



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 3 November 2016

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

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

Thursday 3 November 2016

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME	1
Gypsy Travellers (Discrimination).....	1
Household Recycling Rates	2
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Lochaber Visit).....	4
Livestock (Antibiotic Resistance).....	5
Planning Legislation (Betting Shops)	6
Local Devolution	7
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	9
Engagements.....	9
Cabinet (Meeting)	12
Cabinet (Meetings)	16
Migrants' Contribution to Scotland.....	21
Brexit and the Scottish Financial Services Sector	22
Living Wage	23
ScotRail Services.....	25
POINT OF ORDER	27
BURIAL AND CREMATION CHARGES	28
<i>Motion debated—[Alex Rowley].</i>	
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	28
Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con)	30
Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab)	32
Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)	33
Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)	34
Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP).....	35
Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	37
The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman)	38
DIGITAL STRATEGY	42
<i>Motion moved—[Fergus Ewing].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jamie Greene].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Rhoda Grant].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing)	42
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	46
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	49
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)	52
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	54
Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP).....	57
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)	59
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	62
Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	64
Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)	66
Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)	69
Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP).....	71
Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	73
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)	75
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)	78
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	80
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	83
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay)	86
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION	90
<i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Andy Wightman].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Derek Mackay].</i>	
Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green).....	90
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay)	91

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)	92
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	93
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	94
Andy Wightman	95
Derek Mackay.....	96
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION	98
<i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick].</i>	
DECISION TIME	99

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 3 November 2016

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

Gypsy Travellers (Discrimination)

1. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it tackles discrimination against Gypsy Travellers. (S5O-00291)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): The Scottish Government recognises that Gypsy Traveller communities are among the most disenfranchised and discriminated against in Scotland. We are continuing with work in a range of areas to achieve better outcomes for Gypsy Travellers. For example, we fund and support the work of the Scottish Traveller education programme, which works to promote and develop inclusive educational approaches for mobile and settled Gypsy and other Traveller families.

Mary Fee: The "Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2015" highlighted that Gypsy Travellers continue to be one of the most marginalised groups in Scottish society and that they still face disproportionately high levels of discrimination. Thirty-one per cent of people stated that they would be unhappy if a family member was in a relationship with a Gypsy Traveller, while a further 34 per cent of people stated their belief that a Gypsy Traveller would be unsuitable as a primary school teacher. In light of that, it is clear that the Government's Gypsy Traveller strategy is failing.

Will the minister agree to carry out an immediate review of the strategy? Will she outline what further steps the Government will take to eradicate the deeply unpleasant and systemic discrimination that is faced by the Gypsy Traveller community across Scotland?

Jeane Freeman: I am afraid that I cannot agree with the member that the Government's strategy has failed and that it is therefore entirely responsible for the attitudes that she outlined. I am sure that Mary Fee knows as well as I do that, across a range of discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviours that affect a number of groups in our society, it is the responsibility of not simply the Scottish Government but all of us to tackle those and to do that at every level in our community.

However, I accept that the Government has a clear leadership role in that regard. As the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and

Equalities has said, she is consulting the Gypsy Traveller community and others to reflect on and improve the approach that we take in order not only to tackle the specific issues that people are confronted with, but to build on the work that we have done on health, education and the suitability of sites, and our current work with local authorities. All that will be reported back to the Parliament in the revised strategy, which, as we have already said, will come out in 2017.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): What specific action has the Scottish Government taken to assist the members of the Roma community who are living in Govanhill, particularly in relation to the finding of the BBC Scotland study that more than a third of the 310 local Roma people who were interviewed were receiving less than the minimum wage?

Jeane Freeman: I share the member's concern with regard to that community, as other Scottish National Party members do. That is also part of the discussions that the cabinet secretary is leading in the spirit that the Scottish Government clearly adopts across a range of the things that we do. We consult directly those who are most affected to make sure that the work that we undertake is as effective as it can be.

The Roma community is part of those conversations. We are looking at particular enforcement activities and looking in particular with respect to housing and integration in that community.

Household Recycling Rates

2. Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of recent figures published by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency suggesting that ministers did not meet their 2013 target, what action it is taking to improve household recycling rates. (S5O-00292)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): As the member knows, it is for councils to provide recycling services to households. The figures produced by SEPA are a compilation of the figures provided by each local authority. There is a wide disparity between the best-performing authority and the least well performing authority.

Since 2013, we have agreed the Scottish household recycling charter with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to harmonise recycling and collection services, to which 20 local authorities are already signed up; we have provided financial support for councils to implement the charter, starting with £2 million for East Ayrshire Council, which was announced last

month; and we have committed to reviewing the exemption for food waste collections in rural areas. Overall, since 2011, we have provided some £25 million to councils to support the introduction of food waste services, thanks to which 75 per cent of households now have access to a food waste collection service, which is up from just 300,000 in 2010.

Maurice Golden: In Scotland, local authorities deliver their own recycling strategies with decreasing levels of support from the Scottish Government and its agencies. As the cabinet secretary pointed out, that has led to varying levels of service and different outcomes in recycling rates. The most recent SEPA figures show a patchwork of recycling success and failure throughout Scotland. Members should compare that with Wales, which has encouraged local authorities to take a consistent approach to recycling. Its recycling rate recently hit 60 per cent. It beat its target, doubled its rate in 10 years and leapfrogged Scotland, leaving us the worst recycler in Britain.

Does the Scottish Government agree that a unified and consistent recycling collection service throughout Scotland, coupled with the requisite Scottish Government leadership and support to local authorities, would help us to achieve our recycling targets?

Roseanna Cunningham: I indicated some of the actions that have already taken place, including money that has gone to local authorities. Yes, there is a wide disparity—I referred to that in my initial response—but that shows that it is possible for councils to do extremely well. There are councils that have significant challenges.

As it happens, I am going to the British-Irish Council meeting in Guernsey tomorrow, which is on the circular economy and will deal with waste issues. The member mentioned what Wales is doing. It has done a great deal and I wonder whether he has examined in detail what its programme means. Among other things, it involves fines for councils that do not achieve their targets and individual targets being placed on councils rather than a national target.

I imagine that there would be a considerable amount of debate about that. We are currently in a space that is about collaboration and encouragement. I would rather have stretching targets that we do not quite achieve but continue to implement them through collaboration than go down the compulsion route at this point. We can never rule that out but, to be frank, this would not be the right time to start to consider that.

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Lochaber Visit)

3. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity will next visit Lochaber. (S5O-00293)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): I visited Fort William last Friday, 28 October, for a fin fish summit and I regularly visit the Lochaber area in my role as the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity.

Rhoda Grant: The cabinet secretary will be aware that Rio Tinto plans to sell off the smelter in Fort William. He will know that it is a crucial industry in Lochaber, with 150 people directly employed in it and many more jobs supported in the wider community. What discussions has he had with Rio Tinto? Does he know who the proposed buyer is? What support can he offer the employees in Fort William and the new company in this difficult time?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, the smelter is an integral part of the economy in Fort William and, indeed, a national asset. As the member knows, I was the constituency MSP for Lochaber for the first 12 years of this reconvened Parliament so I entirely share her sentiments about the importance of the matter. I am pleased to inform her that the Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have maintained dialogue with Rio Tinto throughout the Lochaber strategic review with a view to securing the best outcome for the workers and the community.

The workforce was informed on 21 October that the Rio Tinto board had agreed to consider a sale of its Lochaber assets and that exclusive discussions with a potential buyer would begin. Obviously, the sale is a continuing commercial process and we must be careful to respect the boundaries of commercial confidentiality while negotiations continue. We are hopeful that the business will be sold as a going concern and that aluminium production at Fort William, which began around 1929, will continue for many generations to come.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree with me, as the MSP for Lochaber, that continued operation of the smelter, development of industrial activity and the creation of employment and economic value should be top priorities for Lochaber?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I think that Kate Forbes, as the constituency member, is absolutely correct. We need to respect and provide the appropriate space for the commercial process that is under way. However, we are prepared to offer support to any successful bidder that makes the necessary

commitment to the local community in relation to employment, industry, commerce and renewable energy sources. Indeed, the ideal scenario for Lochaber—I hope that everyone shares this sentiment—would be the continued operation of the smelter, but also enhanced development of industrial activity in the west Highlands and the preservation and creation of economic value that that entails.

Livestock (Antibiotic Resistance)

4. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to minimise antibiotic resistance in livestock. (S5O-00294)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government has signed up to the United Kingdom five-year antimicrobial strategy for 2013 to 2018, which was produced in collaboration with public health and animal health authorities across the UK. The strategy combines actions in the human health and animal health environments.

The controlling antimicrobial resistance in Scotland—CARS—working group has been set up. It is chaired by the chief medical officer for Scotland and is developing detailed plans to implement the strategy. The Scottish Government also monitors scientific developments in antimicrobial resistance, liaises with other Administrations and public bodies with an interest in animal health, public health and food safety, and implements a veterinary surveillance programme that monitors the emergence of antimicrobial resistance in animals.

Alexander Stewart: The cabinet secretary will be aware of recent surveys that have taken place. One of the most worrying, which was carried out by the University of Cambridge, found that one in four supermarket chicken samples contained antibiotic-resistant E coli. Such resistances are one of the major health challenges of our generation. What economic assessment is the Scottish Government undertaking to improve the process and to ensure that those resistances are managed? How is the issue being tackled in the livestock sector in Scotland?

Fergus Ewing: I am not sure that I correctly picked up the matter that the member has raised, but I question what I think is his thesis—if I am wrong, about that thesis, I apologise. He has just said that an economic analysis is necessary to deal with the efficacy of work that is being done to tackle antimicrobial resistance. If that is his thesis, it is patently untrue. The work that we need to do to tackle antimicrobial resistance is work for experts in veterinary matters and pharmaceutical products; it is not anything to do with an economic analysis.

I want to do justice to the question, because the member raises a serious matter. If he wants to write to me about these complex matters, I would be happy to consider them further.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):

The minister will be aware that the vast majority of farmers are professional and skilled and are already managing antibiotics for livestock in a sensible, proportionate and responsible way. Does he agree that the last thing that they need is to be bogged down by further Government regulation and red tape?

Fergus Ewing: I have a lot of sympathy for that viewpoint. I respect the work that farmers do and know that they care deeply about the health of their livestock. Mr Chapman is a farmer and is therefore well placed to express those sentiments. However, what puzzles me is the fact that the approach that he has just expressed appears to be almost directly in contradiction to the approach that his colleague, Mr Stewart, expressed just a moment ago. Which is it? Do the Conservatives want more regulation or less regulation? I think that they should cease this apparent schizophrenia on the important issue of antimicrobial resistance.

Planning Legislation (Betting Shops)

5. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I declare an interest: I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will amend legislation to extend planning controls on changing premises into betting shops. (S5O-00295)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): The Scottish Government will lay the changes to planning legislation regarding betting shops before Parliament by the end of the year.

Monica Lennon: I welcome the minister's commitment because it has been more than two years since the previous minister, Derek Mackay, held a summit on the issue. It is disappointing that no action has been taken to extend planning controls on changing premises into betting shops in that time. Such a measure was introduced in England more than 18 months ago.

Given that the clustering of betting shops, particularly in our most deprived communities, has continued in that time, and that the Scottish Government has upheld six of the seven most recent betting shop appeals, when can we expect the use classes order to be amended? In addition, will the Scottish Government assess the cumulative impact on communities of clustering over and above betting shops by including payday loan shops and fast-food takeaways?

Kevin Stewart: As Alex Neil, the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights, stated in Parliament on 5 March 2015, we were seeking powers—they were promised in the Smith report—that would have been more effective than planning controls are in addressing the problems of payday lending and problem gambling. As the Scotland Act 2016 did not deliver those powers, we are now introducing planning controls.

The Scotland Act 2016 included a limited power in respect of the number of fixed-odds betting terminals in new betting shops only. It did not include any powers in respect of FOBTs in existing betting shops; that power remains with the United Kingdom Government.

I hoped that we would have had all the powers to deal with the problem appropriately. Unfortunately, we did not have the support for the issue to be devolved to the Parliament.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The minister will be aware of my campaigning against fixed-odds betting terminals, which have had a negative effect on local communities. Notwithstanding his comments about the limited powers that are coming to the Scottish Parliament, will he provide assurances that the changes that will be laid before the end of the year give local authorities a wider range of powers so that they can deal with the scourge of FOBT machines?

Kevin Stewart: I reiterate that we are getting limited powers, although I hoped that we would have wide-ranging powers to deal with the situation. We will introduce legislation to amend the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order 1997. The order excludes from planning control the changing of certain premises to betting shops, and that exclusion will be removed.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Mr Stewart, who is struggling with his voice, has probably just answered my question. I was going to urge him to use the powers that he has through the planning review to give councils the authority to say how many betting shops there should be, but I think that he has said that he will do that.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Minister, do you want to add anything?

Kevin Stewart: I just reiterate that we will lay that legislation before Parliament.

Local Devolution

6. **Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is advancing the local devolution agenda. (S5O-00296)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Scotland's democratic landscape is being transformed by the implementation of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, the introduction of an islands bill and the development of legislation to bring council functions, budgets and democratic oversight much closer to communities. In parallel, empowering reforms are being delivered across Scotland's key public services.

Adam Tomkins: It is well documented that Scotland is now one of the most centralised countries in Europe. Just yesterday, the Scottish Local Government Partnership criticised the Scottish Government—not the United Kingdom Government—for strangling local democracy and castigated it for bossing local authorities around and controlling everything from the centre. The SNP's programme for government commits to work with local authorities to review their roles and responsibilities. Will the scope of the review include the devolution of any identified power from Parliament to local authorities in Scotland?

Kevin Stewart: Presiding Officer, 96 per cent of Scots think that local people should be involved in making decisions about the design and delivery of their public services. The Government is committed to ensuring that communities across Scotland get a louder voice and stronger powers.

During this parliamentary session, we will introduce a bill to decentralise local authority functions, budgets and democratic oversight to local communities. As I said, we are consulting on and bringing forward an islands bill, to reflect the unique needs of island communities. We will enable community councils that can demonstrate a strong democratic mandate to deliver services. We will work with local government to set a target of having at least 1 per cent of its budget subject to community choices budgeting, which will mean that more than £100 million of spending will be influenced by a direct say from local communities. That is true devolution and true community empowerment.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00400)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Ruth Davidson: Later today, the Parliament will be asked to vote for an increase in council tax. We on the Conservative benches accept the need to end the council tax freeze and to increase rates for people in the very largest homes, but we think that the Scottish National Party's plans go too far by hitting thousands of ordinary working households.

Today, trade bodies are warning that we should be wary of putting up taxes too much and adding to the pressure on families who are struggling with higher inflation while consumer confidence is fragile. Will the First Minister tell us why those trade bodies are wrong?

The First Minister: In every tax proposal that we have put forward, we have sought to be responsible, balanced and progressive. I remind Ruth Davidson that we put our proposals on council tax to the Scottish people in the election in May this year, which we won. In fact, the SNP scored more votes in the election than the Conservatives and the Labour Party combined, so there is a significant mandate to take forward our proposals.

Our proposals are reasonable, balanced and progressive. They increase council tax for people who live in the highest-banded housing and they deliver protection for people who are on low incomes. Of course, for the vast majority of council tax payers, the rebanding will not increase bills by a single penny.

The crucial point is that the proposals that we are putting forward, which will be voted on at 5 o'clock tonight in the chamber, will raise £100 million to help us in our mission to raise attainment in schools. Parties across the chamber frequently and rightly talk about the importance of raising attainment in schools, but we cannot talk about the desirability of the ends unless we are also prepared to vote for the means of achieving that.

Ruth Davidson: Thousands of ordinary families who are living in the situation that I described will be hit by the increases. They will be noting carefully exactly what the First Minister just said and the language that she used, because it is not just council tax that is on the way up for them. We

know that the Scottish Government wants to levy income tax at a higher rate than that in the rest of the United Kingdom, and it has already pushed through business rates that are above the levels in the rest of the UK.

The Deputy First Minister once said:

"This administration ... acknowledges that business rates do play a part in attracting and retaining businesses and has therefore committed to ... setting the poundage rate no higher than that set in England".

He was right then. Why is he not right now?

The First Minister: I will stick with council tax for a second. Three out of four Scottish households will pay no more in council tax as a result of the rebanding on which the Parliament will vote this evening. Yes, people who live in higher-banded houses will pay more. We also propose to lift the freeze, but with a 3 per cent cap, so local authorities will have the ability to decide, within that parameter, to raise council tax if they so wish. That is right, responsible and progressive, and—crucially—the proposals gained the support of the Scottish people in an election just months ago.

On the wider issue to do with taxation, in a few weeks we will bring forward a budget for the next financial year. All those matters will be covered in our budget and the Parliament will have the opportunity, as it always does, to scrutinise and in due course to vote on our budget. I am confident about the reasonable and balanced proposals that we will bring forward.

I know that some members of the Parliament say—they have every right to argue this and will continue to do so—that we should go further. I respect that, and we will have those discussions as we go through the budget process.

However, there is hypocrisy at the heart of the Tories' position. Week in and week out in the chamber, Ruth Davidson stands up and calls for more investment in the health service, more investment in education, more investment in policing and more investment in practically every responsibility that the Scottish Government has, yet she is not prepared to say where the money would come from. She is against modest increases in the council tax, she is against the Government's position of not having a major income tax cut for the highest-paid people in our country and she is against modest proposals on business taxes. She comes here and says where we should spend extra money, but she does not have the gumption to say where that money should come from. That is not an acceptable or reasonable position for those who call themselves the Opposition to take.

Ruth Davidson: That was absolutely zero answer for the one in eight businesses in Scotland

that are paying higher taxes than they would pay south of the border—there was nothing for them.

The bottom line is that the Parliament is moving to a new phase in which economic growth will determine how much money the Scottish Government has to spend. If we tax too much, we will deter that growth and the tax receipts that we need. For Derek Mackay's benefit, I say that that is Laffer economics.

The trouble is that the people who are watching the Parliament see parties whose only question on tax is, "How high can we go?" Why can the First Minister not see that that will only damage Scotland's reputation as a place to do business?

The First Minister: Ruth Davidson is—flatly—wrong. Let us look at business rates. We have the most generous and competitive system of business rates, particularly for small businesses, of any part of the UK, and we have put forward proposals to expand our small business bonus scheme so that more small business premises across Scotland—100,000, following the expansion—will pay no business rates whatsoever. That is how we get growth going in our economy—by supporting the small businesses throughout the country that employ people and provide vital services in communities the length and breadth of Scotland.

I return to a point that I made earlier. We know what Ruth Davidson is against when it comes to taxation. She is against modest reform of the council tax and modest increases for housing in the highest council tax bands. She is against the Scottish Government's position that it is not right to give a massive income tax cut to the highest-paid people in our society. However, we do not know what she is for when it comes to raising the extra revenue to invest in the public services that she always says need extra revenue.

In fact, when it comes to revenue raising, the only people who we know the Conservatives think should pay more are the sick in our society, because the Conservatives want to reinstate prescription charges. They want to protect the highest paid in our society and they want those who are sick and in need of prescriptions to pay the price. The Conservatives' position is shameful, which is why the Scottish Government will continue to put forward the reasonable and progressive positions that we take across the range of tax powers that we have.

Ruth Davidson: I have here the Government's table on business poundage rates. One in eight businesses in Scotland is paying 51p in the pound, whereas it would pay 49p if it were down south. The First Minister says that she knows what I am against. I will tell all of Scotland what I am against. I am against the biggest threat to Scotland's

economy at the moment, which is the constitutional uncertainty that she has put on the table.

It is not just me who thinks that. Last week, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors said that the real problem that investment and jobs in Scotland face is the First Minister's threat of a second independence referendum. The latest Scottish property review says:

"A second independence referendum could have serious consequences"

for the market and would be

"a drag on business investment"

and development.

Here is the SNP's plan: higher council tax, higher business rates, higher income tax and a second referendum that will damage confidence. We all want economic growth, but how will that plan deliver?

The First Minister: I start to wonder whether Ruth Davidson is my secret FMQs agent. Today of all days, the fact that she can stand up and talk about constitutional uncertainty beggars belief, to be frank. On that basis, there is not a lot of competence in her preparation for First Minister's questions.

This is the day when her party's position has just been overturned in the courts. The court has said that the Conservative Party's intention to trigger article 50 without a vote in Parliament is illegal. For her to come and talk about constitutional uncertainty is, to be frank, beyond words.

I make it clear that the Government's job is to make sure that we look after our public services and to bring forward proposals for tax that are reasonable, balanced and progressive and which allow us to protect public services and to support our economy to grow, particularly through our support for the smallest businesses in our country. Our job is also to stand up for this country's interests and do everything that we can to prevent the party that Ruth Davidson is a member of from dragging Scotland out of the European Union against our will. That is the biggest risk to our economy and that is what Ruth Davidson needs to wake up to.

Cabinet (Meeting)

2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-00415)

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

Kezia Dugdale: Presiding Officer,

"The council tax has to go."

Those are not my words, but the words of John Swinney, eight years ago this very month. The

"hated Council tax is totally unfair, and any tinkering with bands would not make the system any fairer."

Those are not my words but the words of Nicola Sturgeon in 2007. Later today, this Parliament will debate the future of council tax in Scotland. Why will the First Minister not keep the manifesto promise that she made to voters to

"scrap the unfair council tax."?

The First Minister: I am proposing to keep the manifesto promise that I was elected First Minister on the strength of just a few months ago in May. I repeat my comment to Ruth Davidson: the proposals that Parliament will vote on today are the proposals that were in the Scottish National Party manifesto, which were put to the Scottish people and which saw the return of this Government with more votes than the Tories and Labour combined. That is the authority and the mandate behind the proposal that we will put to Parliament.

I say again that the proposals are fair, balanced and progressive and, crucially, that they will raise £100 million of extra revenue to invest in our schools to help us to raise attainment and to close the attainment gap, which is something that I have repeatedly said is the Government's top priority.

As I said to Ruth Davidson, I respect that there are voices in the Parliament—the Greens in particular have credibility on this issue; indeed, they have more credibility perhaps than other parties have—that want us to go further. *[Interruption.]* As I have said, I am happy to continue the discussion about progressive reform of local tax. However, the vote at 5 o'clock tonight is not a political game; it is a vote with real implications. The vote is to decide whether we implement these responsible changes to council tax and deliver £100 million extra revenue for schools.

I understand why the Tories will vote against the plans, because the Tories do not believe in progressive taxation. They do not believe, as we have just heard, in raising extra revenue for public services. What I think the public will struggle to understand is if the names of Labour MSPs at any point tonight appear in the same voting column as the Conservatives. That would be inexplicable.

Kezia Dugdale: The First Minister seems to have forgotten that she lost her majority in May—*[Interruption.]* I know, I know—*[Interruption.]* Wait a wee minute. Here is the thing: in 2011, she won a majority in this chamber with a promise to scrap the council tax. It seems that she has a mandate only when it suits her. The truth is that the First

Minister has broken her promise to voters. When the measures are voted on later today, the SNP wants to just "tinker with the bands". Those are Nicola Sturgeon's words, and she admitted that that

"would not make the system any fairer".

This proposal is not big enough and it is not bold enough. Under the SNP's plan, families living in the homes that are worth the least will be as badly off as they are today. Under Labour's plans, families in band A properties would pay less than they do today. New independent research shows that, under the SNP's plans, people in band A will still pay four times more tax as a proportion of their home than the richest people in band H. Labour would scrap the unfair council tax and introduce a fairer system so that 80 per cent of households would pay less. Why will she not support that?

The First Minister: I know that Kezia Dugdale spent the past few days campaigning in an election on the other side of the pond—we would be on the same side for that, incidentally—but let me remind her that her party lost its position as the official Opposition in this chamber in the recent election. The proposals that the SNP put forward in that election attracted more votes than the Conservative and Labour proposals combined—that is the reality. That is why we will put forward our proposals tonight for fair and progressive changes that will raise £100 million for our schools.

It is decision time for Labour, because people will look to see which column Labour MSPs' names end up in tonight. Will they end up in the column of fair and progressive change with more money for our schools, or will they end up in the same column as the Conservatives, who do not believe in progressive taxation and who do not want to protect our public services? It really is decision time for Labour and I look forward to seeing which way it falls.

Kezia Dugdale: The First Minister regularly comes to the chamber and crows about the extra £100 million that she is going to spend on schools. What she fails to tell members is that she ripped out £500 million last year from our schools and local public services. We have yet to hear how many more hundreds of millions of pounds she is going to strip from our local services in this year's budget.

Here is the thing: I believe in investing in education and I believe in the redistribution of wealth, but funding for local services should be redistributed locally. The national Government should have the guts to use its own tax powers to close the gap between the richest and the poorest kids. The bottom line is that the First Minister does not have to pass on Tory austerity; she can make

different choices to protect our local services. Is it not the case that the only way to stop the cuts is to back Labour's tax plans?

The First Minister: If we strip all of that away—because we could debate back and forth about the truth or otherwise of what Kezia Dugdale said—the simple fact of the matter is that at 5 o'clock tonight there will be £100 million for schools on the table. It will be available for schools at the press of a button. We have heard from Ruth Davidson that the Tories will vote against £100 million for our schools. The question is, will Labour line up with the Conservatives tonight, or will Labour vote with the Government for progressive changes to council tax that will deliver £100 million for our schools? People will be watching—we will wait and see what Labour decides to do.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The First Minister might be aware of the tragic case in my constituency of Sean McKenna, whose body was found last week after he had been missing for almost three weeks. I pay tribute to Sean's family for their bravery during this incredibly difficult time, and to the Coatbridge police and many hundreds of local people who dedicated their time to helping in the search for Sean. What support is available to the families of missing persons, and what procedures are in place for police to co-ordinate large-scale civilian searches?

The First Minister: I am of course aware of the tragic case of Sean McKenna and I take this opportunity to offer my sincere condolences to his family and friends.

Police Scotland has standard operating procedures for the co-ordination of, and participation in, civilian searches. In such distressing circumstances, it is heartening to see the very many volunteers from local communities who are willing to give up their time to offer assistance in the search for a missing person. It is important that Police Scotland continues to operate its own procedures and—as it will always do for a range of different issues—keep those procedures under review.

I am sure that we all want to thank the volunteers who assisted and, once again, offer our condolences to the family of Sean McKenna at this unimaginably difficult time.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Is the First Minister aware that the unelected health board in Lanarkshire removed orthopaedic and trauma services from Monklands general hospital on Monday this week, ignoring the vote of this Parliament and the local campaign against the cut? Does she find that acceptable, and can she explain why that has not been called in by her Government as a major service change?

The First Minister: I am genuinely not sure whether Elaine Smith was in the chamber yesterday for the statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport on that and other health matters. The change that has been made thus far is a temporary change and it has been made in the interests of patient safety. The full change, if it was to go ahead, would require to go through all the processes that are normally the case for changes of this nature. The health secretary said yesterday that, in this case, the final decision will come to her for approval—Elaine Smith used the terminology “calling in”. The health secretary made that clear yesterday, and I hope that the member will welcome that.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I learned just last night that Murray & Burrell, a family building firm in Galashiels, in my constituency, that was established in 1928 has gone into administration. Today, 35 tradesmen and office staff and two apprentices are redundant. There is also a substantial knock-on effect on at least 15 subcontractors and more than 25 suppliers, all local.

I understand that the Scottish Building Federation, and the Construction Industry Training Board, with regard to the apprentices, are already involved, but has the Government instructed partnership action for continuing employment? I also advise that the role of the Royal Bank of Scotland in the demise of this local company appears to be central and that, once I have the full details, I will pursue the matter further.

The First Minister: I share the member's concern regarding developments in respect of Murray & Burrell and the potential impact on employees and their families, and the surrounding area. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work will be happy to discuss this further with the member and to include in those discussions the issue of RBS that she raises. I can confirm, though, that our agencies will do whatever can be done to minimise any negative impact. I have already instructed our agency Scottish Enterprise to make contact immediately to see what assistance can be offered. Our PACE team is also making contact to offer support for affected employees.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-00407)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Cabinet will next meet on Tuesday.

Patrick Harvie: There is and has been for a long time a very strong case for real, fundamental

reform of local taxation. As the cross-party commission on local tax reform agreed, the present system of council tax must end. I regret the fact that the Scottish National Party no longer supports that view, but we have been willing to work with the Government on the modest adjustments that we can support, even if we cannot do so without voicing any criticism.

Tonight's vote on changing the bands is one area where we can agree so, whatever else happens in tonight's vote, the Greens will vote for the measure. The FM knows that we will not be alone in doing so, yet the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution has been warning people today what would happen if the change was not agreed to. The media is reporting that the SNP may not even back its own policy proposal at the end of the day.

A minority Government must sometimes accept modest criticisms. We have been clear at every step that we are expressing our criticisms without putting the reforms in any danger. Does the First Minister remain committed to her party's proposal to change council tax bands? Will she be voting for it, as we will, tonight?

The First Minister: I think that I have made clear in my exchanges with the other leaders my support for the proposition that the Scottish Government has put forward—indeed, the proposition that won support in the election. However, we will go further than that this evening.

The amendment that has been lodged, in Derek Mackay's name, to the motion on the Scottish statutory instrument that we will vote on at 5 o'clock, respects the issue of local democracy and acknowledges, as I have acknowledged previously in the chamber, the desire for further discussions about further reform. I have made it clear—I think also in previous exchanges with Patrick Harvie in the chamber—that we are open to discussions, over the course of this session of Parliament, about further reform that is progressive and fair and enshrines the principle of local democracy. I make that view very clear again today.

Effectively, two amendments to the SSI are on offer to parties this evening. There is the one from Andy Wightman, which talks about the principle of local democracy, and there is the one from Derek Mackay, which talks about the principle of local democracy but also, crucially, does what Andy Wightman's amendment does not do and talks about the principles of progressivity and fairness. That is the one that I hope the chamber will vote for.

I can understand why the Tories would prefer to vote for the former amendment, but I hope that other members see that we should unite behind voting for something that talks about local

democracy, fairness and the progressive principle, and then unite behind getting £100 million into our schools. Let us remember that that is the key benefit of what we will vote for.

Patrick Harvie: The Green amendment deletes nothing from the Government's proposals. It changes nothing in what will happen if the bands are changed and the revenue is raised; it only adds modest criticisms that are widely shared.

The First Minister is keen to remind us all that people will be watching and will struggle to understand some of the consequences if the proposal falls. However, the only way in which the SNP's proposal on council tax bands can fall is if it decides to let it fall. It would be astonishing and—to paraphrase the First Minister—people would struggle to understand if the First Minister and her colleagues lined up with the only other party that supports the discredited council tax and failed to back the First Minister's own policy. Is wounded pride really worth £100 million?

The First Minister: I will take responsibility for how SNP MSPs vote this evening. The point that I am making is that there is a choice of two amendments. One talks about the principle of local democracy, which is fair enough—that is the position that Andy Wightman has put forward—and the other accepts that position on local democracy but goes on to talk about fairness and progressive taxation. That is the choice that members have with regard to the amendments.

I know that the words “progressive” and “fair” are not in Andy Wightman's amendment, which makes it easier for the Tories to back it—I understand that; but there is an opportunity for there to be a genuine progressive alliance behind the Government's amendment, which genuinely talks about local democracy, fairness and progressive taxation. I say again that we are absolutely confident in the proposals that we have put forward, but we are also signalling a willingness to talk to other parties across the chamber to further the discussion about progressive taxation. I hope that we can get to that position tonight, and I hope that we will vote for sensible changes that deliver £100 million for our schools.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are a number of further supplementaries. If members and the First Minister are brief, we will get through all of them.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Does the First Minister agree that it is an outrage that disabled people who phone a Department for Work and Pensions hotline to appeal against benefit sanctions are charged more than millionaires who query tax bills are? Will she back calls to end that Tory telephone tax?

The First Minister: A good case has been made for that. It is clear that people who are on benefits, particularly those who receive disability benefits and, indeed, those who receive working tax credits and the universal credit, are seeing reductions and cuts to their benefits from decisions that the United Kingdom Government has made. It compounds that injustice if people are charged money for having to phone up if they need help or advice. That case has been made. The issue is clearly one for the UK Government, and I hope that it will take the right decision.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): In light of recent revelations about Gartnavel general hospital's operating theatres, is the First Minister satisfied with the Scottish Government's handling of our national health service?

The First Minister: Yes, I am satisfied with that. However, as I said in the chamber last week, although our NHS is performing well, it faces challenges, and the job of the Government is to support it in meeting those challenges.

On the Gartnavel issue, we have in place in Scotland a robust inspection system that is designed to ensure that if there are deficiencies in any aspect of how a hospital is run—its cleanliness in particular—those deficiencies are identified, highlighted and rectified. That will happen in this case, and that is what happens generally with the inspection regime that we have in place.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Following this morning's very welcome High Court decision that there should be a parliamentary vote on Brexit, will the Scottish Government actively oppose the UK Government's intended appeal when it reaches the UK Supreme Court?

The First Minister: We will look at the judgment very carefully and, yes, we will actively consider whether there is a case for the Scottish Government to become a participant in that case.

I do not think that the judgment this morning is a huge surprise to anybody who has followed the case, but it is hugely significant and underlines the total chaos and confusion at the heart of the UK Government. We should remember that its refusal to allow a vote in the House of Commons is not some matter of high constitutional principle; it is because it does not have a coherent position and knows that if it takes its case to the House of Commons, that will be exposed.

The job of this Government is to protect Scotland's interests. Scotland voted to remain in the European Union and my job, therefore, is to protect our place in Europe and the single market as far as I possibly can. Scottish National Party MPs in the House of Commons will certainly not

vote for anything that undermines the will or the interests of the Scottish people.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): According to a response to a parliamentary question, in the past decade, Highlands and Islands Enterprise has given £3.5 million to the arms industry, £2.5 million of which was given in the past three years, and Scottish Enterprise has given £15 million. Does the First Minister agree that such expenditure is not some people's idea of a progressive Scotland? Moreover, will she agree to have the enterprise agencies revisit the recipients of that money to give them advice on how to diversify from destructive activities to endeavours that have a more positive benefit for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, Scotland itself and, indeed, humanity?

The First Minister: I think that John Finnie and I will agree on much about the general issue of ethics in the arms trade and the need for weapons not to be misused, as many feel that they are in Saudi Arabia for attacks on the Yemeni people.

However, John Finnie's particular point is at risk of misrepresenting—though not deliberately—the position of our enterprise agencies. The funding that Scottish Enterprise has provided supports companies in diversifying and developing non-military applications for technology as well as, of course, supporting employment opportunities in Scotland. The role of our enterprise agencies is to support employment, economic growth and economic opportunities, but we will always ensure that that is done in line with our wider principles and values. That is the case in this particular area as it is in many other areas.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): On Monday, a family came to my constituency surgery. In March, the father, George Ballantyne, an 83-year-old resident from Corstorphine, had a fall and was taken to Liberton hospital. After exemplary care and some adaptations to his home, he was declared fit to go home in early June. On three occasions, he was advised to get ready to go the next morning, only for the care package to fall through. Last night, George spent his 150th night in Liberton hospital after being declared fit to go home. Given that the health secretary said two years ago that this Government was committed to eradicating delayed discharge, will the First Minister explain to George and his family why he is still in hospital?

The First Minister: The member has raised an important issue. The Government is, of course, committed to eradicating delayed discharges, and we are making progress towards that aim. The reason why we have integrated health and social care services is to try to ensure that individuals do not fall through the gaps in the system, which is

what appears, from what Alex Cole-Hamilton has said, to be happening in this case.

What Alex Cole-Hamilton has outlined certainly sounds to me like an unacceptable situation for an individual. The health secretary has indicated to me that she is aware of the case, is looking into it and will be writing to Mr Cole-Hamilton about it. We want to make sure that we have in place a system in which people get the right care in the right place at the right time. We are making progress towards that, but it is reforms such as the integration of health and social care that will allow us to make further progress in the months and years to come.

Migrants' Contribution to Scotland

4. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what analysis the Scottish Government has conducted into the contribution that migrants make to Scotland. (S5F-00430)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Last week, the Government published two analytical reports on the contribution that migrants make to Scotland. We now have robust evidence on their contribution to our economy and society; we also know that the majority of those who come to Scotland are highly qualified young people who are economically active and that European migrants, in particular, make a positive contribution to the public purse. I welcome those findings, as we know that many sectors of our economy are reliant on migrant labour. I also take this opportunity to say again that we truly value the contribution of all migrants to Scotland and welcome all those who choose to make their lives here.

Ruth Maguire: I welcome the findings, which should help to challenge head on some of the prejudices that sadly still prevail about migrants living and working in our society. How will the First Minister work to ensure that Scotland remains a welcoming place for those who wish to live and work here following the United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union?

The First Minister: We have made it crystal clear on many occasions that the 180,000 or so EU nationals who have chosen to make their home in Scotland continue to be welcome here, and I think that that sentiment is shared right across the chamber.

Their contribution to this country is valued, and the position that has been taken not just by this Government but across the political spectrum in Scotland stands in contrast to the unwelcoming and unpleasant rhetoric about migrants that we increasingly hear from the UK Government.

This Government continues to explore all options that are open to us to protect Scotland's interests in Europe. Later this month, Mike Russell will chair a focus group to listen to and gather information on the impact that the EU referendum result is having on EU nationals, and we will continue to press the UK Government to guarantee, without further delay, the residency status of fellow EU nationals who have made Scotland their home. Frankly, I continue to be appalled daily that that guarantee has not been given and that we have a UK Government that still seems content to use EU nationals as bargaining chips in a wider negotiation.

Brexit and the Scottish Financial Services Sector

5. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the University of Strathclyde paper, "Brexit and the Scottish Financial Services Sector". (S5F-00429)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The University of Strathclyde paper draws attention to the serious impact that Brexit will have on the financial sector in Scotland. It says:

"If the UK does make it much more difficult to bring in skilled people from other countries, it will undermine one of the UK and Scotland's main attractions for internationally mobile businesses and activities."

Since that paper was published, there has been new evidence of the damage that a hard Brexit will cause. Yesterday, a leading think tank warned of a 60 per cent reduction in United Kingdom trade and services with European Economic Area countries if a hard Brexit is pursued.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with the financial services sector and we will continue to consider all possible steps to ensure our continuing relationship with the European Union and the single market. Part of what we will do in that regard relates to my answer to the previous question: we will distance ourselves completely from the UK Government's damaging anti-immigration rhetoric.

Dean Lockhart: The financial services sector in Scotland is indeed vital to our economy, accounting for approximately 10 per cent of our onshore gross domestic product. That is exactly why I am asking the First Minister to follow the report's guidance, which concludes that Brexit

"does not take us to a case for Scottish independence".

Those words are not mine, but the conclusion of the report.

The argument against independence is also highlighted by a report by Scottish Financial Enterprise, which says that 90 per cent of

Scotland's financial trade is with the rest of the UK.

The SNP has issued its consultation paper on a second independence referendum, but it has failed yet again to explain what currency it proposes to use. Would it look to keep the pound? Would it adopt the euro? Would it create a new Scottish pound? That fundamental confusion is creating significantly more uncertainty for the financial sector than Brexit is.

If the First Minister will not listen to us, will she listen to the guidance of the University of Strathclyde report and the financial community and scrap her plans for an independence referendum? In the real world, the question of independence does not transcend everything else.

The First Minister: For a Tory to lead with the chin on currency right now is almost as inept as Ruth Davidson standing up and talking about constitutional uncertainty on the day that her own Government has been overruled in the courts on the triggering of article 50.

My objective is clear and it is one that I hope that all members in the chamber can get behind, whatever our disagreements on the constitution. I want to keep Scotland's economy, including our financial services sector, in the single market. I am seeking to try to find a way to do that, and for the life of me I cannot understand why the Conservatives, who before the referendum expressed support for the single market, find it so hard to support us in doing that now.

We will continue to act in the best interests of Scotland and the Scottish economy. Members should be in no doubt that the alternative to that is for Scotland, including our financial services sector, to be taken over the hard-Brexit cliff edge by the UK Government. That would be disastrous for our economy generally and for our financial services in particular.

Last night, Boris Johnson eventually said something that I could almost agree with: he said that Brexit is likely to be a "Titanic success". That is probably the truest thing that he has said in a long time.

Living Wage

6. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the new living wage rate. (S5F-00411)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I welcome the new living wage rate of £8.45 an hour, which I announced on Monday. It will benefit thousands of Scottish workers and help ensure that people's basic wage meets the real cost of living. More than 630 employers are now

accredited living wage employers and, of all the countries in the UK, we have the highest proportion of employees who are paid the living wage or more. I encourage all employers to recognise the benefits of paying the real living wage and to consider signing up as accredited employers. Although there is much progress, we still have work to do and we are determined that we will do it.

Jackie Baillie: I very much welcome the increase in the real living wage in Scotland and across the UK. However, although there has been significant progress in the public sector, one in five workers—principally in the private sector—are earning less than the living wage, so I share the First Minister's ambition that we must do more. One of the levers that the First Minister has is the Scottish business pledge, but take-up of that pledge is low. It is disappointing that only 0.2 per cent of Scotland's firms are taking part, and the take-up is worst in accommodation and food services, where pay is often lower than in other sectors. What action will the First Minister take to improve the take-up of the business pledge, particularly in those low-paid sectors, and to increase the living wage for more workers across Scotland?

The First Minister: Significant numbers and types of companies have already signed up to the business pledge, but we continue to encourage more companies across Scotland to do so. Whatever our disagreements in this chamber, I hope that all MSPs will join us in encouraging companies to do the right thing by signing up to the business pledge and to the progressive business practices that are encapsulated in that pledge.

The most significant lever that we use, specifically in relation to the living wage, is the living wage accreditation campaign. We now have more than 600 employers signed up to that. Of course, there will be many employers across the country who pay the living wage but are not yet accredited and I encourage them to get accredited. We have set a target of having 1,000 employers signed up to the accreditation campaign by this time next year and all MSPs can help us to ensure that we reach that target.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the Poverty Alliance for the great work that it does in leading the accreditation campaign for us.

We have made progress in the public sector and in the private sector, but 20 per cent of people across the country are still not paid the living wage, which is why we must all work hard to encourage companies to do the right thing. I will end on a crucial point for any business listening to this answer and, perhaps understandably, worrying about whether it can afford to pay the

living wage. The living wage is not only good for workers; all the evidence says that paying the living wage helps companies as well. It helps to increase their productivity, reduce their absenteeism and improve their bottom line, so it is a win-win situation and we should all get behind the campaign to ensure that everybody gets paid the living wage.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Does the First Minister agree with me that the way to ensure true financial security and to lift people out of poverty is to have a strong and stable economy that provides good, secure and reliable jobs, and that such an economy is undermined both by making Scotland the highest taxed part of the UK and by the on-going threat of another separation referendum?

The First Minister: These Tories are obsessed with independence, for goodness' sake.

I agree with Mr Kerr about the importance of a strong and stable economy, which is why I so deprecate the Brexit vandalism of the Tory UK Government. I also think that it is really important—as we have been doing in a sensible discussion about the living wage—that we focus on the financial security of individuals and of families across the country. The Scottish Government is focused on doing that principally through our support for the living wage, but one of the things running counter to all our efforts is the policies of the UK Government, which are about working tax credits being cut, benefits being cut and support through universal credit and the work allowance being cut. Before the Tory members come here and lecture this Government, perhaps they should pick up the phone to their own colleagues in London and tell them to get behind the efforts to improve economic stability and the living standards of families across the country.

ScotRail Services

7. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the First Minister, further to ScotRail being fined £483,000 for failing to meet performance standards, when services will improve. (S5F-00424)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The ScotRail franchise contains the toughest quality regime in the United Kingdom to drive up passenger standards. Our service quality regime checks more than 30 customer facilities and services across trains and stations in Scotland every four weeks. Inspectors patrol the network daily, pushing up ScotRail's quality, meaning that our passenger satisfaction figures sit some 7 per cent ahead of the British average.

The recent fine shows that further improvements need to be made in service delivery. Transport

Scotland has requested remedial action plans from ScotRail to focus on improving performance in the necessary areas.

Mike Rumbles: MSPs have seen the flimsy document entitled "ScotRail Improvement Plan", which has more pictures in it than detail. How can the First Minister expect the public to know what ScotRail's improvement plans actually are if the whole plan is still to be published? It has not been published yet. Ministers are hiding behind commercial confidentiality, which is simply not good enough. The Minister for Transport and the Islands needs to publish the full plan, with any really commercially sensitive information redacted. We need some openness and transparency here.

The First Minister: It strikes me that the member cannot have it both ways: he cannot come and ask a question about hefty fines for ScotRail not meeting its performance targets and then say that the Scottish Government is not taking the issue seriously.

There is no hiding behind any commercial confidentiality. The performance requirements for ScotRail are contained in the franchise. At this stage, it is not meeting the requirement to have 91 out of 100 trains arriving at their destinations within the industry-recognised punctuality measures. The figure is sitting at around 89 trains per 100. That is why the Minister for Transport and the Islands has insisted on an improvement plan.

We will continue to monitor ScotRail's performance against that plan on a weekly basis, because the travelling public deserve to know that their trains will run effectively, efficiently and on time. We are determined to work through the contract to ensure that that is the case. Ultimately, if ScotRail does not meet its performance requirements, we have the option of terminating the contract early. That is very much an option that we keep on the table.

Point of Order

12:46

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Yesterday in the chamber Alex Cole-Hamilton raised a point of order. He stated:

“we have had five sycophantic questions from members of the Government’s party”.—[*Official Report*, 2 November 2016; c 30.]

That related to questions following a statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport.

Rule 7.3 of the standing orders of the Scottish Parliament states:

“Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner”.

Not only was Alex Cole-Hamilton wrong, as three questions, not five, came from Scottish National Party back benchers, but I believe that he fell short of the standards that I referred to by using that language in relation to fellow members of the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I thank the member for her point of order. The Presiding Officer in the chair dealt with that point of order at the time. I take this opportunity to urge all members to treat one another with respect.

Burial and Cremation Charges

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members’ business debate on motion S5M-01511, in the name of Alex Rowley, on the cost of saying goodbye—burial and cremation charges in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges the recent Citizens Advice Scotland report, *The Cost of Saying Goodbye 2016*; understands that 2016 has seen the basic cost of burial fees, not including undertaker charges, increase on average by 8% to £1,373 and that cremation charges have increased by an average of 11%; further understands that the costs levied by councils can increase for a number of reasons, including because of substantial investment in new crematoria and graveyards and as a result of tighter budgets; considers that more must be done to address the rising costs of funerals across the country, and recognises what it sees as the high level of anxiety and worry that many people in Mid Scotland and Fife and across Scotland feel about the cost of saying goodbye.

12:49

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank all the members who signed my motion to allow the debate to take place.

One evening last year, I attended an event in the garden lobby that brought together members of many forums for the elderly throughout Scotland. As I spoke to those who attended, I asked them what the big issues for pensioners were. To my surprise, the cost of funerals came up time and again.

A few months later, I attended a similar event at which the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners’ Rights, Alex Neil, spoke. He announced a review of funeral costs, to a warm reception from those who were in the room. I am pleased that he is here to participate in the debate, and I acknowledge the action that he took to kick off a review and steer the work in a direction in which I believe good progress has been made.

I lodged the motion on the back of the Citizens Advice Scotland report, which highlights the latest increases in cemetery and cremation charges across Scotland. This year, on average, there have been increases of 8 per cent for a burial and 11 per cent for cremation.

I highlighted the issue when I was an opposition councillor in Fife Council because, at that time, the increase in local charges over five years had been horrific, yet Fife remains one of the lower-cost areas in Scotland for burial and cremation. At that time, there was no doubt in my mind that the hikes

in charges were linked directly to cuts in council budgets.

As we saw from the research that was published earlier this week by the Scottish Parliament information centre, the University of Glasgow and Heriot-Watt University, cuts in public services disproportionately hit the poorest and those who are on the lowest incomes. That is also true for service charges that people do not have a choice about: they have to access the service and yet the costs continue to go up.

I acknowledge that some councils have had to make significant investments, but the key point that I ask members to consider is whether it is right to expect those who are least able to pay to bear the brunt of the costs to fund future investment in cemeteries and crematoriums. Future capital investment must be met from general funding, as burial and cremation should be considered to be a public service. As well as acknowledging Alex Neil's role in progressing the issues, I acknowledge the important work of Citizens Advice Scotland in highlighting the levels of funeral poverty and offering solutions.

It is worth taking the time to emphasise what funeral costs can mean. For those who are on the state pension, it takes seven and a half months of their pension income to pay for the average funeral. For those who are on jobseekers allowance, it takes 12 months of the benefit to pay for the average funeral. Approximately 10 per cent of people struggle to pay the cost of a funeral for which they are responsible.

The average debt that people in Scotland take on to pay for funerals is £1,573, according to Royal London, which notes that the level is expected to rise in coming years. The increasing cost of funerals has resulted in the gap between the contribution from the social fund funeral payment and the actual retail funeral costs more than doubling from 2004 to 2015, which has left claimants with an average shortfall of more than £2,000. As the report from the CAS working group states,

"If an individual is unable to pay the cost of the funeral, there are two possible outcomes. Either they take on a level of debt which may create a distress that can interfere with the grieving process, or they may seek to reduce the expense and provide 'less of a funeral' in which case guilt and stigma may interfere with grieving."

The current Department for Work and Pensions grant is described by Royal London as "weak and flawed". Of the 66,000 applications to the social fund in 2012-13, only 53 per cent were successful. Families can end up in a lot of debt when they have borrowed in the belief that they will get support that they are then refused.

Control over this part of social security is now to lie with the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. Although some elements of the new powers that are being devolved to Scotland will take time to set up, I hope that social fund funeral expenses payments can be transferred sooner rather than later, so that we can design a better system in Scotland to support people when they are in need.

I note that the Government's "Fairer Scotland Action Plan", which it published last week, highlights funeral poverty in the final action point. Action 50 states:

"We will improve the current system of Funeral Payments, so it helps more people, is more predictable and provides help more quickly."

That is welcome, I support that and I hope that the Government can now put a timetable on when the powers will be transferred.

The review by John Birrell and Fraser Sutherland set out the detail of what needs to be done, and Citizens Advice Scotland has published further work on the social security powers. We are therefore well placed to make progress.

One of the first experiences that I had in understanding poverty was when, as a child, I was in a graveyard and came across an area with no headstones, which I was told was the area of the paupers' graves. At the weekend, I watched the film "I, Daniel Blake" and heard the phrase "the paupers' slot at the crematorium". I thought that we had made progress and that no one would be described as a pauper in 21st century Scotland.

Let us agree to bring forward a timetable, to build on the good work that is being done and to sort out the issue once and for all.

12:56

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): As I indicated previously to the Presiding Officer's office, I will be unable to stay for the full debate, for which I apologise to the chamber.

I congratulate Alex Rowley on securing the debate, and I join him and other members in welcoming the Citizens Advice Scotland report. I pay tribute to the work that Alex Neil did on the subject before it was rudely interrupted by the First Minister's reshuffle. I draw members' attention to the fact that I was recently elected as a co-convenor of the Parliament's proposed cross-party group on funerals and bereavement, and I look forward to the group looking at the issues that are raised in the motion.

As a Lothian MSP, I was particularly concerned by the CAS report's finding that Edinburgh city, which is in my region, is the most expensive place in Scotland for a burial. From 2015 to 2016,

charges there increased by another 4 per cent to reach £2,253. That is a very large amount of money for any individual or family to find, let alone those who are on low incomes or on benefits, and that figure does not take into account funeral directors' fees or any of the other expenses that are involved in a funeral. Having to find that money can add to the stress that families feel at what is an anxious and difficult time.

Through written and parliamentary questions, I have raised with ministers the concerns of Edinburgh constituents, who are understandably alarmed at the high cost of burial in their area, which is way above the average cost in Scotland of £1,363. They are struggling to understand the differences in basic burial costs across Scotland, which vary by as much as £1,500 between councils. We need to find out more from local authorities about the reasons behind those variations, and I hope that such discussions can take place at an early stage through the Scottish Government's working group on funeral poverty.

There are also disparities in the charges for cremations in local authority crematoria, although they are less marked than those for burials. Given that cremation fees are about 50 per cent cheaper than burial fees, we need to recognise that further burial charge rises in areas in which those charges are already high runs the alarming risk of putting pressure on older residents and their families to rethink their funeral plans and consider cremation, even when their preference is for burial. I think that all of us would agree that that is not an acceptable scenario for constituents.

The United Kingdom Government's funeral payment scheme has been of great assistance to many constituents on low incomes who face funeral costs, and I look forward to the Scottish Government developing a successor scheme. That has been mentioned previously in the chamber, and I recognise the work that the Scottish Government is doing in that area.

I am conscious of the concerns that have been expressed about a lack of awareness of the current scheme, and I know that ministers will want to reflect on that as they develop the new benefit. I hope that we can hear about that early so that the information gets out across Scotland.

It is important that those who are on low incomes know what support is available. I would like to know what action ministers can take to promote affordable funeral prepayment plans among people who are on low incomes, as such plans can protect family members from rising funeral costs.

I again welcome today's debate, which I hope will help to inform the Scottish Government's thinking and work on funeral poverty and to

address the genuine and legitimate concerns that our constituents have raised. I hope that, by working together, we can find a way of addressing this growing problem and putting funeral poverty in Scotland behind us.

13:00

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):

Jessica Mitford, the red sheep of the Mitford family and the author of the extraordinary work "The American Way of Death"—a book that, more than 50 years ago, exposed the shameless profiteering exploitation of families at a time of great distress and vulnerability: the time of bereavement—said:

"You may not be able to change the world, but at least you can embarrass the guilty."

I hope that, when it comes to ending funeral poverty in Scotland, we can do both.

I am delighted that Alex Rowley lodged the motion for debate. Timing is everything in politics: this debate is timed to perfection because it comes at the point when the Scottish Parliament is being handed responsibility for state funeral payments, when the Government is consulting on a new future for social security in Scotland and when the newly passed Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 is being enacted, with a new regulatory regime being established and new inspectors appointed.

The debate also comes when the Government is considering its budget for next year. I make that observation not simply regarding the £4 million that was spent on state funeral payments in Scotland last year—although I would like provision for those payments to rise—but in the context of the forthcoming local government financial settlement, because local government is responsible for setting most burial and cremation charges. That subject came up when I attended the Parliament's cross-party group for older people, age and ageing last week. Some of the pensioners' representatives, including my old friend Jimmy Miller from the GMB union's retired members association, rightly took issue with the enormous differences between burial and cremation charges from local authority to local authority. I can understand that—there should be greater parity. The Scottish Government representative at the cross-party group said that it is a matter of "local political choice", which is a contentious and incomplete statement because it is also a matter of national political choice. To put it simply, the Government cannot freeze the council tax for nine years and expect local charges not to go up.

If we compare the current costs of cremation in Scotland, as Citizens Advice Scotland has done, the situation becomes clear: eight of the 10 least-

expensive cremation charges are in crematoria that are owned and run by Scotland's local councils, whereas eight of the 10 most-expensive cremation charges are in crematoria that are owned and run by the private sector. I say to the Scottish Government that we need a fair settlement for Scottish local government this year so that burial and cremation charges, which are disproportionately levied on the elderly, come down and do not go up.

I hope that the Minister for Social Security agrees that we do not simply need palliative welfare proposals to alleviate funeral poverty. We need a serious and decisive alteration of the balance of power—a structural change in our society—if we are truly to tackle funeral poverty. That is because poverty is not simply about not having any wealth; it is also about not having any power. The one reinforces the other.

It is important that Parliament says loud and clear that we will redouble our efforts to make funeral poverty history and construct a social security system that is designed to support people, literally from the cradle to the grave, and to end what R H Tawney famously described as “the religion of inequality”, which persists in this country. It is also important that we say loud and clear that we will recommit ourselves to dignity, the universal values of humanity and the goal of equality—the goal that drove many of us into politics in the first place.

13:04

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I congratulate Alex Rowley on securing this debate on “The Cost of Saying Goodbye 2016”.

I share the concerns of colleagues about funeral poverty and the number of constituents who have difficulty in raising the money that they need to pay to bury a loved one. Losing a loved one is hard enough without any added burden. We would all agree that everyone deserves a funeral that is meaningful to the bereaved, that is affordable, so that no one is left facing financial hardship and, crucially, which allows people to grieve without financial distress.

As Alex Rowley said, the Citizens Advice Scotland report states that 2016 has seen the basic costs of burial fees, not including undertaker charges, increase by an average of 8 per cent. Although local authorities should recognise the impact that rising costs have and how they contribute to funeral poverty, we have to acknowledge that the money that they raise is invested back in local facilities and services.

Of course, the cost of burial or cremation is not the only factor that contributes to funeral poverty; there are also funeral directors' fees and additional

expenditure on flowers, notices in the paper, catering for the wake and many other things. It all adds up.

Crucially, as has been touched on, the important issue in relation to poverty of every kind is the level of personal finance that is available and the level of assistance that is available to those who cannot pay. One such manner of assistance is the DWP funeral payment, the issues around which have been well rehearsed. That benefit is being devolved to us here in Scotland, and we should endeavour to simplify and promote it when it comes to us. However, even before the benefit is transferred, we must do all that we can to ensure that low uptake of it is tackled. We know that approximately 4,000 people a year in Scotland receive a funeral payment, but the Scottish Government estimates that up to 16,000 people are in need and could apply for that benefit, if all the people who are entitled to make claims were reached.

The issue that we are discussing is not always a comfortable topic to discuss or plan for. Perhaps we need to get better at that and encourage open and honest conversations about dying, death and bereavement. If we can increase awareness about funerals and funeral costs, those who are in a position to do so can plan their finances and, more important, everyone who is entitled to assistance will know how to get it. That will mean that when the time comes—as it will come to us all—to bury a loved one, the focus can be on a meaningful send-off, not money worries.

13:07

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Alex Rowley for bringing this issue to the chamber.

As you know, Presiding Officer, last week, I spoke in a members' business debate about the condition of Scotland's mortuaries. Like the subject that we are speaking about today, it was not something that I had given much thought to until the debate. As a councillor in South Lanarkshire—I declare an interest in that I still sit as one—I have voted on budgets that have increased the cost of burials and cremations. That is easy to do; until one is faced with having to meet that cost after the death of a loved one, it is not personal.

The Citizens Advice Scotland report highlights the huge disparities in the cost of dying between different parts of Scotland. It is a rather grim postcode lottery. If the family of someone who dies in Edinburgh wants to bury them here, they will be hit for £2,200—the highest rate in Scotland. My council is also among the most expensive, at £1,944. However, in the Western Isles, the price is

£701—that is still a lot of money for people to find, but it is still the cheapest, and it is quite a difference in price.

The story with cremations is much the same. Highland is the most expensive area, at £849. By comparison, a cremation in Inverclyde is £552.

However you look at it, saying goodbye in Scotland is not cheap. Therefore, it is no surprise that people struggle to pay the bills and that we have the poverty around saying goodbye that Alex Rowley mentioned.

I must be honest and say that I did not realise that we had privately run crematoriums. I see no reason why we should not, but their costs are, on average, higher than council costs. The motion calls for more to be done to address rising costs. It does not say what should be done, but Alex Rowley helpfully gave some ideas and I hope that the Scottish Government working group can come up with more.

Councils who invest in crematoriums or graveyards will want to claw back some of that investment. Tighter local authority budgets are definitely a factor, as Alex Rowley said. All councils have had to find colossal savings as the Government has put the squeeze on them. Councillors have had to make tough decisions and, even with the ability to increase council tax from next year, that will continue. It is really up to the Scottish Government to look at local government funding and make it more of a priority. Councils deliver so many of the services that really matter to people and yet they have been hit year after year by the cuts to the central grant settlement. If we want to limit price rises for burials, cremations and other services, we have to help councils.

One positive thing to come from today's debate is that it has shone a light on the costs, which is very useful. As I said when I started, few of us will give this any thought until we have to, but it is a lesson to us all to plan ahead. I hope that something good comes from the debate and I thank Alex Rowley once again for bringing it to the chamber.

13:11

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate Alex Rowley on securing the debate. I fully support everything that he said in his speech.

The issue requires a comprehensive response. There is no doubt that funeral poverty is a blight on our communities, whether in urban or rural areas. Sometimes the pressures in each are different.

The report that the Scottish Government produced after I commissioned it made a series of worthwhile recommendations, and I recommend that the Government pursues them, if not to the letter, then certainly in spirit.

For my money, we have four priorities to tackle. The first is financial support, including the bereavement allowance when it is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. As Richard Leonard said, the total budget is approximately £4 million to £5 million, but those in receipt of the allowance, which has been frozen for a number of years, will get only enough to pay for one third of the average funeral cost in today's world. The allowance needs to be upgraded so that it can pay for a larger percentage of total funeral costs.

We also need to look at other ways of supporting people financially. We need to look at the eligibility criteria and, for those people who do not meet the eligibility criteria, we need to consider some other form of financial assistance, such as a loan—without having to go to a loan shark.

Given the small amounts of money involved, there is a need to increase the overall budget significantly. Even an increase of 100 per cent would cost only in the order of £4 million a year but would make a significant dent in levels of funeral poverty.

Secondly, I believe that we have to pursue the recommendations on the licensing of funeral directors. There is no doubt that the industry needs more regulation, not less. There are too many cowboys coming into the industry and too many scams; that needs to be sorted. Although some of the responsibility for that still resides with Westminster, there are things that we can do in this Parliament to tackle the problem. I hope that the minister will not be taken in by the monopoly groups who control some of the membership organisations of funeral directors. She should listen to what funeral directors across the board are saying, not just to the two big boys who control a large share of the market.

Thirdly, I am all in favour of cutting the cost of funerals, but if we go down the route that has been taken in Cardiff—albeit that it has some things to recommend it—whereby council contract funerals are available for £1,000, we must ask why poor people should have to have inferior funerals. Poor people should have the same right as everyone to a decent funeral, and it is difficult to get a decent funeral for £1,000 at today's prices.

Fourthly, on local authority charges, although I absolutely recognise the financial pressures on our councils and the need for councils to raise additional revenue, too many local authorities see funerals as a bit of a cash cow. North Lanarkshire Council, the local authority in the area that I

represent, has increased fees by 39 per cent in one year, which is totally unacceptable. It is not just about charges. Consideration should be given to a system whereby someone who is living in poverty and struggling can get some kind of discount from the local authority to help them to cover the cost.

This is an area in which we can really make a difference. I urge the minister to take a radical, comprehensive approach and to be ready, so that when the bereavement allowance is at last devolved, we can make a quick announcement about significantly increasing the allowance and extending eligibility for it, to help to deal with the problem of funeral poverty in this country.

13:16

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important members' business debate on a topic that touches the lives of us all. I am grateful to Alex Rowley for lodging the motion, and I thank Citizens Advice Scotland for its research and its compelling report, "The Cost of Saying Goodbye 2016: Burial and cremation charges in Scotland".

We all have to say goodbye to a loved one at some point in our lives. It is never easy and when the stress of such a time is compounded by the anxiety of ever-rising costs, the experience can quickly become emotionally overwhelming. The information that Citizens Advice Scotland has compiled on the rising cost of funerals over the past few years is nothing short of shocking.

During my recent visit to the citizens advice bureau in East Kilbride, in the Central Scotland region that I represent, I was concerned to hear that issues to do with funeral poverty and debt are being raised with advisers. One client sought advice from the bureau about assistance with the cost of the funeral of their child. The client and their partner were both employed and living in rented accommodation, and they had no entitlement to Government assistance with the cost of the funeral. They had no savings and no way of paying the funeral costs up front. They were left with no alternative but to take out a loan so that they could pay the costs in advance.

Understandably, that was causing the family a great deal of stress and would have caused great financial hardship. The parents said, "You never think you'll have to bury your child." The family was being thrown into complete emotional and financial turmoil, due to the worst situation imaginable—a situation over which they had absolutely no control.

During the discussion with the CAB, it came to light that one of the parents was ex-service personnel, and an application was made to the

armed services advice project. As a result, I am thankful to say that an armed services charity was able to cover the cost of the funeral.

For people in a similar situation who cannot find a solution, the consequences can be bleak. No one should have to get into debt as a result of having to pay for the funeral of a loved one. The wide variation in the cost of funerals, depending on a person's geographical location and income, is deeply troubling. As Graham Simpson said, the postcode lottery that people face is grim. I am Scottish Labour's spokeswoman for inequalities, and I am extremely concerned that there is such a disparity in funeral costs across the country, because everyone has the right to a dignified funeral.

Alex Rowley's motion is right to say that the rising costs that councils are charging are due to a range of reasons, from significant investment in burial sites and crematoriums to increasingly constrained council budgets. I echo Richard Leonard, who talked about the need for a fair settlement in local government.

Basic burial costs are only part of the total cost of a funeral, as Ruth Maguire stated. The many additional costs include the cost of flowers, celebrant fees and the cost of death notices, which all add to the stress and make the cost more difficult to meet for many families.

I have learned from personal experience, following the death of my dad last year, just how overwhelming it can be when so many choices need to be made in a very short space of time. We need to do more to address the rising funeral cost debts and funeral poverty that we are hearing about, and there is agreement among colleagues from across the chamber about the importance of our doing so. I hope that we can reach agreement, but it is important that, during this parliamentary session, the Government looks again at the issue of funeral poverty and works with parties across the chamber to explore in detail the recommendations of the CAS review of earlier this year.

13:20

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): I welcome the opportunity to close the debate and thank Alex Rowley for bringing it to the chamber. I share his concern and the concern of the many others who spoke in the debate, and I support the motion that we are debating. For families who are mourning the loss of a loved one to be faced with mounting debt and distress because of the cost of the funeral is not only unacceptable but, at times, cruel.

Members have referred to the report that was commissioned by the Scottish Government from

John Birrell, the chair of the Scottish working group on funeral poverty, and Citizens Advice Scotland. The report, which was published earlier this year, recommended action across a number of sectors. The Scottish Government is progressing activities to support people to plan ahead for their own funerals and discuss the matter with relatives; to influence relevant sectors to create downward pressure on funeral costs—I will return to that; and to put in place, when the powers are transferred to us from the DWP, a more effective safety net in the form of a Scottish funeral payment.

As Richard Leonard rightly pointed out, the approach to funeral poverty needs to sit alongside our analysis and understanding of the situation with respect to poverty and our work across Scotland on both poverty and inequalities. The situation is not assisted by the United Kingdom Government's persistence in its ideological clinging to the economics of austerity and the welfare cut upon welfare cut that it is imposing on those who are least able to manage.

Our approach to funeral poverty also sits alongside our work to develop a modern and comprehensive legislative framework for burial and cremation in Scotland. The Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011 allowed us, in May 2015, to remove the doctor's fee from cremation costs, which resulted in a saving of £170 for bereaved families. The Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 contains provision for the re-use of burial lairs, which will reduce pressure on burial ground capacity in the longer term. The 2016 act also requires local authorities to publish and display their fees online, so that they are easily accessible, and contains powers to introduce inspection schemes for directors—although I note Mr Neil's point with respect to the regulation of funeral directors. I take the opportunity to thank him for his work, which has given us a strong foundation.

Our work on palliative and end-of-life care, which supports greater public and personal discussion of bereavement, death, dying and care at the end of life, chimes well with what Ms Maguire said about our general reluctance—as individuals and as a society—to discuss openly the one fact that we all know we will have to address at some point. The Government is also exploring options for a Scottish funeral bond, which would help people to save and plan ahead financially for their funeral. At the same time, as members have noted, we are preparing to take over the DWP's funeral payment.

As for our wider work on social security powers, we have undertaken engagement with people and organisations across Scotland, through which we have heard about much that is wrong with the

system. We have established a funeral poverty and funeral payment reference group, which includes funeral directors' organisations, bereavement services, advice services and local authority representatives.

There are a number of failings with the DWP funeral payment. The eligibility criteria are complex; intrusive and unnecessary questions are asked about family circumstances; there is a range of complicated rules that make entitlement unclear; and its value does not cover all the costs, leaving many in debt—a situation that is exacerbated by very slow processing times.

Mr Rowley asked—fairly—about the timetable that we might pursue for the transfer to the Scottish Parliament of powers in relation to the benefit. Our consultation, which looked at the benefit, lasted three months but ended only on Monday. It would be quite wrong for me as a minister to pre-empt the analysis of the consultation in identifying which areas we would want to change, the improvements that we would want to make or even at this point what the timetable would be for the benefits for which we will take responsibility and the order in which we would do that.

However, I take Alex Rowley's point about using our capacity in areas of benefit responsibility where perhaps the benefit affects fewer people to try to take over those areas earlier. We are trying to identify what the timetable might be, and I hope that we will be able to bring members up to date on that—we will certainly do so in the coming months.

Of course, the situation is made more complex because, across all the benefits that we will take responsibility for, the DWP system is itself complex simply in terms of retrieving the basic data that we need in order to know which individuals receive the benefits that we will take responsibility for. However, I am mindful of Mr Rowley's point, and I hope that he will accept the assurance that we are actively looking at the timetable of progress in taking over responsibility for individual benefits over the lifetime of this session of Parliament.

The bereavement payment is another benefit or area of financial support that still sits with the UK Government. It is a pity that that remains the case, because it is an area that comes within the comprehensive response that we would want to adopt to the question of funeral poverty but which we will not be able to take responsibility for and use in the work that we are taking forward.

Both the application rates and the success rates for the DWP benefit are low, as has been mentioned. We know that only about 4,000 people a year receive a funeral payment in Scotland.

Although the DWP fails to publish accurate statistics, we estimate that the reality is that up to 16,000 bereaved people would be eligible. That is a failure of the system for low-income families. Therefore, and this point is critical, when the funding is transferred to Scotland, it will be based on the spend in Scotland during the year before the transfer—the 4,000 people who receive the benefit rather than our estimate of 16,000—so we know that the resources that will be transferred to the Scottish Government will not come anywhere close to meeting current need or our desire to increase the benefit's reach to all who are eligible. We therefore need to act on rising funeral costs, too, which would also help those who are not eligible for the benefit. We are looking to local authorities and funeral directors to work with us, because they, too, bear a responsibility in relation to those rising costs.

We have set up a number of round-table meetings, led by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities. We have worked with local authorities on what is a shared agenda. We know that local authorities are considering their approach to charges and that they want to work with us on that.

On 16 November, the cabinet secretary will host a summit that will bring together all that work—in addition to work on the DWP funeral payment and the changes that we might make to it—into a more comprehensive package for dealing with the matter.

I am conscious that I have gone on—there is a lot to say—and I apologise for that. I hope that members will accept our assurances that we take the matter very seriously. It is clear that there is cross-party support for what we might do to tackle the issue and I look forward to those conversations with colleagues across the chamber. I hope that Mr Rowley and others will take my response to the debate as an assurance that we are looking at not only what we can do on the benefit payment, but the wider discussions that we must have to properly address the issue.

13:30

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Digital Strategy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Good afternoon. The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-02281, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on realising Scotland's full potential in a digital world.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. During general questions prior to First Minister's questions today, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, Fergus Ewing, said that he thought that the Conservative Party suffered from "schizophrenia". I think that that is discourteous under rule 7.3.1 of standing orders, and I also think that it trivialises serious mental health issues. I ask the Presiding Officer whether she would give Mr Ewing the chance to withdraw that comment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: First, I thank the member for advance notice of his point of order. The member and the Parliament will be aware that a similar point of order was raised at First Minister's questions today. I concur with the Presiding Officer, who was in the chair then, that all members should treat one another with courtesy and respect in the language that they use in the chamber, wherever they are.

I call Fergus Ewing, the cabinet secretary, to speak to and move the motion.

14:31

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): I was immensely honoured to win the politics in business award last week, but I will admit to a twinge of envy at Johann Lamont winning the e-politician of the year award for her erudite and witty engagement on social media. I am struck on a daily basis, even in my own household, by the generational divide that exists in the digital world. It is a space that I and many others in the chamber have learned to inhabit, but we are digital adaptives, whereas children such as my eight-year-old daughter are absolutely digital natives.

It is for our children that we must ensure that Scotland and, indeed, future generations, can realise their full potential in a digital world. We must equip our nation with the skills and attitudes to seize new opportunities and participate in that world. We must acknowledge that digital has fundamentally changed how we live our lives, access information, learn, communicate and do business, and we must seek to develop that.

We must also have the right climate for business, and we must drive economic growth. The digital strategy that was published by the Government in 2011 has served us well, but we must now develop a programme of action on connectivity, the digital economy, skills, participation, security and transforming our public services.

My Cabinet colleague Derek Mackay has overall responsibility for this area, and he will address it and our vision in more detail. First, I make it clear that, if we are to succeed, we must be open to all ideas, knowledge and experience—and indeed we are. Perhaps as proof of that, I am pleased to confirm that the Scottish Government will be accepting both the amendments from the Labour and Conservative parties—although, in so doing, I point out that the reference to “G5” in Labour’s amendment should be to “5G”. I think that “G5” relates—with respect—to something else or somewhere else altogether. Be that as it may, I hope that we will have a constructive debate today, and I am certainly willing to listen to what every member has to say, irrespective of party politics.

We have a strong foundation on which to build. Our investment in the digital Scotland superfast broadband—DSSB—programme is paying off. The total programme investment is £410 million. We are on track to deliver fibre access to at least 95 per cent of premises in Scotland by the end of 2017. I am delighted to announce that an additional 660,000 premises across Scotland now have access to fibre as a result of our programme. Higher than expected uptake of services means that we are reinvesting in the programme to push coverage even further. Moreover, our achievements and progress are being recognised externally. Audit Scotland recently reported that deployment of fibre broadband through DSSB is progressing well and that a higher than anticipated number of premises in Scotland are capable of accessing superfast speeds.

On Monday, I attended the convention of the Highlands and Islands, at which Ofcom highlighted that superfast broadband coverage in Scotland has increased by 14 per cent in the past 12 months, which it presented as the largest increase in the UK. Approximately 2.1 million consumers and small businesses are now able to access superfast services and there have been improvements in both urban and rural areas.

Ofcom’s figures show that mobile service has improved too. Voice calls are now possible from 92 per cent of all premises in Scotland, which is up from 90 per cent in 2015, and 3G coverage has increased from 79 per cent to 86 per cent. Coverage of high-speed data services has

increased significantly and 58 per cent of all premises can now receive a 4G signal outdoors.

However, we are not complacent, as we know that there is much more to do. As Ofcom highlighted, there is still considerable disparity in mobile coverage between urban and rural areas. As Audit Scotland noted, it will be challenging, particularly in remote areas, to meet our commitments on broadband coverage. Although the figures and facts depict a positive picture, that does not always translate into the actual experience of people and businesses. I am acutely aware of that disconnect and am determined to address it.

We are purposely ambitious in this area. Our 100 per cent superfast broadband commitment far outstrips the United Kingdom Government’s plans, which are limited to a universal service obligation at just 10 megabits per second. Although we welcome the UK Government’s contribution to help to meet the shared commitment of achieving 95 per cent by 2017, our progress would not have been possible without joint investment from the Scottish block grant. Without that funding, commercial deployment across Scotland would have delivered only 66 per cent fibre broadband coverage, with as little as 21 per cent coverage across the Highlands and no commercial coverage at all in Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles.

Work is already under way to prepare for delivery of 100 per cent superfast access by 2021. We have published a prior information notice to provide potential suppliers with information on the superfast broadband access commitment as a necessary precursor to commencing procurement early next year. Before then, we will finalise the coverage footprint to be delivered by the digital Scotland superfast broadband programme to complete the commitment to deliver fibre broadband access to at least 95 per cent of premises in Scotland. We will also undertake an open market review and consult formally with telecoms suppliers to determine commercial investment plans.

We are committed to working with industry, especially to improve mobile coverage across Scotland, and we recently published, with the four UK operators, the only mobile action plan in the UK. We are learning lessons from the UK Government’s failed mobile infrastructure project, which delivered only three of its planned 84 masts for Scotland, and we are taking a different approach to deliver the best possible result for Scotland by working with industry to develop a mobile in-fill programme.

We are actively supporting the development of new technologies alongside industry and higher education as part of our world-class programme to extend connectivity to rural areas and establish

Scotland as a test bed for innovation. Our work with industry is key. Government and public investment alone cannot, should not and will not deliver the infrastructure that we all wish for. There is a role for, and a responsibility on, private sector providers to support the delivery of our ambitions.

Although the UK Government has primary responsibility for and powers over mobile connectivity—which is a reserved matter—we are, as far as we can, getting on with what we need to do to realise our ambitions. I am greatly encouraged by the willingness of Sharon White, Ofcom's chief executive, to work with us to find solutions. She has already made a substantial effort to enhance Ofcom's presence in Scotland, with an office in Edinburgh, and she has visited a number of remote areas of the country to aid her understanding of the key connectivity issues. I found her interest in Scotland and her determination to work with us extremely positive and most welcome.

Of course, the outcome of the European Union referendum has created more unwelcome uncertainty in this area as in all other policy and funding areas, but I will continue to press for clarity on whether Scotland will be able to benefit from the EU's recently announced WIFI4EU programme, which aims to extend access to free wi-fi in public places, and on what will happen to funding beyond March 2019, whether that is the €120 million associated with the EU's wi-fi programme or the €941 million of investment that is planned across the 2014 to 2020 EU funding programmes. I will also press for clarity on whether Scots will be able to benefit from the deal on roaming charges that is due to come into effect next year when they travel abroad.

Realising Scotland's full potential in a digital world is critical to our ambitions to become a fairer, more inclusive and more prosperous economy. Achieving our commitment to deliver superfast broadband to 100 per cent of premises by 2021 is fundamental to that and it will require us all to put our shoulder to the wheel. We are open to ideas and to positive contributions to create a shared vision. It is in all our interests to ensure that Scotland can indeed realise its full potential in a digital world because, as Bill Gates once astutely observed,

"The internet is becoming the town square for the global village of tomorrow."

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the need for Scotland to have a clear vision to realise its potential in a digital world; acknowledges the importance of digital connectivity to achieving this vision, and that commercial providers have a key role to play alongside the Scottish Government and the public sector in delivering strong broadband and mobile infrastructure, and notes that the Scottish Government will build on the 2011 Digital Strategy, Scotland's Digital Future,

through a programme of action on connectivity, digital economy, skills, participation, security and transforming public services to help realise Scotland's full potential in a digital world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jamie Greene to speak to and move amendment S5M-02281.2. You have a generous seven minutes, Mr Greene.

14:42

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Seven?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Were you expecting more?

Jamie Greene: I thought that I was getting nine minutes, but it is fine.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can take nine minutes if you wish; I have some time in hand.

Jamie Greene: I will try not to—don't tempt me.

I will begin by explaining that G5 is a brand new handset that a certain mobile operator has just brought out. I think that it came out last week, so it is very topical. I thank Labour for bringing that up.

It is a great pleasure to open the debate as the Conservative spokesman for technology, connectivity and the digital economy, and as a member of the cross-party group on digital participation. I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

I want to set out my vision on digital Scotland and to demonstrate the importance of universal digital participation to Scotland realising its full potential in a digital world. Here in this chamber, we often debate the subject in terms of connectivity and digital infrastructure and we look at targets and percentages, but when considering digital participation, it is important to look behind the numbers.

Let me expand on that. I am sure that every member receives many letters and emails from constituents who struggle to access high-speed internet; indeed, we sometimes hear from constituents who struggle to access any-speed internet. That is the case not just in rural areas but in our towns and cities. I think that we will hear many examples of that during the debate. My tuppencworth on the issue relates to someone who lives just a few miles from the Parliament but who cannot access high-speed internet because he lives on the wrong side of the street. Where I live in North Ayrshire, as I mentioned in my maiden speech to Parliament, I still achieve a speed of 1.5 megabits per second, which is a speed of years ago.

It is important to acknowledge what the Royal Society of Edinburgh pointed out in its 2014 report

on digital participation. It said that, although investment has been forthcoming and welcome, and numerical targets are all well and good, such targets

“leave the door open for existing inequalities to go unaddressed.”

Those inequalities include a lack of affordable internet, a lack of devices to make use of it and a lack of basic digital skills to use either of those tools. For those on low incomes, for example, buying a tablet or paying a high monthly fee for broadband is not always an option. Therefore, their digital participation is already restricted, regardless of whether broadband is available in their area. If someone lives in a city but has no 4G coverage in their area, their digital participation is restricted. The future digital participation of children who attend a school that does not have a computing teacher is already restricted. Those restrictions create inequality and hold people back from what the great online has to offer—namely, making day-to-day living cheaper, faster and easier.

I will consider one example of that: healthcare, where those inequalities are most prevalent in Scotland. In one community, we might be able to make a general practitioner appointment, see our medical records or order repeat prescriptions online. If we drive a few miles down the road, the story is quite different—it is a phone call, a two-week wait and a piece of paper. However, in a small country such as Belgium, people can use the same identification to access their healthcare as they can to download documents from their town hall.

While other countries are investing in e-health, in Scotland a person's postcode determines whether they get their prescription by post or email. I have seen how proper digital back offices work in other countries, where substantial investment in digitised records, single logins and user-friendly websites and apps lets the public access public services cheaply, more quickly and more easily.

NHS Education for Scotland's director of digital transformation, Christopher Wroath, pointed out only last month that health services also face challenges that are, in part, down to the lack of information and communication technology skills in the healthcare systems. In Scotland, three quarters of firms say that digital technologies are essential or important for their plans for growth, but 30 per cent of the Scottish population lacks basic digital skills. It is up to the public and private sectors to use digital innovation not only to connect every citizen to the services that they need but to promote businesses that contribute to our country's social and environmental wellbeing.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The member makes some interesting and valid points, but does he accept that, for Scotland—and, indeed, countries around the world—there is a huge opportunity to develop new interfaces between the human users of technology and the technology itself and that the real triumph of the computer will be when we no longer know that we are interacting with one?

Jamie Greene: Wow! Okay—therein lies the answer. That leads nicely into my next point—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps you could explain what he meant to the chair. I have no idea what it meant.

Jamie Greene: I shall respond to the Presiding Officer in writing on that intervention.

Stewart Stevenson makes a good point. Networks are not just physical things. We should build networks of people—human networks of digital innovators, entrepreneurs, designers, developers and content creators. I refer, for example, to people working together to solve a problem such as identifying and removing the barriers that women have in reaching leadership roles in science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers.

What is at stake? According to Deloitte, if Scotland were to become a world leader in digital industries by 2030, it would experience an increase of more than £13 billion in gross domestic product but, if we continue as we are, it may experience an increase of only £4 billion. That is a £9 billion loss to our economy over the next 15 years if we do not take immediate and visionary action.

Something that members may not see often in the Parliament—especially from a Conservative member—is a copy of the *Daily Record*. This is an edition from 1 January 2000. In it are predictions such as:

“bulky TV sets ... will be replaced by ... flat-screen technology ... If we're chilly? Intelligent central heating systems will”

respond

“automatically”,

and

“people will be able to order and pay for anything they want direct from their mobile phones.”

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Not if they cannot get a signal.

Jamie Greene: If they can get a signal.

Today, those predictions sound amusing to us but, 16 years ago, they were like predictions from “Tomorrow's World”—like the Sinclair C5 only a bit

more useful. Progress has come much faster than we ever anticipated.

My amendment is important for two reasons. First, we must acknowledge the challenges that face us in achieving 100 per cent high-speed broadband in Scotland. Therefore, we should be open minded as to the technology mix that we might need to achieve that last 5 per cent. Some of my colleagues will go into that in more detail. Secondly and more importantly, we must remember that the end result of all that is not simply hitting a target. Our ambition must be to achieve full digital participation in Scotland. Therefore, I appeal to the Scottish Government to be entirely visionary and I look forward to hearing more about its plans in the debate.

We now have a generation of Scots who have had mobile phones since they were five years of age and who face the automation of middle-management jobs, with professional, creative, design and manufacturing services being automated, online or completely virtual. I do not want Scotland to be a country that catches up with the digital economy; I want Scotland to lead it.

I conclude with the final words of the editorial of the newspaper that I spoke of earlier, which was published on the first day of this new millennium. They say:

"The only limits to what mankind can achieve in our next 100 years, let alone the millennium, are the ones in our imagination."

I move amendment S5M-02281.2, to leave out from "and notes that" to end and insert:

"recognises Audit Scotland's recent conclusion that reaching 100% of premises with superfast broadband will be challenging; notes that the Scottish Government will build on the 2011 Digital Strategy, Scotland's Digital Future, through a programme of action on connectivity, digital economy, skills, participation, security and transforming public services to help realise Scotland's full potential in a digital world, and acknowledges that the ultimate ambition of the Scottish Government should be to achieve full digital participation and the benefits that this brings in terms of fairness, economic performance and service provision."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Greene. We are most impressed that you have kept such an old newspaper.

I call Rhoda Grant. You have seven minutes, Ms Grant, and perhaps you will tell us what G5 is.

14:50

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I do not have a clue what G5 is, but I know what 5G is. I think that there was a typo in our amendment, for which I apologise, but I am sure that that will not stop the chamber supporting it, as it makes a lot of sense.

The debate gives us an opportunity to feed our views and priorities into the refresh of the digital strategy. There is little in the motion that can be disagreed with, but we need not only to have an agreed vision but to be in a position to make it a reality.

As the Audit Scotland report makes clear, the Scottish Government has to do better at providing access to the digital economy in areas where there is market failure or progress is slow. We will continue to hold the Government to account on its performance in that regard and we urge a better and faster response.

Everyone, regardless of where they live and what their income is, should have access to technology to allow them to access work and information. They should also be able to participate in the social interaction that digitisation can bring and which we take for granted to a great extent. *[Interruption.]* I hate to point out that the Presiding Officer's phone has gone off.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is so unkind of you to mention that, as it will be in the *Official Report*. Well, it happens to the best of us, and I am the best of us.

Rhoda Grant: You are obviously switched on digitally.

Although you might not be part of it, Presiding Officer, we have a digital divide. In affluent urban areas, the market has provided, and continues to provide, the infrastructure that is required. Our cities are quickly becoming digitised in the business sectors and the leafy suburbs, with 4G and now 5G being rolled out, as well as dedicated city services and free wi-fi in public places. However, unfortunately, our rural areas and our deprived inner-city areas are being left behind.

As more and more information, goods and services are digitised, those of us who do not have access will be further disadvantaged. Benefit applications, job searches and the like are all on digital platforms, and people who do not have access have less chance of changing their lot or getting the benefits that they are entitled to. A lack of connectivity means that our farmers are getting up in the wee small hours not to milk the cows but to try to submit their common agricultural policy payment claim while no one else is using the connection. At a time when we face depopulation in our islands and remote areas, digital access has never been more important and required.

Our vision is of a digital economy that breaks down barriers and makes us an inclusive society that leaves no one behind, regardless of where they live. We agree with the Scottish Government that telecommunications companies must play their part. They make huge profits from rolling out infrastructure in lucrative markets, and they must

reinvest some of those profits in the areas where markets fail.

There must also be a role for the Government when the market fails. Digital connectivity is a necessity not only for the individual but for service delivery, not least in health and social care services. We need to make sure that what the Government provides is as good as what the market provides and that it can be easily upgraded so that areas do not fall behind again when technology changes.

Technology is changing and we need to make sure that all installations are future proofed. New technologies are being developed. Last week, I learned of li-fi, which can provide solutions in hard-to-reach areas as well as making others even more connected. I find it hard to imagine that every light bulb will act as a digital router.

In deprived urban areas, the infrastructure is as poor as that in rural areas, because the communications companies do not believe that the people who live there will be able to afford to buy their services. However, even if people have the infrastructure on their doorstep, that does not mean that they have access. We must find ways of enabling everyone in our society to access digital technology so that they can access health and social care services and so that they can be introduced to economic opportunities.

Connectivity comes at a cost. People need money to buy a computer and to pay for a broadband connection. When someone is struggling to keep the roof over their head and food on their table, connectivity is not always their top priority. Some time ago, I visited the citizens advice bureau in Wick, which had recognised the problem. It had set up a room with second-hand computers that the CAB had been able to get its hands on, which allowed its clients to access the internet for jobs and benefit searches.

That is helpful, but technology moves on. We all expect to be online all the time, and service provision is built around that level of connectivity. Therefore, those of us who do not have that level of connectivity are left behind.

We are in the middle of a second enlightenment whose future will be digital—from reading a book to having our health monitored. The internet of things, which puts information at our fingertips, is growing. Before we get there, we can know how warm our house is and turn up the heating. The opportunities are limited only by our imaginations, yet knowledge and skills in our digital world are limited.

We need schools to teach digital skills as part of their basic education, from the youngest primary school child to those who are leaving with advanced qualifications. Such skills need to be

taught as part of every subject in our colleges and universities and as part of lifelong learning and continuing professional development in the workplace. The speed of change is rapid and we need to make sure that our workforce keeps up to date.

We need complex programming skills, but we also have to understand the technology. The farmer who can tell immediately which of their animals needs their attention from looking not at their fields but at their computer screen tells us that no area or line of work will not need such skills, so we need to make sure that we have them.

Our amendment highlights the fact that we require to make progress urgently and that we need to sweep away the digital divide. We offer the amendment as a positive contribution, but we are also concerned about the speed of our progress. Other small countries are way ahead of us and we must catch up and get ahead. Being more connected would provide work and life opportunities that we can only guess at, while to be left behind would be a catastrophe. We will support the Government to provide a world-leading digital infrastructure, but we will also hold it to account should it fail.

I move amendment S5M-02281.3, to insert after “mobile infrastructure”:

“; recognises that all people in Scotland must have access to affordable high-speed broadband and G5 mobile access and the skills to use them both at home and in the workplace; calls on the Scottish Government to close the digital divide by monitoring levels of access and ensuring that everyone has a level of connectivity that is fit for the 21st century, regardless of their geographical location or income”.

14:58

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): If I learned anything when I did my computer science degree at the University of Strathclyde in the late 1970s, it was that we should not expect anything in digital technology to stay the same for long. I started that course only seven years after the Americans landed on the moon, and the technology to get them there used a tiny fraction of the computing power that we have now, even in our mobile phones.

The point is that there will never be a time when technological developments slow down and we can stand back and admire our achievements. The challenge for us is organising things to embrace the technology of today and to prepare the ground and open the doors for the rapid progression to what lies ahead in the future. What is certain is that we need the digital infrastructure—the superhighway, as we used to call it—and all our population need to be able to access it and to be

engaged by the wonders and possibilities of it all. We also need to create the potential for growth and attract the people—principally software developers—who can imagine what that future could look like and start building it. Those are the key drivers behind the European digital single market strategy, which I will talk about in a moment or two.

In the work that the Scottish Government is doing, I see all those elements and the potential to open doors to the future. First, we are engaged in delivering the infrastructure to 100 per cent of our homes and businesses over the next five years, which is a huge task in a country such as Scotland.

Secondly, we are working towards broadening access to digital technologies for all sections of the community. We have to ensure that no one and no section of society is excluded.

Thirdly, we are creating opportunities for our young people to get excited about the fantastic possibilities of a career in software design, which can take them anywhere in the world to work. Good work is being done to get more females into technology, and initiatives such as the CodeClan digital skills academy and coding clubs are perfect for nurturing the new talent that we will need.

None of that is easy and there will be no end point, even if we think that we have made good progress, but such interventions are essential if we are to deliver a better digital world. As the great Alan Turing, the father of computer science, said:

"We can only see a short distance ahead, but we can see plenty there that needs to be done."

If we embrace that view as we plan our digital future, we will not go far wrong.

Right now in Europe, we are short of about 600,000 ICT personnel, and by 2020 the shortfall could be just under a million. If we are to develop and expand the economy, the success of the digital single market strategy in Europe will be crucial, as it is estimated to be worth more than €400 billion in additional growth.

Cross-border online services account for only 4 per cent of the digital market in Europe, whereas online services within countries' jurisdictions account for about 42 per cent. That is why the three aims of the digital single market strategy—better access, creating the right environment and creating the potential for growth—are crucial not just for Europe but for Scotland. Under the strategy, we will make e-commerce easier, with no tariff barriers, and we will simplify copyright so that people can buy and develop content across Europe much more easily.

As members might expect, the digital single market will be a key driver for economic growth

here in Scotland. It will be interesting to see whether the United Kingdom Government plans to walk away from that when the UK departs from the European Union or whether it wants to be part of such a market, as I think that it must do.

I am the convener of the proposed cross-party group on digital participation. It is clear to all colleagues who attend its meetings that technology can be the greatest tool that we have to help us to deliver social justice. I am grateful to the Carnegie UK Trust for its briefing and for its support in the cross-party group.

Social justice—or inclusion or access—does not happen by default. Indeed, it gets worse by default unless we do something about it. Digital exclusion also gets worse unless we do something about it. It is no surprise that the most excluded groups in society are usually the elderly, the unemployed and people who are living in poverty.

The Scottish Government's digital participation programme, to which nearly £2 million has been allocated, will help the people who would benefit most from being online—particularly our most vulnerable citizens. The work that is being done with the voluntary sector and housing associations should also help us to peg back the digital divide.

The Scottish Government's approach to all such matters is correct. It mirrors and enhances what Europe is trying to achieve. The approach is ambitious and forward thinking and should help Scotland to make a step change towards realising our potential in the digital world that we live in.

In that digital world, I have no doubt that we will continue to

"only see a short distance ahead",

as Alan Turing said. However, as long as we are willing to accept that and the new challenges that we will have to overcome, our digital future will be even more exciting than the digital present that we live in today.

15:04

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I do not think that a single member of the Scottish Parliament who represents a rural region or constituency did not campaign during the election on a ticket that included sorting out the lack of broadband and mobile connectivity in their area. What we said and what we published in our election literature will no doubt be quoted back to us and waved in our faces at the next election, if we fail.

I therefore welcome the Government's commitment to deliver superfast broadband by 2021. I believe, however, that it is an ambitious promise that will be a real challenge to deliver. We

are happy to work with the Government to achieve it, but should it not deliver or do enough to deliver, we will become the Government's fiercest critics.

Scotland as a whole has the lowest proportion of premises with access to fibre broadband in the UK, and the Highlands and Islands have the lowest proportion in all of Scotland, with only 79 per cent of premises having access to fibre broadband. In the Highlands, 26 per cent of properties have broadband speeds of less than 10Mbps. Those premises will prove to be the most difficult to deliver superfast broadband to, although those fragile rural areas most need broadband.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): As Edward Mountain did, I contributed my own material to the election, and the leaflets addressed broadband. If he is prepared to be critical in helping the Scottish Government, is he also prepared to be critical of the UK Government if we cannot get there, given that telephony is still a reserved matter?

Edward Mountain: I am sure that Bruce Crawford would like to listen to the rest of my suggested remedies before he asks whether we should remove the plank from other people's eyes before we have removed the plank from our own.

The 26 per cent of properties that have broadband speed of less than 10Mbps are the ones that it would be most difficult to deliver superfast broadband to. However, those rural areas need it. Allowing those residents to contribute to the economy and enabling their children to use the internet for learning, are not just vital—they are imperative.

Let us be clear: the digital divide in Scotland is massive, and the Highlands are without doubt at the bottom of the league. If the aim is to deliver broadband to the last 5 per cent of households in Scotland, which will not have access to fibre broadband, one has to ask how we can ensure that they get what has been promised to them. At the outset, I support calls for BT—which will be the main supplier in such areas—to outline the exact areas that it will not be able to reach by 2021, so that we can see where the problems are.

We also have to accept that the cost of delivering fibre broadband to those super-remote properties and houses will only increase.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will Edward Mountain take an intervention?

Edward Mountain: No. I am afraid that I would like to crack on as I have already taken one.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is plenty of time, if you wish to take an intervention. It is up to you.

Edward Mountain: I have heard one or two things from Stewart Stevenson on broadband at committee meetings, so I would like to push on.

Stewart Stevenson: You have not heard this.

Edward Mountain: I am sure that I will hear more.

The other day, we heard that the cost of delivering broadband is currently over £3,000 per house in some cases. As we get to the last 2 per cent—the super-remote houses—the cost of delivering fibre could be well in excess of £50,000 per house, which makes it unjustifiable. Therefore, we must look at other options.

Some areas might benefit from community broadband—an initiative that is being led by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Most of the projects are based on radio connection and the nearest cable. There are other options, but they are limited by the final connection to the cabinet. We support community broadband and believe that it needs an increase in funding, but we would like the support that community broadband gives to be extended from communities to individuals and businesses. We hope that the Government agrees with us: we will wait to see whether it does when it announces its budget.

We might also be able to consider satellite, although it has huge start-up costs. The Avanti pilot project, which has over 500 connections in Scotland, offers speeds of 30Mbps. However, that project will conclude shortly. If it is to be used as part of the solution, the Government will need to consider increasing the funding. People who have satellite broadband would argue—rightly, to my mind—that they have to pay a higher cost and that, if satellite is going to be part of the final solution, it is unfair that they should bear the cost, which is substantially higher than what is paid by people who live in urban areas. If the Government is going to rely on satellites to deliver its promise, it must be prepared to fund them and to make their running costs equitable with the running costs of urban landlines.

I would like to offer potential solutions for the Government to consider, which could all be addressed. There will be issues in addressing them, but where there is a will, there is a way. Many hydro power schemes are run from central control rooms and use satellite connections. A perfect example is at Dalnессie. There is infrastructure at the top of the River Brora, but there is no connection to the telephone in the house next door to that site. Perhaps the Government would consider working with the hydro operator to see whether there are ways of connecting that infrastructure to the remote houses in the area.

Many people will have seen masts next to bridges on railways lines. The masts, which are owned by Railtrack, usually have fibre cable connections to central controls. It might be possible to connect to those and to use them in remote areas to deliver broadband. Other utilities have fibre connections in remote areas; we might be able to use those, too.

Before I close, I would like to mention telecommunications.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have 30 seconds to mention them.

Edward Mountain: I will be quick.

So many parts of the Highlands—the “not spots”—are not covered by mobile communication. Those of us who live in rural areas would like to have 4G. We have no G, and we certainly do not have G5 or whatever it is that Labour is proposing. We would like to see 4G rolled out.

My message to the Government is that its promise is admirable and that we would like to work with it in delivering it. However, it cannot be delivered based on a postcode lottery, with the last 5 per cent—the difficult houses—bearing inequitable cost compared to that which is faced by those in urban areas—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Mountain. That is fine; that is good. Please sit down.

Edward Mountain: Okay. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

15:11

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): As we meet here today, it can be all too easy to take our digitised world for granted. It has been more than 40 years since Arthur C Clarke stated:

“Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

To an average citizen of, say, the 1960s, our digitally connected world of today would have been scarcely imaginable and would have been deemed, if not the stuff of magic, certainly the stuff of science fiction. We are all the inhabitants of Marshall McLuhan’s “global village”. It is difficult to overstate the impact that that has had on our way of life. At no point in the history of our species has it been easier to acquire new knowledge. Goethe may have said that one

“who cannot draw on three thousand years is living from hand to mouth”

but today, via a smartphone, one can access the entirety of human knowledge between hand and eye.

Never has it been easier to trade. From the streets of Mong Kok to the slopes of Montmartre, from Tokyo’s Akihabara to Glasgow’s Barras, not one of those great districts—which are rightly famed for their markets and street trade—can compete in range and reach with the omnipresence of the world wide web and its vast array of shops and traders.

The effects of digitalisation on our civic society, political process, media and even our language—for example, “hashtag ScotParl16”—has been profound. It has, for instance, never been easier for people to contact and interact with their elected representatives and governing bodies. Online platforms have posed challenges for traditional print media and have given opportunities to others. The results have been as complicated and unpredictable as any other aspect of life.

As significant as the impact to date has been, developments and advances in digitalisation of our lives in the coming years and decades are likely to be monumental and will potentially redefine our understanding of what it is to be human. However, before turning to those more speculative matters, I express my support for the Government’s approach to realising Scotland’s full potential in a digital world.

I applaud the ambition to deliver fibre optic broadband to 95 per cent of Scottish premises by the end of next year, and the commitment to deliver it to 100 per cent by the end of this session of Parliament. That commitment will be warmly welcomed by many of my constituents in Renfrewshire South, particularly in Howwood and Lochwinnoch, where too many are unable to enjoy the internet speeds that are available in other parts of my constituency.

Equally welcome are the plans to work with industry on a mobile programme to address gaps in 4G coverage, of which—again—there are several in Renfrewshire South. With mobile connectivity now of such importance in our lives it is vital that coverage be as wide as possible.

The Government’s vision for superfast broadband and 4G will contribute significantly to achieving digital equality. However, digital equality requires more than equality of access. For Scotland to realise its full potential in a digital world, it is vital that digital literacy be enhanced, so I welcome the Government’s recognition of that in its motion, which references skills and participation. The realisation of the Government’s vision for Scotland’s digital future will equip the country with the infrastructure, resources and skills that will allow Scotland to realise its digital potential. However, it is vital that realisation of that potential is informed by the values of equity and equality.

The digital revolution has been an enabler of the emergent gig economy or access economy. Although that represents an important development that allows individuals to monetise their existing assets and skills, it is also another manifestation of the economic instability that is experienced by the contemporary precariat generation. Scotland's digital future must be inclusive, with the benefits being shared by all and not accrued to the privileged few.

We must also be aware of the role of digitalisation in relation to automation and artificial intelligence. Many professions—from paralegals to truck drivers—will be challenged in the coming decades by the introduction of machines that can perform tasks more efficiently and for less cost. Although the Government cannot be realistically expected to predicate policy on such inchoate technologies, it can take the opportunity to embed values and principles that will ensure that the human cost of the disruptive effects of continued and future digitalisation is minimised and mitigated.

Of similar importance are data security, data regulation and data privacy. It has been said that when something online is free, you are not the customer—you are the product. Regardless of whether or not we are paying, data that are generated from our online activity have a huge number of applications, both positive and negative. As we move into the era of the internet of things, in which even the use of household appliances will produce data that can be captured, it is vital that we are continually vigilant for attempts by corporate interests to undermine citizens' rights to privacy, and that we ensure that our frameworks and regulations keep pace with technological developments.

It is fair to say that there is broad agreement across the chamber that Scotland must realise and embrace its digital future. A Scotland that realises its digital potential stands to benefit significantly both economically and socially. I commend the Government for bringing the motion to Parliament and I look forward to my Renfrewshire South constituents and communities across Scotland enjoying the benefits of greater connectivity and digitisation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that there is a protocol that, once they have spoken in the chamber, they remain for the two following speeches. They should not nip out immediately afterwards. I say that without looking at anybody in particular.

15:18

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I do not think that I am alone in thinking that

human history is the history of technology. From the wheel to the printing press to the silicon chip, technology has shaped the way that we live our lives and what we are able to do. Nowhere else in the world could that be more true than in Scotland. It was our steel, our ships and our railway locomotives that brought about the first wave of globalisation and allowed us to reach places that it had not been possible to reach before. However, we are also aware in this country of the profound impact that technology change can bring. When those self-same technologies became obsolete, the people who worked in those industries found that their labour was no longer efficient enough and they were replaced by workers in other parts of the world.

We have talked a lot in the debate about connectivity, but what are we connecting to? I am sure that I am not alone in the chamber in regarding Stewart Stevenson as something of a visionary, and his comments about seamless interfaces and integrating the human mind are relevant. We have to understand that the changes that technology will bring are profound. Tom Arthur was right to raise the issue of automation, as that will be the next wave of technology, but it will be different. It is thought that as much as 36 per cent of the jobs in this country could be made obsolete by automation. Previous technological leaps have improved productivity, essentially enabling us to do more things as individuals; the difference now is that automation threatens to replace us altogether. We need to talk as much about digital obsolescence as we do about digital exclusion. As we look towards the renewal of the Government's strategy on technology, it would be extremely remiss if we did not also look at how we deal with automation and how we cope as a workforce.

Let me spell out some of the potential impacts of automation. Tom Arthur mentioned automated vehicles. A truck costs something like £200,000, and we have an ageing workforce in the haulage industry. Therefore, it does not take much of a leap to understand that there is a huge benefit to having trucks that can drive continuously, 24 hours a day. It would greatly increase the return on that investment and improve efficiency. When we realise that 6 per cent of the workforce work in transport and distribution—it might be as much as 10 per cent when we include wholesale industries—we understand the impact that automated vehicles could have. News reports on automated vehicles might use the punchline "Look—no hands", but the more serious reality is that we might be looking at a situation where it is "Look—no jobs."

However, this is about more than just the economy of things. Administrative jobs are also under threat from automation. The recent Deloitte report, which was mentioned earlier, highlighted

that 88,000 jobs could be lost in our public services—the jobs of people who administer and organise vital services in our society. Lest we think that our analytical capabilities might save us, in healthcare, AI algorithms are already in use: in cancer screening they are identifying cancers more effectively and efficiently than the human eye. They also are identifying drug interactions that no physician can keep in their head. In the legal industry, AI is able to analyse documents for loopholes and is already being used to draft legal documentation.

Although this is a problem that we have to take very seriously, we are starting from a good place. In Edinburgh alone, we have hundreds of high-tech start-up companies, which employ thousands of people. We need to take the steps now to ensure that we can take those thousands of jobs and turn them into hundreds of thousands of jobs. However, we must also acknowledge the issues that we face. For all the warm words and seriousness in how we treat STEM subjects, we need to recognise that, since 2007, we have been losing two STEM teachers a year in Scotland. Likewise, we have seen a drop of 187 computer science teachers. We urgently need to address those issues in our education system.

I welcome the comments about reskilling in the skills framework and last week's enterprise and skills review document, but we need to ensure that our skills infrastructure is as much about reskilling people in the workforce who have found that their skills are obsolete. We need to help them to renew, refresh and update their skills to make them relevant in the workforce.

We also need to bake technology into our learning. It is not good enough to treat technology as something separate in the curriculum. We need to ensure that pupils in our schools are learning to use technology in English, history and other subjects, because technology is pervasive and part of every single activity that we undertake. Likewise, we need to ensure that we support businesses to tech up. In the economy of tomorrow, every single business needs to be a technology business. The focus should be as much on the ability of whisky producers to use big data to produce the perfect dram as on software and technology companies.

This is a big change, and we have to stop treating it as a novelty. When we faced unemployment of 12.5 per cent in the 1980s, we viewed that as tragic, and we need to take very seriously indeed the possibility that we face that 36 per cent of the workforce will be made obsolete. It is happening now and it is happening fast. Willie Coffey was absolutely right to highlight the pace of change in technology. We have to recognise that, with automation, we face the

complete removal of people from the entire chain in the economy, from design to manufacture to the supply of the goods that we use every day. I would like the Government to take automation that seriously as it reviews its strategy.

15:24

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): We have already heard some quite interesting quotes to set up the debate and frame the arguments. In his opening remarks, Mr Ewing quoted Bill Gates, who said:

"The internet is becoming the town square for the global village".

That is no doubt a global village in which the Prime Minister will be appalled to learn that we are all citizens of the world. I see more opportunity in that than threat, but we need to recognise the profound change that is coming upon us, as other members have mentioned.

Willie Coffey mentioned Alan Turing, who said:

"We can only see a short distance ahead".

Let us remember that Alan Turing wrote about thinking machines more than 70 years ago.

Jamie Greene was right to say that technology is moving very fast in the area, but I question whether we are really talking about events that were unimaginable a generation ago. E M Forster's science fiction story "The Machine Stops" prefigured ideas such as the internet and instant messaging more than 100 years ago. We can see some of the consequences of automation that Mr Johnson talked about taken to an extraordinary extreme in the imagination of our own late and much-lamented Iain M Banks.

Human beings have always been far better at imagining and inventing such technological changes than controlling how we use them and how the consequences impact on our lives. We will keep on imagining and reimagining in the area. It is not just about the middle-management jobs that have been mentioned. Who knows? Even legislators might one day be replaced by AI or software that is as close to AI as makes no practical difference.

The internet of things, which Mr Arthur mentioned—it is, of course, also known as the internet of things that people can hack—will also have profound positive and negative consequences for all of us.

Part of my problem with how we have debated the issue so far is not to do with what is in the motion or the amendments. I will very happily support all of them, and I welcome a lot of the work that the Government has done in the area.

However, there are questions that we have not yet begun to grapple with.

On digital participation, for example, what does participation really mean? When we talk about democratic participation, we do not just mean being on the electoral register; we mean having a sense of control and power in the citizenry, and the ability to hold power to account. If we talk about economic participation, we do not just mean having a job or an income; we mean fair work and ensuring that the way that the economic systems work benefits the common good. Digital participation does not just mean having a connection or access to some technology or being a passive recipient of software products. It should mean something much richer than that, which involves the digital rights agenda. That was in our amendment, which, sadly, was not selected for debate.

The digital rights agenda is absolutely critical if we want the change to be beneficial. If we want to maximise the social, cultural and economic benefits of the technologies that are being rolled out around the world, we absolutely have to look at digital rights issues.

Let me give a few examples. We have become much more aware of state and corporate surveillance and the collection of data and metadata around the world. The way in which they are being used is already stepping way beyond what most people are aware of. If we want the big data agenda to create benefits for our society and people, we absolutely need transparency and control over how that data is used by state or corporate players.

If we want to address some of the barriers to participation that Mr Greene talked about, we should recognise that that implies net neutrality and saying no to the idea that internet service providers can decide which packets of data will get beneficial or preferential treatment on the internet. If we all want fair access, and access to networks to generate a fair benefit for all of us, net neutrality absolutely has to be a principle.

Although the European Union has taken some steps in that direction, net neutrality is not nearly as strong as it ought to be, and some individual member states have stronger legislative requirements around it than the EU has. Whatever happens with our future participation in the EU—I hope that it continues in Scotland—we absolutely need to go further than Europe has gone on principles of net neutrality.

There are also intellectual property law issues. Few people—other than, perhaps, the Pirate Party—would argue for the abolition of intellectual property law, but the law needs to strike a fair balance between the stimulation of creative goods,

the dissemination of creative goods and fair recompense for the people who have undertaken that creation. At the moment, that balance is all out of kilter. The law does not properly promote the dissemination of creative goods; indeed, in very many cases, it restricts it. For those who are trying to get their first foot in the door of the creative industries, whether we are talking about a back-bedroom operation with people coming up with their own software or any other aspect of the creative industries, fair recompense for their work often comes far below the interests of large corporate players that can decide which relatively narrow aspects of intellectual property they can own, buy, sell and milk.

Those are just a few of the examples of the digital rights agenda relating to privacy and open standards. Freedom of speech is another issue, but it would probably take me another six minutes to begin to discuss it.

I again welcome the motion and the amendments, but I would argue that the Scottish Government's strategy must embrace and develop a digital rights agenda. After all, the internet is not just going to be our town square; it is fast becoming critical to every part of our community, our economy and our personal and interpersonal lives. What matters is not just what happens if the machine stops, as E M Forster wrote, but what happens if the machine stops working in the common good and serving the interests of citizens and starts putting the interests of the Apples, the Googles or, indeed, the state players ahead of citizens' interests. I hope that the Government's digital agenda will begin to embrace such wider issues as it develops in future.

15:31

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

The benefits of digital innovation are well documented, and we must aim to ensure that Scotland is a global leader in that area. To do that, we need a clear strategy that ensures that technological innovation benefits communities all across Scotland.

The motion acknowledges the importance of the role of digital connectivity in any such strategy. As a representative of the Highlands and Islands, I appreciate the challenge. I come from an incredible part of the world, with its high mountains and breathtaking coastline. However, although my region's topography and geography are the reason why it is one of the most beautiful areas in the world, the terrain and population dispersal pose serious challenges in providing the level of digital connectivity that we need across the region. At home, we say that we need that connectivity more than most people—after all, we are already hard to

reach physically; we must not be hard to reach virtually.

As a result, the Government's target of delivering 100 per cent superfast broadband all across Scotland is very welcome. In the period from 2013 to the end of this year, the percentage of premises in the Highlands and Islands with fibre optic broadband will have gone from 4 to 84 per cent. That is to be welcomed. Uptake of fibre broadband in the Scottish Highlands has been so high that a clawback clause has kicked in and the digital Scotland scheme is getting an extra funding boost. The new investment of £2.3 million means that 6,000 more premises will be connected to fibre. Investing in improved coverage and quality will have a huge impact on connectivity and is fantastic news for our region.

Rural communities such as the Highlands and Islands face additional challenges, not just with regard to digital innovation and connectivity. We all know the issues with ageing communities and, as I have said before in the chamber, we in the Highlands and Islands face the issue of the ageing demographic more than most. The delivery of health and social care in rural and remote communities and the restricted employment options are also challenges, but a high-speed and resilient broadband connection will provide the means to overcome such challenges and to transform our communities.

In fact, those very challenges have forced organisations and businesses in the region to innovate and to develop solutions and collaborations that have the potential to lead the world. I will give just one example. NHS Highland has been developing a resilient digital connection through a commercial provider. Omni-Hub is providing a robust connection with Armadale surgery in north-west Sutherland, and I have to tell members: if it works there, it will work anywhere.

Another such digital innovation in the Highlands and Islands is the fit house collaboration between NHS Highland, Albyn Housing, which is a housing association, and Carbon Dynamic, which is an SME that develops modular housing. The collaboration has developed houses that have been co-designed with end users and are embedded with technology that meets the needs of both the person living in the house and NHS Highland. It will enable digital gateways to be placed in homes and data captured from modern devices such as wearable health monitors to be sent to NHS Highland. There will be one system for all, and information will be captured on a safe, secure network. With people's consent, that will allow health and care agencies to intervene more quickly, if appropriate.

The fit home project is going one step further than most: it is also focusing on preventative

interventions, using artificial intelligence and case-based analytics that were originally developed for the oil and gas industry and transposing that knowledge base into the health and care field. The project is using digital interventions to increase face-to-face contact within the home and improve public service delivery. It is developing and commercialising digital systems and, through a social enterprise model, reinvesting profit back into health and care delivery.

NHS Highland is aiming to keep people in their homes longer, enable earlier hospital discharge, lower the number of emergency admissions and bring the latest technology and cutting-edge technical ability into mainstream health delivery. That is what patients want.

Small companies in the Highlands, working with the national health service, are creating a range of other state-of-the-art digital health applications that use smart devices to send and receive health information, enable home investigations and home consultations and provide information and messaging portals for patients with cancer and long-term conditions. Delivering health and care in the community in that way enables jobs to be repositioned back into the community and allows people to remain in or return to more rural communities around Scotland. It creates resilience in those vital areas and job opportunities for the Highlands' school leavers and graduates.

Collaborations between commerce, the NHS and the third sector are thriving in the Highlands, and unique alliances are solving problems that organisations could not fix on their own. They are also creating innovative digital health and care solutions that can be exported around the world and which might, therefore, feed some much-needed money back into our vital public services.

This Government's investment in and commitment to superfast broadband are creating the infrastructure to enable technology companies to locate in the Highlands, which is making the Highlands and Islands not only a fantastic place to live but a world-class place to work. Developing superfast broadband connections has the potential to transform Scotland on many levels, and it is already happening.

15:38

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):
Page 33 of the SNP's "A Plan for Scotland: The Government's Programme for Scotland 2016-17" says:

"Our commitment is to deliver superfast broadband access to at least 95% of premises"

by the end of next year

"and 100%"

by the end of this parliamentary session.

"This will transform connectivity, improving the productivity of businesses in remote and rural areas and the prospects of people who live there."

I will return to that at the end of my contribution, which is why I wanted to start with it. They are grand words that are full of promise, and they were reiterated today by Fergus Ewing. Forgive me, Presiding Officer, for being somewhat sceptical about them.

I could give examples of what many of the people who have contacted me about connectivity have to say about it, but I do not want to involve them in the debate. If you will forgive me, Presiding Officer, I will use my own experiences to give a touch of reality to the debate.

I live in a beautiful part of rural Scotland. It is not so remote, because a trunk road—the A97—runs past my front door. We have a terrible broadband connection, and I and my neighbours were looking forward to being connected to superfast broadband, as advertised—as it says on the tin, as it were—by the Scottish Government.

Eighteen months ago, we were delighted to see that the roadside outside our homes was being dug up, and guess what? Yes, the superfast broadband cable was being laid right outside our homes, along the length of the A97 at Kildrummy in Aberdeenshire. We were happy to put up with the disruption of the road and all that that meant, but you can imagine our disappointment, Presiding Officer, when we were told that, even though the superfast broadband cable was being laid right outside our homes, we were not going to be connected. That was despite having seen adverts all over the place, in all the local villages, telling us that superfast broadband had arrived.

"Why is that?", one might ask. It cannot be the cost of reaching us in a remote area, as we are not in a remote area. The superfast broadband cable is not being delivered to each home, despite the warm words; it is being delivered to a series of green boxes along the route. My house and those of our neighbours are not connected to a green box, they are connected to the telephone exchange, so even though the superfast cable is going right by us and we are not any distance from it, we are not being connected to it.

Stewart Stevenson: Not yet.

Mike Rumbles: That was 18 months ago.

Several members from across the chamber have highlighted their view that because we are in the remote areas, we cannot really be reached effectively, and that what is slowing the programme down is reaching the last 5 per cent, but I am afraid that that is not the case. I have no doubt that the minister, who is listening to my

speech, genuinely believes that the roll-out programme is going well and that the statement made in "A Plan for Scotland" is being fulfilled, but the reality is that broadband access is not being delivered to every home, just to every green box in the land.

I repeat my point: superfast broadband is not being delivered to every home or business premises as promised. I would be interested to know from the minister whether my home—and I use my home as an example—is being counted as being connected because the area is connected—

Stewart Stevenson: No, it is not.

Mike Rumbles: Well, I would like to hear that from the minister rather than from the back benches.

Are we actually counting the green boxes that are being—

Stewart Stevenson: No.

Mike Rumbles: One of my colleagues on the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee keeps saying that from a sedentary position, but I would love to hear it in an intervention from the minister. I would like to hear some reassurance, not just for my benefit but for the benefit of all the people in my local community who have contacted me about the issue, but still the minister is not intervening. I take that as a message.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention from me?

Mike Rumbles: I would certainly give way to the minister if he could tell me—

Fergus Ewing: I am sorry to hear that Mr Rumbles has not been connected, and if he gives me the details of the case I would be happy to look into it. Does he not accept that both Audit Scotland and Ofcom, the regulator, have judged and highlighted the fact that although there is more to do, as I said in my opening speech, we are making faster progress in Scotland than is being made elsewhere in the UK? We have also set out clearly our plans for a tender exercise next year in order to achieve our target, which, as he said, is a target that we must achieve in the lifetime of this Parliament?

Mike Rumbles: I am certain that the minister believes all of that in good faith, but I am trying to give him a touch of reality about what is actually happening out there. It was a year and a half ago that the cable was laid. I am being reliably informed by those who are in a position to tell me that, far from improving my already poor broadband service, the likelihood is that the service will actually get worse as those who are connected will adversely affect the signal.

Stewart Stevenson: No, no.

Mike Rumbles: I can hear, “No, no,” being shouted. If the minister really is of the belief that all is well with the programme, and if I go back to my communities in the north of Aberdeenshire and tell them that 95 per cent of premises will be connected by next year and that all premises will be connected by 2021—

Stewart Stevenson: That is correct.

Mike Rumbles: If the minister believes that, either he is being duped by the providers of the service or he does not understand the contracts that the Scottish Government has signed.

It is all very well for the minister to boast, as he does in the blurb, that 7,700km of cable have been laid, which is

“enough to stretch from Glasgow to Kathmandu”,

as it says in the Scottish Government document; but, good as it might be for Kathmandu, it is certainly no good for Kildrummy.

15:45

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Scotland is a small nation that could be a demonstration of digital potential. For that, there needs to be trust, security and convenience. The Government has to empower citizens, charities and small and medium-sized enterprises to allow that potential to be reached through innovation—Patrick Harvie made that point.

In her first speech as UK information commissioner, Elizabeth Denham said:

“It’s not privacy or innovation—it’s privacy and innovation ... Consumer trust is essential to achieving growth.”

I will focus on that.

First, however, I will touch on the wider issue of broadband. Much is said about rural areas missing out on high-speed broadband, but many urban areas do, too, sometimes without any apparent logic, as Mike Rumbles just touched on. My street in East Kilbride gets high-speed broadband but, just down the road on the same estate, I have a constituent who lives in one of two houses in his street that do not have it, although we have the green boxes nearby. That is frustrating enough, but it is even more frustrating that there is no way for him to find out when he will get connected. I urge the Government to act on that specific point, which affects a lot of people. They just need to know when.

I go back to trust. Scotland is missing out on reaching its full digital potential because there has not been enough collaboration between the private, third and public sectors. The general data protection regulation provides individuals with

increased control over how their personal data is collected and used online, but more can and should be done to ensure that individuals can take back control of their online identities.

Fergus Ewing: The member has asserted that the problem is that there has not been collaboration between the Scottish Government and operators. The opposite is the truth, since we are the only part of the UK to have an action plan, and the mobile operators have commended us for the approach that we are taking, as opposed to that south of the border, where only three out of the 78 masts that were promised in the mobile infrastructure plan were delivered.

Graham Simpson: I am not here to have a go at Mr Ewing. I am saying that some work is being done, but it is not enough.

The European data protection supervisor, Giovanni Buttarelli, recently gave his views on personal information management systems. He said:

“Our online lives currently operate in a provider-centric system, where privacy policies tend to serve the interests of the provider or of a third party, rather than the individual. Using the data they collect, advertising networks, social network providers and other corporate actors are able to build increasingly complete individual profiles. This makes it difficult for individuals to exercise their rights or manage their personal data online. A more human-centric approach is needed which empowers individuals to control how their personal data is collected and shared.”

I agree with that. It is human nature to resist snooping and meddling in our lives.

Scotland will face cybersecurity threats now and in the future. Citizens look to the Government—that could be the UK Government or the Scottish Government—for safety and security. They do not look to any Government to spy on them.

Local authorities still ask citizens to fill in paper forms and have made no real progress in enabling citizens to live their lives with dignity, in control and with their choice of digital identity that is privacy friendly. Councils’ attitudes to sharing data do not raise potential digital hopes, as there is no trust.

A report by the Market Research Society puts consumers at the heart of the privacy debate. It highlights that,

“up until now privacy has largely been treated as a political football”,

with too much focus on the legal and technological aspects of holding personal data. It shows that only one in 10 of us feel in complete control over keeping our personal information private. It also reveals that the Government is trusted only marginally more than the supermarkets when it comes to looking after personal information and that banks are more trusted than charities.

Digital participation is starting in some areas but is not yet achieving its full potential. Reports such as “Tackling Poverty in Renfrewshire” recognise that empowering citizens includes digital empowerment. The think local act personal partnership and Citizens Online, which has an innovative project in the Highlands—that will please Maree Todd—are examples of that.

Citizens do not currently have a reason to use the online services that the public sector provides. Public services IT is built for public services organisations and not for citizens. People are excluded, inequality is perpetuated and Scotland does not benefit from advances in technology. The Carnegie UK Trust, which Willie Coffey mentioned in his measured speech, recently reported that Scotland is still not yet reaching its potential in digital services and called for a new focus on tackling digital exclusion.

Scotland will not reach its full potential until the Government trusts others and is trustworthy; that is why the reality is so far behind the digital potential. The Government must recognise that citizens are the nation’s most important asset and empower them so that Scotland can reach its full potential.

I will give the minister one more idea, which is to look at procurement. In procuring IT projects, we should ensure that Scottish firms get the contracts, because far too many do not. We need to empower citizens, provide better information and look at procurement—those are three ideas for Fergus Ewing to take forward.

15:52

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Digital connectivity will have the biggest impact on rural Scotland, and I speak as the member for a constituency that is in real need of coverage to bring us up to par with our urban neighbours. With enhanced connectivity we could flourish, given the amount of businesses that could be located in rural areas and the start-ups that would have a chance to be on a level playing field with those in an urban environment.

With today’s technology, a graphic designer, a business consultant, a public relations manager or an accountant should be able to work remotely from anywhere and still deliver the same level of service as someone who works from an office in a town or city high street. We should not all have to travel miles from our rural homes into a city to sit at a desk or have to clog up the roads to do a job that can be done just as satisfactorily at the end of a phone and with a decent broadband connection. Scottish Enterprise estimates that 150,000 new businesses need to be created to bring Scotland’s productivity up to an optimum level, and digital

connectivity for our rural areas is key to meeting that target.

In the business that I ran before I was elected to Parliament, I could work from home by uploading video files of my work for clients to review and holding Skype meetings with clients in other cities and countries. If I had lived just three miles to the east, in Foveran or Udney Station, I would not have stood a chance, just like one of my constituents who lives just a quarter of a mile outside the village of Fyvie. He called me last week to say that he would have to move as he is struggling to run his graphic design business without access to broadband.

On a basic level, one of the most constraining things about poor access to broadband is the lack of access to everyday services and to the advantages that being online can provide. I would call meeting the need for such access digital justice or digital equality.

A recent example in my constituency brought home to me the way in which internet poverty can impact on a community’s options and success. In New Pitsligo, we had an unfortunate situation where a local bakery that had been established for more than 100 years—John Smith & Sons—was forced to close permanently. My colleague Eilidh Whiteford MP and I worked with the group that was responsible for the bakery and the staff who faced redundancy to help them through the process, try to find them alternative work and enable them to access support.

Many of Smith’s employees had not had to look for work in many years, as they had been long-serving employees, and Smith’s was the biggest employer in the village. I must admit that, when I gave some of the workers practical advice, I did not anticipate how much of an issue their lack of digital connectivity would be.

In May this year, New Pitsligo was not particularly well connected digitally, and most of the people who came to seek support were not online. In addition, New Pitsligo does not have a good mobile signal, so many of them did not even have mobile phones. How does one even attempt to find a job in 2016 without access to the internet? Sites such as Monster.com, s1jobs and LinkedIn, as well as the human resources pages on company websites with the most up-to-date recruitment opportunities, were not available to most of the people who came to us for help, and neither were the online resources that would have allowed them to access the advice and information that they needed to access the jobseekers allowance that they were entitled to until they found new work.

Those people’s employment opportunities were limited because of their internet poverty. That was

compounded by the fact that their rural location was serviced by very few buses that could get them to facilities that were better connected and publicly available. Many of those people did not even have an email address.

Rural homes have also been disadvantaged in accessing services such as the distance learning programmes that the Open University offers, setting up in business from home, accessing the savings that are offered by internet shopping, changing energy tariffs online or even accessing news outwith that which is broadcast on traditional media. Many rural residents cannot use internet banking. Is it not amazing that internet banking is not available in the places that need it most—those that do not have a bank?

The biggest unleashing of potential has to come from such rural areas. With the 100 per cent broadband coverage that is promised by 2021, we will directly tackle digital inequality, and we might also dramatically increase Scotland's productivity.

I will end by picking up on some of the criticisms that Mr Rumbles and Mr Mountain made. I have just read an article in *The Daily Telegraph* in which the Liberal Democrats' leader—

Mike Rumbles: *The Telegraph?*

Gillian Martin: Where I read the article does not matter. Tim Farron criticises the regulator for some of the issues that Mr Rumbles described. Mr Farron seems to have a better grasp of the technology and of who is to blame for some of the issues that Mr Rumbles talked about—Mr Rumbles should look at that article. Mr Farron criticises BT Openreach and Ofcom for BT's continued monopoly and asks for action on that front, rather than from the Government, which is trying to make things better.

15:57

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I must admit that the importance of the digital world to the smooth operation of daily life is something that I can often take for granted. Being connected to the internet is a vital part of daily life, whether it be for sending work emails, communicating with friends and family or checking social networks. For the range of uses that we put it to, internet use has simply become second nature for many of us. I include myself in the group of MSPs who frequently check our mobile devices in the chamber—it is allowed now, isn't it, Presiding Officer?—to respond to emails, to carry out a quick fact check or to send that all-important tweet. We all do it.

The digital world exists alongside, and is now interwoven with, our reality, and it provides numerous opportunities for growth and increased

productivity. I welcome the motion's recognition that digital connectivity is vital to Scotland achieving its full potential in the digital world, and its commitment that the Government will build on its 2011 digital strategy.

However, Scotland achieving its full potential in the digital world requires not only the delivery of infrastructure but Scotland's population being able to access that infrastructure and being equipped with the skills to use it. I therefore welcome Rhoda Grant's amendment. Even if we are to achieve the goal of 100 per cent access to superfast broadband by 2021, there will still be work to do to ensure that everyone can access the internet, regardless of their income or location.

The biggest risk to not achieving our full potential in a digital world obviously comes from the inequity of provision when it comes to access to the internet and the skills that are required to use it. We know that deprivation hampers the progression of Scots in many ways, from educational attainment to health outcomes, and the link between deprivation and internet use is no different. It has been a persistent problem that contributes to a vicious circle of inequality, and it is one that urgently needs to be addressed if we are to make use of the potential digital talent of all of Scotland's population.

The 2015 Scottish household survey, which was published in September this year, found that just 60 per cent of households with an income of £15,000 per year or less had access to the internet compared with 98 per cent of households with incomes of more than £40,000. Research by Ipsos MORI, commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust as others mentioned, that analyses that survey data finds a strong overlap between digital exclusion and commonly cited characteristics of deprivation. We know that people who are older, are on lower incomes or live in more deprived areas are statistically less likely to have digital access than the rest of the population. Closing the digital divide must be a vital component of the Government's strategy if we are to achieve our full potential in the digital world. That is entirely possible, but only if all relevant partners work together to more closely monitor the levels of internet access and make the necessary interventions and investment to tackle areas that need improvement.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): I absolutely agree with Monica Lennon on tackling the digital divide. Will she make any specific suggestions to inform our reshaping of the strategy so that we tackle it? I hope that that question will be taken in the spirit in which it was offered.

Monica Lennon: I would be more than happy to email the cabinet secretary to make some suggestions.

I will talk about some projects in my area and show how we could continue to support them. The benefits of expanding internet access to people who are without it are numerous. That includes young people in education—we had some in the gallery earlier, but they have gone—and people who are searching for employment.

I recently visited a community development charity in the Central Scotland region that I represent: Community Links (South Lanarkshire), which operates a range of projects that are aimed at tackling poverty. I met volunteers and service users at the supporting employment and learning by empowering communities in technology—SELECT—hub at Hillhouse in Hamilton. SELECT is a digital inclusion project run by volunteers and staff that supports people to use the internet as an employability tool. Local people use the service to increase their digital skills, including the ability to apply for jobs. I found that it is really popular among older people who are aiming to retrain and find it difficult to navigate online-only application systems, such as those that are used by the Department for Work and Pensions for applications for jobseekers allowance.

I declare an interest as a South Lanarkshire councillor. The SELECT hub is jointly funded by South Lanarkshire Council's tackling poverty fund and the Scottish Government's people and communities fund. It is a great example of good practice in relation to community-led digital inclusion. The service users that I met were clear about the benefits of the project and the huge difference that it had made to them by giving them free access to the internet and a helping hand that they would not otherwise have had. I hope that projects such as the SELECT hub will continue to attract support from the Government.

Expanding digital access is a vital component of tackling inequality. It will not only help individuals but boost Scotland's position as a world-class digital nation if more and more people have the digital skills that enable them to get on in life. I welcome the Scottish Government's motion and its support for Scottish Labour's amendment.

16:03

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I suspect that, by the end of my contribution, I may be judged either an iconoclast or a heretic. I am reminded that, on 23 July 1633, Jenny Geddes threw her stool at the minister in St Giles cathedral because of the first use of the Anglican "Book of Common Prayer". She sought to

overturn the prevailing norms and I will do something similar.

None of this digital stuff matters at all. We really should be debating communication and services because those are what we are trying to get to. Digital infrastructure is merely one of a range of ways in which we might support those broader aims.

Let us talk about communication. The Roman empire had a series of hilltop signalling posts that enabled a message to get from Londinium to Roma in a mere six hours. It did not work at night or if there was fog or low cloud, but a lot of the time it meant pretty good—for 2,000 or so years ago—communication from the outposts of the empire to the centre. That was one of the reasons why the Roman empire was so much more successful than the Greek empire, which was still sending messengers around with messages in cleft sticks or, alternatively, sending secret messages by shaving the head of a slave, writing the message on the slave's head, waiting till their hair grew and then sending them off—it took months.

What we are actually talking about and interested in is communication. Digital communication has been around for a lot longer than we would think. The Scots invented the first fax machine in the 1840s—of course, it was probably analogue, rather than digital, and the technology that we use today is very different. The telegraph, which was the first real digital communication medium, was the key thing that opened up America by enabling communications to be taken to the west coast, which was the making of that big country whose future we will all be watching with interest next week. The first private telegraph line between Edinburgh and London was opened in 1868, when the Bank of Scotland—for which I worked for 30 years—installed a telegraph line between its head office on the Mound and its office in Broad Street in London. The telephone came to the bank a wee bit later, in 1882. Like banks everywhere, the Bank of Scotland was cautious about technology and the board approved the telephone only on the strict understanding that it not be used to conduct business.

Computers, too, have been around for quite a long time. Astrological computers were used in Arabia more than 1,000 years ago.

Edward Mountain: I am always amazed at how much knowledge the member has, but I hope that we will move beyond faxes at some point and get to broadband. I encourage the member to address the question of how we will get broadband in the remote parts of the Highlands. Could that be weaved into his history?

Stewart Stevenson: We can certainly do that, of course. However, I will say, in part, that broadband is not necessarily digital. It is actually digital data that is carried on analogue signals. That is neither here nor there, but it illustrates why, when we talk about digital, we shouldnae get bogged down in all this techy stuff. What we actually want is for people to get access to services and good communications.

I am disappointed that Mike Rumbles is not here to hear me mildly correct one or two things that he said. I will start by addressing his statement that he lives next to a trunk road called the A97. That will be news to people, because there is no trunk road with that name. The A97 is a local road that is the responsibility of the local council. I will correct him on another point. He has been told on umpteen occasions that he is on an exchange-only line. So am I. My exchange is on fibre; I am not. I am counted in the 5 per cent that was mentioned, and so is Mr Rumbles. My brother lives in the centre of Edinburgh. He is on an exchange-only line, so he is in that 5 per cent, too. Different technology will be needed to connect people who are connected differently for reasons of history that go back more than 100 years to when the first telephones were installed in Scotland in the late 1870s—some of that wire is still around.

Daniel Johnson: I take the member's point that, in essence, we are not dealing with something new and that we are essentially talking about communication. However, the key difference is that we are facing a change in technology that is not just about communication but involves replacing every step that humans currently take as part of the supply chain across a broad range of things. That is new and it is something that we have never faced before and it must be addressed.

Stewart Stevenson: I agree with the member. He is absolutely correct. Of course, we have been through a similar change in the mechanical era, when we automated the looms. That had a hugely disruptive effect and we will see the same huge disruption again.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: Not from that source.

Mike Rumbles: Oh, go on.

Stewart Stevenson: You would not take mine. I have corrected your problems.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Please refrain from having conversations with each other. Please speak through the chair.

Stewart Stevenson: I will address my remarks to the chair, as I properly should do.

The big challenge involves ensuring that there is equality of access to the services that we can deliver via the internet. At the moment, rural areas are behind the pace. It is important that we get them on pace by 2021 and ensure that they are connected. However, as we develop the services, we are going to have to consider who gets the rewards for work that is productive. A lot of work will be of a social and cultural nature because the production of goods and the engagement in the delivery of services will employ a lower proportion of people as time goes on. That is a fact that we will all have to face, whatever our political views. We are going to have to have a debate about the wider effects of changing the way in which we run the modern world.

We also have to consider carefully—Patrick Harvie touched on the point but did not develop it—homogeneity versus diversity. If we get to a position where there are very few sources of services, a mistake or an error in the implementation of those service deliverers will have much wider effects. The first law of epigenetics says that the more highly optimised an organism is for one environment, the more adversely it is affected by a change in that environment. The bottom line for today's debate is that we need diversity of supply and delivery. That way we can move forward together and I am sure that we will do so.

I hope that, in his future contributions, Mr Rumbles will take the opportunity to correct the almost totally misleading contribution that he has made today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Harper, you have the unenviable task of following Mr Stevenson.

16:11

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Thank you Presiding Officer, but I do not know if I can ever compete with Stewart Stevenson in any of my speeches.

We have heard a lot of examples of digital connectivity and what we can do. I was part of a surgical team in California that developed robotic surgery so that we could do remote access surgery with a surgeon who was not even in the same room as the patient. That was quite an exciting time for me.

This afternoon, however, I want to concentrate on the importance of high-quality digital connectivity for rural communities so that Scotland can realise its full digital potential, and the importance of connectivity for social inclusion,

business growth and development, and provision of public services. In a rural region like Dumfries and Galloway, digital connectivity is increasingly important. Indeed, it is vital to a wide range of activities and is the number 1 issue for many constituents to whom I speak.

I have already held two broadband surgeries—one in Stranraer and one in Dumfries—with the assistance of Digital Scotland, which was much appreciated. Common to both surgeries were concerns that constituents brought about the more difficult-to-connect parts of a large and rural area. Many of those constituents still have little or no access to the internet, and several places do not even have access to mobile phone coverage.

It is fair and important to recognise that good progress is being made, with 34,294 premises across Dumfries and Galloway already being connected to fibre broadband and capable of receiving download speeds greater than 24Mbps. At the end of the first quarter of this financial year, 74 per cent of the premises in the region were connected to fibre broadband, which is up from an assumed 26 per cent in 2012. Progress is significant and demonstrable—it is important that we do not lose sight of that. With 26 per cent of the region still to be connected, acknowledgement of good progress should not distract from the significant challenge of rolling out the next generation of broadband and, in some cases, any broadband at all, so that the locations and businesses that are ready to catch up can do so.

Businesses in Galloway are, of course, already capitalising on improved connectivity by expanding their operations and exploiting new opportunities. One of the businesses is Jas P Wilson, a dealer in and manufacturer of forestry machinery, which the Minister for Employability and Training, Jamie Hepburn, visited recently. That company is marketing its products in European countries and is developing markets that will allow it to expand and secure its future as an important local employer.

On the other hand, the excellent visitor attraction, the Galloway activity centre, on the beautiful shores of Loch Ken, has no broadband access and little current prospect of being able to arrange broadband at a reasonable cost. It has investigated every option that is currently available and found that the options are either logistically impossible or will incur costs that the business cannot afford. Like Jas P Wilson, it has the potential and drive to expand what it does and grow as a business. Affordable digital connectivity will make a huge difference to its ability to perform and expand.

Digital connectivity can also have huge benefits for delivery of healthcare. In particular, it can help patients to avoid at least some of the lengthy

journeys that they would otherwise have to make to manage long-term health conditions. A good example is the nurse-led diabetes clinic at the Galloway community hospital in Stranraer, where patients can upload data from blood glucose monitors and insulin pumps and have a videoconference with their consultant, rather than make the 150-mile round trip to Dumfries or wait for a consultant appointment in Stranraer. Sound day-to-day management is the key to long-term wellbeing for people with diabetes, so such easy access to regular appointments makes a huge difference to management of a condition that can be personally debilitating and costly to the national health service, if it is poorly managed.

Education can also benefit from progress on digital connectivity. The Dumfries learning town project is looking at ways in which digital connectivity can widen course choice in the senior phase of secondary school. Small numbers of students in more rural secondaries might not otherwise be able to access the variety of specialised higher courses that are commonly available to their urban counterparts.

Mobile coverage in Dumfries and Galloway is patchy, and access to mobile broadband is even more so, especially outwith the urban centres of population. Indeed, this year's tourism economic activity monitor report for the region highlighted access to mobile broadband as the issue that is of greatest concern to tourism businesses.

Tourists expect to be able to navigate by their phone, research visitor attractions in an area and make bookings while they are on the move—and people increasingly expect to be able to do all that in the rural areas that they visit, just as they can in urban centres. I therefore warmly welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to work with the UK mobile network operators on an action plan to fill in the blank patches in my region.

I am happy to support the motion. I have outlined some of the benefits of digital connectivity for rural areas and some of the challenges that such areas face as we become increasingly interconnected. Above all, I am confident that the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to maximise digital connection and participation in Scotland are the right ones, and will help to realise Scotland's full potential in a digital world.

16:17

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): This has been an interesting and important debate that has covered a wide range of issues. I will touch on some of them.

Above all, we heard from many members about our digital ambitions for Scotland and the importance of digital connectivity for our economy.

A key theme that is emerging from the debate is that we cannot and should not underestimate the importance of access to a digital communications structure that is fit for 21st century Scotland.

We rightly expect our children to learn to read and write, but we must also recognise that in today's Scotland knowledge of and expertise in digital communications are essential if our young people are to access jobs in our economy.

As we heard, it is not just the workforce of tomorrow that needs to be equipped. As Daniel Johnson and other members said, the companies of today—large and small—need to be able to compete in an increasingly challenging market, in which they are often up against companies in countries whose Governments are prepared to invest in state-of-the-art digital infrastructure.

We therefore need to recognise, as Audit Scotland has done, that we can and must do better in Scotland. I do not think that any member disagrees with the four themes of Scotland's digital future programme: connectivity, digital economy, digital participation and digital public services. However, as many members have said, we need to ensure that objectives are met on the ground, in our communities.

Members are right to have raised issues that people in their constituencies and regions face: I will do likewise. As Jamie Greene does, I represent West Scotland, which is one of the most urbanised and densely populated parts of Scotland, although the region also includes a number of rural areas. A key theme of today's debate has been the digital divide—and not just the divide between areas of affluence and areas of material deprivation. As Rhoda Grant said, the market has provided for many areas, but rural areas and many urban areas have been left behind. Tom Arthur was right to raise the issues that exist in his constituency that affect people in Howwood and Lochwinnoch. In Scotland's largest town, Paisley, there are still many issues around broadband. A number of householders in Hawkhead are living in new homes but are using dial-up broadband despite residents saying that the developer has installed the necessary infrastructure. There are a number of other examples in my region—other members have given examples in their areas—of households being still unable to access fibre-optic broadband because they are connected directly to the local telephone exchange and not through a green cabinet.

The problems that have been experienced in recent years can be resolved with effort, application and investment, but members have rightly made the point that a far more difficult issue is the lack of access for those who do not have the resources or the training to benefit from what our

new digitally enhanced society can offer. As the minister said at the start of the debate, and as other members have echoed, it is therefore important that we recognise the generational digital divide. We cannot ignore elderly households whose bewilderment at the new technology excludes them from the financial advantages of being able, for example, to control their heating system from a smartphone. Why should they be excluded from the best online deals for goods and services just because they do not have access to a computer or a smartphone?

Emma Harper and Maree Todd made some important points about the role of technology in the NHS, but as we develop telecare systems for social care, we must ensure that elderly and disabled people who are already on the wrong side of the digital divide are in no way further disadvantaged.

Willie Coffey made important points about digital inclusion and digital technology as a tool for ensuring social justice. If Parliament is serious about tackling poverty, we need to be serious about digital inclusion. Why should poorer households with the lowest disposable incomes be forced to pay the highest prices—prices that members can avoid because we are able to access the internet? Monica Lennon made important points about the number of people who do not have access to the internet. If we truly want a digitally inclusive society we must address the households and communities that are being left behind.

Many of our councils are trying their best to bridge the digital divide. Monica Lennon gave examples from South Lanarkshire Council, and a number of councils are offering computer and internet access in libraries and other public facilities. However, I have to ask—it would be remiss not to—how our councils will be able to continue to offer such access to excluded and disadvantaged people if their budgets are slashed, which will force them to make even harsher cuts. I hope that the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government will tell us how they will fund and ensure public access to digital facilities throughout Scotland. The Scottish Government must also consider how it supports the expansion of town-centre access to modern fast broadband such as Renfrewshire Council wants to deliver in its town centres.

As members have said, digital inclusion is also vital for education and skills. Daniel Johnson made some important points about the fact that the numbers of STEM teachers and computer science teachers are being cut. It should not be left to children whose parents can afford it, either at home or through private education, to have access to iPads, tablets and other digital devices. Such

devices are becoming the norm for communication, research and learning, so it cannot be right that young people in deprived communities are trying to enter a competitive workforce without the same familiarity with modern systems as young people from more affluent backgrounds.

We can say that we want to break down barriers, to invest in infrastructure and to do what is required for individuals and households whose age, income or lack of connectivity means that they are being left behind, but we need to follow that up with real and meaningful action. That is why we will support the Government in providing world-leading digital infrastructure and access, but will hold it to account when it must do better.

16:24

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

The debate has been interesting, and there have been some thoughtful, well-informed speeches from all parties. It has been all the better because it must be the first debate that we have had in quite a while in which there has been hardly a mention of Brexit—although the cabinet secretary could not help himself eight minutes into his speech—and not a single mention of a second independence referendum. Long may that trend continue.

Mike Rumbles talked about his frustration with his green box beside his non-existent trunk road, and we had the customary history lesson from Stewart Stevenson. I must correct one thing in his speech: if he checks, he will find that the riot in St Giles on 23 July 1637 was not occasioned by the reading of the Anglican “Book of Common Prayer”, but by the reading of a new common prayer book devised specifically for Scotland.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take a brief intervention on that point?

Murdo Fraser: On that point? Yes, of course.

Mike Rumbles: Stewart Stevenson was also wrong on a number of other issues. There was, of course, no such thing as the Greek empire, which he kept talking about. He was wrong on so many things that I cannot list them here.

Murdo Fraser: If Mr Stevenson is interested in reading more about the politics and history of mid-17th century Scotland, I can recommend a very good book that was written last year and which is still available in good bookshops.

The digital economy has long been an interest of mine. In my very first speech in the Scottish Parliament in 2001, I talked about what was then called the “new economy” and the need for better connectivity in rural areas. I have reread that speech and, interestingly enough, the term

“broadband” was not mentioned in the debate, never mind “superfast broadband”. However, the principles are the same.

In opening the debate, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity referred to his politics in business award—incidentally, I congratulate him on winning it at last week’s politician of the year awards. Like him, I congratulate Johann Lamont on her e-politician of the year award. Despite being nominated three times in a row, I was—once again—cruelly snubbed by the judges. There is always next year.

I was struck by the speeches from members who are much younger than me in which they recognised how much society has changed. Jamie Greene quoted from the *Daily Record* of 1 January 2000 the newspaper’s thoughts on how the world would change. Tom Arthur was very good, setting out some of the changes that he too has seen in his lifetime, which is much shorter than mine.

We have come a long way in 50 years. We have a Scottish Government with a manifesto commitment to deliver superfast broadband to 100 per cent of properties by 2021 and a UK Government that is committed to a universal service obligation. However, there are a lot of challenges ahead.

In its briefing for the debate, the Federation of Small Businesses tells us that three quarters of Scottish firms say that digital technologies are essential or important to their plans for growth. To make the most of the opportunities, firms need access to the right infrastructure and the right skills. Willie Coffey touched on the need for skills to be available in the workforce.

According to the FSB’s survey in June, 83 per cent of Scottish premises could access superfast broadband compared to 89 per cent of premises south of the border. Sadly, superfast broadband roll-out for small or medium-sized businesses tends to lag behind the roll-out for the wider population.

As we heard throughout the debate, there are particular issues in rural areas. Rhoda Grant, Edward Mountain and Maree Todd all referred to the situation in the Highlands. I know from my experience that there are large gaps in the provision of broadband in areas such as Perthshire and Stirlingshire. However, it is not just rural areas that need attention, and Graham Simpson reminded us that many urban locations have similar problems.

The lack of mobile connectivity is a big problem for large parts of Scotland—Emma Harper reminded us of that just a few moments ago—and Scotland’s position is the worst in the UK in that regard. I remember in my early years in the Parliament people complaining to MSPs about

mobile phone masts—they thought that the radio waves would fry their or their children's brains. Now people come to us to complain about mobile phone masts because they are not being built fast enough. More can be done to encourage the operators to share masts.

Derek Mackay: The member raises a very fair point about existing and new mobile phone masts. Does he welcome the actions to extend permitted development to encourage mobile operators to extend coverage and deliver the technology that will achieve the coverage that we all want to see?

Murdo Fraser: In the spirit of consensus, I am very happy to agree with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution's point about how we can encourage the private sector to work together to deliver masts more efficiently and get involved in the sharing of masts, which is important.

Having talked about the private sector, I will touch on the situation in the public sector, to which a number of members, including Daniel Johnson and Graham Simpson, referred.

On Tuesday, Deloitte and Reform launched the report "The State of the State 2016-17: Brexit and the business of government", which contains a lot of interesting information about the future of public services. As Daniel Johnson reminded us, the report said that more than 800,000

"public sector jobs could be lost to automation by 2030"

in the UK, which would save something like

"£17 billion annually in wages compared to 2015."

Such a shift would be gradual, but it shows the challenges that we face regarding a changing workforce, as well as the potential for lower costs in the delivery of public services.

However, as the report made clear, digital transformation is struggling to meet that ambition. Many of those who were interviewed for the report told the authors that they felt that their organisations should be more digitally advanced than they had been able to achieve. One permanent secretary said that he felt that his department was

"always a year away from an outcome."

The head of a national body in Scotland said:

"We're at digital 1.0, but digital 3.0 or 4.0 is where we need to be".

Sadly, too many of those in the public sector who are moving towards more digitised systems have had a negative experience. Another public sector leader who was quoted in the report said:

"We have wasted time digitising systems that weren't fit for purpose in the first place. It's rethinking these systems that will radically improve productivity."

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I am probably in my last minute—I apologise.

In Scotland, our experience of information technology systems in the public sector is not always a happy one. We all know about the IT system for common agricultural policy payments, which was 158 per cent over the original budget. Audit Scotland said of that system:

"We do not expect the programme to deliver value for money."

The IT system for NHS 24 is 73 per cent over budget and due to be completed four years later than originally planned. Police Scotland had to abandon the project that was intended to provide a unified, integrated IT system for the country's police force—the system had been due to go live in December 2015.

The report quotes the leader of one national agency who said:

"Most people in the public sector would rather die in a ditch than roll out a large IT system. It will end their career."

Such views are disappointing, but perhaps not surprising. We need to get better in the public sector if we really want to fulfil our potential in the digital world. The opportunities are there for greater efficiency and for more productive public services, but at the moment we are simply not making it work. There is room for improvement in both public and private sectors, and we have seen in the debate that the way forward is to work together. In the spirit of consensus, we are happy to support both the Labour amendment and the Government motion.

16:32

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Today's debate has been constructive, helpful and consensual, and a number of fair suggestions were made that will feature in our refreshed digital strategy. To pick up where Murdo Fraser left off, we will need to be bold and radical, and we will need to work in partnership across the public and private sectors to achieve the digital transformation. As the lead for the Government, I have been working with the Scottish leaders forum, with local authorities and with a range of people who are involved in digital activity. The approach of doing things differently will continue as we embark on the process to realise our shared digital ambitions.

I want to cover as many points as possible that members raised. Edward Mountain was correct to draw attention to the fact that the fibre infrastructure will not physically reach every part of Scotland. We will take it as far as we possibly can, but other technological solutions will have to be used for the areas that we cannot reach in order to

achieve 100 per cent superfast broadband coverage, and we will expand mobile coverage as well. The solutions go beyond fibre, so that was a fair point to make.

Jamie Greene covered digital participation, as did Patrick Harvie, as well as the use of data and the potential for public sector transformation. There was a sense in the past that things felt quite futuristic, which is a further lesson in why we should future proof as much as we can, in recognition of the technology mix that will exist.

Rhoda Grant covered the potential of the strategy refresh and made a number of suggestions. She said that the strategy must be turned into actions and cannot just be rhetoric, which is a fair point. There must be clear actions from the strategy, and I hope that members will believe that that is the case when we publish it next year.

One reason why we cannot publish the strategy now relates to Neil Bibby's question about resourcing for capital infrastructure for connectivity. That is closely aligned with the autumn statement, the budget that I will propose and what parties bring to the table. As recently as a few hours ago, I met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to discuss our request for a capital stimulus to support and grow the economy and tackle the digital divide.

Willie Coffey covered the rapid progress in technology, which he is well placed to talk about—I am talking about not his longevity but his experience in the sector. He talked about how we can stay ahead, be at the cutting edge and do things differently, like other small European nations. Those nations have a different culture. They focus on how to use data—in a safe way—to deliver better public services, and we have something to learn from them.

I heard the concerns of Tom Arthur and other members about coverage in their constituencies, which must be taken on board. Equally, I take on board Daniel Johnson's comments about productivity and automation. Smart technology has downsides, which we need to consider, even as we accept the positives on the journey.

It was refreshing to hear about Emma Harper's expertise and her involvement in technology's transformation of surgery. We heard about Stewart Stevenson's ever-present expertise in digital. I say to Murdo Fraser that I was up for a politician of the year award, too, but, in all modesty, he was robbed of the award of e-politician of the year. However, I give all credit to Johann Lamont.

Patrick Harvie was creative and used quotes to make important points about digital participation. I quote Steve Jobs, who said:

"Great things in business are never done by one person. They're done by a team of people."

That maxim applies equally to government, hence the double act—the silver surfer that is Mr Ewing and the salt-and-pepper surfer, perhaps, that is me. I thank Jackson Carlaw for exposing my previous issues.

Such partnership, with Mr Swinney addressing skills and with the public service transformation that I will take forward, will ensure that the physical infrastructure is there. I hope that, when we publish the refreshed strategy, it will cover all the areas that are of interest across the public and private sectors. It will be not just a Government strategy but a strategy for Scotland. It will look at skills, physical infrastructure and cybersecurity, which some members touched on.

We want to engage on those issues and continue to build a picture of what will work for Scotland. I am delighted to announce that we have launched an online interactive dialogue app so that we can capture a wider and more diverse range of views as we take our strategy forward.

Digital creates vast possibilities for our citizens. It affects how citizens engage with society and the Government and how they access public services and a host of other services. It enables us to deliver those services more efficiently and effectively. It affects how people manage their health and how they learn and engage. It enables us to get more out of the education system and affects how businesses operate and capitalise on opportunities.

We are making significant progress on promoting digital participation. More than 80 per cent of Scots now use the internet. Between 2013 and 2015, there was around a 20 per cent increase—from 42 to 63 per cent—in broadband access at home among social housing tenants. Our digital inclusion toolkit is important to enabling us to expand on that. The Scottish wide area network telecoms section will reach out through the public sector, and there are further interventions to tackle the digital divide.

I could go through a range of actions that we are taking. A good example of where e-services have worked well is from e-planning and e-building standards, which are projected to save £73 million over five years, having cost just under £2 million. That digital-first approach to services can make a difference for the client and the determining body.

We want to enhance business digital capabilities, too. The enterprise and skills review will support us in that, as will new initiatives such as CivTech, which I have had the pleasure of being involved with, to harness new ways of supporting the talents of technology start-up companies and address our joint civic challenges.

A range of other interventions will support our digital strategy to capitalise on the opportunities in the wider economy.

I will briefly mention Brexit. I have engaged with the sector, which says that there are serious challenges that relate to the loss of expertise. We must take those concerns seriously, but we must focus on the opportunities that are before us to build our economy, tackle the digital divide and transform our public services in a way that focuses on the new infrastructure that will release our country's potential, as Daniel Johnson described.

Such investment is well worth supporting. The consensus that we have established in the chamber today puts us on a strong footing as we take forward the revised strategy.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S5M-02121, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the draft Council Tax (Substitution of Proportion) (Scotland) Order 2016.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Council Tax (Substitution of Proportion) (Scotland) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

The Presiding Officer: Each member will have up to three minutes to speak in the debate.

16:41

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): Scottish Green Party MSPs will vote for the statutory instrument, regardless of what reasoned amendments end up as part of the final motion.

The substance of the vote is whether the statutory instrument is approved by Parliament. It should be. We have considerable criticisms of the Scottish Government's overall approach to the issue, but we agree on some matters. We agree with the First Minister's adviser on poverty and inequality, Naomi Eisenstadt; with previous commissions, including the Burt commission; with statements that the First Minister has made on the matter in previous sessions; and with the commission on local tax reform's first recommendation, which is:

"The present Council Tax system must end."

The statutory instrument will not do that; it merely provides a tepid reheat of a discredited system. However, I repeat that we will support the statutory instrument and vote for it. We will do so because it provides an extremely modest but welcome step in making the council tax, which is probably the most regressive tax in the United Kingdom, that little bit less regressive. However, the tax proposal is fatally flawed, as people's tax liabilities will be levied without an accurate or up-to-date assessment of the tax base. The consequence is that many people who should pay less tax will pay more tax.

Technically, the debate is about a modest change, but it is actually about something more fundamental. At this time—four and a half years out from the next election—the Parliament has a unique opportunity to build a majority for far-reaching reform that strengthens local democracy, accountability and fiscal autonomy; endorses a fiscal framework for future local government settlements; and provides communities with real power to choose for themselves the scope, extent

and quality of local services and how they are funded.

My amendment would alter nothing in the legislation. It would not alter the bands, the multipliers or the rates. It provides Parliament with an opportunity to express its views on the future of local taxation and local democracy.

Will the council tax ever be abolished? Who knows? Will it ever be based on an accurately assessed tax base? Who knows? Will local government in Scotland be granted the kinds of fiscal freedoms that are enjoyed by municipalities and councils across most of Europe? Who knows?

Above all, will the statutory instrument become law tonight? It will if the Scottish National Party votes for it.

The debate makes it clear that the ball is in the SNP's court. If the SNP votes for the motion, it will pass; if it abstains, it will let the Tories win. Next week, our minds will turn to further important matters. Let us pass the legislation.

I move amendment S5M-02121.1, to insert at end:

"but, in so doing, regrets that the Scottish Government's proposals for Council Tax reform undermine the principle of local accountability and autonomy and fail to address a number of issues identified by the Commission on Local Tax Reform; notes the opportunities to remedy this during the current session of Parliament, and considers that there should be further discussions by all parties to seek to establish an enduring system of local government finance."

16:44

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): My amendment delivers the key points in the Greens' amendment. This Government recognises the importance of local accountability and local democracy, and we agree to continue discussion on the reform of local taxation. However, crucially, we are inserting a key aim of embedding fairness and progressive taxation into those reforms. The Greens' amendment does not mention progressive taxation, just to enjoy the support of the Tories—only long enough, of course, for the Tories to pull their support in a bid to halt an increase in council tax for higher-value properties, despite their own manifesto proposition. Opportunistic opposition might well be convenient, but the mature and responsible actions of a Parliament of minorities require the Opposition to provide not only a critique but principles on which we can all build. Surely fairness is one of those principles.

This Scottish statutory instrument is purely about the council tax multipliers in consideration of the proposal that won the support of the Local Government and Communities Committee. According to the Resolution Foundation, the

proposal will see council tax become fairer and more proportionate. In its report from April, the Resolution Foundation stated that the policy

"would raise revenue in a progressive manner, with the tax rise falling harder on higher income households."

It will see council tax bills increase for those who live in properties in bands E to H while protecting those on low incomes from any change and protecting the 75 per cent of taxpayers who live in bands A to D. Changing bands E to H will generate £100 million each year of additional revenues for local authorities, which is £100 million that local authorities would not otherwise receive. We will continue to engage with local government on distribution matters, and I have been clear that every penny raised in council tax will stay with the local authority.

I have also set out to the chamber and the Local Government and Communities Committee this Government's commitment that the steps that we are taking today are simply the first on a journey of reform. These are the earliest changes that we can make to ensure that additional resources are available to councils from April.

Over this session of Parliament, we can work together to make local taxation fairer. Both the First Minister and I have put that on the record, and I gave that commitment to the committee. If the Parliament votes for our amendment tonight, that principle will be embedded in future reforms.

Next month, I will bring a budget to this chamber. I have already written to each party, asking for their proposals so that we can enter into a constructive discussion. We must be able to go into that discussion knowing that it will be based on positive engagement on all sides, on honouring commitments and on this Parliament embracing new powers. We all have a duty to show that we are beyond party-political games on such significant matters.

I move amendment S5M-02121.1.1, to leave out from "regrets" to "should be" and insert:

"recognises the importance of local accountability and autonomy in taxation, believes that reform should improve progressivity and fairness and calls for further consideration of the recommendations of the Commission on Local Tax Reform and".

16:47

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Today we are sitting in uncharted waters. Parliament could be about to vote to allow the Scottish Government to impose a tax rise on local government, claw that money back and then spend it as it sees fit on a nationwide school attainment fund. It is totally unprecedented.

First of all, let us be clear: we on these benches are in favour of a school attainment fund. We need to close the attainment gap after nine years of failure by the Scottish National Party. I imagine that the chamber will be united on that statement—the first part of it, anyway.

However, as the Green amendment makes clear, the Scottish Government's funding of a measure—any measure—on the back of councils is an attack on local democracy and local accountability. As I said in a previous debate on the matter, it is a basic principle that money should be spent by those who have been elected to raise it and who are answerable for it to the electors. If council tax increases, the increase should be spent by councils. It should be entirely a matter for East Renfrewshire Council, for example, to decide how to spend the £4 million that will be raised by increasing the amounts charged in the top four bands, for Edinburgh to decide how to spend its £15.6 million or for South Lanarkshire to decide how to spend its £5.5 million.

However, in a financial sleight of hand that would do Derren Brown proud, Derek Mackay will allow local authorities to keep their extra council tax—legally, he has to—but will take it back by cutting grants. It is the first time that that has ever happened, and it is a slippery slope.

We will be voting for Andy Wightman's amendment, because it rightly points out the grave way in which that undermines local accountability and autonomy. It undermines accountability because it is councillors who should be answerable to the people for council tax, and it undermines autonomy because it is councillors who should decide how that tax is spent.

Other Opposition MSPs accepted that when we last debated these measures, and they voted that way—with one exception. Will they stand by their principles today and vote against this measure? I hope so, because principle is in short supply in politics. Simply noting the issues does not go far enough. If members truly believe in localism—and we do—the only way to vote is against this national tax that is being dressed up as local. If the measure goes through, when people get their council tax bills next year they should be in no doubt that part of the increase is nothing to do with their councils and everything to do with the SNP and anyone who votes with it today.

16:50

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I rise to support Andy Wightman's amendment and I make it clear that the Scottish Labour Party will be voting for the statutory instrument. As Andy Wightman said, it is a modest movement, but it is nevertheless welcome. That is the view that local

authority leaders across Scotland take; any additional funding would be better than none.

A couple of key points need to be made. First, if the council tax was so unfair in 2007—John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon made it clear that it was unfair and Nicola Sturgeon went further and said that tinkering with the bands was not good enough and that the council tax had to go—how is it suddenly fair today? How could Derek Mackay possibly claim that?

Secondly, on the subject of continuing the discussion, the fact is that the Scottish Government set up a commission that everyone in here, apart from the Tories, signed up to. The one broad agreement that we reached was that the council tax was past its sell-by date and had to go. How many more discussions does Derek Mackay want to have before he makes the right decision and gets rid of the unfair council tax? He talks about bringing forward his budget. The fact is that £100 million will be raised through the statutory instrument, which is why we will support it. However, Derek Mackay intends to take £100 million out of the local government grant in order to fund a national priority. He did not have the guts to be honest with the people of Scotland and say that we will fund education directly by increasing taxes. He is going to hide behind local government.

That is unlike the Labour Party, because we were quite clear that we would fund schools with £100 million by increasing the top rate of taxation. The difference is that we were honest with the voters. I say to Derek Mackay that we will support the statutory instrument because we recognise that it is important that the money goes into local government. It is a step in the right direction, but we have to get rid of the SNP council tax and bring in something that will put local government on a fair financial footing.

16:53

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): If we defeat the Government today, Parliament will take the first step towards bringing an end to the council tax. The Liberal Democrats will vote against the Government's amendment, as it eviscerates Andy Wightman's amendment, which we will support. We will oppose the Government on the draft order. We are opposing the Government because we have a long track record of supporting true local democracy, we favour the true reform of local taxation to a progressive land value tax and we respect the work of the commission on local government taxation.

If the Government wins, it will embed the council tax, which the SNP has told us it hates but about which it has done absolutely nothing for a decade.

The minister will need to forgive me for being a bit sceptical of new promises now. This could be the only real chance that the Parliament gets to vote on council tax reform. If the Government wins today we will only get talks about talks about talks. If the Government wins today, it will undermine local democracy by imposing an unfair redistribution mechanism over the heads of councils. The more councils raise, the more they will be punished.

If the Government wins today, it will be a message to carry on as normal. If the Scottish Government was serious about investing in our schools to get Scottish education back up the international rankings, it would back our plans to use a tax over which it already has control. To raise £500 million every year—five times as much—to transform our education system, the Government should put a modest penny on income tax. That would be fair, progressive and moderate. It is bizarre that the Government might even vote against its own tax rise today, so if we defeat the Government, Parliament will be taking the first step to bringing an end to the council tax. I urge Parliament to take that step.

The Presiding Officer: To wind up the debate, I first call Andy Wightman.

16:56

Andy Wightman: One of the most impressive witnesses at the local government evidence session at the commission on local tax reform was a councillor from the Scottish Borders. She told us that she wanted to go into the next election with a manifesto stating what her party proposed to do if elected. She wanted to tell her electors how much her proposals would cost and how she proposed that they be paid for. In other words, she wanted to do what most politicians in a representative democracy want to do. However, in Scotland that ability has been eroded to the point where it is really not possible to make such an offer, as councils today are, in the words that Tom Johnston used in writing about burgh reform in 1832,

“mere miserable starved caricatures of their former greatness”.

Derek Mackay has repeated the assertions that he made on the radio this morning seeking to justify the mechanism for redistribution of moneys among councils by arguing that it is a well-established practice. It is not. It is a practice that was introduced by Mrs Thatcher. It was introduced in the Rates Act 1984, when non-domestic rates were removed from local control and centralised. That act also introduced domestic rate capping, which is another proposal from the SNP that no doubt Mr Mackay would argue is traditional and well established.

Mr Mackay said that we are on a journey. I look forward to that journey. I hope that we can all get on board the bus. I think that some parties will get off the bus a little sooner than other parties, but I hope that, when we do get on that bus, everything comes on the bus with us and nothing should be off the table, and I would be happy to be on the same bus with everybody in this chamber. Perhaps we should call the bus the commission on local tax reform.

At no time have Scottish Greens ever sought to block this legislation. We took great care not to do so in committee and we are taking great care not to do so tonight. I commend my amendment to members.

16:58

Derek Mackay: The Greens might think that they are on a bus, but I would argue that it is the Tories who are taking them for a ride. What the Greens are proposing is to remove progressive taxation as a fundamental principle to get the Conservatives on board only long enough for them to try to stop us raising the council tax for higher-value houses. Mr Wightman is wrong. It is the case that there is redistribution in local government, and it was not just under the Conservatives, and it is not just under the SNP; such a regime existed under the Labour-Liberal Executive for years as well. The principle remains the same. Every penny that is raised in council tax will stay with those councils.

The SSI is just about the multipliers. The Opposition parties cannot even agree on what they appear to be uniting to agree on. The Tories say that it is about no change, the Liberals and the Labour Party think that it is about some change or that it is about raising income tax rather than council tax, and the Greens think that it is about radical reform. Actually, the vote is about changing the multipliers, which is a reasonable, balanced approach that is in keeping with the mandate that the Scottish Government secured in the election at which we got, in an open and transparent way, the consent of the people to take forward our proposition, which also won the support of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

Our reforms are “more progressive”. Those are not my words but the words of the Resolution Foundation. They can be implemented as early as next April, so we can generate £100 million a year for our public services, for local authorities and for targeting on education—something that we have all said that we would agree on. Of course, 75 per cent of council tax payers pay no more as a consequence of our balanced reforms.

The Opposition told us for long enough that the council tax freeze was unsustainable. We have introduced a package of measures that will take forward sustainable increases to ensure that we generate more for public services in a progressive way.

We recognise our responsibility to taxpayers, to local authorities and, most importantly, to our young people. We will see that additional funding delivered. Most importantly, this party and this Government will not let petty party politics stand in the way of doing the right thing for Scotland's children and for taxpayers across the country.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes our debate on the council tax. The question will be put at decision time.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S5M-02302, on committee membership.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Dean Lockhart be appointed to replace Alex Johnstone as a member of the Finance and Constitution Committee.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question will be put at decision time, to which we now come.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are seven questions today. The first question is, that amendment S5M-02281.2, in the name of Jamie Greene, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02281, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on realising Scotland's full potential in a digital world, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-02281.3, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02281, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on realising Scotland's full potential in a digital world, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-02281, in the name of Fergus Ewing, as amended, on realising Scotland's full potential in a digital world, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises the need for Scotland to have a clear vision to realise its potential in a digital world; acknowledges the importance of digital connectivity to achieving this vision, and that commercial providers have a key role to play alongside the Scottish Government and the public sector in delivering strong broadband and mobile infrastructure; recognises that all people in Scotland must have access to affordable high-speed broadband and 5G mobile access and the skills to use them both at home and in the workplace; calls on the Scottish Government to close the digital divide by monitoring levels of access and ensuring that everyone has a level of connectivity that is fit for the 21st century, regardless of their geographical location or income; recognises Audit Scotland's recent conclusion that reaching 100% of premises with superfast broadband will be challenging; notes that the Scottish Government will build on the 2011 Digital Strategy, *Scotland's Digital Future*, through a programme of action on connectivity, digital economy, skills, participation, security and transforming public services to help realise Scotland's full potential in a digital world, and acknowledges that the ultimate ambition of the Scottish Government should be to achieve full digital participation and the benefits that this brings in terms of fairness, economic performance and service provision.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-02121.1.1, in the name of Derek Mackay, which seeks to amend amendment S5M-02121.1, in the name of Andy Wightman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02121, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order. Can I have my monitor checked, please? There is something wrong with it. The light was not flashing. I have got the card in.

The Presiding Officer: In this case, because there is some doubt about whether the vote is being carried out correctly, that is a point of order, so I will rerun the vote. I ask Liz Smith to move to another seat, so that there is no doubt. Thank you. If members are okay with it, we will rerun the vote.

The question is, that amendment S5M-02121.1.1, in the name of Derek Mackay, which seeks to amend amendment S5M-02121.1, in the name of Andy Wightman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02121, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: Members may cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 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)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)

Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-02121.1, in the name of Andy Wightman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02121, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of an SSI, 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)

Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-02121, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, as amended, on approval of an SSI, 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, 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 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)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 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)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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 92, Against 35, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Council Tax (Substitution of Proportion) (Scotland) Order 2016 [draft] be approved but, in so doing, regrets that the Scottish Government's proposals for Council Tax reform undermine the principle of local accountability and autonomy and fail to address a number of issues identified by the Commission on Local Tax Reform; notes the opportunities to remedy this during the current session of Parliament, and considers that there should be further discussions by all parties to seek to establish an enduring system of local government finance.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-02302, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Dean Lockhart be appointed to replace Alex Johnstone as a member of the Finance and Constitution Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:07.

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

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

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba