agenda of closing the attainment gap. That was the promise that the Government made at the election, and we will fulfil it by injecting new resources into Scottish education.

It is important that we take decisions to ensure that the support is in place to assist us in tackling the attainment gap in Scottish education. The welcome that Mr Gray has given to a number of the provisions that I have set out should be extended to the additional resources that the Government is putting in place in that respect.

On Mr Gray's second question, which was about governance, it is not part of my plan that schools should opt out of local authority control. I want to ensure that schools have the necessary powers and responsibilities to be able to create excellence and to take the decisive decisions that will deliver quality education and attainment for the young people in those schools. My plans are about ensuring that schools are part of the democratic fibre and fabric of Scottish society and that they operate in the local authority context, but I also want to ensure that the school leadership of Scotland is able to take the decisive decisions that will transform the life chances of young people. That strikes me as an agenda that can be broadly supported in Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sure that members are very appreciative of the cabinet secretary's thoughtful remarks but, in the interests of brevity, I point out that 10 members are trying to get in.

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** We know that greater parental and community involvement has been shown to promote children's attainment and achievement, and I welcome the cabinet secretary's plans to involve parents and the wider community more with the review. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that teachers, parents and communities will also be involved in the creation of a fair funding formula for our schools?

**John Swinney:** I am determined to engage widely in Scotland on all those questions. It is important that we have a broad debate about them to ensure that the Government's thinking and approach are informed by a wide selection of opinion. I give the assurance that we will make

every effort to capture that input and report to Parliament on the changes that we intend to make as a consequence of that dialogue.

**Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):** I do not want to labour the point too much, but will the cabinet secretary please clarify that, if a school is producing top-class results and parents want to opt out of local authority control, he will allow them to do so?

**John Swinney:** In my statement, I made a number of commitments on the centrality of the Government's view on the establishment of a comprehensive education system in Scotland that is under democratic control, and I reiterated those points in response to Mr Gray. My objective is to empower schools to be able to deliver in a comprehensive education system the excellence that every single child in Scotland has a right to expect. The governance review is about how we can empower schools to enable them to do that so that, wherever a child lives and goes to school in Scotland, they have access to an excellent education system with their interests, needs and aspirations at the heart of its design.

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to stay away from the academy model and grammar schools. Does he agree that the conclusion of a recent Institute for Fiscal Studies report that grammar schools can

"stretch the brightest pupils, but seem likely to come at the cost of increasing inequality"

shows how right that decision is?

**John Swinney:** I started my statement by referring to the importance of achieving excellence and equity within Scottish education. Those values and aspirations are right at the heart of the agenda that we will take forward. We are determined to ensure that every effort is made to focus on our mission of closing the attainment gap in Scottish education and I do not believe for a moment that that would be made any easier—in fact, I think that it would be made a great deal more difficult—by undertaking some of the reforms that we hear are taking place elsewhere.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I do not know how many times the Deputy First Minister mentioned "devolution" in his statement, but I certainly welcome his conversion to the cause.

Teachers' pay and conditions are currently negotiated and set out nationally. With regard to the powers that he is considering handing down to regions and schools, will the Deputy First Minister confirm that pay and conditions will continue to be set at national level?

**John Swinney:** In the governance review, my presumption is that teachers' terms and conditions will remain a national issue. I want to ensure that we have an open and participative debate about the factors that will make a real difference at school level, and which will ensure the creation and delivery of excellence and equity for all in the education system.

I have deliberately made the consultation exercise open to enable a debate to be had about the right levers to be located at school level and to determine how we can best improve the performance of Scottish education and deliver on the expectations of young people in every part of the country.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary said that he wants to engage with as many people as possible and to hear views from every part of Scotland in the review. It is crucial that young people have their say, so I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary confirm in his statement that they will. Will the cabinet secretary elaborate on what plans there are to facilitate that?

**John Swinney:** A range of engagement opportunities will be taken forward to ensure that we capture the views of young people. They are the ones who can most effectively tell us about the issues that they face in the development of their educational journey, so it is important that we use every mechanism that is available to us to capture their input. Specific consultations will be held and measures taken to capture that input from young people to inform the discussions that the Government takes forward.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement.

If the big idea for Scottish education is educational regions, will they be imposed? Have ministers forgotten the human and financial cost of centralising the police? Why was there no mention of Education Scotland in the cabinet secretary's statement today? Will he agree to separate school inspectors from ministerial policy and advice? On funding, a needs-based funding formula for schools is very different from government funding to deliver education in a council area. Is that not centralisation of funding by another name?

**John Swinney:** On Tavish Scott's first point, the question of educational regions is, as I explained to Liz Smith, a product of the issues that were raised with us by the OECD review, which encouraged us to support a more collaborative model for delivery of education. The OECD encourages the sharing of best practice and expertise around different areas of the country and in different parts of the education system. In the

review, we are trying to respond to that challenge because although the OECD review said that Scottish education is strong, it also said that we have to continue to reform it, so we must respond to that challenge.

On the question about how educational regions will come about, as I indicated in one of my earlier answers, collaboration is already emerging among local authorities on delivery of education around the country. That is a discussion that we want to have with local authorities, which is why I will see my counterpart in COSLA regularly to advance the discussions.

On the second point—the role of Education Scotland—I appreciate that there has not been much time to consume the consultation document, but Tavish Scott will see that the document raises the role of different bodies at different levels within Scotland. There is adequate opportunity for those issues to be examined and tested as part of the consultation exercise.

On the needs-based formula, the complete text that I used was that it had to be

“a fair ... needs-based ... formula”.

That means that a variety of different issues have to be taken into account in arriving at an appropriate funding formula that meets the needs, the challenges and the aspirations of different areas of the country within the education system. The Government will consult on that issue in March next year and we will continue that discussion. However, I stress that any analysis has to be underpinned by an acceptance of my point that there has to be a fair approach to that needs-based funding formula.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** As the cabinet secretary rightly pointed out, Scottish education has very strong foundations. Does he agree with the director general of the Confederation of British Industry, who recently said:

“On qualifications, Scotland has a proud record”,

and added that

“Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence is leading the way”?

**John Swinney:** There is a very strong body of opinion—not least of which is the OECD review—that indicates that curriculum for excellence has been a bold and successful reform. The challenge is that we have to make sure that curriculum for excellence works effectively alongside other policy interventions that the Government makes, particularly in relation to skills and on developing Scotland's young workforce.

The work that Mr Hepburn and I are doing to integrate school education and the skills agenda with the work that Ms Somerville is doing with the

higher and further education sectors is vital to ensuring that all our interventions are aligned in order that we can create the strongest possible skills base, which will be relevant and applicable to the development of the Scottish economy.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):**

The cabinet secretary wants councils to collect £100 million, which he will then divvy up, and he will form new national and regional bodies. How is that not more centralisation?

**John Swinney:** The first thing that I will say to Mr Simpson is that there is a democratic point: the Government went to the electorate to seek a mandate for the proposals, and the Government was given a mandate to take forward the proposals. We are now engaging in consultation on implementation of our manifesto commitments. I invite—and have already invited—local government to take part in the dialogue on pursuit of that agenda.

I commit myself to engaging purposefully with that agenda and to ensuring that we make the necessary progress in delivering excellence and equity within our education system. Those are the values and the aspirations that underpin the policy commitments around reforming the council taxes in order to generate revenue, and reforming the structures of Scottish education to deliver the collaboration that I have talked about in response to the OECD review.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):**

I draw to members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests; I am a local councillor for South Lanarkshire Council.

Today's announcement acknowledges local authority control of schools, but it also surely signals a diminished role for local government in delivery of education. What assurances can the Deputy First Minister give that the creation of educational regions will not put pressure on, or divert vital funding away from, local government budgets, and that it will not lead to unintended bureaucracy?

**John Swinney:** I will certainly be taking steps to ensure that the reforms do not generate unintended bureaucracy. I am spending a significant proportion of my life removing unintended bureaucracy from the system, as things stand.

The arguments about education regions are about collaboration to encourage educational excellence. That is the purpose of the reforms—they are not to overlay bureaucracy, but to ensure that we have the resources and the capability to enhance the quality of Scottish education. That is what the OECD challenged us to consider and that is what the Government is consulting about today.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):**

I am extremely pleased to see the Scottish Government delivering on yet another manifesto commitment and continuing to make progress on giving every child the same opportunity to succeed. Will the cabinet secretary outline how long the review will last, and the role that the national improvement framework will have in supporting parents and communities?

**John Swinney:** The national improvement framework is predicated on a number of key themes, one of which is parental involvement. I will have the opportunity to discuss many of the questions with the national parent forum of Scotland when I meet it this coming Saturday.

The national improvement framework also provides guidance on how we take forward the agenda and how it supports in every respect the closing of the attainment gap. The steps that we have today set out in the governance review are integral to ensuring that the message of excellence and equity that is at the heart of the national improvement framework is delivered as a consequence.

**The Presiding Officer:** I apologise to Ross Greer for not being able to call him, and I thank the cabinet secretary for his admirable acceleration.

## Common Agricultural Policy Payments

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a statement by Fergus Ewing that is an update on common agricultural policy payments. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:51

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing):** I thank all the staff working in Edinburgh and at the 17 area offices around Scotland who have worked flat out since May to progress the 2015 payments. On the visits that I have made, I have seen at first hand the dedication of our staff in helping to resolve the issue—often going above and beyond normal expectations—to ensure that farmers get their money as soon as possible. Their efforts have paid off. Substantial progress has been made. By 30 June, almost £310 million had been paid out to farm businesses, with more than £110 million of that since the end of May. Work has continued apace over summer to process and progress the remaining payments, which are the most complex cases. As a result, the tail of 2015 payments has been larger than we might normally expect, but I can assure members that we are working hard to resolve those and we aim to pay the majority of outstanding cases by the middle of next month.

Moreover, everyone who is eligible but who has not yet been paid should have been offered a loan. This summer, I asked officials to ensure that we were delivering on that promise and I am pleased to advise Parliament that over 30 new loan offers have been made in recent weeks. In many more cases, the need for a loan has disappeared as people have received their CAP payment. I can confirm to members that over 99 per cent of eligible claimants have now had either a CAP payment or the offer of a loan. However, I will not be satisfied until every single farmer and crofter who is entitled to a payment has received it in full.

Today we are publishing details of the 2015 CAP payments to date. As at last Friday, over £350 million has been injected into Scotland's rural economy through the various payment schemes. Of that total, £326 million has been made in 2015 basic, greening and young farmer payments. Over 17,500 farmers—almost 96 per cent of those who are eligible—have received their full payment.

Under the less favoured area support scheme, loans of approximately £54 million out of an

estimated total of £66 million were made in March. Technical issues are holding back the final LFASS payments but, as loans have already been provided to over 11,000 eligible applicants—mostly at the rate of 90 per cent—the vast majority of potential payment recipients are largely unaffected.

Rural priorities payments of £10 million have already been made with further payments expected later this month, and land manager option payments of £4 million are due to start from October. It should be noted that those payments are normally made after the payments under the other schemes.

The vast majority of sheep support payments were made in July as we said they would be, with more than 900 farmers receiving £4.3 million. We have also nearly completed payments under the mainland and island beef schemes, with £30 million paid out to more than 7,000 farmers.

Although we are close to completing payments for 2015, it is clear that we are not there yet. Members will recall the European Union-wide decision made by Commissioner Hogan in May, which was called for by the Scottish Government and other EU countries, such as France. That changed the situation radically, with penalties waived for payments made from 1 July to 15 October. Moreover, the penalty regime applies to the United Kingdom as the member state and any penalties will be determined by the performance of all four countries. The key now is to complete the vast majority of remaining payments by mid October, which is what we aim to do.

In May, I also undertook to put 2016 payments on an even keel. That work began with the information technology payment system. I have met the Auditor General, Caroline Gardner, to discuss Audit Scotland's findings on the futures programme. I wanted to put matters right and she is helping us to achieve that. We are publishing our response to Audit Scotland's report today, having accepted its recommendations in full. Next week, I will give evidence to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, while officials will appear before the Public Audit Committee at the end of the month. The Auditor General will provide a brief update as part of her audit of the Scottish Government accounts for 2015-16. Officials are inputting to that process and co-operating with it in full.

We all recognise that there are lessons to be learned and I am keen to work with the Parliament and members to do just that. We have already learned much from this first year of the new CAP payment regime and that experience will help to smooth the 2016 process. However, some parts of the programme are still being added and developed and will feature for the first time in

2016. Our contractor, CGI, has assured me that the IT system functionality for 2016 will be delivered early next year and final processing will be undertaken thereafter. Therefore, I expect and anticipate that payments will be made and substantially completed between then and the end of the payment period, namely by the end of June. I am happy to report back to Parliament in January next year on progress.

However, I am sure all members can agree that farmers and their families need certainty in these uncertain times. Despite that uncertainty, we are determined to build sustainable growth in Scotland's rural economy. As part of that, I am holding a series of summits, including with the farming and food sectors, to explore how best to deliver investment, jobs and opportunities in rural and island communities. We will also develop a Scottish rural infrastructure plan in 2017 to better co-ordinate existing and planned expenditure and resources. That will allow a more cohesive approach to economic activity that benefits our rural, island and coastal communities.

Although such activity will help to support future growth, we must also secure the immediate needs of our farmers and ensure cash flow in the rural economy. I am confident that we are putting the 2016 payments on a better footing. I am also reassured that the arrangements we have put in place with our contractor mean that they should be able to deliver on the timescale they have committed to for payments. However, those arrangements are not risk free and, to be frank, I am not prepared to take those risks, particularly with families' and communities' livelihoods.

Therefore, every farmer and crofter who is eligible for a basic, greening or young farmer payment will be able to apply for a loan up to the value of 80 per cent of their entitlement. Letters will be issued before the end of the month to farmers inviting them to apply and everyone who applies by the deadline of 12 October will receive a loan of 80 per cent of their entitlement in November. Our aim is for the bulk of payments to be made in the first two weeks of November.

The new loan scheme will provide much-needed cash flow for normal business costs such as wages, feed and seed, fuel and fertiliser at a time of year when those bills often start landing on the doorstep. It will also give farm businesses the security and certainty that they need to take longer-term investment decisions, such as decisions about the purchase of new machinery, equipment or facilities. It will bring certainty not only to farmers and crofters but to those who are employed in and running supply-chain businesses in the wider agricultural sector.

Our estimates suggest that more than 17,000 businesses will be entitled to qualify for the loan

initially, with work continuing on the making of offers and payments to the remaining eligible businesses by the end of the year. The scheme has the potential to inject up to £300 million into Scotland's rural economy before the end of the year, securing jobs and investment, stimulating growth and acting as a bulwark in these uncertain times.

As I said, from day 1 in this job—and for the foreseeable future—the resolution of the CAP payment issues has been my top priority as cabinet secretary. I promised to fix the problem, and I am fully aware that we are still some way off from that. I reiterate what I said in May: we are sorry that, although we have made substantial progress, we are not there yet. However, I remain absolutely committed and determined to fix this, and I am getting on with doing just that.

To achieve that, we need to set a realistic timetable that our farming community can trust, and we need to be mindful of the extraordinary effort that is being put in by staff all over Scotland to achieve our objectives. I thank them for their continuing efforts and I also thank our farmers and crofters for their patience and their willingness to work with us to help us get it right. In the meantime, I want them, their families, their employees and everyone working in the agricultural sector in Scotland to know that, by offering certainty and clarity through our loan scheme, giving them the confidence and security that they need to get on with their everyday business and take longer-term investment decisions that are good for the rural communities in which they live and work, we are building growth in Scotland's rural economy. I hope that that is an objective and an outcome that everyone in this chamber will welcome.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 30 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business.

**Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):** I am grateful to the minister for providing his statement in advance. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests regarding farming.

Today, the minister has said that we need certainty going forward. However, he has just confirmed what we all expected: the IT system still does not work and is not expected to work until well into next year. That is why some £40 million is still outstanding for this year's payments—nine months late. What a slap in the face for farmers who are sitting with a record level of debt, at a staggering £2.2 billion. That is also why he cannot deliver 100 per cent of payments in December, as we should be able to expect. Instead, he is



offering an 80 per cent loan. That loan is an admission of failure.

However, we still have problems from this year to face up to, so I have two questions for the minister. First, when will he deliver the £8 million of LFASS money that is still outstanding? Secondly, will he recognise that his Government has lost the trust of farmers due to this fiasco and finally agree to a parliamentary inquiry into the 2015 CAP payments?

**Fergus Ewing:** First, it is not for me, as a minister, to state whether the Scottish Parliament should hold an inquiry; that is a matter entirely for Parliament. I have indicated that I am to appear before the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, that my officials are to appear before the Public Audit Committee and that the Auditor General herself is to report further to Parliament. I welcome the opportunity to submit to the scrutiny of Parliament. However, it is not for ministers to suggest to Parliaments—far less order them—what to do.

On Mr Chapman's first question, we aim to start LFASS payments in September. However, the vast majority of those who are awaiting their payments have already received a loan payment of around 90 per cent. It is fair to state the facts as a whole rather than selectively. The picture, as far as LFASS payments go, is that the vast majority of recipients have received loans. I believe that those payments started in March and April. March is when LFASS payments are normally made, not last December as may have been implied.

On Mr Chapman's second question, I have been quite straightforward in accepting that there have been grave difficulties for the farming community. I still recognise that—that has not changed. When, over the summer, I attended eight area offices and visited about 11 farming and agricultural shows, game fairs and other events, I found that the farming community wanted a realistic assessment and an improvement in respect of 2016.

I was therefore disappointed that Mr Chapman and the Conservatives did not specifically welcome what I believe will be welcomed by the farming community around Scotland, namely that, earlier than ever before, in the first fortnight of November, we intend that there be distributed up to £300 million before the end of the year. Surely it is not unreasonable to expect that even the Conservatives could find it in their hearts to welcome that step, which I am sure will be appreciated by many farmers today, particularly those who traditionally plan investments at the end of the year.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of his statement and join him in paying tribute to the

staff who are working flat out to try to clear up this mess.

In a statement to Parliament in May, the cabinet secretary set out his three objectives: to complete payments; to minimise penalties and deliver compliance; and to set the 2016 scheme on a proper footing. It is clear from his statement that he has not achieved any of those. Will he at least tell us the value of CAP payments that are still outstanding, by which I mean the full CAP payment outstanding rather than that amount less any loan payment made? Will he confirm when 100 per cent will be paid?

**Fergus Ewing:** I can tell the member that, as at 9 September, the total value processed for payment has been £326 million and that 17,744 eligible businesses for which we have processed payment have received those payments. Around 500 farmers have yet to receive their payment in full, but the majority of those will have received the offer of a loan. It is not possible yet to estimate precisely the total amount that remains to be paid because that amount is not fixed and depends on a number of other calculations. However, I will come back to the member with that information later.

So far as putting payments on a proper footing is concerned, we have made considerable progress over the summer months. In her report published on 20 May, the Auditor General warned of the possibility of penalties in excess of £100 million. I believe that we have demonstrated that we have dealt with matters in such a way that that will not happen. We have secured great progress in relation to compliance and are busting a gut to ensure that there will be the minimum difficulty in that regard.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Before I ask my question, I would like to put on record the fact that the First Minister has appointed me as parliamentary liaison officer for rural economy and connectivity, and I look forward to working in that capacity with members across the chamber.

I welcome the announcement of the new loan scheme, which will inject up to £300 million into the rural economy in my region and across all of Scotland this winter. Will the cabinet secretary provide more detail about how the loan scheme will operate, where potential applicants can find out more about the scheme and whether other countries operate a scheme like it for 2016 payments?

**Fergus Ewing:** We will write with details of the loan scheme to all farmers and crofters who are eligible for the CAP basic payment scheme and greening 2016 payments. We aim to write to them by the end of this month; indeed, I have been involved in revising two drafts of the letter. We will

write separately to inform any applicants who we believe will not be eligible for CAP BPS and greening payments in 2016 to explain why that is the case and we will write separately to any applicant who for any reason will be offered a restricted payment due to their specific circumstances.

I urge everybody who receives a letter to respond immediately if they can, as that will allow us to process their payment as quickly as possible. Applicants will receive details and terms and conditions in their letter, there is information on our website and there is a customer information line. I am happy to provide details to all members if that would be useful.

Those arrangements have been put in place and the aim is to invite people to return forms as quickly as possible and, at any rate, by 12 October, to ensure that payments can be made in the first fortnight in November to those individuals who do that.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement. In Galloway and West Dumfries, claims that are being approved by the local office are still being rejected by the IT system in Edinburgh. Although I and all my colleagues welcome the loan scheme that the cabinet secretary announced today and the stability that it will bring to farmers and rural communities over the winter months, does the cabinet secretary accept and agree that this is yet another admission of failure, this time over the 2016 payment run, with him being only hopeful that substantial payments will be made by June 2017?

**Fergus Ewing:** Finlay Carson's constituents will have their claims dealt with by the Dumfries office, which I had the pleasure of visiting some months ago. The Dumfries office has received 1,372 eligible claims, of which 1,303 have been paid in full, 29 have been paid in part and 40 are unpaid. I will not be satisfied until every eligible claimant has received payment in full, but those figures illustrate that the position is just not as bleak as the Conservative's rhetoric makes it out to be. We have substantially completed the task and I have accepted that there is more work to be done.

Incidentally, I am pleased that Finlay Carson—unlike his predecessor, the Conservative's official spokesman—welcomed the loan scheme. I assume that that is the Conservative Party's official response.

I absolutely believe that farmers around the country will be pleased that today I, for the Scottish Government, have brought forward a practical, helpful, sensible response to the difficulties in 2015.

**Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):**

The cabinet secretary alluded to the uncertainty that Scotland's farmers, crofters and rural communities face as a result of the Tories taking us out of the EU against our will. Can he advise what he is doing to seek guarantees about the future of Scotland's CAP funding?

**Fergus Ewing:** I do not want this to be at all political. I welcome the fact that there was—albeit after a little while—confirmation that the pillar 1 payments will be met by the UK Government. However, we have sought confirmation from the UK Government on the security of the money for Scotland's rural community—namely the Scotland rural development programme money—that, for us as a member of the EU, was secure until 2020 under the European arrangements. That money amounts to £360 million.

Sadly, despite Mr Mackay's attempts to persuade David Gauke of the Treasury to provide clarity about the future of that money, there is no clarity. The many farmers who have applied or intend to apply for payments from schemes under the SRDP element—pillar 2—are waiting for that clarification from the UK Government. It is a simple matter of fact that that is generating far more uncertainty than anything else that currently affects rural Scotland.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary said that the loan scheme

“has the potential to inject up to £300 million into Scotland's rural economy before the end of the year”.

Does he agree that that is in no way a good news story? It is a rationalisation, as the loans are necessary only if problems with the coming year's payments are possible. Does he also agree that, although the scheme will provide 80 per cent certainty, that is still a sorry state of affairs?

**Fergus Ewing:** I disagree. I hope that most farmers will agree that the scheme is an entirely practical step. Such an approach is mirrored in other parts of the EU—notably France. My announcement that farmers and crofters will be entitled to 80 per cent of their basic entitlement within the qualifying limits will greatly reassure those who are listening and who want to know when they will receive their payments.

I have been told not once but many times by many people at agricultural shows—I know that Claudia Beamish diligently attends them, too—that one thing that farmers want is clarity and certainty. They want me to say today when payment will be received. I have said that they will all be entitled to a loan if they wish to have one and are eligible. We aim to make those loan payments in the first fortnight of November. That is clarity, which I believe will be welcome.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley)**

**(SNP):** It is good that the Scottish Government has accepted Audit Scotland's recommendations in full and has begun to implement them, but it is clear that there are many lessons to learn. Will the cabinet secretary flesh out those issues?

**Fergus Ewing:** The kernel of the issues relates not to the good work of the people who work in the 17 area offices but to the application of the IT system to an extremely complex process that involves 4 million hectares and 400,000 fields. Each field is the size of four or five football pitches, and the permissible area for the margin of error is equivalent to the area of a goalmouth.

That situation and the scheme's complexity mean that the IT systems are complex. Mr Coffey's question was about the pre-existing problems. We have addressed all the issues that the Auditor General for Scotland identified in her report and I met Steve Thorn, who is a senior director with the contractors, on 1 June and last week on 7 September. The contractors have made a number of changes to the computer systems.

Without labouring my answer, I suspect that I will have the opportunity to give the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee more details of the work that we have done, the IT fixes that have been delivered and what we are doing to ensure that the IT fixes that have not yet been delivered are delivered.

A great deal of work has been done. I will be happy to account to the parliamentary committee with more details later.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Green):** I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement. The word "certainty" was peppered throughout his statement, as it has been throughout his answers. I draw attention to the organic sector's plight. As he said, farmers across Scotland face a critical time when they must make investment decisions. For organic farmers, that means investment decisions about habitat management and whether they wish to stay organic for the long term or to convert more land to that certification.

Such farmers need certainty. What is the Government's commitment to running the agri-environment climate scheme, notwithstanding the points that the cabinet secretary made about the SRDP's future?

**Fergus Ewing:** We have shown considerable commitment to the greening and agri-environment schemes. Indeed, just two weeks ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Soil Association Scotland representatives. We discussed in detail some of the opportunities and challenges facing the organic sector at the current time.

Obviously, we want to continue to provide appropriate supports on all the measures, but it is reasonable to say that that task is made literally impossible to perform at the current time because of the lack of any clarity from the UK Government about the future of pillar 2 and rural development programmes.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast)**

**(SNP):** It is a cause of some embarrassment to me as a systems engineer that a computer development problem is at the heart of the problem. It is clear that farmers have experienced pain; the Government has experienced pain to its budget, too. Will the minister ensure that the contractor also shares some of the pain of fixing the IT problem?

**Fergus Ewing:** I assure Mr Stevenson that, in my meetings with the contractors and the project team in Saughton house, we have had full and frank discussion of all the issues resulting in, as I reported to Parliament earlier in the year, a substantial saving on the contract, a driving down of costs and performance improvements. Therefore, the contractors have responded to our requests and, indeed, to our requirements to secure better value for money.

I know that Mr Stevenson has an on-going interest in IT projects. He will have copious knowledge about all the matters from his previous experience of implementing them in practice, so perhaps it is a shame that we did not have his input into the project some five years ago. I hope that he will be pleased to hear that a great deal of work has been done to address precisely the issues that he—correctly—raises.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland)**

**(LD):** The minister has just confirmed that more than 500 farm businesses still have not been paid what they were due nine months ago and that, for the coming year, his 80 per cent loan plan means that the average farm business will still be £6,000 out of pocket—and for goodness knows how long, because the minister has confirmed that the IT system is not working and will not be running until well after all the payments are supposed to have been made. It is a dreadful admission that this year's payments are not going to work. How does that square with his commitment in his previous statement to Parliament that the 2016 payments would be put on a proper footing?

**Fergus Ewing:** Were it the case that Mr Rumbles's series of assertions were accurate, perhaps there may be something in his points.

**Mike Rumbles:** You just said that.

**Fergus Ewing:** However, since they are not, I am afraid that there is no point. He has accused me of making a statement in which I promised that payments would be made after the due period, but

that simply is not the case. I said precisely the opposite—that we seek to have the majority of the payments paid by the end of the payment period. Therefore, his first point does not follow.

**Mike Rumbles:** This is disgraceful.

**Fergus Ewing:** His second point also does not follow from his assertions. Although I said that 500 cases remain to be paid, I also pointed out that the farm businesses involved in all those cases should have received an offer of a loan.

**Mike Rumbles:** So I am right.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rumbles, please stop shouting from your seat. Carry on, please, cabinet secretary.

**Fergus Ewing:** I have made it absolutely clear that the businesses involved in most of those 500 cases will have received a loan. More than that, precisely because I was concerned to ensure that that was the case, I asked my officials to go back over the matter in the summer. As I said in my statement, an additional 30 cases were identified as a result—if Mr Rumbles wants to read the statement later, he will see that. I will not be satisfied until every farmer and crofter has been paid in full. I will get on with that job.

**Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** What assurances can the cabinet secretary give to those recipients of payments whose cases are deemed particularly complex but who still require timely payments to be made?

**Fergus Ewing:** I assure all individuals in those circumstances that work is being done to deal with their applications. Many members of this Parliament will be aware that, every year, there is a tail of cases that present particular difficulty. Such cases generally fall into categories such as cross-border cases, private contract clause entitlement cases and cases in which there is dispute about the area of land that is permissible for the purposes of the claim. I think that it is accepted that complex cases generally cause problems for some people. However, I want to assure every individual who is in such a position—it is a relatively small minority of people—that everything is being done to process their claim as quickly as possible.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary referred to the decision to waive penalties for payments made between 1 July and 15 October. Given that the decision was exceptional, will future penalties for late payment not also be waived? If not, how much will the penalties cost?

**Fergus Ewing:** The First Minister and I lobbied Commissioner Hogan—I think it was on 20 May—and were pleased that our efforts and those of other EU member states, including France, which

sought a similar approach, received a sympathetic hearing. That means that the fears that the Auditor General for Scotland quite reasonably identified in her report will not come to pass. That is a major step forward and a tribute to all the hard work of the staff in the area offices.

The member asked what will happen in future years. That will depend on whether we remain fully in the EU, as we wish to do, will it not? Currently we have had absolutely no plan from the United Kingdom Government for what will happen in the next five years. However, we will always work to minimise difficulties and maximise compliance, as we have done with some success over the past few months.

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** What engagement does the cabinet secretary plan to have with members of the farming industry to inform additional improvements to the system?

**Fergus Ewing:** We engage with farmers through our area offices. Indeed, from my visits I have discovered that many of the people who work in our area offices throughout the country are members of the farming community and have been or are farmers themselves. We provide a great deal of information through our area offices, whose staff are extremely adept and capable of providing helpful information.

On other means of providing information, I have made it clear that we are contacting every eligible farmer about the loan. The process for that has been set up with clear leadership, which is reporting to me. We are also happy to use excellent organs such as *The Scottish Farmer* to promote with great accuracy the steps that farmers must take if they are to take up the loan scheme, which will deliver up to £300 million to rural Scotland and the farming community in the early part of November.

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I have been contacted by many constituents in the Borders who have been adversely affected by the Scottish Government's failure to deliver their CAP payments on time. Many have incurred significant consequential losses. What is the minister's response to people who say that the Government should pick up those losses?

**Fergus Ewing:** I respond to any individual case that a member of the Scottish Parliament, including Mr Lamont, raises with me. I do not believe that I have received any such case from Mr Lamont. If I do, I will study it carefully.

I do not think that many Governments have accepted the case for consequential loss, for a number of pretty good reasons. However, if Mr Lamont writes to me and can come up with

arguments in the context of any relevant case, I promise to consider them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Mountain is next, and I have two more requests to ask a question. If everyone is fairly succinct, we will manage to get everyone in.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I declare an interest as someone who is part of a farm partnership.

I join the cabinet secretary in thanking the staff in the area offices for all the extra work that they have undertaken in unpicking the CAP payments disaster, which was predicted but not admitted at this time last year. Can the cabinet secretary please tell us the cost of the extra work that the staff have undertaken, including the cost of the overtime and the extra hours that they have put in, as well as the cost of the extra people who have been employed, over and above the IT costs that he will no doubt tell the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee about next week?

**Fergus Ewing:** I value the extraordinary effort that has been made by staff throughout our rural payments and inspections directorate offices, and I assure Mr Mountain and all members that the focus has been on making absolutely certain that the claims are processed as quickly as possible. If that has involved an element of overtime, that is money well spent. If Mr Mountain's committee wishes to pursue the issue I can examine it further, but I think that the effort that the staff have made has been well worth paying for. In the circumstances, that was absolutely the right thing to do.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Statistics are often thrown about in this chamber, but statistics can be people, and in this case they are Scottish farmers. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that mention of the percentage of farmers who have received some payments is of cold comfort and little help to those whose debt—in the absence of their CAP payments, which are now nine months overdue—continues to rise?

**Fergus Ewing:** I have made it clear on several occasions that I entirely accept that any farmer who has not received payment in full will obviously feel disappointed, angry or aggrieved about that. That is why I am very pleased that we have made such progress since the most recent occasion on which I reported to Parliament on the matter. We will continue to leave no stone unturned in order to get all payments out to all farmers as quickly as we can.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I declare an interest as a farmer.

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the reducing profitability of Scottish farming, as

evidenced by the accumulated farming debt of £2.2 billion. There is a need to encourage new entrants into farming. How does he think that will be achieved against the background of reducing profitability and growing debt that the Scottish Government has overseen since 2007?

**Fergus Ewing:** First, I think that Mr Scott would agree that it is reasonable to point out that the support of the banks during difficult periods over the past year has been very much appreciated. We greatly value the joint working that we do with banks—I met some recently—and I would like to thank all the banks that are involved in the farming community in rural Scotland for their efforts.

Secondly, it is reasonable to point out that, although the recent average debt statistics reveal that the average debt per farm has increased in Scotland, our friends in the Opposition have not mentioned the fact that it has increased by more in the rest of the UK. Of course, the decision to take on more debt is made for a number of reasons.

On a positive note, I was pleased that some of the sales reported very good prices, not least one that I heard about involving the sale of 11,000 lambs at Dalmally. Everything else aside, I hope that we can all agree that that is a good thing.

## More Homes Scotland (Investment)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-01392, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on more investment for more homes Scotland. I call Kevin Stewart to speak to and move the motion.

15:34

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Last week, the First Minister set out our programme for government. It is a plan to build a more prosperous nation with a dynamic, sustainable and inclusive economy, with public services that put people's needs first, and where every individual has true equality of opportunity. We can achieve that ambition only if people can access a good-quality, warm and affordable home. This Government is ambitious for housing, with a commitment of over £3 billion to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes over the next five years, of which 35,000 are for social rent.

We already have a strong track record of delivery. We invested £1.7 billion in affordable housing over the lifetime of the last parliamentary session and we exceeded our target to deliver 30,000 affordable homes by over 10 per cent. That shows what can be done when we all work together, but the targets we have set for this parliamentary session are much more challenging.

Our ambition for housing can be met only if we work in partnership with councils, housing associations and developers to expand on what we do well, to push the boundaries of innovation and to make the housing system work for people. That is the more homes Scotland approach. More homes Scotland includes all the actions that we are taking to increase the supply of every type of home and to make the housing system work for people. Over the summer, I have been out and about, speaking to many different people, and I have been struck by how positive they are about that. In August, I visited Fernan Gardens, which was developed by Shettleston Housing Association in Glasgow. With solar panels on the roof, an efficient heat recovery system, triple glazing, a landscaped central courtyard and integrated wi-fi, those flats provide modern, attractive, safe and secure housing for older people. That just shows what can be done.

Expanding what we do well means more investment for more housing. To achieve our ambitions, we will invest more than £572 million in affordable homes this financial year. Councils have been allocated over £100 million more than last year and the basic subsidy rate for councils

was increased by 24 per cent in January. In statistics published today, I was pleased to see that we have a 26 per cent year-on-year increase in the number of affordable homes approved in the period to the end of June. That is a healthy start.

We are also supporting home ownership through our shared equity schemes. This year, £160 million is available to support up to 5,000 households to buy their own home, adding to the 22,000 who have already benefited through those schemes.

Government investment in housing is also good for the wider economy. It will support around 14,000 jobs in the construction and related industries in Scotland and will generate £1.8 billion of economic activity each year. That is a substantial contribution to boosting our economy, creating jobs and investing in our future, but it cannot be done with Scottish Government investment alone. Securing wider investment is just one reason why we keep innovating. We are the only Government in the United Kingdom to invest in charitable bonds and we have invested over £40 million so far.

We are also pushing forward with innovation in mid-market rent. The Local Affordable Rented Housing Trust will deliver up to 1,000 affordable homes across Scotland over five years, supported by a £55 million loan from the Scottish Government.

Our £25 million rural housing fund is increasing the supply of affordable rural housing, promoting self and custom build, and supporting smaller building firms.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Liberal Democrats welcome the introduction of the rural housing fund. Will the minister speak to and act on Lib Dem calls for a commensurate island housing fund and meet us to discuss the details of how to meet the demonstrable and acute needs in our island communities?

**Kevin Stewart:** Mr Cole-Hamilton is right that it is also important to focus on the housing needs of our island communities. The Government will therefore also establish an islands housing fund with up to £5 million over the next three years. That accords with our positive and comprehensive vision for the islands, as outlined in our programme for government.

Our national housing trust initiative uses guarantees to unlock the development of affordable rented homes. This morning, I was at Shrubhill in Edinburgh for the site start of the seventh NHT development in the city. It takes the totals to 886 affordable homes in the city and more than 2,000 across Scotland.

However, our housing sector can deliver only if we make the housing system work better—not least our infrastructure, land, planning and tax systems. We have made supplying more homes a national strategic infrastructure priority. We are working with local authorities, and through our flexible five-year housing infrastructure fund we will unlock strategically important sites.

The planning system has a critical role to play. Yesterday, I attended a planning workshop session with folks from across Scotland who have met yesterday and today to discuss planning in the run-up to our white paper. We will bring forward our planning bill early in the current session of Parliament, and we are pressing ahead—with local authorities—to deliver simplified planning zones in order to help to attract investment and promote housing delivery.

Earlier this year, we published the place standard to help people to work together to design and deliver successful places. Last week, I met representatives from Sanctuary Group, Robertson and Torry community council at Craiginches in Aberdeen, in Maureen Watt's constituency. They had broken ground on a development of 124 new affordable homes for key workers in Aberdeen on land that was previously owned by the Government. That is an excellent example of making good use of public land and of engaging local people to provide much-needed affordable housing and create a sense of place.

We will make more land available for housing by modernising compulsory purchase orders and empowering communities through implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016. In our approach to land and buildings transaction tax, we have prioritised support for first-time buyers and those who are buying homes at the lower end of the market. In the first year of the tax, more than 41,600 buyers paid less tax than they would have paid under United Kingdom stamp duty. Finally, we have ended right to buy to safeguard up to 15,500 existing homes for future generations.

We can succeed only if we all work together. Our integrated and collaborative approach to developing the joint housing delivery plan, which was published last year, demonstrates how highly we value our partners and communities. I look forward to working with the Parliament, the joint housing policy and delivery group and the sector to transform our ambition into reality.

I repeat to the Parliament something that I have said before: we have a shared interest in ensuring that we provide the people of Scotland with the warm, affordable homes that we all believe they should have. I am willing to talk to everyone in this place about how we go about the delivery of that house building programme.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, the target of 50,000 affordable homes, 35,000 of which will be for social rent, is ambitious. As a Government, we will do everything possible to rise to the challenge and fulfil that ambition.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will you move the motion, please, minister?

**Kevin Stewart:** I move,

That the Parliament recognises that providing the right houses in the right places is essential to ensuring that everyone has access to a warm and affordable home; welcomes the shared objective across local authorities and housing associations to deliver 35,000 social rented homes, as part of the wider Scottish Government commitment from them and other partners to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes, backed by expenditure of over £3 billion over the course of the current parliamentary session; welcomes the increased subsidy rates for housing associations, the promise of five-year resource planning assumptions for local authority areas, and agrees that a whole system approach to housing is essential; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to action on infrastructure, land and planning in support of increased housing supply across all tenures as part of the More Homes Scotland approach, including the new housing infrastructure fund to unlock key development sites, the Scottish Government's positive response to the planning review and commitment to land reform, and welcomes the continued commitment to delivering housing as a key way of promoting inclusive growth, supporting each year approximately 14,000 full-time equivalent jobs and generating £1.8 billion in activity.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that you were so pleased about giving me some time in hand that you forgot to move the motion.

I call Alex Johnstone to speak to and move amendment S5M-01392.3.

16:44

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. So that I do not fall foul of your ire at the end of my speech, may I begin by moving the amendment in my name?

We have finally got round to a debate in this Parliament in which we are actually talking about what is important to people. It may surprise many people that much of what is contained in the commitments that the minister made in his opening speech will find favour with the Conservatives.

Any cursory look at the commitments that were made on housing in the Conservative Party's manifesto in May will show that we have a great deal in common, but we must be careful not to exaggerate our claims and achievements. Again, however, we find ourselves today in a position in which it is being claimed that the commitment in the previous session of Parliament to build 30,000 affordable homes was achieved. Need I point out again that the manifesto commitment for the

previous election was for 30,000 homes for social rent, and that that was transmogrified into a commitment for 30,000 affordable homes, 20,000 of which would be for social rent? There therefore remains the question whether that commitment was actually achieved.

The minister said that we can succeed only if we are all working together. I agree with that point, which is why I want to emphasise what we have in common. We committed in our manifesto to house building becoming a national strategic infrastructure priority, so I welcome the fact that the Government has made that move. We gave a commitment to a total build of 100,000 new homes over the course of this session of Parliament, 50,000 of which would be in the affordable housing sector. Again, that is a target that we have in common with the Government. We also wish to oversee investment in clean, secure and affordable energy because the ability to heat homes is vital and we want to ensure that nobody will live in a hard-to-heat home in the future.

We welcome the Scottish Government's promise on house building, but we believe that it does not go far enough in some areas and that there is room for improvement. For example, not nearly enough is being done to attract additional investment from private or institutional sources, which might see the sector as now being more attractive in the current economic environment. There is also the example of the bungled attempts to bring investment through the discredited memorandum of understanding with China.

The Scottish National Party Government's motion mentions "increased subsidy rates", but it is a bit rich for the nationalist Government to act like the champion of housing association subsidies when, in 2011, the Scottish Government significantly cut the capital subsidy per home from an average of £70,000 to £40,000, directly causing the collapse in the number of completions in 2012-13.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** Will Mr Johnstone give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** No, thank you.

That Government action was like setting fire to someone's home and then expecting a medal for phoning the fire brigade. More seriously, it now points to the minister's lazy analysis, which ran deep through his opening speech. If the minister wants to make comparisons, I will pick one for him: the number of completions of affordable houses in 2015 was 4,037.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Alex Johnstone give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** No, thank you.

The total completions in 1983, at the height of the Conservative Government, was 4,763, which is 726 more than was achieved last year. It is worth noting that we can all draw comparisons and conclusions.

The Scottish Government's obsession with the figures for council houses alone rather than those for social rented housing further betrays the Government's contempt for the housing associations and what they have achieved.

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

**Alex Johnstone:** Okay. Finally, I will.

**Kevin Stewart:** Housing associations have welcomed the Government's commitment and are working in partnership with us to deliver the 50,000 affordable homes. Mr Johnstone has talked about the Government's record on house building, but does he recognise that we are building more homes in Scotland per head of population than are being built in England and Wales, where his party is in Government?

**Alex Johnstone:** I will acknowledge that the Scottish National Party forms the Government of Scotland and will be accountable for its actions in Scotland. If the Scottish National Party Government chooses to fall back on the slim defence of comparison with other parts of the United Kingdom, it is in breach of its own rules, as far as comparison is concerned. Let us talk about Scotland and what we can achieve in Scotland, rather than doing Scotland down by comparison with other areas of the United Kingdom.

The SNP has a very poor record on help for first-time buyers. On 27 September 2013, the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Capital Investment and Cities launched the three-year help to buy (Scotland) scheme, which allocated £130 million for the 2015-16 financial year. We see that budget being significantly reduced this year.

The number of loans that are being given by institutions to first-time buyers remains below the level in quarter 2 in 2007, which was when the SNP came to power. That suggests a failure by the SNP to provide adequate support for helping people on to the property ladder.

The SNP has committed to cutting fuel poverty, but the budget for fuel poverty and energy efficiency has also had reductions. The Conservative manifesto committed to warmer homes. Scotland is a cold place most of the time, and research shows that living in a cold and damp home is much more likely to cause health problems. Increasing energy efficiency and heating homes should be top priorities. Again, the Conservative Party's manifesto for the May election offered commitments in those areas.



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

**Alex Johnstone:** I will carry on at the moment, thank you. The minister had a speech of his own.

We want ambitious targets to be set for energy efficiency, and we want all properties to achieve an energy performance certificate C rating or above by the end of the decade. We are happy to work with the Government in order to achieve that.

We want more investment in energy efficiency, and we do not believe that current policies go as far as they could. The Scottish Conservatives will support energy efficiency budget increases in the budget process on which we are about to embark.

We also believe that energy efficiency improvements should be reflected in the tax system. Specifically, energy efficiency improvements could be incentivised through land and buildings transaction tax discounts or the business rates system. The SNP should be held to account for allowing a drastic fall in that.

There are other things that I could mention. The failure to provide an adequate number of care home places again demonstrates a lack of joined-up thinking and a failure to comprehend the housing landscape. Also, the planning system review is welcome, but that system has been an adversarial block to development for too long.

As I said at the outset, there is a great deal that we could have in common on the matter. Unfortunately, however, the Government will persist in putting things in its motions that we cannot support. We will vote against the motion for the simple reason that it could not avoid mentioning land reform once again.

I move amendment S5M-01392.3, to leave out from “, the Scottish Government’s positive response” to end and insert:

“; welcomes the continued commitment to delivering housing as a key way of promoting inclusive growth, supporting each year approximately 14,000 full-time equivalent jobs and generating £1.8 billion in activity; calls on the Scottish Government to make energy efficiency and heating homes a top priority by introducing a target for all properties to achieve an EPC C rating or above by the end of the decade; further urges the Scottish Government to introduce a target of a 10% year-on-year increase in new house completions across all sectors; calls for the recognition of energy improvement initiatives in the tax system; welcomes the fact that, after nine years in power, the Scottish Government has finally realised that the planning system is in desperate need of review; acknowledges the increased subsidy rates for housing associations, but highlights that the previous SNP administration slashed average grants to housing associations from £70,000 to £40,000.”

15:53

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am the Labour spokesperson with the housing and social

justice brief. We have that brief because having a warm, secure and affordable home is at the heart of our social justice policy.

Housing costs push many people in Scotland into poverty—that is one of the conclusions of Naomi Eisenstadt’s report entitled “Shifting the Curve—A Report to the First Minister”. It says that some

“290,000 people ... were in in-work poverty before housing costs”

were included, and that when housing costs were included, the figure rose to 420,000 people. I think that we agree at least that housing is a pressing issue for Parliament. I assure the minister that there is indeed a shared interest in that.

Scottish Labour supports a national house-building plan—we think that that is a more definitive approach to reaching the 50,000 new-build target—to ensure the co-ordination of new-build homes, and we support the Government’s desire to tackle the housing crisis in session 5 of the Scottish Parliament. However, Scottish Labour also supports Shelter and other housing experts that believe that the figure of 50,000 should not be the limit of our ambition, and that we need to build 60,000 homes to stand still. Nonetheless, we support the general ethos of the Government’s position, and we do not intend to get into a debate in Parliament about the numbers; rather, we will get into a debate with the Government about how the target can be achieved.

We all agree that there is an acute need for new housing on a large scale. There has been a 13 per cent increase in the number of children who are staying in council hostels and bed and breakfasts, and a dramatic increase in the number of one-person households since 2008. There is also a reported conservative estimate that 150,000 households are on council waiting lists. According to Shelter Scotland, 30,000 people are classed as homeless. We estimate that at least 45,000 people might have been excluded from that list as stock-transfer authorities appear not to be counted. I appreciate that it is hard to get accurate data on waiting times and lists because of double counting, but I ask the minister to look into it. The whole of Glasgow is not in the picture because Glasgow is a stock-transfer authority. For example, the Glasgow Housing Association waiting list alone is 24,000, so I call on the minister to look at the figure for waiting lists. We think that it is a conservative estimate but, nonetheless, it illustrates the need for new-build housing.

**Kevin Stewart:** I thank Ms McNeill for allowing a debate to take place here today. It seems as if others are often unwilling to take interventions.

I am certainly willing to explore the figures for waiting lists. I will ask civil servants to look at the situation closely and will report back to Parliament.

On the national delivery strategy, we have the more homes Scotland board and the joint delivery group, which brings together 26 organisations. We have the determination and—I am glad to hear—Labour has the determination to help us in the task of delivering those homes.

**Pauline McNeill:** I will say more in due course about why we want to put the emphasis on a national plan.

There has been a decline in the number of first-time buyers because of the economic crash and the fact that average deposits are at a staggering £20,000 for a new house. That is a factor that cannot be underestimated as one that slows down the housing market and the availability of mortgage loans. I do not believe that all that is the responsibility of the Scottish Government. Although the situation is improving, it is tough to get a mortgage these days and such factors impinge on the housing market.

Homes for Scotland, which favours the building of 100,000 homes during the fifth session of Parliament, calls for a plan to include all tenures, which recognises that many people want to own their own homes. We fully support the aim that at least 35,000 of those homes should be socially rented accommodation.

We know that there are many obstacles to building, which is why Labour wants to place the emphasis on the need to take a national approach. We need more parliamentary time to consider issues of planning and infrastructure, but I will mention one today. The level of efficiency in the planning system does not seem to be fit for Government policy. As we saw in 2015-16, it still took 40 weeks from starting an application to finishing it. That is an improvement from the previous 64 weeks timescale, but the situation has to be examined if we are serious about reaching the 50,000 homes target.

**Kevin Stewart:** The independent panel that was looking into planning published its report at the beginning of my tenure as minister. The Government responded to that quickly with some initial moves. We are also moving quickly towards the planning white paper. I hope that the whole Parliament will engage with that. I share some of Ms McNeill's frustrations and I want to see a much more simplified planning system that will include simplified planning zones for housing.

**Pauline McNeill:** I look forward to a more detailed debate on the planning system.

Another weakness in the planning system is that the level of house building has fallen by 40 per

cent since 2007, despite the increase in the number of households. We have seen figures today that illustrate that the Government's previous targets have not been reached. I mention that to illustrate the need for a more comprehensive national plan.

Meeting the target to deliver 50,000 homes during this parliamentary session would be quite an achievement, so we have to make sure that all the steps are in place to achieve that. We agree that some consideration of the types of homes that are needed has to be part of that essential plan.

We also need to consider the design of homes. As many others have, I have visited the Building Research Establishment innovation park at Ravenscraig, which shows that homes for the future can be built with zero waste and can be designed for people with dementia, for example, with special measures.

I agree with aspects of the Tory amendment, in that when we are designing and building new homes, we need to think about energy efficiency. The targets on fuel poverty have not been met, so they must be a major feature in the building of new homes.

The affordable homes policy is a policy that can, I believe, mark the success of this Parliament. I do not underestimate the task but I also do not overestimate the hope that the policy will give many people who need a warm affordable home, if the target can be achieved in this fifth session of the Scottish Parliament.

I move amendment S5M-01392.4, to leave out from second "welcomes" to "essential;" and insert,

"recognises the advice of housing experts including Shelter Scotland that building 60,000 affordable homes over the next five years would further tackle Scotland's housing crisis; acknowledges the increased subsidy rates for housing associations and the promise of five-year resource planning assumptions for local authority areas and agrees that the National House Build Plan is essential to Scotland's approach to investing in housing; agrees that investment in new, affordable, warm housing is vital in tackling poverty, inequality and Scotland's fuel poverty levels."

16:01

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the minister's opening remarks and I am pleased to speak in this debate in support of the Scottish Government's motion.

It is clear that the Government is committed to treating Scotland's housing shortage with the seriousness that it deserves and I welcome the commitment from the Government and other partners to deliver a minimum of 50,000 affordable homes over the course of this parliamentary

session—a commitment that will represent more than £3 billion-worth of investment.

Official statistics published today show that the number of affordable homes that have been approved has increased by 26 per cent over the past year. That news should be welcomed across the chamber as a good sign of early progress in meeting our ambitious target. The Scottish Government is due credit for its actions over recent years.

In the previous parliamentary session, a target of 30,000 affordable homes was exceeded against the backdrop of continued Westminster cuts to our capital budget. The help to buy (Scotland) shared equity scheme, which has been described by Homes for Scotland as an “unqualified success”, boosted the supply of private homes, helping the delivery of new affordable housing. Furthermore, the abolition of the right-to-buy scheme in Scotland after 30 years was overwhelmingly welcomed by housing bodies.

Recently, the housing infrastructure fund, which invites local authorities to identify housing sites that can be unlocked as a matter of priority, was established, and I was particularly pleased to see the launch of a dedicated rural housing fund in April. The fund, which totals £25 million, is available to community organisations, development trusts, private landowners and private developers and is further evidence that the Scottish Government is dedicated to addressing the unique issues that are associated with the provision of housing in rural Scotland.

The Scottish Government is clearly committed to working with local authorities and other partners to deliver affordable housing. However, it is undeniable that the housing crisis has been growing across the whole of the UK for over a decade. I therefore believe that there is a pressing need to identify the root cause of the problem.

Reading through the policy literature in preparation for the debate, it struck me that one issue was raised consistently by various stakeholders—the planning system, which the minister has already mentioned in relation to the upcoming white paper on planning. As far back as 2004, the Barker review of housing supply concluded that a more effective planning system was vital to increased housing provision, particularly in terms of land allocation. That conclusion was supported by the Scottish Government’s 2007 report, “Firm Foundations—the Future of Housing in Scotland”.

It is for that reason that I welcome the Scottish Government’s root-and-branch review of the planning system and the understanding—as outlined in the more homes Scotland approach—that specific action on land and planning is

required to increase housing supply across all tenures. We have already seen progress on that front. The latest Scottish Government statistics show an improvement in the time that was taken to decide major housing developments in 2015-16.

In Scotland, we are already building more homes than anywhere else in the UK. However, to reach our bold target of 50,000 new homes, we cannot rely solely on the public sector. As the minister’s motion states,

“a whole system approach to housing is essential”.

Homes for Scotland rightly highlighted in its recent manifesto that the private sector has a crucial role in the delivery of affordable housing. The Scottish Government’s actions to date have undoubtedly helped to stimulate growth in the private housing market, but a more flexible approach by local authorities is also needed.

Too often, planning burdens, bureaucracy and unpredictability impact on small businesses disproportionately. Local small and medium-sized businesses are perhaps best placed to understand the needs and opportunities of the communities that they work in. A prime example of that in my area is S & A Housing Support Services, which I recently visited and which has been working with Dumfries and Galloway Council’s homeless service for almost 25 years to provide fully furnished, supported and secure emergency accommodation. The business provides 24-hour support and enables each homeless person to address the issues that contributed to their circumstances.

It is not just the number of homes that we build that is important, but the kind of homes. To again paraphrase Homes for Scotland, we need to build the range of homes that meet the diverse needs and life journeys of all of those living in Scotland. I agree with Shelter Scotland, which has emphasised that

“It is essential that we don’t hit the housing target but miss the point”

by

“building ill-designed, isolated new communities”.

It is unacceptable that at least one in five disabled people or people living with long-term health problems who require an adapted house lives somewhere that is not at all or not very suitable to their needs. We need to build housing that can be adapted as the needs of the occupant change—a house for life. They should be mobility impairment friendly, learning disability friendly and dementia friendly. The Stranraer business that I mentioned has expanded its current practice with an additional proposed model of supporting people with difficult healthcare needs.

I agree with Shelter Scotland that creating a supply of affordable and adaptable housing must continue to be a top priority for the Scottish Government and local authorities throughout this session of Parliament. I support the motion.

16:07

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Scotland is in the grip of a housing crisis. With the Scottish National Party now into its third term in government, a briefing that was issued by Shelter today spelled out the stark facts. There are 150,000 households on council waiting lists, over 10,000 households are stuck in temporary accommodation and last year nearly 30,000 people were assessed as homeless, which is one household every 20 minutes. The first thing that the minister should have done today is apologise.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Graham Simpson:** No.

Targets are great, and 50,000 affordable homes in five years sounds a lot. It is, but of course targets can be missed. An example is the SNP's manifesto commitment in May 2011 to build more than 6,000 new social rented houses a year, which, as Alex Johnstone said, was missed. The SNP's shaky record does not fill me with confidence.

Like the minister, over the summer, I was lucky enough to visit a number of housing associations in my patch. I heard about the great work that they are doing in areas such as Wishaw, Motherwell and East Kilbride. I also visited new council housing in East Kilbride. It is not the only place where new council housing is springing up. North Lanarkshire Council is to be commended for its ambitious programme to build 800 council houses in the next five years. As a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee, I have also seen the work that is being done in Glasgow by Cube Housing Association, which is part of the Wheatley Group. We chatted to some very satisfied tenants there, and my feeling is that there is a vibrancy across the sector. Local housing associations are adapting and in general are offering a very good service to their customers, as Cube refreshingly calls them.

There is great work going on and I want to praise some of it. Lanarkshire Housing Association, which is based in Motherwell, has focused on improving engagement with tenants using text messaging and an improved website alongside a tenant focus group. East Kilbride and District Housing Association has paid student bursaries to five tenants in the past year, has a partnership with a credit union and provides free school uniforms to poorer tenants.

The local housing associations that I visited are small but they are up to the Government's challenge. Subsidies will be vital, of course. Although they are being increased, we should remember that—as Alex Johnstone said—the SNP cut them in the first place.

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

**Graham Simpson:** Not yet, because I am about to strike a positive note with Mr Stewart. If he really wants to hit that 50,000 target, he must ensure that some of the money filters down to the smaller housing associations. If he is serious about hitting the target, he must involve them. As Andy Young, the director of East Kilbride and District Housing Association, told me yesterday, they are ready to help and are up for it.

**Kevin Stewart:** I visited a number of smaller housing association developments over the summer, including Cunninghame Housing Association in Ardrossan and Shettleston Housing Association. I do not know whether it is because Mr Simpson is new to the Parliament, but the Conservative members seem to forget that the Conservatives cut our capital budgets by 26 per cent in the previous session of the Parliament. We could have done much more had that money not been slashed by a Conservative Government.

**Graham Simpson:** I could have done without the condescending tone and being described as a newbie and, therefore, not knowing very much. I had come up with a positive idea, which I hope Mr Stewart is ready to take on board.

We need more homes across the board, including privately owned homes. Reforms to the planning system can help with that but we will not see legislation until next year. I wonder whether Mr Stewart could find a way to speed up the implementation of measures such as simplified planning zones, on which he would find support across the chamber. That could unlock and hasten development.

We need action. Overall, total new builds still remain almost 40 per cent down on 2007 levels. We also have a long way to go to ensure that all our homes are warm. That should be a priority. Too many people live in homes that are not up to scratch, which has huge implications for health and educational attainment. Living in cold damp homes results in a much higher likelihood of mental health problems, a higher incidence of respiratory disease and other physical issues. That is simply unacceptable.

We need to do more. As Alex Johnstone said, there are many areas on which we can unite. I hope that I have been reasonably positive to Mr Stewart and that he will take on board some of my suggestions.

16:13

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I welcome the fact that we are having a debate on housing. The subject is a huge priority for my constituents and I have a strong personal interest in it, as I have worked for housing associations in the past.

There has been a lot of good news on housing delivery in recent years. The target of delivering 30,000 new affordable homes from 2011 to 2016 was achieved. In fact, we got 33,490 new homes. In my area, the Commonwealth games village remains a big success story of recent years, with 700 new homes, which are a mixture of social rented and owner-occupied properties.

There continue to be challenges in the housing sector. Otherwise, why would there be a commitment to provide 50,000 more affordable homes in the next five years? However, I do not believe that there is a crisis in the way that there was after world war two or in the way that there is in a country that has an earthquake or a war. Opposition politicians need to be careful how they use words. If they use words such as “crisis” too often, we risk those words losing their effect and they risk losing personal credibility.

A debate title such as “More Investment for More Homes Scotland” clearly indicates that we will focus on additional housing stock. That is good. As Kevin Stewart mentioned, he has been in my constituency twice recently to open developments for Shettleston Housing Association and West of Scotland Housing Association. New developments for owner-occupiers in my area continue to be made in Broomhouse, Baillieston, Belvidere and Parkhead. Link Housing Association plans mid-market rented accommodation at Dalmarnock.

I would like to thank Clyde Gateway and the Scottish Government for funding for cleaning up the old power station site so that housing could be built on it.

I want to touch on one or two other issues. A key phrase in the motion is

“the right houses in the right places”.

That surely has to include the maintenance of existing stock. A lot of work has been done on improving energy efficiency and the linked issue of ending fuel poverty. That is great, but there is a wider issue in that many owners in tenemental stock are not investing what they need to in their properties. For example, in the estate where I live, where there are 270 post-war flats, there are factors in place but residents pay only the absolute minimum, so only absolutely essential repairs take place. I came across another example this week, because one of my staff lives in a tenement with

no factor. Major repairs need to be done and some owners have led on that. Glasgow City Council is giving a 50 per cent grant, which is great, and is insisting on the building having factors in future, which is also welcome. However, two residents are resisting repair work and refusing access to their premises. It seems to me that there is something wrong when it remains so difficult to get repairs and maintenance done on people’s homes.

In both those examples, I have mentioned factors or a lack of them. Whether there is a factor in place usually depends on the title deeds, and also on whether residents have appointed a factor. Therefore, I ask the Government whether we should consider making it compulsory to have a factor in situations where there is common property. If the Government agrees with that proposition, does it think that the factor needs to have powers to do proactive maintenance? I accept that some people have had bad experiences with factors, but I think that we must consider this issue if we are serious about maintaining existing homes.

Returning to the provision of new housing, I welcome the proposals for a mix of housing, whether it is owner-occupied housing, social rented housing, private rented housing or whatever. I have constituents for whom the help-to-buy scheme has been incredibly welcome because it has made the difference between their not being able to buy a house and being able to do so.

Having worked for a few housing associations, I think that the work that they do is tremendous, especially because they can look at the whole community rather than just individual buildings. I have some agreement with what Graham Simpson said, and I think in particular that smaller associations can be particularly good at knowing their tenants and their communities really well.

An example of that is greater Easterhouse, which straddles the Glasgow Provan constituency and my Glasgow Shettleston constituency. It has eight associations that are independent but work together. Most residents chose to transfer to the community associations rather than stay with Glasgow Housing Association when the council stock was transferred. However, now, Glasgow City Council allocates grant—and sometimes the land—for new housing developments, and there is a feeling that there seems to be an unhealthy close relation between the council and the Wheatley Group, which consists mainly of the GHA. There is a strategic agreement between the council and Wheatley Group. In itself, that can be a good thing, but the fear is that such an arrangement could squeeze out smaller housing associations, which probably know their

communities better. I think that that was the point that Graham Simpson was making.

Housing continues to be the subject that most constituents raise with me, and I have to say that the right to buy stripped our area of some of its best housing in the social rented sector. Graham Simpson wanted an apology, but I would like to hear an apology from the Tories for implementing the right to buy and for decimating the housing stock.

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

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The member is in his last minute.

**John Mason:** In particular, the number of properties at ground-floor level has reduced in the social rented sector. Because we have an ageing population, that has resulted in demand seriously outstripping supply. I am therefore delighted that the right-to-buy scheme has been stopped.

I welcome the Government's commitment to housing. Of course, we will not solve all the challenges overnight but, at a time of financial pressure, a commitment to 50,000 new affordable homes is absolutely tremendous, and I hope that all parties can at least agree to welcome that.

16:19

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. One of the principal reasons for the creation of this Parliament was the need to drive housing policy up the political agenda. A devolved Scottish Parliament with responsibility for primary housing legislation and housing investment and planning was a critical part of the case for constitutional reform in the 1980s and 1990s, but it was also part of the argument going back to the days of John Wheatley and the Rev James Barr.

The Rev James Barr's name reminds me that next year is the centenary of the Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland's report, "Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland, Rural and Urban". The commission, chaired by Sir Henry Ballantyne, included among its membership the Rev James Barr, who was later to become a Labour MP. It was set up following representations from the county medical officers and the Scottish Miners Federation about the terrible housing conditions in Scotland's coalfields. The commission concluded:

"Problems such as child-welfare, care of mothers, better education, temperance, and a living wage are all relevant to the housing problem".

Those are the problems—well, perhaps not temperance—that we will be grappling with this afternoon and when we debate housing in the weeks and months ahead. The recommendation

of the royal commission was a massive programme of council house building, but even a moderate programme of council house building would be welcome.

We know that 10,500 households are homeless and in temporary accommodation in Scotland. Over a quarter of those households contain children. I ask the Scottish Government what chance we have got of closing the educational attainment gap when too many of our children live in substandard and overcrowded accommodation. That is why, this month, Shelter has called for a new homelessness strategy. It is looking for political leadership from Parliament to galvanise action with a common vision and a common goal. Given the force of the argument put forward by the organisation that is best placed to comment on the matter, I assume that the Government will recognise the need for such a strategy and will act immediately to establish a group to take that forward.

My second point is that we do not need just a technological or one-off fix; we need a long-term plan for public housing in Scotland that produces a mosaic of homes that work rather than a monolithic, top-down housing system that does not. It means giving tenants and workers alike a greater say in how public housing is provided so that tenants are able to do much more than merely complain. If we want the confidence of the people, we must have confidence in the people. It means creating towns for people, with homes—and people—back in our town centres. It does not mean concreting over the green belt. It means looking at repair and improvement. It means redoubling our efforts to return empty homes to use and looking at new instruments, such as pension fund investments, to supplement public support.

We are debating housing here today, but we need decisions on housing to be taken locally. We must move away from local administration back to local government, in which elected councillors devise local solutions to local problems. That is why I was delighted that, last month, North Lanarkshire Council announced its plan to build an extra 1,000 new homes. It is why I am calling today for the letter issued by the Scottish Government to local councils, in which they were warned that every housing development above 100 houses would be automatically called in, to be rescinded.

**Kevin Stewart:** I abolished that when I came into office. That has already happened.

**Richard Leonard:** I apologise to the minister for that. I am delighted that he has corrected me.

My final point is that, over the time that the current housing crisis has deepened, total

employment in construction in Scotland has fallen. It has fallen by 16,000 in the past five years, with half of that drop—8,000 jobs—going out of the industry in the past 12 months. A person does not need to have studied John Maynard Keynes's "The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money" from cover to cover to work out that there is an obvious place for central Government and local government intervention here. If the housing targets were exceeded, as the minister has claimed again this afternoon, on that evidence alone it is clear that the housing targets were set too low.

We need more ambition in our plans for Scotland's housing. We need the renewed political will to make tackling homelessness a priority. We need a boost in construction jobs, socially useful jobs, good jobs, local jobs and trade union jobs, as part of an anti-austerity agenda. We also need a more decentralised, localised, democratic approach. If we secure that, we will have begun to serve the purpose for which the Parliament was created and the purpose for which we were elected.

16:25

**Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** It is 17 years since a house was last built in Staffin, on Skye, and it is 10 years since the school roll boasted 50 children—it is now down to 14. One local business can cite five instances when it failed to recruit or retain staff because of a lack of housing, and the population fell by 5 per cent in four years, from just over 600 residents in 2009 to over 550 in 2013. Before anyone tells me that that is the trend in rural Skye, I point out that the population of Portree, which is a mere 30 minutes south of Staffin, has risen by 11 per cent in a decade. It is no coincidence that the population has risen as the number of houses has gone up. Portree has been the beneficiary of significant housing development in the past few years under the previous ambitious SNP Government.

The opportunities that the Government's targets will provide to my constituents cannot be overestimated. On my travels and in my conversations, housing is repeatedly raised as one of the greatest needs for rural Scotland. High prices, low availability and poor stock are the three key factors that push my constituents from the rural areas of Scotland to its urban centres. I welcome every new house that is built in rural Scotland, because it means another family whose children go to the local school, another retired couple who can remain part of the community or another individual who is driving forward the Highland economy. Yes, I welcome the Government's commitment to build 50,000 new

homes, but almost more than that I welcome the £25 million rural housing fund that takes into account the unique issues that rural homes face.

Let me sketch out four unique issues in rural Scotland that a specifically rural housing policy should address. First, there is a much higher proportion of second homes in rural areas—7 per cent as opposed to 1 per cent in the rest of Scotland. Naturally, that makes it harder for residents to access housing. However, it is not a simple picture, especially after a summer in which the Highlands have hosted unprecedented numbers of tourists who have required accommodation. In fact, across Skye and Badenoch there is not enough tourist accommodation, which is why organisations such as Great North Lodges, which is based in Aviemore, are vital to our Highland economy. Great North Lodges manages 32 self-catering lodges, encourages local spend and provides employment to a vast network of cleaning and maintenance staff and full-time staff in an area that needs jobs. Such organisations are to be commended for their work. In a constituency such as mine there are not always easy answers, so a nuanced and considered approach is needed and more houses need to be built.

Secondly, 2012 figures show that average prices in accessible rural areas are a staggering £49,000 higher than they are in the rest of Scotland. Thirdly, more than three quarters of housing in remote rural Scotland is owner occupied compared with just more than half of housing in the rest of Scotland. Fourthly, as members have already touched on, housing in remote rural Scotland is far less energy efficient than housing in the rest of Scotland, with 15 per cent of housing stock in rural areas being in the lower bands compared with only 2 per cent of housing in the rest of Scotland. That is a key reason why 22 per cent of those who live in remote rural areas such as my constituency are in extreme fuel poverty compared with 9 per cent of people in the rest of Scotland. However, by 2021 the Government will have spent £1 billion to tackle fuel poverty. The problem is not just that housing is less energy efficient; 47 per cent of remote rural stock is deemed to be in a state of urgent disrepair compared with 36 per cent of stock in the rest of Scotland. The Government's ambition in the previous parliamentary session and this session is vital.

**Kevin Stewart:** I thank Ms Forbes for a well-thought-out speech. The Government is being innovative. Does she welcome the fact that Lochaber Housing Association is to get moneys through a charitable bond to build 50 new houses in Fort William?

**Kate Forbes:** I cannot stress enough how delighted I was to see that announcement, because housing stock for my constituents is about not just having a roof over their heads but having safety, security, health, children in schools, jobs and growing businesses. That is part of a much bigger impact on rural Scotland, so I welcome the announcement.

I have identified some of the pressing reasons why I welcome the Government's priority and why I welcome a specifically rural fund to address the issues that my constituents face. I thank the Government very much.

16:31

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** Since 2007, the SNP has overseen a 40 per cent drop in house building, which means that there are fewer homes for families across our country. That drop means that we have ended up in a situation in which, according to the Scotland Institute, 74,000 households are suffering from overcrowding.

During the recent recess, I visited the Keepmoat site on Garvald Street in Greenock and met Link housing in Luss to see social housing developments. I was impressed by those developments, which address community needs.

The SNP's failure on house building has meant that, according to the charity Shelter, the number of people who need to live in temporary accommodation is not coming down. More than 5,000 children in Scotland now live in temporary accommodation. When we consider that more than 25 per cent of the people who are in temporary accommodation in Scotland have to use bed and breakfasts and hostels, we can see why the problem is so big.

The only way to solve the problems is to start building more homes. That is why the Scottish Conservatives are committed to supporting the building of 100,000 new homes over the lifetime of the parliamentary session, at least half of which should be affordable housing.

Although we need more homes, the rate of house building in the private sector has gone down by 44 per cent over the past nine years. Action must be taken to remedy that. I recommend that the Scottish Government take some suggestions from the Scottish Conservatives' manifesto to encourage the house-building private sector. The Government should encourage local authorities to compile publicly available brownfield land registers, which would allow house builders big and small to explore their options more easily. Along with a presumption in favour of planning applications on brownfield sites when those applications contain a major housing element,

those proposals would significantly help house builders.

Moving on to the planning system, it is wrong that the Scottish Government is overturning half of council planning decisions. The SNP's top-down approach to planning permission is wrong and misguided. We should be aiming not to take power away from those who are most affected by planning decisions but to empower them. That is why the Scottish Conservatives believe that simplifying and speeding up the planning system is of the utmost importance. That would not only support house building by making the system easier to navigate but make planning decisions easier for the public to understand. It would also remove some of the confusion and stress that communities feel when trying to understand why decisions take so long to be made and why they are made in certain ways.

We should not only build new houses but ensure that the housing that we have is more effectively managed and used. For example, there are an estimated 27,000 empty homes in Scotland, which are a wasted asset. Bringing them back into use would be a good first step in providing more housing for the people of Scotland, which includes housing for armed forces veterans and, particularly, disabled veterans.

The Scottish Conservatives have called for the removal of constrictions that central legislation places on the allocation of housing. I think that everyone in the chamber agrees that allocation policy that would be good for my constituents in Dumbarton, Vale of Leven, Helensburgh, Greenock and Luss, for example, might not work as well for other members' constituents. Allocation policy should be decided with those who are most affected by it—the local communities. That is why I want such decisions to be taken locally.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Rather than send a note to each member, I will just tell James Kelly, Alex Cole-Hamilton and Ben Macpherson that, out of the kindness and good hearts of the preceding speakers, you now all have six minutes. I call Andy Wightman.

16:35

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** I welcome this housing debate. I will cover three key challenges that this Parliament has the capacity to deal with: affordability, housing land supply and existing homes.

The Scottish Greens take the view that everyone should have access to affordable houses. All houses should be affordable, but they are not. Average prices in Scotland are now double what they were in 2003, and they have



risen at twice the rate of inflation and outstripped average earnings by an even higher rate.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Wightman, will you move your microphone a little closer to you, so that the official reporters can hear your dulcet tones? Thank you.

**Andy Wightman:** As the *Financial Times* wrote in January 2015:

"The politics of building more houses is as tortuous as the economics is clear. But the current state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue. What Britain needs is a government brave enough to trumpet the virtue of falling house prices, and make it happen."

Therefore, I am pleased that the Scottish Green Party is the first political party in Britain to have argued that average house prices in Scotland need to fall if we are serious about affordability. With average house prices at about six times average earnings, that is clearly not the case.

The second area that I will cover is housing land supply. As has been pointed out by a number of speakers, house-building targets that the previous SNP Administration set in 2007 have not been met, and that is in large measure due to a failed model of new house building that has been dominated by the speculative volume house-building industry. That stands in stark contrast to the rest of Europe, where self-procured housing is at a rate of well over 50 per cent in most countries.

In Berlin, for example, the city council helps groups of families or older people build apartment blocks to meet their housing needs. Across Germany, the inflated value of land consequent on receiving planning permission is capped at existing use value, meaning that 90 per cent or so of housing investment goes into high-quality homes that are energy efficient and last far longer than the typical design life of new-build houses in the UK. In real terms, German house prices are the same today as they were in the early 1970s, during which time Britain's house prices have multiplied by five. That difference is a key reason why Germany is a far more productive and prosperous country.

To achieve more efficient supply of land for housing, public authorities must be allowed once again to acquire land at existing use value, as was the case prior to 1959 and as remains the case in Germany. That would also mean ending the nonsense that Government does not interfere in the private market.

In February, in its response to the commission on housing and wellbeing's recommendation of a national target of 23,000 new houses per year, the Scottish Government argued:

"We do not set targets for overall housing supply, as this depends heavily on the activities of the development and house-building industries and is largely out-with"

Scottish Government

"control."

That followed the then housing minister, Margaret Burgess's answer to a written question from Liam McArthur MSP, in which she said:

"In Scotland we expect the private housing market to operate wherever it can without government intervention."—[*Written Answers*, 29 January 2016; S4W-29368.]

It is surely time to admit that the laissez faire approach to housing has failed. Indeed, on the waterfront in my Edinburgh constituency, there are acres and acres of land lying unused and derelict that should have houses built on them. Much of the land is owned in the British Virgin Islands.

That brings me to the third challenge: existing homes. All parties in the chamber are committed to taking action on warm homes. That is very welcome, but the scale of the challenge is significant. Indeed, 85 per cent of the homes that will exist in 2050 have already been built, and with much of the housing stock in poor condition and the particular problems associated with communal tenement property, a major effort is required to bring existing housing up to modern standards. I was glad to hear John Mason make that point.

Part of that will involve rethinking how we regard housing, so that we see housing not as private property but as part of the public infrastructure of our cities and rural areas. Much of the tenement property in Edinburgh was built 100 or 200 years ago, and with the right care and maintenance it will last another 100 or 200 years. In other words, such properties are assets to be maintained and refurbished in the long-term public interest rather than for short-term financial gain. That is why one of the proposals in our manifesto is for a not-for-profit repair service and a new housing investment bank.

There are issues to do with not just the quality of existing housing but how it is used. A constituent of mine in Edinburgh commented in *The Guardian* last week that he is the only resident in his tenement stair. The other flats are Airbnb flats, second homes or student lets. He said:

"We are heading to a place where we have little in the way of community any more".

The issue could be resolved by changes to the planning regime to make a range of residential uses, such as student accommodation, holiday homes and retirement homes, subject to planning consent, so that housing allocation can be better governed to maintain communities and target different housing needs.

Scottish Greens are ambitious for housing. We need to transform our whole approach to housing in this country and challenge the model that we

have inherited—a model that is failing and is not delivering for growing numbers of our constituents.

16:41

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the chance to speak in this afternoon's debate on housing investment, which is a significant issue for constituents in my predominantly rural region.

I want to begin by picking up on the idea of the right houses in the right places. Our rural housing strategy builds on the premise that communities should be empowered to define their immediate local requirements and longer-term aspirations. A community-led approach is vital to understanding the unique dynamics that inform access to housing in Scotland's more rural places.

For example, in Dumfries and Galloway it tends to be the case that private landowners have a greater role in the provision of rental accommodation. Added to that, a higher proportion of holiday homes and empty properties inevitably creates additional pressure on the already limited housing supply.

That is why I want to talk about the Dumfries and Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust, which works with small rural communities to identify what they think are the right houses in the right places, as part of a wider drive for rural regeneration in the region. The trust works to increase provision of a broad range of affordable housing across all tenures in rural areas. In only a short time, it has developed an extremely productive working relationship with the Scottish Government and local strategic partners in housing and communities.

The trust's approach is an exemplar of partnership working that understands local challenges but is not constrained by them. Where appropriate, the trust works with large private landowners on the application of the rural housing burden, thereby maintaining long-term affordability in private projects.

The trust is also responsible for the delivery in Dumfries and Galloway of the £25 million rural housing fund. The fund was launched by the Scottish Government in April to increase the supply of affordable housing in all tenures in rural Scotland. The fund is available for three years and provides capital support for new housing and refurbishment projects, as well as a smaller contribution towards relevant feasibility studies. It is open to a wide range of applicants in Scotland, and we must actively encourage Scotland's rural communities to come forward and apply for a decent share of the funding.

It is clear that community-led development has its challenges, but thanks to the engagement efforts of the Dumfries and Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust, housing projects are beginning to emerge that have the potential to increase the capacity of local development trusts and secure the longer-term sustainability of small communities.

At this stage, the trust is providing support to seven applications that have progressed beyond expression-of-interest stage, as well as support for the development of a number of other bids. Six of the seven live applications are from community development trusts and are benefiting from the feasibility and project development element of the rural housing fund, which facilitates community-led housing while addressing specific local demand and minimising the risk for communities. The other application relates to a private landowner.

The projects are diverse in nature and promote a range of approaches to rural housing, including the construction—in partnership with a housing association—of new-build housing; the purchase and refurbishment of long-term empty homes; the refurbishment of a former police station; the seeking of asset transfer from the local authority; and the building of new-build housing on land that has been made available through the national forest land scheme.

The trust values the flexibility of approach from the rural housing fund, which it says is particularly important in addressing small-scale localised rural housing needs, particularly when the intervention is community led. The trust also reports that it sees a close alignment between the rural housing fund and the new Scottish land fund, which, in turn, is allowing community-led housing projects to address the key barrier of availability of land.

I am delighted that the Scottish Government understands the unique challenges that rural communities face. We do not want our rural areas just to survive; we want them to thrive. That is why I welcome initiatives such as the rural housing fund that allow communities to take the driving seat on innovative housing.

16:45

**James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, as I believe that housing is one of the most important issues that the Parliament will consider. It is not just a case of trying to ensure that we have enough homes for the citizens of our country that are wind and watertight; we need to look at the implications for some of the other issues that we as parliamentarians consider. Poor-quality housing and a lack of housing can drain people's ability to advance themselves through education. Poor

housing can also have an impact on the health of the families who live in such housing and, as a result, it can undermine health service budgets. Sadly, in recent years there has been real growth in mental health problems, to which poor housing has been a contributory factor.

I will look at some of the issues around housing, explore how they have affected the private rented sector and touch on the need for us to have a proper, honest and open debate if we want to tackle the housing issues that face us.

John Mason warned Opposition politicians not to say that there was a crisis in housing in Scotland, so I will not alarm him or any other SNP back benchers by talking about a crisis. However, it is important to look at some of the statistics and at what they mean on the ground in Scotland. There are 150,000 people on housing waiting lists, of whom 30,000 are homeless and 10,000 are in temporary accommodation. In Glasgow, there are 24,000 people on the waiting list, of whom 4,500 are in temporary accommodation and 419 are homeless. That picture is replicated all over the country. Rutherglen and Cambuslang Housing Association has 651 people on its lists, but it can rehouse only 45 of them. There are real issues across the country.

We should compare those figures with the number of houses that have been built over the course of recent years. It is being kind to say that progress has been very slow, to say the least. In 2015, there were only 16,000 housing completions—that is 40 per cent below pre-recession levels. That level of house building is not enough to meet the challenges that we face with growing waiting lists.

The impact of that feeds into the private rented sector. Twenty-eight per cent of 18 to 34-year-olds hold a mortgage—the lowest that that rate has been for some time; it is 15 per cent lower than it was at the start of devolution. The lack of affordable housing pushes up rents. In Glasgow, the average rent for a two-bedroom flat is now £668 a month. People are being put under real pressure, and I think that we need to be open and honest about that.

The minister made a very earnest speech—as we would expect from someone new to the brief—in which he praised the Government's record and talked about his plans. However, we need to be honest about the issues that we face, as there will be challenges ahead due to budget constraints.

The Fraser of Allander institute report that was published this morning says that there are potential cuts of £1.6 billion coming down the line for the Scottish Government between now and 2021. Local government potentially faces £1 billion of those cuts, on top of hundreds of millions of

pounds of cuts in recent years. It is no surprise that, under those financial challenges, completions for councils and housing associations are down by 20 per cent, according to today's statistics.

**Kevin Stewart:** Starts are up, and ensuring that new-start housing continues to increase will be the most important thing in the future. I am pleased that housing associations and councils are stepping up to the plate in that regard.

**James Kelly:** The minister might delight himself by standing up and saying that, but people come to our surgeries and talk about staying in overcrowded accommodation or in houses that are not fit to live in because of dampness. There are real issues that Mr Stewart needs to acknowledge as a Government minister, and he needs to be honest about the finances.

The scale of the financial challenge means that, if the SNP Government is serious about achieving the targets that it has set out, it needs to look at progressive taxation. That was an issue in the election, during which we put forward an honest programme and said that we needed to expand the public purse in order to deliver public services and not have an anti-austerity agenda. It is not enough simply to complain about what the Tories in Westminster are wrongly allocating to Scotland; the Government needs to look at the powers that it has and what it is going to do with them.

We face a massive crisis and it is time that we had an open and honest debate not only about how we solve housing issues, but about how we fund housing in future.

16:52

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I welcome the cross-party consensus that the motion seeks to foster. In particular, I thank the minister and the Scottish Government for meeting Liberal Democrat calls for an island housing fund.

The challenge that is before members is great. Put simply, if we are to tackle our national housing crisis, we need to work together towards a comprehensive national homelessness strategy. The reform of housing law to give people the right to a settled home was a landmark achievement in tackling the crisis. Progress has been made, but it is incumbent on us to build on that achievement and to ensure that we see real change for those who need it. Over the next five years, we must work together and put party differences aside.

I welcome the Government's motion, but I encourage it to go even further: building 10,000 houses a year will go a long way towards addressing need but, as Pauline McNeill said, that must not be the limit of our ambition. Every month

that goes by without action makes the ambition harder to achieve.

There are 150,000 households on council house waiting lists; despite their having gold priority, people in my constituency are missing out time and again as houses become available. According to Shelter Scotland's latest report, more than 5,000 children are in temporary accommodation—up 13 per cent from last year—which sets us back still further in our efforts to meet our obligations under article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite the best efforts of the Scottish Government, backed by parties across the chamber, we are slipping backwards in that crucial agenda.

Scotland is facing a perfect storm of unaddressed need and rising demand. The level of urgency is profound, so I welcome the commitment to building 50,000 homes, but that must be the baseline from which we seek to rise. The approach will work for those in need only if we meet the vision of those who are campaigning across the housing sector to ensure that it benefits the people who are at the sharp end in our society. We must do all that we can to make sure that those who are in need of a home get one. The Parliament will do them a disservice if we simply descend into a Dutch auction about numbers.

It is absolutely right that we address the rurality problems that Kate Forbes described, so I thank the minister again for the island housing fund, which will help island communities, given the acute needs that are caused by adverse weather, transport problems and building problems in those areas.

In my remarks today, I particularly want to address the need for a whole-systems approach. We have heard a lot about the problems that walk hand in hand with housing need, including fuel poverty, digital exclusion and other areas of social inequality in our society. We need a whole-systems solution, and I welcome the approach to that in the Government's motion.

Breaking that down into granular detail in my constituency, I note that we need to talk about building communities—not just houses. I will give some examples. The garden city proposal for Gyle falls into the footprint of Ladywell medical practice and will, if it comes on stream, deliver a further 4,000 patients to a doctors' surgery that is already on its knees. Other communities including South Queensferry and Kirkliston are set to nearly double in size due to housing proliferation, yet despite paying Edinburgh council tax, they are not served by affordable direct public transport links into the city that are on a par with those that other suburban communities have. It is small wonder, then, that our fairer fares campaign has already garnered nearly 2,000 signatures. Finally, I point

out that the proposals for development at Cammo would see homes built on much-loved green belt, which will cause at a stroke further gridlock at Barnton, which is the main junction on one of the most congested stretches of arterial route outside the M25.

Do not get me wrong. Liberal Democrats are not opposed in any way to housing development, but it must be intelligent development. Building huge dormitory estates on the outskirts of cities without giving a thought to the impact on local services, transport and infrastructure will only give rise to the manifestation of yet further inequalities in our society. That is why, this week, I have written to the cabinet secretary and ministers asking whether the Government will consider legislation to amend the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 in order to compel developers—through section 75 orders on planning gain—to construct primary healthcare facilities in developments of a certain size, and to factor in pressure on arterial routes.

We need to be much smarter in our housing, which is at the centre of solving the crisis of inequality that we see right across Scotland. We need to see housing as an enabler that gives people—wherever they are—better quality of life. It is only by having good-quality housing in the right places with local services, transport links and broadband connectivity that meet people's needs that we can ensure that we deliver the transformative change that is needed across the country. I thank the Government for bringing this debate to the chamber.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Cole-Hamilton. Ben Macpherson will be the last speaker in the open debate. I remind members that all those who took part in the debate must be in the chamber for the closing speeches, which will follow.

16:58

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** I, too, warmly welcome this debate on housing, which constituents consistently raise with me in surgeries and is a top priority in my constituency.

The journey towards ensuring that everyone in Scotland has access to a warm, well-designed, good-quality and affordable home is, of course, an on-going process and is, as has been articulated in the chamber today, a shared aspiration for us all. Today marks another positive step on that journey, with ambitious and achievable proposals from the Minister for Local Government and Housing and a firm commitment from the Scottish Government to build at least 50,000 affordable homes during the current session of Parliament,

including 35,000 affordable homes for social rent. That investment will provide accommodation for families, individuals and people who are in need, and it will deliver invaluable economic stimulus in these challenging financial circumstances.

As Alex Cole-Hamilton articulated, the need to build more homes is particularly pressing here in Edinburgh, where the population is growing so strongly. I have the privilege of representing Leith, which is the densest urban area of Scotland. It is vibrant, diverse and bustling, and it is undergoing a process of renewal, but it will never lose its character.

I also have the honour of representing north Edinburgh, which is also a very strong community that is in the process of regeneration, and is facing challenges but undergoing positive change. My constituency is already meaningfully benefiting from Scottish Government investment in affordable housing. In collaboration with the City of Edinburgh Council and various housing associations and developers, more affordable homes are being delivered in north Edinburgh and throughout Leith. For example, it was announced today that 236 new affordable homes will be built at the Shrubhill site, which I warmly welcome. I hope that the minister enjoyed his visit to that site in Leith this morning.

As well as having a positive benefit in itself, public sector housing investment is having a multiplier effect; it is helping to boost employment, providing opportunities to small businesses and, in my constituency, helping vibrant creative industries to grow and develop. Public sector investment is also attracting new private interest in investment. For example, in recent weeks and months, I have been in discussions with social entrepreneurs and charities about proposals for innovative housing and regeneration projects in Leith and across the north of Edinburgh, including at the waterfront, which Andy Wightman rightly highlighted earlier. I look forward to supporting those initiatives where I can, in the coming months.

What is happening in my constituency is demonstrative of the fact that the Scottish Government's commitment to house building is having a positive economic effect as well as a meaningful social impact, and is encouraging confidence and creativity as well as building homes for the public good. That is why I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to invest £3 billion in housing throughout this parliamentary session. That capital investment will not only provide more places to live for our fellow citizens, but will create 14,000 full-time equivalent jobs and generate £1.8 billion of economic activity a year—positive demand-led economic growth with multidimensional social benefits in challenging

economic times. Together with measures to support the industry and help people into home ownership, Scottish Government capital investment in housing is having, and will continue to have, a transformative effect despite Brexit, the challenges of austerity and significant cuts to Scotland's capital budget.

Recently, I met the Rock Trust, which is a remarkable organisation that is doing inspiring work to support young men and women in our communities who have, usually through no fault of their own, become homeless. They are young men and women who have grown up in austerity and have often been subjected to the negative consequences of welfare reform, and are part of a generation for whom the cost of housing is a major problem. We must always do more for vulnerable people in our society, and the measures that have been proposed by the Scottish Government today to build 35,000 homes for social rent will make a difference for younger citizens, families and individuals.

Through investment and legislative changes, whether in planning or land reform, private sector rents or measures to address fuel poverty, the Scottish Government's programme for housing is reassuringly realistic and inspiringly ambitious. It will deliver new homes, investment in current housing stock, improved urban environments and helpful economic stimulus. It will help to create sustainable growth, promote social justice, strengthen communities and tackle inequality. For those reasons and others, I commend the minister's bold agenda and look forward to working with the Scottish Government, other MSPs, the City of Edinburgh Council, housing associations and others to help to deliver more affordable housing for the people I represent in Edinburgh Northern and Leith.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to winding-up speeches. I call Alex Rowley to wind up for Labour.

17:04

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The debate has been positive. I believe that there is consensus in the Parliament that we need to take action to address the housing crisis in Scotland. Without getting into who is to blame for what, the statistics speak for themselves and show that we have a housing crisis in Scotland that needs to be tackled.

I welcome the tone of the minister's opening speech. Labour is absolutely committed to working with the Government in the Parliament to deliver 50,000 affordable homes, with 35,000 of them for social rent, but I hope that we can go further.

I know from experience in Fife Council that delivering that level of housing is not without its challenges. That is why Labour has said that we need a national housing strategy—a plan—for Scotland. Sitting alongside that, councils need to be empowered to establish local housing partnerships that can deliver.

Back in 2011-12, when I was the leader of the Labour group in Fife, we proposed in our manifesto to build 2,700 houses for rent in Fife over a five-year period. I am happy to say that Fife Council is on target and will deliver those 2,700 houses by April next year. That experience led me to write a paper about the housing crisis and why we must build more public sector houses in Scotland. The paper sets out that experience and the facts on why we need to drive forward.

I highlight in the paper that, when I was in Paisley last year, I met a family who had moved from a cold, damp house into a new housing association house. The family explained to me that the daughter had suffered continually from asthma attacks and had very often been taken to hospital, but since the family had moved into their new house, with its fuel efficiency and everything else, the little girl had not had to go back to the hospital once. James Kelly's point about housing being among the most important issues that we will debate in the Parliament because of its impact on all other social policies that we will have responsibility for is absolutely correct.

The family also told me about their monthly income. In their old damp, cold house, they paid 25 per cent of that monthly income on heating and fuel. When they moved into the new house, that figure shifted to less than 5 per cent of their total household income. If we are serious about tackling inequality and poverty, we absolutely have to tackle Scotland's housing crisis.

We should not forget homelessness. I started to become concerned this year when I read different things from charities about the number of rough sleepers there are. When I tried to find the statistics, I found it very difficult to find out how many rough sleepers there actually are. I welcome the launch of Shelter Scotland's homelessness: far from fixed campaign, which Richard Leonard and Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned, because homelessness is far from fixed. I hope that we recognise across the chamber that homelessness is far from fixed and that more must be done to eradicate the unacceptable situation in which far too many people in Scotland still, in 2016, find themselves. We need to give a commitment to tackle that.

Alex Johnstone for the Conservatives gave a critique of the SNP's record to date and talked about looking at other ways to secure funding. I draw attention to Unison Scotland's proposals,

which I hope the minister has read, looking at the pension funds. We can certainly start to look at more investment through the pension funds.

Establishing the local partnerships is about getting it right. Homes for Scotland quite rightly says that we need to look at not only homes for rent, but homes to buy. We need to encourage that process. I am sure that, in the coming months, we will see a lot more about the planning processes in Scotland.

I will talk about the capacity to deliver the 50,000 affordable houses. Fife had the capacity to do what it did because there was such a dip in the private market. If we got private housing moving tomorrow and we started to build the 50,000 houses in the private sector that Alex Johnstone talked about, we would have a major problem with capacity because we have a skills gap in the building trade in Scotland. By setting out a clear and strategic plan through a national house-building programme for Scotland, we can start to plan. We can work with all our partners, such as the colleges, the builders, and the private sector. If we do that we can—as the experience in Fife showed—create apprenticeships and local jobs and support local companies. It is about that type of partnership. Emma Harper talked about the need to involve more local housing associations and gave examples from her area. Creating a local housing partnership in every area is not about creating bureaucracy—that is already there. It is about bringing together the housing associations with the local authorities and getting people like planners and those who own the land sitting around the same table and starting to move the agenda forward.

I give credit to Fife, which has built 2,700 houses in the past five years. Let us look at that example and go forward, working together to tackle the housing crisis in Scotland.

17:11

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** I am very pleased to have the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

As we have heard from my colleagues in the chamber, the Scottish Conservatives believe that it is necessary to build 100,000 new homes across all housing sectors during the current parliamentary session. It is also essential that the Government ensures that nobody lives in a hard-to-heat home. Such a policy would be assisted by ensuring that Scotland invests in clean, secure and affordable energy.

Having the ability to call a place home is one of the most instinctive human aspirations that I can think of. The shortage of housing across all sectors of the market is concerning for all, but not

least for young people and growing families. I have lived everywhere. I have been a tenant of Glasgow City Council, a homeowner and have rented privately. My concern for the next generation is about the point at which my 22-year-old son will be able to get on to the housing ladder in any capacity.

Although I recognise the Scottish Government's attempts to combat Scotland's housing shortage, with its commitment to 50,000 affordable homes during the next parliamentary session—35,000 of which will be social rented homes—I will repeat the sentiments of my colleague Graham Simpson that we need to see real action from the Scottish Government. Following its failure to meet its original 2011 manifesto target of building more than 6,000 new social rented houses a year, it would be fair to say that we can be slightly cynical about the Scottish Government's ability to fulfil its own policy promises, as in 2015-16, for example, that figure had dropped to less than 3,500 in the year.

**John Mason:** Will the member welcome the abolition of the right to buy, which has been a real boost?

**Annie Wells:** The SNP promised to build 30,000 social rented homes. We have heard here today that it cleared that target by 10 per cent but, when it came into power, it lowered the target to 20,000 new homes and created 10 per cent more than that. We are aware that the Scottish Government likes to move the goalposts to meet targets.

I will turn my attention now to the region that I represent, which is Glasgow, for those who did not know.

Glasgow City Council's draft housing strategy for the next five years reveals that between 2001 and 2011, the owner-occupied sector in the city reduced by 1.2 per cent and the social rented sector saw a huge 10.6 per cent reduction. In an area such as Glasgow, where social rents make up a larger percentage of housing stock—an estimated 36 per cent of its 300,000 residential properties—the impact is much greater. That pressure can be felt nowhere more than in Govanhill, where I recently met members of the community campaign group to discuss the issues that are affecting an area that has unfortunately become infamous in Glasgow.

After meeting a number of residents during a walkabout, I found that their main concerns were the appalling living conditions caused by dilapidated properties, fly-tipping in the back courts, vermin and crime. Above all, however, and no doubt due to a lack of affordable social housing options, rogue landlords charging ludicrous rents

came top of the list for ingraining poverty in the area.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Ms Wells give way?

**Annie Wells:** I will just finish this point.

That is why I was very pleased to see the First Minister onsite at the Govanhill affordable housing scheme last week and that is why I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to build 50,000 extra affordable homes. However, I feel that there is much more to be done.

**Kevin Stewart:** I thank Ms Wells for taking the intervention.

The Government has invested a significant sum of money in taking over some of the properties in Govanhill to make sure that folk are living in reasonable conditions. Does Ms Wells agree with me that that investment is welcome, that there is more to be done, but that in co-operation with Glasgow City Council and Govanhill Housing Association, we have made major efforts in that regard?

**Annie Wells:** I have been in Govanhill and I know that the Government is putting money into Govanhill—I know that there was a £9.3 million initiative in Govanhill on an enhanced area of four blocks of houses. However, it is a bigger problem than that. I welcome the fact that we are putting in further investment but I still think that we need to be doing more in Govanhill and areas like it throughout Glasgow. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is putting that effort into the area.

To follow on from what Alex Cole-Hamilton said, when we are building houses, we need to look at the community that we are building them in and we need to put community at the heart of housing, whether it is social housing or private housing. I was at one of the housing associations with the minister during recess and we visited the Camlachie Housing Development, which I think we both agreed was a great development, with the community very much at the heart of it. I would like to see more of that approach.

I also want to stress the importance of setting numerical targets for increasing housing stock across all tenures by working with the private sector. It is estimated that around 1,500 private houses used to be built in Glasgow every year—a level of building that we have not seen since the 2008-09 recession. Worryingly for Scotland as a whole, statistics reveal that private house building is down by 44 per cent since the SNP came into power in 2007.

As has been proposed by the Scottish Conservatives today, we need to look beyond the 50,000 affordable homes and create an extra 50,000 homes in the private sector over the next

five years. We need to be creative in how we do that and we have proposed a number of policies that would assist with that.

It could be done, for example, by providing grants to private landlords to build new properties in exchange for them letting out the properties at affordable rents for a given time period and making use of empty properties by bringing them back into use. In Glasgow alone, it was estimated that, as of March 2016, nearly 1,900 properties had been lying vacant for more than six months. We have already heard that Glasgow has a waiting list of 24,000 and that will only increase.

Further to that, as Maurice Corry pointed out, we would also like to encourage local authorities to compile publicly accessible brownfield land registers, allowing house builders, small and large, to explore their options more easily.

The final point that I would like to make is the need for the Scottish Government to prioritise ensuring that no one in Scotland lives in a hard-to-heat home. Shockingly, nearly a third of households in Scotland live in fuel poverty. Although the Scottish Government has proposed a £0.5 billion investment over the next four years, the Scottish Conservatives have recognised the importance of the issue by proposing the spending of £1 billion over the next five years.

As Alex Johnstone mentioned, energy efficiency could be incentivised through LBTT discounts and efforts should be made to create a dynamic energy mix policy so that fuel poverty can be eradicated in Scotland or, at the very least, start to decline.

In short, the Scottish Conservatives want to see an emphasis on increased housing stock across all tenures as well as a concerted effort to eradicate fuel poverty.

17:20

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** Any debate on housing is always much more than a debate about bricks and mortar, important though they are. A breadth and depth of issues need to be addressed and we all need to understand them. In particular, we need to understand where to go further and faster. Members have touched on issues to do with infrastructure, construction skills, finance, access to land and of course planning. Many speakers from across the chamber rightly spoke about the links between housing and social justice, our economy, our environment, fuel poverty, the attainment gap and health inequalities. Many members also welcomed the rural housing fund and of course Mr Stewart's announcement today that there will also be an islands housing fund,

which will sit alongside that and which recognises the unique needs of our island communities.

I make it clear to Alex Johnstone that our target is at least 50,000 affordable homes, 35,000 of which will be for social rent. I was somewhat puzzled by his contribution and that of other Tories, as they made no specific commitment to social rented housing. The Tories have a bit of a cheek to complain about reducing budget subsidies when there was a 26 per cent reduction to our capital budget. Of course, the Tory Government also withdrew the green deal, which meant a loss of consequential funding that could have been used to tackle fuel poverty.

**Alex Johnstone:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Angela Constance:** Certainly.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I had a feeling that Mr Johnstone would take the bait.

**Alex Johnstone:** Along with everyone else in the chamber, I realise that there was a squeeze in finances during the financial crisis, but the SNP Government, in a previous incarnation, chose to target the housing budget for a 40 per cent cut in a single year. It reined back from that, because it realised how deep the cut was, but it was this Government's decision.

**Angela Constance:** It was also this Government's decision, in the previous session of Parliament, to invest £1.7 billion, which supported 30,000 affordable homes. Looking forward, it is also this Government's decision to invest £3 billion to ensure that we achieve 50,000 affordable homes. It is also this Government that chooses to invest £35 million a year to mitigate policies such as the bedroom tax—we are always mitigating welfare reform. Of course, we cannot have a debate about housing and a whole-systems approach to tackling the need for more housing without acknowledging the detrimental impact of Westminster's austerity and welfare reform, which most certainly has made a contribution to the rising level of evictions, given that the biggest reason for that rising level is that people are unable to pay their rent.

On a more conciliatory note, Pauline McNeill acknowledged that the target of 50,000 affordable homes is ambitious and that it would be quite an achievement if it were to be met. Of course, Richard Leonard encouraged us all to be more ambitious. Pauline McNeill's point that we need to focus on the how as well as the numbers certainly struck a chord with me, as it is an important point. It is important that we recognise all of the underlying issues, as well as recognising—as do the Tories and others—that we indeed had a financial crash and the worst recession since the depression. Nonetheless, the level of modern



apprenticeships in construction is back to pre-recession levels, which should be welcomed.

I gently point out to Richard Leonard, who gave us an interesting historical perspective on housing and Parliament's role in it, that it was the SNP Government that had the courage to take through the legislation to abolish the right to buy, thereby safeguarding 15,500 homes over the next decade for future generations.

A number of really good points were made about the role of local authorities. The City of Edinburgh Council, North Lanarkshire Council and Fife Council, to name but a few, should be commended for the progress that they are making and for their ambitious targets at local level for affordable housing. The important point of learning from Fife Council in particular is how it took an all-council approach and galvanised efforts across the public sector to reach out and set ambitious targets. I am delighted to hear that it is making good progress on that. There is much for other councils to learn from councils that have been trailblazers in the matter.

It is not surprising that we have had much discussion about planning. It is the Government's aim to simplify and strengthen our planning system. Over the summer recess, Mr Stewart announced that there would be 10 immediate points of action following from the review of planning. We will publish a white paper before the end of the year and that will be an important point for the Parliament to focus on prior to the introduction of the planning bill. As evidence of imminent action, there will also be pilots of simplified planning zones.

I stress that the Government wants to support the provision of more housing across all tenures. That is why we have invested heavily in the help-to-buy scheme, which has supported 22,000 people—three quarters of whom are young people between the ages of 18 and 34—to purchase a home of their own.

I do not accept Andy Wightman's description of our approach as simply acceptant of the laissez-faire private sector. We are trying sensibly and pragmatically to focus on the levers that we have to support social housing in particular. However, I agree with his point that we have to regard housing in all its forms and tenures as part of a public infrastructure that contributes to the public good.

Points have been made about homelessness and fuel poverty. I reassure members that homelessness is far from being forgotten. Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned the landmark legislation that we pulled together in the Parliament, but what happens on the ground is crucial. Yes, homelessness applications have reduced, as have

the number of households that are assessed as homeless, but I will not demur from the fact that we have some road to travel before we eliminate and eradicate homelessness in Scotland.

Although the number of children in temporary accommodation has reduced, I do not want any child in Scotland to be in temporary accommodation. Of course, we have to acknowledge that there will be women and children who seek refuge. There will also be women, children, families and men who are faced with emergencies and have no alternative other than to access temporary accommodation. However, we must ensure that that temporary accommodation is for the shortest time possible and is of a suitable quality.

Fuel poverty is at 35 per cent in Scotland. If it were not for rocketing fuel costs, it would be at about 9 per cent. I am glad that there is cross-party consensus for a warm homes bill. It is important that we listen to the findings of the strategic fuel poverty group and the rural fuel poverty group prior to introducing such a bill later in the parliamentary session.

Alex Rowley and James Kelly touched on some of the annual housing statistics that were published today. There is much to be welcomed in those statistics. They present a strong platform on which to build to make further progress but they identify some challenges on new housing supply and new-build completions that will certainly have to focus our minds and which underline why we have to increase our endeavours and will have to monitor progress carefully across all tenures. However, it is fair to say that housing starts are up by 4 per cent. That is higher than at any time since the financial crash. Affordable housing supply has increased by 26 per cent over the year.

This Government has an excellent record in delivering affordable housing. In the previous session of Parliament, we exceeded our target of building 30,000 affordable homes by 10 per cent. That is because, when we reached our target, we most certainly did not stop there. The figures speak for themselves. From 2007 to March 2016, we delivered 60,704 houses. That compares well with the 38,015 that were delivered by our predecessors between 2000-01 and 2006-7. Of course, our predecessors had the privilege of rising budgets. We have managed to deliver more affordable housing than them—on average, the figure is up by 24 per cent a year—at a time when our capital budgets are being slashed, when we are in a period of financial austerity and crisis and when we await the outcome of Brexit.

Since 2007, we have built more homes per head of the population than is the case in England and Wales. Comparisons with our nearest friends and neighbours might not be the be all and end all, and

they should not be the limit of our ambition, but they are nonetheless interesting and important, because that higher per capita rate of housebuilding in Scotland has enabled 44,600 more homes to be built than would have been built at the lower per capita rate that we see in England and Wales. That number of homes—as would have been pointed out by George Adam, had he spoken in the debate—is equivalent to a new town the size of Paisley.

We built 33,000 affordable homes in the previous parliamentary session, and we will build on that number with £1.7 billion of investment, which will be ramped up to £3 billion, despite the uncertainty of Westminster austerity and Brexit. We are absolutely determined to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes. That is an ambitious target, an affordable target and a target that I believe is achievable.

## Decision Time

17:31

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are three questions to be put. The first question is, that amendment S5M-01392.3, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01392, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on more investment for more homes Scotland, 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)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)  
 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)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 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)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 29, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-01392.4, in the name of Pauline McNeill, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01392, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on more investment for more homes Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (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)  
 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)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)

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)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 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)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

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)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)

Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 27, Against 67, Abstentions 29.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-01392, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on more investment for more homes Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 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)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

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)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)

Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 93, Against 30, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises that providing the right houses in the right places is essential to ensuring that everyone has access to a warm and affordable home; welcomes the shared objective across local authorities and housing associations to deliver 35,000 social rented homes, as part of the wider Scottish Government commitment from them and other partners to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes, backed by expenditure of over £3 billion over the course of the current parliamentary session; welcomes the increased subsidy rates for housing associations, the promise of five-year resource planning assumptions for local authority areas, and agrees that a whole system approach to housing is essential; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to action on infrastructure, land and planning in support of increased housing supply across all tenures as part of the More Homes Scotland approach, including the new housing infrastructure fund to unlock key development sites, the Scottish Government's positive response to the planning review and commitment to land reform, and welcomes the continued commitment to delivering housing as a key way of promoting inclusive growth, supporting each year approximately 14,000 full-time equivalent jobs and generating £1.8 billion in activity.

## NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Services)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S5M-00505, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on save our services. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes with concern reports that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's final draft local delivery plan includes proposals to transfer birthing services from the community maternity units at the Vale of Leven Hospital and Inverclyde Royal Hospital to the Royal Alexandra Hospital (RAH) in Paisley and the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital (QEUH) in Glasgow; rejects the assertion in the plan that "extensive public engagement" has taken place on the proposals and is unaware of any attempt by the NHS board to consult members of the public; believes that denying pregnant women in Dumbarton, Vale of Leven, Helensburgh and Lomond the choice to give birth at the Vale of Leven Hospital runs contrary to the *Vision for the Vale*, which was published in 2009 and committed the Scottish Government to ensuring that the community maternity unit would be "sustained and promoted"; understands that the plan also includes proposals to close the rehabilitation wards at Lightburn Hospital and transfer emergency paediatric services to the QEUH with the downgrading of the children's ward at the RAH; believes that the NHS board will make a decision on the proposals on 28 June 2016, and notes calls for the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to intervene and pledge to work with local communities to prevent the closure of health services.

17:36

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I very much welcome the opportunity to hold a debate on the proposed cuts to health services across Greater Glasgow and Clyde—specifically those that are proposed at the Vale of Leven hospital. Other colleagues will cover the cuts to the children's ward at the Royal Alexandra hospital, the cuts to maternity services at Inverclyde royal hospital, the cuts to in-patient facilities at the centre for integrative care and the closure of Lightburn hospital. All those cuts were highlighted in January this year and are back today with a vengeance.

I welcome to the chamber campaigners from across the country and from my local area. I single out the hospitalwatch campaign group and the *Lennox Herald* for their consistent campaign on protecting local health services in my area. I also welcome Marc McLean as a very lonely figure in the press gallery.

Six months ago, we stood in this chamber and debated cuts to our local health services. At that time, the Scottish National Party Government said that there was nothing to worry about. It said that we were wrong and the leaked health board paper

had no standing—basically, "Nothing to see here." In the run-up to the election, the attack on us became even more shrill. We were liars and we were simply scaremongering. Promises were made to local communities, including mine, by SNP candidates, the then Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport and even the First Minister.

I like to keep election leaflets to see what promises have been made. Let me read from this one, which was popped through the door of every household in Dumbarton constituency during the election. These are the words of Shona Robison:

"I have been consistently clear that this Government sees a bright future for the hospital, which plays a crucial role in the local healthcare system."

She also says, in the same leaflet:

"I will not approve any move away from the Vision for the Vale commitment".

I absolutely support that. Ms Robison has been abundantly clear. However, the health board has not quite got the message, so the suspicion in my community is that a deal has been struck behind the scenes.

In 2009, I whole-heartedly welcomed the vision for the Vale of Leven hospital. It contained commitments to deliver a wide range of services at the local hospital. While we have seen staff numbers drop and a substantial number of clinics cancelled, the vision remains an important commitment for local people in my community.

So important was the community midwifery unit for the Vale vision, it was pictured on the front page. Again, I like to keep Government documents. I never know when they will become useful. The exact wording was:

"The Community Maternity Unit will be sustained and promoted".

That is the very same maternity unit that is up for closure today. The number of births at the community maternity unit has fallen sharply in the past year, despite the birth rate for women remaining steady. Since 2009, the number of births to women who are resident in Dumbarton, Vale of Leven and Helensburgh has fallen by only 8 per cent, while the number of deliveries at the Vale of Leven CMU has fallen by nearly 70 per cent, with the largest decrease occurring between 2014 and 2015. That suggests that the health board has not been serious about promoting the CMU to local women—which takes me on to its marketing activity.

The health board's marketing plan promised to promote the CMU with media releases highlighting the positive achievements, editorial briefings and case studies with volunteer mothers speaking out in support. However, a search of the online

archives of the *Lennox Herald* shows that there were only five positive stories about the Vale CMU between 2008 and 2011. They are outnumbered by stories about the health board reducing the opening hours, midwives being redeployed to the Royal Alexandra hospital and campaigners fighting against threats to local health services. Where were the pictures of newborn babies that we all like to see in our local paper?

We were also promised leaflets, posters and information for general practitioners across a wide catchment area. Over the summer, I contacted every GP practice in Dumbarton, Vale of Leven, Helensburgh, Lomond, Clydebank, Bearsden and Milngavie. They were asked to respond to a survey on marketing activity for the CMU. Almost half of them responded, and responses came from every geographical area. Three quarters of the GPs were not aware of any marketing activity for the CMU, and no GPs currently have information leaflets or posters on the walls of their surgeries to promote the Vale unit. At the Vale hospital reception there is not a leaflet to be had. We were promised that the health board would promote the unit, but it has completely failed to do that.

Along came the new centralised maternity booking service, which was introduced in June 2014. It cut out the GP and diverted newly pregnant women to a call centre that is based at the Southern general hospital. Surprise, surprise! That coincided with a 57 per cent drop in the number of babies who were born at the Vale of Leven hospital, even though the total number of births by local mums actually rose by 6 per cent. There were 77 babies born at the Vale in 2013-14, 33 in 2014-15, and the number is down to a handful now. I accuse the Government of closing the unit by stealth.

In May 2010, the CMU was downgraded from a 24-hour service to an 8 am to 8 pm service, with midwives on call during the night. The negative publicity that was generated by the health board's changes further undermined confidence in the unit. I say to the Government: please do not tell me that this is about safety. I have demonstrated that the actions of the health board have undermined the CMU. I hope that the Government is not really suggesting that CMUs across the country, of which there are many, are unsafe.

The health board has not committed to a formal public consultation of service users and the wider public. Instead we have an engagement strategy that is based on a consultation that was conducted almost a decade ago. The health board just cannot be serious. We need a full three-month consultation with public meetings, so that people have a genuine opportunity to make their voices heard.

I want to believe the health secretary and the Government when they say that there will be no cuts at the Vale. I really want them to fulfil that promise. If the health secretary's commitment is true, why has not one SNP MSP signed my motion—not even George Adam, Stuart McMillan, Ivan McKee or Gil Paterson, who have a direct interest in the area? If the health secretary's commitment is true, why has the change not been designated as a major service change? I would be pleased to hear from the minister when she sums up.

If it is designated as a major service change, it must go to ministers for final sign-off. It would be unacceptable if the health secretary said that the matter was for the health board, because that would certainly—as sure as night follows day—sound the death knell for the Vale's maternity unit.

If the health secretary is saying that there will be no cuts at the Vale, why on earth are we having a pointless and expensive consultation? There is only one thing left to say: "Save our services, deliver what you promised just six months ago, and stop the cuts."

17:45

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** There is no doubt that the second decade of the 21st century is a pivotal moment for healthcare and healthcare systems—not just in Scotland but around the world. An ageing population, the shift to more multidisciplinary working and rapid advances in research and technology—to cite just some of the trends—present challenges and opportunities that the national health service's founders could scarcely have imagined. The decisions that we take today on research, on our NHS's organisation, on relationships between investments in social, community, primary and secondary care and on the education and training of the health and social care workforce of the future will determine how well our health service responds to the challenges and opportunities.

People in Scotland should get the care and support that they need, in the right place and at the right time. That is why we are transforming our health and social care system to ensure that it keeps pace with Scotland's changing needs.

Notwithstanding that, I support Inverclyde royal hospital and the community maternity unit. I have campaigned to save services in the past and I will do so again. On social media last week, I posted the consultation document that Jackie Baillie referred to in order to encourage people to get involved. I will meet the chief executive and the chair of the health board this week, and I will meet the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport later

this month. I have been raising, and will continue to raise, the issue in order to encourage the electorate to get involved and to make their thoughts known.

Despite the cuts to the Scottish Government's budget from the United Kingdom Government since 2010, Audit Scotland's report "NHS in Scotland 2015" found that health resource spending has increased in real terms. Audit Scotland confirmed that a real-terms resource increase has taken place in every single year from 2008-09 to 2014-15. Westminster has cut the Scottish Government's capital spending budget by 25 per cent, but our resource spending has increased in real terms, as per the Scottish Government's commitment and as confirmed by Audit Scotland. Scotland also has a record-high NHS workforce and continues to make advances in diagnosis, treatment and care.

Jackie Baillie spoke about the past and about the campaign that took place in 2008. Through that campaign, Jackie Baillie, other parliamentarians and I succeeded in maintaining the community maternity units, and I would still like those units to be maintained. However, we cannot forget that it was under the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive that the cuts agenda started. We lost the consultant-led maternity service in 2003, which is when the maternity unit issues started. A review took place in 2008, when Jackie Baillie, others and I succeeded in campaigning to save the current formulation of the units, as I said.

**Jackie Baillie:** Our communities would not forgive us if we simply blamed each other for things that happened in the past or which are currently happening. Will Stuart McMillan join me to resist the cuts? Will he explain why he found it difficult to support my motion?

**Stuart McMillan:** I genuinely appreciate Jackie Baillie's contributions in the chamber, but I have said today and outside Parliament that I am campaigning to save the community maternity unit at Inverclyde royal hospital. I cannot make my position any clearer to her.

Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board has a record-high budget of more than £2 billion, which has increased by more than 27 per cent under this Government. Nevertheless, it has been announced that the board is to press ahead with further scrutiny of the proposals that include the closure of seven in-patient beds at the centre for integrative care, and closure of the community maternity units at the IRH and the Vale of Leven hospital in Alexandria. Although it is clear that antenatal and postnatal courses at the Rankin unit in Greenock will remain, the health board proposes to cease birthing services at the IRH.

There are typically 30 members on Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS board, most of whom are health and finance professionals. The seven remaining members are Labour councillors—one representative from each local authority in the health board area. Once again, we have seen evidence that, unfortunately, the week before—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You will have to hurry along, Mr McMillan.

**Stuart McMillan:** I am concluding, Presiding Officer. The week before the health board made its proposals, the representative from Inverclyde resigned, so Inverclyde was left with no voice on the board when it made its decisions on the matter.

To conclude, Presiding Officer—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes, please.

**Stuart McMillan:** I will take no lessons from the Labour Party on NHS cuts. I will always stand for services being delivered at local level. That is my past record; that will continue to be my record.

17:51

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I pay tribute to Jackie Baillie for securing today's debate and thank her for her commitment to the Vale of Leven hospital. I know that local people in Dumbarton and, indeed, the campaigners at the Vale appreciate all her efforts in the Parliament and beyond. I also pay tribute to the campaigners of all the services across the west of Scotland and beyond who dedicate so much of their time to protecting the local community services, and I thank our hard-working and dedicated NHS staff. The pressures and the failures that we see in our NHS are despite, not because of, our staff, who are undervalued, underresourced and overworked by the Scottish Government.

I am quite disappointed. Having heard Mr McMillan's speech, one would almost have thought that his party had not been in government for almost 10 years, that health was not devolved and that someone else was in control of our NHS. The reality is that the NHS in Scotland is already independent. This Parliament and the Scottish Government set the NHS's budget and its priorities, and they oversee its delivery. If there are any failures in the NHS and its services, those are the failures of this Government, and trying to blame someone else is simply shameful.

All seven Labour councillors on the health board unanimously opposed the board's cuts. The reality is that the rest of the health board is appointed by the Scottish Government, and it is they who need to up their game.



**Stuart McMillan:** Mr Sarwar will be aware that, the week before the proposal was published, the Labour councillor from Inverclyde Council resigned, so no Inverclyde voice was left at the board meeting.

**Anas Sarwar:** Mr McMillan says that he is a voice for Inverclyde. Let us hear what that voice said during the election campaign. He pretty much called the Labour candidate, Siobhan McCready, a liar for bringing up the cuts that were coming. He said that she was

“playing carelessly with the Inverclyde population by indulging in unfounded information about threats to health services she has gleaned from informal conversation with friends”.

Perhaps Mr McMillan should have “conversation with friends” across Inverclyde who are disappointed with his failure to stand up to his own Government and protect services at Inverclyde Royal hospital.

Responses to freedom of information requests from the Labour Party have found that we face almost £1 billion of cuts to our NHS over the next four years. What was the Government's response? It did not own up to the fact that we have challenges in the NHS; instead, it said that there are no cuts and went on to say that anyone who suggests that there are is being completely false. That information came from freedom of information responses across the country. The Government should speak to the campaigners at all the hospital services across the country.

Jackie Baillie was called a liar during the election campaign for saying that the Vale of Leven maternity unit was under threat, but she was proved to be right. The hard-working campaigners in the public gallery deserve their time with the health minister, so that she can explain why they were lied to during the election campaign. I have mentioned Inverclyde. Siobhan McCready was labelled a liar for talking about the proposed closure of maternity services at the Inverclyde royal hospital. Expectant mothers in the west of Scotland deserve better than that.

Given that we are talking about letting people down, let me show members the front page of the *Greenock Telegraph* before the election, where, in order to win votes, our First Minister shamelessly said that there would be no cuts to services in Inverclyde. What has happened? There are proposed cuts and closures at the Inverclyde Royal hospital. The Government cannot run away from its failures on the matter.

What about Paisley? Neil Bibby was accused of being a liar for saying that there was a potential downgrading of the paediatric service at the Royal Alexandra hospital. What has happened? We have seen the facts: there are proposals to

downgrade the service. Mothers and families in Paisley deserve better.

It is the same with Monklands district general hospital and the centre for integrative care—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, Mr Sarwar.

**Anas Sarwar:** Our patients deserve better and so do our NHS staff. [*Applause.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask people in the public gallery not to clap or shout out—not that you have shouted out so far, but just in case. Thank you.

17:55

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the motion that Jackie Baillie has lodged on an issue that is of huge significance not simply to colleagues who represent constituents in the west of Scotland but—more important—to the people of West Dunbartonshire themselves, who have utilised the fantastic services that staff at the community maternity unit at the Vale of Leven hospital have provided for many years. I represent the Highlands and Islands, so I am acutely aware that the service has been used by people in, for example, Argyll and Bute, in my region. The Vale of Leven hospital has a wider geographic reach than might at first be imagined.

The Scottish Government's programme for government continually reinforces the point about the need for the NHS to be more community orientated. Indeed, the first of the four priorities on health for the coming year is

“empowering a truly community health service ... to deliver the reforms needed for successful community health services”.

With that in mind, it is understandable that so many people will be puzzled that the Scottish Government's idea of delivering more community health services is to sit on its hands, as the CMU is likely to be closed and expectant mothers will be told to make a journey of an extra half hour to an hour to Paisley or Glasgow instead. That is not building more community-led services; it is dismantling them. That is, rightly, a matter of grave concern.

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Donald Cameron:** I am sorry, but I have only four minutes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the extra time if you want to take the intervention, Mr Cameron.

**Donald Cameron:** I will take the intervention.

**Aileen Campbell:** I clarify for Mr Cameron that, under the board's proposals, there will be no closure of the CMUs. I think that he inaccurately said that there would be closure.

**Donald Cameron:** I said that the unit is "likely" to be closed.

Among some of the reasons that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has presented in favour of closure is an issue that the Scottish Conservatives have been raising for some time—short staffing, which cuts across the NHS. In its paper on the matter, the health board said:

"we are finding it difficult to recruit to the CMUs as you need experienced staff who live close enough to attend when a woman presents in labour".

With a 16 per cent rise in the number of nursing and midwifery vacancies across Scotland in the three months to June, it is no wonder that such a vital service will struggle to cope with demand. The staffing crisis lies at the door of the party that has run the NHS in Scotland for the past nine years.

In 2009, the "Vision for the Vale of Leven Hospital" document stated clearly that the CMU facilities at the Vale of Leven hospital would be protected until 2011. Even as recently as June 2016, the First Minister said:

"we will not approve proposals that run counter to the vision for the Vale."—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2016; c 16.]

Despite those warm words, not a single SNP MSP has given their support to Jackie Baillie's motion. There must be questions about the commitments to the CMU that this Government has made.

Stuart McMillan attempted to contrast the Scottish Government and the UK Government. Let me draw my own contrast: it is well known that NHS spending in England has increased by more than NHS spending in Scotland.

Nearly 2,000 people have signed the petition to prevent closure. It is clear that this is a heartfelt issue in the West Dunbartonshire area. Although the health board has launched a re-engagement process, it must ensure that that does not become a talking shop in which the outcome has already been decided. The process must be open and must truly reflect the feelings of respondents, many of whom will have first-hand experience of using the service.

If the Scottish Government is truly committed to the vision for the Vale and to promoting more community-based services, it and the SNP will join me, my colleagues and others across the chamber in supporting Jackie Baillie's motion. I commend her for her persistence in pursuing the matter.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** As quite a few members still wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Jackie Baillie.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can see lots of happy faces.

18:00

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Jackie Baillie for securing this important debate.

This morning, along with Kezia Dugdale, I met dozens of parents and grandparents at the RAH in Paisley, all of whom rely on local NHS services. I can tell the Scottish Government that they echo the thousands of people in Paisley who have already signed petitions to defend the children's ward at the RAH. Once again, the message was loud and clear: the SNP Government needs to stop its cuts to our local NHS. The transferring of in-patient paediatrics from the RAH to Glasgow represents the closing of the children's ward as we know it and a closure for the thousands of children who need it.

We know that there has been uncertainty over the future of the children's ward at the RAH for many months, but the difference between this debate and the previous debate is that we are no longer discussing proposals—we are now discussing the official plan. Anas Sarwar is quite right. Before the election, SNP politicians said that Labour was scaremongering for highlighting the proposed cuts. George Adam described the threat to the RAH children's ward as a "fantasy", and in January and March he even told me that I should stop campaigning alongside local families in Paisley to protect it. Through his actions, he has shown that it is obvious that he has been more interested in saving his own job than in saving the children's ward at the RAH. I hope that, at some point, he will take the opportunity to tell us whether he simply could not understand what the proposals meant for the RAH or whether he was deliberately trying to hide the truth from the people of Paisley before the election.

The time for the SNP Government to come off the fence is well and truly over. I reiterate my call to the health secretary to come to Paisley to meet local parents and grandparents. She should be under no illusion about just how important the RAH children's ward is to local families.

The concern for local NHS services that has been mentioned is felt in not only Renfrewshire

and West Dunbartonshire but Inverclyde. In recent weeks, I have heard from many people in Inverclyde who are extremely concerned by the centralisation agenda that is affecting their local NHS services. Earlier this year, we warned people that there was to be a review of maternity services and exposed the fact that it could affect local provision. Again, all that we heard from the SNP was accusations that we were scaremongering, yet now we see that the birthing unit at Inverclyde royal hospital is also to be axed. As Jackie Baillie rightly said in relation to the Vale of Leven hospital, the birthing unit in Inverclyde should be maintained and it should be supported to provide a service to more mothers instead of closing its doors.

Therefore, I call on the Scottish Government and the health secretary to intervene now, provide the health board with the resources that are needed and stop the plans to close the Inverclyde birthing unit. Local families will be amazed that the Government has not already done that, given that last year Nicola Sturgeon was on the front page of the *Greenock Telegraph* promising that Inverclyde hospital was safe and saying:

“There are no plans to centralise services out of Inverclyde.”

Again, the reality is that a number of services have been transferred from Inverclyde royal hospital to Glasgow recently, and the removal of the birthing unit is the latest example of the hospital's downgrading. The cuts are leaving people with a real fear about the hospital's long-term sustainability.

We have been here before. The Scottish Government wrongly denied that there were proposals to cut and close hospital services. We are no longer discussing proposals—they are now official plans.

It may be past five o'clock but it is decision time for the SNP Government. It is time for SNP ministers to stop sitting on their hands and watching as services are cut back.

On behalf of my constituents, my message is clear: the future of our local hospitals depends on keeping those key services. Ministers must stop saying that they are protecting NHS budgets when they are not and must stop saying that they will keep health services local when they will not. They must give NHS boards the resources that they need and give families in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde the guarantees that they want on their local NHS services.

18:05

**Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** For the purposes of time and my speech, I

will focus on the part of the motion that relates to the Vale of Leven hospital.

History does not bode well for Labour when it comes to the NHS and, specifically, to the Vale of Leven hospital. In 2009, the vision for the Vale ended a decade of damaging uncertainty for the Vale of Leven hospital and for the erosion of services—including accident and emergency—by the previous Labour-led Scottish Administration. The then Cabinet Secretary for Health, and now First Minister, made a commitment to protect the Vale, and this year—on camera and in front of 400 people in West Dunbartonshire—Nicola Sturgeon made the same commitment to the Vale of Leven hospital. If that was not enough, the cabinet secretary reiterated the commitment of the Scottish Government to the Vale of Leven hospital remaining open in front of the Parliament, the public and, again, on camera.

**Jackie Baillie:** I agree that that was all very helpful and I want to agree with both the First Minister and the health secretary about the Vale hospital. Why, then, do we have the proposal before us today? Does Gil Paterson support my specific call that it should be designated a major service change so that it is signed off by the very ministers who said that they would protect the Vale?

**Gil Paterson:** If it was another situation or any other element of the health board, if the Government was telling health boards dominated by the Labour Party to do one thing or another, or if the Government interfered willy-nilly with health boards, Labour Party members and other opposition MSPs would be up in arms. That is not the Government's job and that is not how it works. The Government will be involved once the process has taken place and not at the present time.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gil Paterson:** I have just answered you, Jackie.

**Jackie Baillie:** No, you have not; you misunderstood.

**Gil Paterson:** That is the answer that I am giving you.

**Jackie Baillie:** It is wrong.

**Gil Paterson:** Thank you very much for that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Would you two stop having a spat? You can take it outside after the debate.

**Gil Paterson:** I apologise. It is not like me, Presiding Officer.

As it stands, Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board is carrying out a review of services and I welcome the Scottish Government's view that it

would be unacceptable if any proposals were not consistent with national policy—such as the review of maternity services that is being carried out—and the view that any proposals must be subject to proper and meaningful engagement with the people affected.

The motion asks for the cabinet secretary to intervene. However, Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board has already initiated a consultation period and we need to encourage everyone with a vested interest to engage with the process.

A serious question arises from the consultation in regards to the community maternity unit at the Vale of Leven hospital. The Vale of Leven and Inverclyde hospitals provide a wide range of maternity care services to women in each locality with 5,000 non-birth contacts each year, which is very positive news indeed. However, the figures for the Vale's baby delivery service are shockingly low. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde had a planned figure of 200 births per year for the Vale, yet in 2015-16 the actual figure stood at just 43—less than one birth a week—and the figure peaked at 112 births in 2009.

It must be remembered that women are advised consistently during their pregnancy by midwives and other medical professionals, including on what happens when complications arise. There is a concern that, with fewer women meeting low-risk criteria, there is a higher chance of complications, and it would seem that women are voting with their feet—

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

**Gil Paterson:** Sorry?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will you come to a close now, please?

**Gil Paterson:** I will, Presiding Officer.

It would seem that mothers are using the Vale for all other maternity services but opting to have their delivery elsewhere. The figures need to be analysed and the question needs to be asked why the vast majority of mothers in the Vale area are not using the unit for delivery. I want to know about that, not just as an MSP but as a father and a grandfather.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Paterson—

**Gil Paterson:** I will close. I did take quite a long intervention—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Paterson, you are well over your time. Thank you.

**Gil Paterson:** Thank you. *[Applause.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Well, you got a clap, anyway. *[Laughter.]*

I remind members that they should not make interventions until they are so directed by the chair, whether that be standing up to try to make a formal intervention or muttering from their seats.

I call Alex Rowley, to be followed by Maurice Corry.

18:11

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):**

As the lone Fifer in the debate, I want to support Jackie Baillie and I congratulate her on lodging her motion.

What we are seeing is a lesson to people throughout Scotland about the centralisation of services, given that we are seeing cuts taking place right across Scotland. The first point that I want to touch on is that there needs to be transparency, openness and honesty from the Government about the cuts that are taking place in health services across Scotland. The question that I ask when I look at the motion is what the review is being driven by. If it is being driven by cuts, the result will be the centralisation of services to save money.

When the NHS board in Fife said earlier this year that it was going to have to cut £30.8 million from its budget, the director of finance said that the extent of the challenges was unprecedented both locally and across the NHS in Scotland as a whole. She said:

“I have not seen the scale of these financial challenges in the whole of my career”.

That was reported in the local press. If that is the case, there needs to be transparency and honesty about the level of cuts that our health service is facing, rather than the Government hiding behind reviews and then centralising services.

My second point is about the point in the motion on “extensive public engagement”. We need to ensure that, when engagement takes place, it takes place properly. The Scottish Government has standards for engagement, and it needs to start with all the facts being placed on the table.

I make those two points to the minister. We need to know the extent of the cuts both in the case that we are discussing and elsewhere so that we can understand what is driving the reviews, and we need proper consultation.

**Aileen Campbell:** I reiterate that there is record investment in the NHS. We understand that there are challenges. It is right that NHS boards review the services that they provide to ensure that they are the right ones. I agree with and take on board the point that engagement and openness need to be part of the process, but I reiterate that it is ordinary for NHS boards to review their services. Does Alex Rowley agree that that is part and

parcel of ensuring the smooth running of our NHS?

**Alex Rowley:** I would agree if it was clear what was driving the reviews. The director of finance at NHS Fife said:

"I have not seen the scale of these financial challenges in the whole of my career".

Massive cuts are being imposed.

My final point is that the Government cannot simply hide behind local health boards, because it is the Government that is saying to them that they have to cut their budgets. That is where we need openness and transparency.

I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing this evening's debate and wish her and colleagues in all parts of the chamber who are going to fight for these services every success.

18:15

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to speak in this debate on an issue that is very important to many of my constituents in West Scotland, particularly the West Dumbartonshire area and Argyll and Bute. It is a testament to the strength of feeling about the issue that I congratulate Jackie Baillie on bringing it and her motion for debate in the chamber. The motion has support from across the political spectrum in the chamber, except of course from SNP members.

I declare an interest in that all four of my children, including twins, were born in the 1990s in the CMU unit at the Vale of Leven hospital. We received fantastic support there, in sometimes difficult circumstances.

The issue in the motion has attracted the support of nearly 2,000 people in the west of Scotland, who have signed a petition to try to prevent the closure of services at the Vale of Leven hospital. That is a clear indication of the support that exists in the community at large for the services that are provided at the hospital. Their views must be listened to and considered when any decision is being made about the future of the hospital.

I ask that the pending increase in the 2,000 Royal Navy personnel at Faslane and their families, who have needs for medical support locally, are considered seriously by the Scottish Government in its reviews. The public are making it clear how they feel about the closure proposals. I welcome the decision to launch a re-engagement process, but only if it is open and fair and really wants to hear what the local people think should be the future of their hospital and its wonderful NHS staff.

I do not believe that there is any point in pretending to engage with the public if a decision has already been taken behind closed doors and the views of the public will just be disregarded. That would be disingenuous and a complete waste of public resources. This February, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport said that the vision for the Vale remained key for the hospital and ensuring that plans for the CMU were delivered. In June this year, the First Minister promised that her Government would not approve proposals that ran counter to the vision for the Vale. I think that the people in West Dumbartonshire and Argyll and Bute would have been right to assume that those statements meant that the Government and the SNP would be against any proposals to close the CMU at the hospital. Again, that begs the question why no SNP member has given their support to the motion.

The statements from the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport were a promise made to the public who rely on their local hospital and to the people of the west of Scotland. I truly hope that the Government will decide to honour that promise.

18:17

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** The document that I hold up is Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board paper 16/45, which purports to lay out the case for the closure of Lightburn hospital. I attended the health board meeting on 16 August, along with the save Lightburn campaign, when this paper was first presented. I have met separately with directors of the health board, along with representatives of the save Lightburn campaign and Parkinson's UK, to review the case made in this paper in more detail. To my mind, having looked at it, this paper fails to make a case for the closure of Lightburn. The data in it is used more for support than for illumination.

**Anas Sarwar:** Does the member accept that it was wrong for the local SNP MSP to use parliamentary resources during the election campaign to write to voters in his constituency to say that there were no plans to close Lightburn hospital and that saying so was a desperate pitch from Paul Martin, who was attempting to stand shoulder to shoulder with locals against the closure of a hospital that was not closing? Can he take that back and apologise to the local people?

**Ivan McKee:** I have in my hand the letter that I put out during that election campaign, which says nothing of the sort. My letter laid out clearly to constituents the process that would have to be gone through before any closure would take place, which is the process that we are going through now.

As I said, the data in the health board paper is taken from a one-day sample of end destinations for in-patients, which covers all the hospitals in the east end of Glasgow, not just Lightburn, and leaves us none the wiser regarding the relevance or implications of the data. No data is presented to back up the claim that the plans to move services will deliver improved outcomes for patients and no data is provided on how often services that are not currently provided for at Lightburn require to be accessed by in-patients there, which is a key part of the board's argument for closure.

The board plans to move out-patient services from Lightburn hospital to a proposed new health hub at Parkhead, despite there being no timescale for its construction and none of the required £32 million of funding being in place. The board has directed me to an integration joint board for all the questions that it has been asked about the proposed hub. That is a case of integration being used as a vehicle to shift responsibility rather than share it.

No clarity is given on what measures will be put in place to cover the period between the proposed closure of Lightburn and the hoped-for construction of the new facility. In the meantime, the Lightburn site has suffered significant underinvestment. Recently, part of the site was boarded up. Apart from being an eyesore, that sends the signal that the site and the patients whom it serves are undervalued.

Lightburn serves a local community in the east end of Glasgow with a high proportion of elderly residents. Recovery rates are better when patients are closer to family and friends and they can benefit from frequent visits. The plan to relocate in-patient rehabilitation services to the other end of the city presents visitors, who are often elderly, with transport challenges.

We often hear about tackling health inequalities and shifting resources to the most deprived communities, but the health board's plan to close Lightburn does precisely the opposite. Resources would be removed from an area that, according to the recent survey of multiple deprivation, contains three of the four most deprived areas in Scotland.

The health board paper stresses the importance of the strategic shift from acute services to the community, but it proposes the transfer of services away from a hospital that is located in the heart of the community to a large acute hospital some distance away. The board has made it clear that the final decision on Lightburn has not been made, and it has stated on several occasions that its proposal is based not on financial considerations, but on clinical factors alone.

The public engagement on Lightburn's future has now started, and the public will have their say

on that local service. I urge all those with an interest in local communities to take part in that process.

The answer to shifting the focus of service delivery from acute services to the community is not to close a hospital in the community and move patients who are undergoing rehabilitation to a large acute hospital some distance away, and the answer to tackling health inequalities is not to shift resources from the most deprived communities to the centre. The answer to improving outcomes for patients is not to move them away from friends and family and reduce rather than improve their outcomes, and the answer to improving health service provision for the people of the east end of Glasgow is not the paper from the health board.

18:22

**James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** I congratulate Jackie Baillie on lodging a substantive motion, which, in light of the large number of contributions to this very important debate, clearly touches on a number of constituencies and regions. I will use my speech to speak up in favour of Lightburn hospital, as I did in a previous members' business debate in 2013.

I know from my family experience how widely used and valued Lightburn hospital is. It has a priority for elderly services, and is used by quite a big elderly population around the east end of Glasgow. It would be really detrimental to the service to move it to the other end of the city, because where it is sited now—just off Edinburgh Road—is near to the main bus services, which are widely used by those who access the hospital.

The hospital has a very valued Parkinson's unit and a dedicated Parkinson's resource that is used beyond the east end. I know from my previous position as the MSP for Rutherglen that a great number of people in Cambuslang and Rutherglen used it. Services for the elderly and for those with Parkinson's are very much needed in the east end of Glasgow and beyond, and they must be maintained.

What strikes me about this debate and the debate over the past six months is the absolute brass neck of the SNP. Before the election, a motion came before the Parliament in which the SNP told us that it was

"committed to maintaining and improving safe and effective local services across Scotland, including in the Royal Alexandra Hospital, Vale of Leven Hospital, Lightburn Hospital and St John's Hospital."

Sure enough, when the election passed by, the cuts rolled down, and we are starting to see proposed closures.

**Ivan McKee:** Is the member aware that the proposal comes from the health board and not from the Scottish Government, and that there is a process to be gone through?

**James Kelly:** You've got to laugh, haven't you? Who is actually running the NHS in Scotland? We have had SNP MSP after SNP MSP standing up and saying, "It's got nothing to do with us. We're only in power. Don't ask me to take any responsibility." It is galling.

I return to what Ivan McKee said. Let us look at what Anne McLaughlin said in her letter on House of Commons notepaper:

"I have been in touch with the Scottish Government and have received an unequivocal assurance that Lightburn Hospital is under no threat of closure."

I want to hear from the minister what communication took place between Anne McLaughlin, the member of Parliament for Glasgow North East, and the Scottish Government. What assurance was Anne McLaughlin given about the closure of Lightburn hospital? It is vital that we know the answers to those questions.

Lightburn hospital is vital to the east end of Glasgow and it is important that there is a strong campaign to save it. It is also important that the SNP starts to take responsibility for some of the decisions that it is taking and that it stands up and is counted on the issue. Let us save Lightburn; let us save our services. Glasgow deserves better.

18:26

**The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell):** We have had a robust debate and I know that all members will contribute their views to the on-going engagement. Aside from the robust exchanges, I genuinely appreciate that members have highlighted their personal connections to services that are important to them.

What is not in question is the level of priority afforded to the safe stewardship of the NHS by the people of Scotland. No public services are valued more highly, and I put on the record the Government's sincere appreciation of the unstinting professionalism and commitment shown by those who work so tirelessly in our health and social care services.

Turning to Jackie Baillie's motion, I think that it would be helpful to establish some facts. First, contrary to what is stated in the motion, no decisions have been made about the service change proposals that it mentions.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the minister designate the proposed cut to the CMUs as a major service change? That is not up to the health board and the Scottish health council; it is ultimately a decision

for ministers. Will the minister insist that that final decision is made by the health secretary?

**Aileen Campbell:** As Jackie Baillie knows, a process has to be gone through—I will elaborate on that during my speech. She knows that no decision has been taken and that a process of engagement is on-going.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde formalised the proposals at its board meeting in August, and—as we would expect—it is now in the process of engaging with the affected local communities, staff and other stakeholders, so that it can consider their views. I encourage local people and their representatives to play a full part in that process.

The process will take the form of three months of public engagement on the proposals relating to the CIC, the community maternity units and Lightburn hospital. It will run from September until November.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Aileen Campbell:** I am sorry, but I want to make progress.

That engagement will help to inform the health board's on-going work with the independent Scottish health council, and that will include coming to a view on which of the service changes should be considered major. The board will reconvene following that work—probably at the meeting that is planned for December—and will then agree the next steps.

Should any of the proposals be designated as major, the board must undertake formal public consultation of at least three months, and its final service change proposals will be subject to ministerial approval. In the case of the proposals around transferring paediatric in-patient and day cases from the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley to the new Royal hospital for children, the board will discuss the next steps at its meeting in October. The board has already been clear that, should it move to proceed with the paediatric proposals, that would represent major service change.

The possibility that some or all of the proposals might change as a result of the public engagement that is under way and that some or all might ultimately be subject to ministerial approval means that it would be inappropriate for me to discuss the specifics in any detail beyond reiterating that it would be unacceptable if any formal proposals were not consistent with national policy, such as the on-going review of maternity services. Gil Paterson and Ivan McKee made that point well.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the minister take an intervention on the matter of process?

**Aileen Campbell:** Okay.

**Jackie Baillie:** I understand what the minister says about substance, but let us be clear. The RAH proposal is already designated as a major service change. Can the minister confirm that it is not for the health council to decide and that it is within the gift of ministers to say what is a major service change?

**Aileen Campbell:** As I have said, there is a process to go through—it is being worked through—between the NHS boards and the Scottish health council. If major service change is considered, there will be ministerial intervention. However, I have talked through the process very clearly. I am happy to provide it in writing for Ms Baillie if she still does not get it, but I will now continue with the remarks that I want to make.

I want to be clear that this Government remains committed to robust, evidence-based policy making, as set out in our national clinical strategy. Underpinning that is our long-term commitment to secure local services where possible and develop specialised services when necessary. That will ensure that our health and social care services are responsive to the many challenges and opportunities that we face, from the pressures resulting from demographic change to the continuous advancements in technology.

Where change is advocated, we will ensure that the local boards work with all stakeholders to make the case for it. What we will not countenance is change being dictated to local communities, as has happened in the past—I think that Alex Rowley made the point that open engagement is crucial in such service reviews.

I reiterate that local people can be assured that this Government will always focus our approach on providing as many services as possible as locally as possible.

**Anas Sarwar:** Can the minister confirm that in her letter, which was written using parliamentary resources, Anne McLaughlin MP said that she was in direct contact with the Scottish Government? Is the minister aware of that direct contact and, if so, what was the form of that contact?

**Aileen Campbell:** I am not aware of that; I will need to look into it after the debate. I am happy for the member to write to the ministerial team.

**Anas Sarwar:** No—I am asking you to write to me about that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Sarwar, I have already asked you not to speak from a sedentary position. Please desist.

**Aileen Campbell:** As I said, our record in government is one of ensuring that we deliver services as locally as possible, which stands in

stark contrast to the record of the previous Administration.

Jackie Baillie's motion calls on ministers

“to intervene and pledge to work with local communities to prevent the closure of health services.”

We should reflect on what this Government has done for such services since 2007—Stuart McMillan was right to include this point—and compare that with what Labour delivered when it was in power.

Nicola Sturgeon's very first act as health secretary in June 2007 was to come to Parliament and announce that we were overturning the previous Labour-led Administration's decision to close the highly valued A and E departments at Monklands and Ayr hospitals. Since our decision to save those units, they have provided much-needed emergency capacity, with more than 830,000 attendances between them. We have not just maintained those services; we have invested in them and enhanced them.

What of the Vale of Leven hospital in Jackie Baillie's constituency? It was this Government that ended a decade of damaging uncertainty by approving the vision for the Vale in 2009, while the Labour-led Administration that Jackie Baillie served under as a minister presided over the closure of the hospital's A and E department in 2002. *[Interruption.]* Jackie Baillie may sigh, but unfortunately the uncomfortable truth is that her Labour-led Administration closed the A and E department. Indeed, our approval of the vision for the Vale secured its remaining emergency services and meant that key local services that would have been lost under previous proposals were safeguarded and improved.

On delivering on the commitment to the vision for the Vale, I can confirm that in-patient activity has increased by 36 per cent when compared with 2009-10; that day case activity has increased by 28 per cent—an increase of more than 1,000 cases; that emergency attendances have increased by 12 per cent when compared with 2009-10; and that we have invested £21 million in a new primary care centre, which opened on the Vale site in 2013.

The Government has been consistently clear that we remain committed to the vision for the Vale. We continue to see a bright future for the hospital, which plays a crucial role in the local healthcare system.

Ministers are fully aware of the strength of local feeling in relation to the current proposals about maternity deliveries at the Vale. I today received a petition with around 2,500 signatures from the *Lennox Herald*. I know that there are people in the public gallery, and I once again encourage all local



stakeholders to make their feelings clear during the public engagement work that is under way.

I add that the health board's review will include working with the chief medical officer to look at midwifery services across the region, and that we have been clear that it would be unacceptable if any final proposals were not consistent with national policy such as the review of maternity services that is due to be published later this autumn.

In closing, I reiterate the Government's absolute commitment to the delivery of high-quality and sustainable health and social care services. Such services are not static and our clinical strategy underlines our approach to change, where the evidence supports that and as informed by meaningful public engagement. I know that Ivan McKee will ensure that his constituents' voices with regard to Lightburn hospital will be heard during that engagement process.

Where there are proposals for major service change in the NHS, they must be subject to formal public consultation and, ultimately, ministerial approval. Local people can be assured that, in all such cases, ministers take all the available information and representations into account before coming to a final decision. I look forward to ensuring that all members get their chance to ensure that their constituents' voices are heard in the review processes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I thank those in the public gallery for their courtesy.

*Meeting closed at 18:36.*



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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