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Wednesday 9 November 2016

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Wednesday 9 November 2016

CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY	1
Rail Unions (Meetings)	1
Rail Lines and Stations (Support for Reopening)	2
Superfast Broadband (Installation Timetable)	4
High-speed Fibre Broadband (Access)	5
Linked Holdings	7
Superfast Broadband (Access)	8
ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM	9
National Marine Centre	9
Shale Gas Imports (Release of Carbon Dioxide)	10
Invasive Rhododendron (Threat to Woodland)	11
Biodiversity (Central Scotland Green Network)	12
Water Quality	13
Circular Economy Strategy	14
Ministry of Defence (Environmental Discussions)	15
Carbon Emissions (Reduction)	16
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE	
(BASING REFORMS)	18
Statement—[Keith Brown].	
The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown)	18
PREVENTION AND ERADICATION OF HATE CRIME AND PREJUDICE	30
Motion moved—[Angela Constance].	
Amendment moved—[Annie Wells].	
Amendment moved—[Pauline McNeill].	
The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance)	30
Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)	33
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)	36
James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)	39
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)	42
Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)	44
Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab)	47
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	49
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	52
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)	55
Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)	57
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	58
Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	61
Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	63
The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing)	66
BUSINESS MOTION	70
Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	72
Motions moved—[Joe FitzPatrick].	
DECISION TIME	73
INTERNATIONAL CREDIT UNION DAY 2016	75
Motion debated—[Ruth Maguire].	
Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)	75
Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	77
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)	79
Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)	80
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)	81
Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)	82
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)	84

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)..... 86

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) 87

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse) 89

CORRECTION 93

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 9 November 2016

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Economy and Connectivity

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time. To get as many members in as possible, I would prefer short and succinct questions and answers to match. I say that more in hope than in expectation.

Rail Unions (Meetings)

1. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met the rail unions. (S5O-00302)

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): In addition to regular engagement with the Scottish Trades Union Congress, meetings have been held to discuss specific issues with individual unions. Most recently, I met Manuel Cortés, the general secretary of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, on 25 October. As part of my regular engagement with the STUC, I will meet the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and the TSSA tomorrow, when I imagine that a number of issues will be discussed.

Richard Leonard: The three major railway trade unions all oppose the Scottish Government's proposal to wind up the British Transport Police's operations in Scotland and absorb the service into Police Scotland. The unions cite the need for a distinctive police service for the railway. The deputy chief constable of the British Transport Police told the Justice Committee only last week that dual control of the transport police's function would lead to even more train delays and to railways crimes being downgraded.

My constituent Lucy Milton, who is an employee of the British Transport Police and who lives in Airdrie, wrote to me:

"There isn't a thought for those of us lying awake at night wondering how we will support families or indeed how the service we have worked so very hard to provide will be delivered once this is over. They don't care what happens to us."

How does the minister answer Lucy Milton, the deputy chief constable, ASLEF, the RMT, the

TSSA and the other transport experts? Why will the Scottish Government not drop the proposed bill?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Now, Mr Leonard, you have set us off in a bad way, because that was not a short second question. I hope that you will not repeat that approach, minister.

Humza Yousaf: I will keep my answer brief, Presiding Officer. I will engage with the unions tomorrow, when I will be keen to hear their concerns. I will see whether I can give them the necessary reassurance.

I will say a couple of things to the member's constituent and those who oppose the policy. First, we are giving a lot of assurances that we will protect the number of staff and the terms and conditions of BTP officers. Most important, we are ensuring that railway expertise is maintained on the railways. I recognise that BTP officers joined the BTP to be on our railways and not out on the beat in the streets, and we will protect their expertise.

Secondly, we were elected on a manifesto promise to do what we are doing with BTP integration, and I remind the member that we got more votes than his party and the main Opposition party combined. *[Humza Yousaf has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* That is the rationale behind what we are doing.

I will consult the unions, the British Transport Police and anybody else who has any concerns about the integration of the BTP. Police numbers will be protected and officers' terms and conditions will be protected. I would have thought that the member would welcome that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Oh, dear—all hope is gone.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): When the minister last met the rail unions, did he discuss with them the need for repair and better maintenance of the fabric of the rail station at Prestwick airport?

Humza Yousaf: The matter was not raised in the last discussion that I had with the rail unions, but I am more than happy to discuss it with the member and to see whether I can provide assurances about it and take it up with Network Rail.

Rail Lines and Stations (Support for Reopening)

2. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to third sector organisations that seek to build a case for the reopening of rail lines and stations. (S5O-00303)

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): If requested, the Scottish Government provides advice through Transport Scotland to third sector organisations and others on the application of its transport appraisal and business case guidance. The guidance is published on Transport Scotland's website.

Mark Ruskell: The minister might not be aware that the Newburgh train station group recently applied unsuccessfully for funds from the national lottery to develop a Scottish transport appraisal guidance report after Fife Council had exhausted funds supporting the STAG process for the critical Levenmouth rail route. Does he agree that the planning of our 21st century rail network should not depend on a lottery game? Will he commit to the provision of enough funds to examine the cases of all emerging rail projects, while also reviewing the STAG process to make it more streamlined, transparent and cost effective?

Humza Yousaf: I am more than happy to discuss that in more detail with the member. I met members of the Levenmouth rail campaign and had a good discussion with them. The proposal has some merit, although there are still questions that need to be answered, which Fife Council is working on.

The campaigners did not raise the funding of the STAG appraisal as an issue, but I agree with them that there is merit in looking at whether the appraisal process can be made less cumbersome. I am more than happy to do that and to take that feedback. I am waiting for the council's feedback on the Levenmouth rail option. All rail projects will be considered with an open mind if they have fully costed and robust business cases.

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): Success has been demonstrated by the number of passengers who are travelling on the Waverley line from the Scottish Borders, which illustrates the positive impact that opening lines and stations has on rural communities. The minister is aware of the campaign to reopen East Linton and Reston stations. Will the Scottish Government indicate when those much-needed stations will be reinstated?

Humza Yousaf: When I last met the stakeholders who are involved in that conversation, I mentioned that the Scottish Government has increased its contribution to the construction of those stations to 50 per cent. I received a letter from Scottish Borders Council that said that it wished to enter into further discussions and, when I reply to it in the next few days, I will ensure that Rachael Hamilton is copied in. There is a way forward and we are committed—as are the council and the elected members, I am sure—to the reopening of East Linton and Reston stations.

Superfast Broadband (Installation Timetable)

3. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will publish a timetable for the installation of superfast broadband indicating when the service will be available in each area. (S5O-00304)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): Planned deployment information, including expected timescales, for the digital Scotland superfast broadband programme is available on the digital Scotland postcode checker. The DSSB programme will extend fibre broadband access to at least 95 per cent of premises by the end of 2017 and we are committed to extending superfast coverage to 100 per cent of premises across Scotland by 2021. The timetable for delivery will depend on the outcome of new procurements, which will begin next year.

Willie Coffey: As much information as possible—and as soon as possible—is the best option for communities and families so that they can get best value for money with the data services that they plan to buy. In the broadband contracts that the Scottish Government is delivering with BT, how is it ensuring that it is also getting value for money?

Fergus Ewing: The member makes a valid point. Communities throughout Scotland are keen to know when they will get access to superfast broadband—that is absolutely understandable and we are not complacent about that. There are five stages to upgrading a green roadside cabinet: design, survey, build, connection and activation. All members will understand that issues can be identified at any one of those stages that can change the expected delivery date, and that should be borne in mind in relation to timescales.

The member asked about value for money, which I assure him is a key consideration. Each quarter, the digital superfast broadband programme assures milestones that are delivered by BT against contractual targets. That assurance feeds into the level of payment that BT receives quarterly so, if it does not deliver, it does not get paid.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I appreciate that there is a difference between making the service available in each area and connecting every household in an area, as the Government has committed to do. Does the minister understand the frustration that is felt by many people who have no idea when they might get connected to superfast broadband, despite announcements having been made perhaps 18 months or two years ago that superfast broadband

is now in their area and despite having superfast broadband lines going past their homes?

Fergus Ewing: If Mr Rumbles had listened to my first answer, in which I indicated that information is available on the digital Scotland postcode checker—*[Interruption.]* Mr Rumbles is interrupting from a sedentary position.

I absolutely agree and, as I said, I am not complacent about the situation. I understand those perfectly legitimate concerns, which are expressed by a great many people.

However, I am pleased that bodies such as Ofcom have recognised and praised the progress that we are making in Scotland. Ofcom, which is the regulator, has said that our progress on broadband is better than that south of the border. I appreciate that recognition from the regulator, but we are not complacent and we are aware of the concerns.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): What is being done to encourage greater take-up of superfast broadband in areas where it has been delivered, in order to allow more resources to be channelled into communities that currently cannot access superfast broadband?

Fergus Ewing: A great many people are pretty keen to access broadband where they can. The member makes a reasonable point, which I will reflect on to see whether we can do more. I am pleased that he shares our concern and our commitment to ensuring that there is universal coverage by 2021. I will write to him about whether there are any ways in which we can encourage take-up. It is primarily a matter for each person to decide whether to take up services if they so wish.

High-speed Fibre Broadband (Access)

4. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to extend access to high-speed fibre broadband across the country. (S5O-00305)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): The digital Scotland superfast broadband programme will extend fibre broadband access to at least 95 per cent of premises in Scotland by the end of 2017.

As outlined in the programme for government, this Government has put digital connectivity at the heart of its agenda and it is committed to delivering 100 per cent superfast broadband access by the end of this session of Parliament.

Daniel Johnson: Thank you for that response. We can measure the importance of broadband by the number of questions lodged about it.

Given the engineering complexities of deploying fibre broadband cabinets, which do not allow

digital Scotland to give any specific details regarding roll-out times, and given that many of my constituents in the very heart of Edinburgh still do not have access to fibre optic broadband, what is being done to ensure that the March 2018 deadline for roll-out will be met?

Fergus Ewing: There are two answers to the question. First, in two contracts throughout Scotland, we are delivering an investment by the Scottish Government of £400 million, with support from the United Kingdom Government and others. That programme has been praised by Ofcom. It has been acknowledged as being effective by not only Audit Scotland but the UK Government.

Secondly, as I said in answer to the first question, we will roll out access through a procurement process that will be entered into next year. It is important that we do not rush it. The UK Government was thought to have rushed its so-called mobile infrastructure plan. The result was that only three masts were erected instead of 78. That was because the preparatory work to ascertain the existing level of cover was not done. In other words, we cannot proceed with the roll-out of the contract for the remainder until we are absolutely sure what the specification is for those who already have it.

I am sorry for the length of the answer, Presiding Officer, but it is important that I answer the member's question fully.

That preparatory work is essential but we are adhering to our timetables and I am very pleased that our progress has been recognised by the regulator, Audit Scotland, and the UK Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let us hope that answers get shorter, as well as questions.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have a short question. Although fibre optic broadband is important in rolling out high-speed broadband across Scotland, there are some areas where it will not be appropriate or that it will not be able to reach. Aside from fibre optic broadband, which methods—that will be cost-neutral to the end user—is the cabinet secretary considering for those hard-to-reach areas, many of which are in his constituency and my region?

Fergus Ewing: As I have indicated to the chamber before, the process of tendering next year acknowledges that one size does not necessarily fit all and that we will therefore need to be flexible enough to enable a variety of techniques to be adopted. The member makes a perfectly reasonable point and it is one that we are already pursuing.

Linked Holdings

5. Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer.

To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken to address the reported concerns of farmers and industry representatives regarding new rules on linked holdings. (S5O-00306)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): The purpose of the ScotMoves system is to enable efficient and effective disease control and eradication and the protection of public health. The system has been developed collaboratively by a joint Scottish Government and industry working group to ensure that, while animal and public health is protected, the requirements are feasible for businesses, meet European Union legislative requirements and do not impede trade.

Peter Chapman: The cabinet secretary will be aware from his meetings with stakeholders and industry leaders that the change has caused a great deal of concern among the farming community. Can he explain why he is changing a perfectly good system when the new system is creating further anxiety for farmers and another hoop for them to jump through at an already difficult time?

Fergus Ewing: The original question referred to “reported concerns” that were and remain unspecified. The working group included the National Farmers Union Scotland, which developed the proposals along with us, so it cannot be said that they come as a surprise.

The direct answer to Mr Chapman’s question is twofold. First, the current system risks non-compliance with EU rules and a fine of up to €3 million. It seems sensible to avoid that if we can, and any prudent Government must do so.

Secondly, and most important, there is the issue of disease control. It is essential that we have a system of recording cattle movements and keeping records that protect against disease. Some of us in the chamber can recall what happened when Scotland was beset by disease; Mr Chapman, as a farmer, will be well aware of that.

I will write to Mr Chapman with the details, but it is important in principle for all members to know that the proposals are driven by the need to protect Scotland against serious outbreaks of disease such as foot-and-mouth disease, and that, for that reason, the change is absolutely necessary. Everybody in the working group—including the NFUS—acknowledged that, which is why it is going ahead.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary tell us what progress has

been made in implementing the 2016 common agricultural policy basic payment loan scheme?

Fergus Ewing: I am pleased to tell Joan McAlpine that the first payments under the national basic payment support scheme were paid to almost 12,000 farmers last Friday and totalled just over £246 million. That funding will give our rural communities the security and certainty that they need to plan for the year ahead, while driving forward the rural economy. I am grateful to all the officials who successfully administered the £246 million in payments to just under 12,000 farmers.

Finally, we encourage the 5,000 farmers who received a loan offer but have not yet replied to decide whether they wish to apply and, if so, to return the application slip as soon as possible.

Superfast Broadband (Access)

6. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many homes have exchange-only lines and no access to superfast broadband. (S5O-00307)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): The digital Scotland superfast broadband programme has connected more than 200,000 homes and businesses on exchange-only lines to the fibre network. By the end of the DSSB contracts, we expect that around 320,000 exchange-only lines will be connected.

We will undertake an open market review later this year to determine how many premises will not have superfast broadband access delivered commercially or through the DSSB programme. That will allow us to determine an intervention area for our new investment programme, which will help to deliver our 100 per cent superfast broadband commitment.

Gordon MacDonald: My constituents, from Fairmilehead to Balerno and Ratho, who have exchange-only lines, are concerned that they have access only to basic broadband with very low download speeds—in some cases, as low as 0.8 bits per second. What steps are being taken to address that issue in semi-rural areas and when will those areas get access to superfast broadband?

Fergus Ewing: The Pentlands and the Fairmilehead exchanges that cover Balerno and Fairmilehead have been enabled for fibre broadband, but not all homes and businesses have been connected yet. Constituents can check their details on the digital Scotland website or contact the DSSB team with any specific concerns. I am aware of Gordon MacDonald’s strong interest in the matter and I will write to him with further details.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to the four members whom I was unable to call. Along with the other Presiding Officers, I am trying to get short questions and answers to allow the members at the tail end to get in. With your help, we will get there one day. We will now have to move on to the next set of portfolio questions.

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

National Marine Centre

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it will offer the new national marine centre being developed at North Berwick. (S5O-00312)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government wrote in support of the national marine centre in North Berwick as part of the project's successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Marine Scotland officials sit on the project's marine advisory group to provide advice and support as it develops the subsequent application to the Heritage Lottery Fund as well as other funding opportunities.

Iain Gray: The national marine centre is a development of the Scottish Seabird Centre, which has a substantial track record of success. It has around 270,000 visitors per year and brings people from all over Scotland and indeed the world to North Berwick. The marine centre project has the potential to expand that educational and tourism success into all aspects of the marine and coastal environment. As the cabinet secretary indicated, a major fundraising programme is under way, but further Government support will be crucial to secure match funding from the lottery funds to allow the project to proceed. Will the cabinet secretary commit to seeking such an investment?

Roseanna Cunningham: I mentioned some of the support that has been provided so far. I understand that a £3.5 million bid is being made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. I agree with the member that the proposal is an extraordinary potential development that offers a great deal. There is a funding gap of, I think, £2 million, and funding applications will potentially be required. One of those could be to the coastal communities fund, for which round 4 awards will be announced in March 2017. Although the Scottish Government commits funding to the coastal communities fund, ministers are not actively involved in the decision making for it, as the member no doubt understands. However, the coastal communities fund funding officer is meeting the project team on 18 November to discuss details of the application.

Shale Gas Imports (Release of Carbon Dioxide)

2. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much carbon dioxide was released as a result of Ineos importing shale gas from the United States. (S5O-00313)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Although the Scottish Government and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency hold a range of site-specific emissions data, data on feedstock delivery and specific processes that take place in individual sites is not available. The Scottish Government therefore does not hold information on the CO₂ emissions from imported ethane gas for particular sites. Emissions from the production of shale gas will be captured in the inventory of the country of origin.

Alexander Burnett: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, climate change has no borders. Is she happy to be not only costing our economy jobs but managing to cause a greater environmental impact at the same time?

Roseanna Cunningham: The Scottish Government continues to value the contribution that Grangemouth makes to the Scottish economy. We are supportive of the investment there and the efforts to ensure a sustainable future for the petrochemical and refinery business. Obviously, decisions about sourcing supply for that are a matter for the company.

As we have seen from discussions over the past few weeks, we need to be extraordinarily careful about adopting any kind of gung-ho or rushed approach to the industry. The Government's job is to base decisions on evidence. The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy's statement yesterday made it very clear that we will proceed on the basis of the research that is available. We will come to a considered judgment on unconventional oil and gas by the end of 2017.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The report on unconventional gas decommissioning that was launched yesterday found that there are big gaps in the regulations and that the full costs of restoration are unlikely to be known until the end of any project. Given the failure of the coal industry to successfully clean up the toxic legacy that it left behind in areas such as west Fife, will the cabinet secretary commit to including full liability for environmental clean-up costs in the Government's consideration of the economics of unconventional gas?

Roseanna Cunningham: Clearly we will look at that. I understand why there is a huge amount of concern about the issue and I can assure the chamber that the Scottish Government is treating it with the seriousness that it deserves. There

were some indications in the expert conclusions that there was low risk of post-decommissioning well failure. We are looking very carefully at the issue and we will be taking that into consideration as we move forward.

Invasive Rhododendron (Threat to Woodland)

3. Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle the threat to woodland from invasive rhododendron. (S5O-00314)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Responsibility for the removal of invasive non-native species such as rhododendron lies with landowners rather than Government. The Scottish Government makes funding available to private woodland owners for rhododendron control projects under the Scottish rural development programme forestry grant scheme. To date, more than £340,000 of FGS funding has been committed. Since 2011, action on the national forest estate has cleared an area of 5,131 hectares on designated sites.

Rachael Hamilton: The Woodland Trust and the National Trust for Scotland say that our trees and woods are under real pressure from rhododendron. Both are calling on the Scottish Government to focus the right resources and give the correct priority to the eradication of that invasive species. Scotland has by far the largest population of rhododendron, at 53,000 hectares, of which the largest concentration is in the west. Will the Scottish Government address this ecological issue before the situation gets beyond control?

Roseanna Cunningham: I indicated in my initial answer that landowners must be involved. We are taking the threat to woodland from invasive rhododendron very seriously and we are in the process of finalising a national approach. The final draft of that is likely to be published in March 2017; no doubt Rachael Hamilton will be watching out for that with great interest.

As I indicated, there is funding for private woodland owners. If Rachael Hamilton is in touch with individual woodland owners who have not applied for that, I urge her to suggest that they do so.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):

What support is given for partnership working with non-governmental organisations, volunteers and public bodies in relation to those types of challenging invasive species? They are such a scourge on our countryside. I recently visited the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Nethan Gorge reserve, and Japanese knotweed has started to grow there. It is a serious problem.

Roseanna Cunningham: Claudia Beamish is correct. Although rhododendron is probably the most invasive species that we have to deal with, it is not by any stretch of the imagination the only one. Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam are also particular problems.

The same issue arises in respect of those species. Landowners have the primary responsibility. One reason why I mentioned the work that has been done on the national forest estate is that the Scottish Government is a landowner, as are NGOs. There are other community landowners, too. Land ownership brings with it huge responsibilities, and this is one of them. The funding that is available does not mandate any particular kind of work. We encourage landscape-scale partnership work, specifically in designated sites, because in reality such partnership working is what will help us to eradicate this pest.

Biodiversity (Central Scotland Green Network)

4. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what lessons can be learned from the central Scotland green network in relation to biodiversity. (S5O-00315)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): I am delighted that this Government is supporting Europe's largest green space project, the central Scotland green network. Its work, which demonstrates that nature can thrive in built-up areas and bring a range of benefits for communities across the central belt, includes everything from landscape-scale initiatives such as Seven Lochs wetland park and large-scale green space improvements to small-scale initiatives such as window boxes. Its activity is also showing how biodiversity can revitalise neighbourhoods. For example, vacant and derelict land provides opportunities to green our urban landscapes both temporarily and permanently.

Mark Griffin: The Scottish Government launched "Scotland's Biodiversity - a route map to 2020" last summer. What progress has been made towards achieving the six big steps for nature?

Roseanna Cunningham: We continue to make progress in respect of biodiversity. As I have indicated in the meetings that I have had—even those this week, including with the CSGN yesterday—we know that there is still a great deal more to be done. As an example of one thing that links across the portfolio, it helps biodiversity to look at the kind of landscape partnership that we talked about in the previous question. That means that even dealing with problems such as rhododendrons can have a beneficial impact on biodiversity. The actions that we take across

Government are important and we continue to make progress while accepting that there is still a great deal more to do.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): The central Scotland green network can be seen as a building block towards a national ecological network. The Scottish Government's biodiversity 2020 strategy states that developing a national ecological network has proved to be challenging because there is no consensus on what that is. Earlier this week, the chief executive of Scottish Natural Heritage said, "What is it? No one knows."

Does the cabinet secretary agree that there is a need to define the national ecological network to better target resources as well as to embed it across different areas, including the land use strategy, marine policy, the biodiversity strategy and the national planning framework?

Roseanna Cunningham: I try not to get drawn into extended arguments about specific definitions. In previous years, when I was responsible for some of my current portfolio, people even questioned the use of the word "biodiversity". The member has probably been in that kind of conversation.

We can spend a lot of time talking about definitions. However, I would like to be able to commend examples such as the CSGN, which are doing it anyway, right across what might be seen as the most difficult part of Scotland, in order to make these arguments. The network is making the arguments and it is winning. Some of the things that the CSGN is involved in are quite extraordinary. In a sense, it does not matter how we make the definition sound as long as we are doing it on the ground.

Water Quality

5. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that Scottish Water maintains the highest standards of water quality. (S5O-00316)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government recognises the importance of achieving high standards of drinking water quality. In the period 2015 to 2021, Scottish Water has been directed to make improvements to Scotland's drinking water at a cost of in excess of £500 million. Compliance with drinking water standards is assessed by the drinking water quality regulator for Scotland. In her 2015 annual report, she reported that, at 99.92 per cent, Scottish Water had delivered record levels of compliance with legislative standards.

Brian Whittle: Is the cabinet secretary aware that Scottish environment statistics that were published recently show that the number of rivers

and lochs that were categorised as having poor water quality has increased by 17 per cent since 2011? Will the Scottish Government take more affirmative action to mitigate that problem and to help to prevent the potential impact on riparian wildlife?

Roseanna Cunningham: Scottish Water constantly keeps a watching eye on water quality. That is extremely important, whether we are talking about lochs, bathing water or drinking water.

A number of treatments are under way that will help in that regard. If the member wishes to raise any specific concerns, I invite him to do so, either through me or directly with Scottish Water.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be well aware that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage work closely with the whisky industry to ensure the highest possible quality of water for climate change and export market purposes. Will the cabinet secretary join me in praising the collaborative work of Diageo and the environmental agencies in creating a new state-of-the-art closed-loop distillery condenser at the new Roseisle facility on Speyside?

Roseanna Cunningham: It certainly sounds like something I would very much want to commend. I thank the member for raising the issue because, having been at its recent launch, I am aware that the Scottish whisky industry is moving strongly on environmental concerns and has launched an environmental strategy of its own. That is welcome because, after all, Scotch whisky is sold on to the international market on an image of clean water in a beautiful environment. When products are sold from Scotland in that way, it is important that the industries that are involved in the production of those products realise that they have a responsibility for that environment, too.

Circular Economy Strategy

6. Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made implementing its circular economy strategy. (S5O-00317)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Since "Making Things Last", the document containing our circular economy strategy, was published in February, I have opened the circular economy investment fund for bids from collaborative, reuse and repair projects by small and medium-sized enterprises and social enterprises, and I have awarded more than £2 million to East Ayrshire Council to implement the household recycling charter, with further support

available to councils to deliver a consistent approach to recycling in Scotland. I welcome the fact that 20 local authorities have now signed up to the charter.

Public bodies, partner organisations and, indeed, other cabinet secretaries and ministers are undertaking additional activity, as this is a cross-cutting Government approach that can succeed only if everyone plays their part.

Mairi Evans: The cabinet secretary has answered the first part of my supplementary question, which concerned the household recycling charter.

What further work will the Government be undertaking with local authorities, given that they are the bodies that will be responsible for implementing many of the actions that are in the strategy?

Roseanna Cunningham: I apologise to the member for gazumping her. As I indicated, 20 of Scotland's 32 councils have signed up to the household recycling charter, which has been so successful thus far due to the close collaboration between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which brought it about in the first place. That co-operation will continue as we start to implement the charter and take forward other elements of the "Making Things Last" strategy, including the commitment to review the rural exemption for food waste collections.

It is fair to say that a number of the councils that have signed up are in the early stages of their transition planning for this, but the idea is to ensure that, as far as possible, we have consistency across council boundaries in how recycling is done. We think that that will offer far more opportunities than currently exist with regard to waste and recycling.

Ministry of Defence (Environmental Discussions)

7. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Ministry of Defence in the last year regarding the environment. (S5O-00318)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Scottish Government and MOD officials have had a number of meetings in the past year to discuss a range of environmental issues, including protected areas, radioactive substances and MOD plans for the marine environment.

John Finnie: I thank the cabinet secretary for that reply and for her reply last week to my written

question that asked the Scottish Government to consider an assessment of the impact of the unmanned warrior MOD exercise. In that reply, the cabinet secretary said:

"As the competent authority MoD have responsibility for undertaking any appropriate environmental assessments under the relevant EU Directives or UK legislation."—
[Written Answers, 1 November 2016; S5W-03891.]

Will the cabinet secretary advise whether those environmental assessments have been shared with the Scottish Government? If not, could she request and publish them?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member is correct to say that the MOD is the competent authority that is responsible for all environmental matters relating to defence under the relevant EU and UK legislation. We discuss a number of issues with the MOD. There was a recent meeting with MOD officials to discuss the proposed Inner Hebrides and Minches special area of conservation for harbour porpoise. Marine Scotland also maintains a relationship, based on regular contact, with the MOD. Obviously, we want to assist the MOD, where possible, to deliver on its environmental obligations.

I will need to double-check whether we are able to publish the environmental assessments—because we do not own them, in a sense. I will get back to the member when I have established that.

Carbon Emissions (Reduction)

8. Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce carbon emissions. (S5O-00319)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Scotland is a world leader in tackling climate change, with ambitious statutory targets and strong progress to date. Our policies and measures include expanding renewable energy production, improvements in energy and resource efficiency, transition of transport to a lower carbon basis, expansion of renewable heat and sustainable land use.

In 2014, Scottish emissions were down by 45.8 per cent from baseline levels, meaning that we exceeded our world-leading statutory target—to reduce emissions by 42 per cent from baseline levels by 2020—six years early.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A brief supplementary, please, Mr Arthur.

Tom Arthur: In the spirit of asking terse questions, what further measures and action can the Government take to reduce carbon emissions from transport?

Roseanna Cunningham: As the member might expect, I suggest that one of the things that he

could do would be to ask the Minister for Transport and the Islands directly about that issue.

I advise the member that the draft climate change plan is being drawn up and will have a number of transport-related measures in it. The draft will be presented to Parliament in January 2017. No doubt he will be looking forward to it with some interest.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we move on to the next item of business, I apologise to the two members whose questions were not taken. We are improving.

Ministry of Defence (Basing Reforms)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a statement by Keith Brown on the Ministry of Defence basing reforms. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work will take questions at the end of his statement; there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

14:41

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): Scotland is a society that holds the members of our armed forces in high esteem. We have a long and proud history with the military. Many of our military sites stretch back hundreds of years and are deeply embedded into local communities.

On Monday evening, the Secretary of State for Defence announced his plans to reduce the size of the defence estate. His announcement was long anticipated and followed a period of extreme uncertainty in many communities across Scotland.

The defence secretary announced that the future lay down of the three services in Scotland would be concentrated on existing bases at HM Naval Base Clyde, RAF Lossiemouth and Leuchars barracks. Those were described as “regional hubs”. However, the scale of the cuts in Scotland are much harsher than expected. The defence secretary confirmed eight sites for disposal, reducing the size of the defence estate by almost a fifth.

The proposed sites for disposal are Fort George in Inverness, MOD Caledonia in Rosyth, Glencorse barracks in Penicuik, Meadowforth barracks in Stirling, Craigiehall and both Redford barracks sites in Edinburgh, and RM Condor airfield in Arbroath. The timescales vary, with most sites intended for disposal by 2022 but with longer lead-in times for the Army to vacate Fort George and Glencorse by 2032.

Scotland’s defence footprint has been hollowed out through successive cuts, so the severity of this fresh round of cuts comes as a shock. It also comes just three years after Philip Hammond announced the last army basing plan, billed as offering stability and certainty. Those recent commitments to Scotland have, for the most part, been disregarded.

I will turn to the impact on individual sites. Fort George, which has been a garrison for almost 250 years, will be vacated by the Army by 2032. As well as severing historic ties, that represents a near total removal of the Army from the Highlands, a traditional recruiting ground. Initial estimates by

Highlands and Islands Enterprise indicate that more than 700 jobs could be affected directly and indirectly. Highland Council estimates a loss of approximately £20 million from the local economy.

Fort George is an historic property in the care of Scottish ministers, operated by Historic Environment Scotland under a memorandum with the MOD. Despite that direct interest, the MOD failed to keep its promises on consultation. Urgent discussion is needed to establish the financial implications. The Ministry of Defence claims that Fort George is not fit for purpose as a modern garrison—not least because it has failed to invest in it properly over the years and it will now struggle to bridge the gap.

The cuts have also extended to Glencorse barracks, which is a state-of-the-art facility that is home to more than 500 personnel from 2 SCOTS, the Royal Highland Fusiliers. The announcement proposes that the Army vacates the site by 2032. That will be of particular interest to you, Presiding Officer, because the site is in your constituency. As you will know, Glencorse has had a garrison for almost 150 years and a loss on that scale will be a major blow for Midlothian. It is a modern, fit-for-purpose barracks that is popular with the Army. I visited it recently, and I expect serious questions to be levelled at the MOD about the logic of its argument in relation to the facility.

Meadowforth barracks, Stirling, and Redford infantry and cavalry barracks have been listed for disposal by 2022, and there is no clarity on where Army units will go. Interestingly, more than half—the bulk—of the Royal Regiment of Scotland will be changing its location, such is the contempt that the UK has shown for stability and certainty for our armed forces personnel and their families.

The MOD has long struggled to dispose of Craigiehall barracks in Edinburgh, which has been listed for disposal for the third time. That begs the question whether the proposed disposal of the barracks will yield the financial savings that we are told are required, or whether the MOD is simply generating uncertainty for personnel and communities. Incidentally, the barracks at Stirling includes the defence and security vehicle maintenance unit.

In the case of the city-based barracks, and in the case of RM Condor airfield in Arbroath, I encourage the MOD, even at this late stage, to engage with the local authorities and the Scottish Government to discuss the practical impact in a constructive way. It has singularly failed to do that up to this point.

In his remarks to the House of Commons, the defence secretary treated the impact on Fife extremely carelessly. His statement and the accompanying strategy document failed to

acknowledge that closure of MOD Caledonia will mark the end of the Royal Navy's presence in Fife. MOD Caledonia is a mixed site that houses a variety of lodger units, military and civilian personnel, and naval assets such as HMS Scotia. We urgently need clarity on plans for the site. The Royal Navy has had an enduring presence in Fife, which stretches back to the battle of Jutland and beyond. It is extremely sad to see that legacy being cut away and run down in such a discourteous way.

Yesterday, the First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister to express her firm opposition to the cuts and to seek clarity on personnel numbers, unit moves and any financial support that will be provided to communities that are affected by closures. She also expressed concern about the MOD's failure to keep its promises to consult the Scottish Government. I made every effort to meet MOD ministers before decisions were made, but they cancelled meetings on several occasions. No consultation took place, even in the case of Fort George, where the Scottish ministers have a direct interest in the operation of the site. That shows a complete lack of respect for the Scottish Government's legitimate interests in decisions that have a clear impact on Scotland and the Scottish economy.

The Scottish Government does not accept that Monday's announcement is the end of the story, and I will work closely with the local authorities that are most directly affected to agree next steps. I have asked officials to establish a working group for that purpose and to campaign against the decisions. I am also keen to work with parliamentarians from all parties, as there is a clear interest throughout the chamber in retaining a strong defence footprint across Scotland.

The announcement contained very little detail on unit moves and personnel numbers. In recent years, the MOD committed to increase the number of regular personnel in Scotland from the current figure of roughly 10,000 to 12,500 as an attempt to remedy the ever-decreasing numbers. However, the announcement made no mention of that figure, and I am very concerned that that commitment will no longer be met. In the midst of the chaos of the defence secretary's statement, there is a clear risk that Army units will be diminished or quietly moved out of Scotland altogether, and there are other risks on the horizon to the reserves and the training estate, given that further cuts are planned.

As I said, Scotland has long held a strong connection to the military, and we cannot let down areas such as the Highlands, Fife and other strong recruiting grounds where that connection is being torn away. We must unite as a Parliament to sustain a strong defence footprint in Scotland. To

that end, I ask for support from members across the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much.

The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I keep saying it: the shorter the questions, the more questioners we will get in.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement.

I would like to declare an interest: my father was a soldier, I was a soldier and my son is a soldier. Therefore, I recognise that the recent announcement about the defence estate is the latest step in ensuring that our armed forces have the best facilities not only for training but for their families.

We must accept that the Army has reduced in size from about 150,000 regular soldiers in 1980 to the 82,000 that we have now. Many famous regiments have been lost, including the one that my family and I served in. However, the UK Government's commitment to an effective defence remains strong. Two new aircraft carriers and eight new frigates are being built in Scotland; the new fleet of P-8 patrol aircraft will be based in Scotland; and £100 million is being invested in Scotland at Lossiemouth. There will be no reduction in Scottish regiments, which form 10 per cent of the armed services and will be based in Scotland. None of those things would have been achieved had Scotland been independent. What we heard on Monday was a gradual and planned reduction in the defence estate that will allow our servicemen and the families who loyally support them to have the best access to training areas and facilities.

Will the Scottish National Party Government now accept the need to support the services in order for them to become, as Michael Matheson said yesterday in relation to another service,

"fit for the ... needs of the future"?—[*Official Report*, 8 November 2016; c 3.]

Secondly, will the Government work with us to find a way of making, where possible, the redundant defence estate an asset for local communities?

Keith Brown: I recognise in Edward Mountain's initial remarks his very direct interest in the armed forces. It led me to hope and expect that we would hear something other than total and unquestioning support for the Conservative Government's moves and the cuts that have been proposed.

I do not know how many serving members of the armed forces Mr Mountain has spoken to recently, but I am sure that they will tell him that they are sick to the back teeth of the uncertainty that that Government has caused and of the shifting around that happened as a result of the previous basing review, when they were told that they would be going to one place and then to another. How does the member expect members of the armed forces to plan family life around that, put their children into schools and so on? In the school that serves Fort George, half of the pupils are from Fort George. What is going to happen to it?

The member asks whether I will support the services. Of course I will; indeed, that is the very reason why I have made this statement. What I ask him is this: instead of slavishly reading out the latest press release from the Conservative Government, will he get behind the armed forces properly and oppose these cuts?

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, am disappointed at the outcome of these decisions. This is a very difficult time for the communities that depend on these bases, because not only the base jobs but jobs in those communities will go. We have seen in areas where bases have closed the impact on public services, which have suffered from a lack of staff because of the absence of the service personnel partners who had staffed the schools and hospitals in those areas.

What discussions has the Scottish Government had with the MOD on safeguarding those communities and assets? Has it set up a partnership action for continuing employment team in each of the affected areas, and has it invited the MOD to be part of those partnerships to mitigate, as far as possible, the negative impacts of the closures on Scotland?

Keith Brown: I thank Rhoda Grant for her question and agree with much of what she has said about the impact of these proposals on local communities.

With regard to PACE, we have already been in contact with the local authorities that are affected, and we intend to take that further by, as I have said, putting in place a working group to establish how we work through these proposals. I have had direct discussions with two of the local authorities but, of course, we did not know where the cuts were going to be felt. Because we have not been taken into the confidence of the MOD or the Westminster Government, we have not had the contact with the MOD that we had asked for. In my meeting with Mark Lancaster some months ago when the basing review was first announced, I asked for proper consultation.

There is not a single recorded instance in the past nine years of the Scottish Government being taken into the confidence of the UK Government and then betraying it by making things public, and I offered that private space to see whether we could discuss how some of these challenges might be met. However, my offer was not taken up. Instead, there was a series of farcical attempts to hold meetings with the relevant minister, and we had the First Minister sending a letter to the secretary of state to get a meeting off the ground. Eventually, we received a courtesy call after the announcement, and that prevented some of the discussions that Rhoda Grant has rightly said should be taking place.

That said, I intend to ensure that any approach is as inclusive as possible, and if there are Conservative members who are not willing just to slavishly toe the line and who wish to challenge some of these things, that would be useful. All parties should be involved in this, but I give my commitment that the Scottish Government will engage with local authorities and offer PACE assistance where necessary. I also hope that we get continuing support from Labour members for these activities.

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The UK Government's announcement that Fort George will close means that the Black Watch will no longer have a permanent presence in the Highlands of Scotland. The armed forces will, of course, continue to visit for training exercises and to use the bombing ranges, and the controversial Trident nuclear submarines will continue their presence in our waters. The announcement will result in the loss of £20 million a year to the Highlands economy, more than 700 jobs—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Ms Todd, but I want short questions. I know that your heart is in this, but other members want to ask questions.

Maree Todd: In a part of the country that has suffered depopulation—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—I want a question.

Maree Todd: Will the Scottish Government join me in asking again that the UK Government honour its commitment to permanently base the Black Watch at Fort George? Should the closure go ahead, what can the Scottish Government do to mitigate the potential social and economic impacts?

Keith Brown: I assure the member that we have already made the point that Fort George should continue, not least because of the historic connection, and we will continue to make that case. That was part of the purpose behind the establishment of the working group.

We have met Highland Council and made a joint statement about the need to avoid exactly the outcome to which the member refers. I can never remember a time in previous strategic defence and security reviews when a base has been scheduled for closure in 16 years and has been perhaps two or three SDSRs away from the effect of that. The real issue, of course, is when the personnel will move away from the base.

I assure the member that, in concert with Highland Council, I will take up those issues with the MOD and UK ministers, if we eventually manage to get a meeting with them.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The cabinet secretary did not utter the word “Kinloss” once in his statement. That is a shameful omission.

In August, the BBC reported:

“The SNP has raised concerns about the future of Kinloss Barracks in Moray.

Moray MP Angus Robertson says he has been told by an ‘impeccable source’ at the Ministry of Defence ... the former air station could be closed.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would like a question, please, Mr Ross.

Douglas Ross: Does the cabinet secretary accept that the reckless tweet from Angus Robertson for political motives has caused unnecessary anxiety among military personnel, their families and the local community, and that, on reflection, that MP should have had far more respect for the armed forces and the people of Moray?

Keith Brown: The question—I think that it was a question—that has just been asked demonstrates how far removed Douglas Ross was from the interests of the campaign group, the local authority and the other elected members who took up the issue. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have had your question, Mr Ross.

Keith Brown: In fact, Douglas Ross deserted the field when the rest of us stayed to ensure that Kinloss would be saved. He let down the people in that community, and we helped to save it.

Douglas Ross: Shameful!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: When I said that you had had your question, I meant it.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary share my concern and sadness about the closure of Meadowforth barracks and the Forthside vehicle maintenance depot in Stirling, which will bring to an end a long and historic direct connection between Stirling and the military? Does he agree that the decision to

dispose of Forthside, together with the recent job losses that were announced by HSBC, strengthen the case for the go-ahead of the transformational Stirling and Clackmannanshire city deal, which can help to redevelop and reinvigorate the Forthside site?

Keith Brown: I share the member's sadness. As Stirling forms part of my constituency, I am, of course, well aware of the very long connections with it, not least through the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. There is a huge connection with the armed forces in the Stirling area, and there will be great sadness around the area because of the closure, and the closure of some of the other functions that are currently carried out there, which the member mentioned.

While the UK Government seems content to hollow out our armed forces, the Scottish Government will work towards trying to achieve a city deal with Stirling and Clackmannanshire in order that we can help to rebuild, perhaps fill the hole from some of that economic loss and do the constructive thing. We will do what the UK Government has not done: we will consult with it on how to go about doing that. Conservative members constantly ask us to work with the UK Government, and we have tried to do that. However, they have nothing to say when their Government refuses to do that.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the economic and social effects of the closure of Fort George? What forward strategy has the tenant, Historic Environment Scotland, developed to keep Fort George open as a tourist icon post 2032? Finally—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—that is sufficient.

Keith Brown: We sought to discuss those very issues with the MOD and UK ministers, but we have been unable to do that. If the member wants me to, I will happily provide him with the different requests that we have made for meetings to try to discuss them.

We have had some discussions with Highland Council, which is equally concerned. I mentioned the school in particular, but the member is right to say that there will be a huge economic impact in the area. We will certainly pass on to the member any further information that we can get as we try to have some consultation or discussion with the MOD. Of course, the local council will continue to be involved.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement. The cabinet secretary has made reference to Leuchars station, which is in my constituency. If the Fort George announcement

proceeds, the Black Watch will be looking for a new headquarters. Will he meet me to consider the possibility of headquartering the Black Watch in Leuchars in Fife, its traditional recruiting ground?

Keith Brown: I am happy to meet the member, of course, to discuss the general implications of the announcement. However, if it is the case that Fort George is closed, the Black Watch will, essentially, be evicted from its traditional home and looking for somewhere else to go. That is scandalous treatment of the Black Watch, given its historic position and its location in the Highlands. The implication of Fort George closing is that more than half of the Royal Regiment of Scotland will have to get on the move, about three years after we were told that the review that was announced at that time would provide certainty for our armed forces.

I am more than happy to meet the member on the specific point that he makes.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): The announcement on Monday by the MOD that both the Redford cavalry and infantry barracks were to close by 2022 will have a massive impact on local businesses, shops, schools and services in and around the Colinton area of my constituency.

In the run-up to the independence referendum, the UK Government highlighted that a defence presence generates economic benefits for communities throughout Scotland through jobs, contracts and requirements for support services—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—ask your question, please.

Gordon MacDonald: Given the potential economic impact that the announcement will have in my constituency, does the cabinet secretary agree that it is not acceptable that the UK Government had no discussions with the Scottish Government prior to the announcement?

Keith Brown: I agree with the member, and it seems that everyone apart from the Conservative members in the chamber agrees that it is a scandal that there was no consultation. Of course there will be an impact in that part of Edinburgh. I grew up in Edinburgh, where everyone knows about the Redford barracks; they have been there for many years. Their closure—if that can be achieved, given what has or has not happened yet in relation to Craigiehall—will be very damaging. That is all the more reason why there should have been that discussion, and why that discussion should take place now.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): In recognising the sincerity of the minister's interest in the armed forces, can I ask what specific

experience or expertise the Scottish Government has to determine either the defence estate required or the actual defence needs of the United Kingdom? Given that that expertise will be at best limited, what is the ultimate objective of his statement today?

Keith Brown: It would appear from that question that Jackson Carlaw sees no role for the Scottish Government in the review, despite the impact on local communities and the economic dislocation. Given what he said, he must also assume that the Scottish Government or any member of the Scottish Parliament should take no interest in the welfare and the interests of serving members of the armed forces.

That is a terrible indictment of the limited approach of the Conservatives in this Parliament. We will continue to be concerned, and we will continue to try to work with the UK Government, which is very difficult when it refuses to even talk. Perhaps it would have been better if Jackson Carlaw had condemned that total lack of consultation and prior discussion, rather than trying to make some puerile point.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): If the UK Government decides to forge ahead with the base closures, will those sites transfer to the Crown Estate after being declared surplus? If so, will they then, under the new devolved powers, become the responsibility of the Scottish Government?

Keith Brown: I thank Mark Griffin for his question, but I am afraid that I have to say the same as I said to a previous member: we have not had that discussion. We have no idea what is in the mind of the MOD or UK ministers. There has not been the courtesy of a single meeting to try to explore those issues, including the one that Mark Griffin rightly raises.

We have a very legitimate interest in some of the sites, such as Fort George, where the Scottish Government has an interest through Historic Environment Scotland. We have an interest in other areas, too. I made a plea to Mark Lancaster all those months ago, saying that there may be an interest in securing land that has been made surplus to requirements for the provision of veterans' housing. Again, there was no consultation on the matter.

I can assure the member that as we get more information—if we get more information—I will be more than happy to pass it to him.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement. Given that sites such as Redford and Glencorse cover extensive areas and given the pressing need for affordable housing, will the Scottish Government urge the MOD to do what is

already happening in England, where it plans to transfer five large sites to the Homes and Communities Agency, and seek from the UK Government a commitment that the ownership of Redford and other sites will be transferred to Scottish ministers, who will then seek to develop them for wider community benefit in partnership with local authorities?

Keith Brown: I certainly made the point to defence ministers, as I have just mentioned, that transferring land or buildings to the Scottish Government in some cases would enable us to provide housing. However, we should not forget the listed nature of some of the buildings at Redford, and economic dislocation is also an issue. Given the number of people who are paying into the local economy and helping local services, there will be a massive loss whether or not we are subsequently able to produce additional housing.

I have made the member's point to the UK ministers and I will continue to do so.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary join me in paying tribute to the Moray economic partnership—which I attended, as did Highlands and Islands Conservative Douglas Ross MSP on occasion, albeit that he clearly covered his ears—for the role that it played in saving the Kinloss barracks? Will he now ask his officials to liaise with the MOD to find ways in which the spare capacity that has been available on the Kinloss site since the RAF base was closed by the Tories can be used for job creation and local or new businesses?

Keith Brown: Yes—we will look into that question and come back to the member on progress. I thank the member and the other elected members in the area who were actually willing to fight for the future of Kinloss. To question whether it was right and raise this as an issue, Richard Lochhead must have been aware—that is why he was concerned—of a senior MOD official briefing the chief executive of Moray Council that Kinloss was at risk. Obviously Douglas Ross was unaware of that, because he was so disengaged from the campaign and he deserted the field at the very moment when people in Kinloss were looking to elected members to try to save Kinloss—which we did, and which he ran away from.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Can the cabinet secretary inform the Parliament, under his plans, how many major army bases there would be in Scotland if we left the United Kingdom?

Keith Brown: Perhaps it is worth reminding the member that we are discussing the UK Government's commitment to cut the armed forces. It would be useful if he asked a question that was genuinely about that. Obviously, he has

no genuine interest in any of those issues. This is about a UK Government, three years after a review of the disposition of forces in Scotland, going further and cutting that back once again. The member has not a word of concern to say about that, which is deeply unfortunate, so it may rest with the Scottish Government and other members who are genuinely interested in our armed forces to take those issues forward.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): The plans to dispose of the airfield at Condor will do nothing to address the long-held concerns locally that 45 Commando is destined eventually to move to the south of England—something that was actually intended to happen in 2013. Given the cabinet secretary's close personal connection to the marines, does he share those concerns? Does he, like me, wonder who might want to buy an airfield within a marine base given the likely security restrictions?

Keith Brown: That is a good point. Anybody who is familiar with 45 Commando and the airfield there will wonder what the rationale is behind that move, as they will wonder about Fort George. I cannot see a huge potential receipt for Fort George anytime soon, not least given the restrictions that will apply there—not security restrictions of the type that the member mentioned, but architectural restrictions.

I have no idea what the MOD's thinking was—because it refused to discuss the matter—about selling off the airfield at Condor but keeping 45 Commando there. However, I am willing to commit to the member that we will try to find out what the purpose is, whether there is any likelihood of a receipt and whether there is any likelihood of this absurd decision being reversed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. That concludes questions on the cabinet secretary's statement. I know that I was quite hard on members, but that meant that everyone who wanted to ask a question got to do so—something of a record in here.

Prevention and Eradication of Hate Crime and Prejudice

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-02364, in the name of Angela Constance, on working together to prevent and eradicate hate crime and prejudice.

15:09

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): I start by simply stating that there is never an excuse for hate crime and prejudice and that this Government is absolutely committed to tackling it, wherever it happens, whenever it happens and whoever it happens to. People who do not experience it might not always see it, but the reality is that an attack on one is an attack on all of us. I know that that view is shared by members across this Parliament.

The report of the independent advisory group on hate crime, prejudice and community cohesion was published recently. I thank Dr Duncan Morrow and the other members of the group for their insightful, cross-cutting report, which contains recommendations that reach across Government and society. We accept the recommendations in the report and will use them to inform an inclusive and wide-ranging programme of work. This debate is an opportunity for the Parliament to inform and shape that work as we move forward together.

When I read Dr Morrow's report, I was struck by the personal testimony of people who have experienced prejudice and hate. It is imperative that we do not lose those personal insights and experiences when we discuss our approach, policies and laws. We know that there are people who experience what is sometimes described as "low-level" persistent abuse and harassment, and that they experience it many times a day, in public—on transport, at school—at home or at work. Those experiences and personal testimonies are very much reflected in the breadth and depth of the recommendations that Dr Morrow and his colleagues made in their report.

Such experiences are traumatic for individuals and deeply damaging to communities and community cohesion. Whole communities can end up isolating themselves from society and enjoying fewer opportunities to interact and engage with others. That makes for weaker integration and interaction across communities. It is simply not good enough that people in our country experience such prejudice. I repeat: wherever it happens, whenever it happens and whoever it happens to, it needs to be tackled and it needs to stop.

A hate crime is a criminal act that is committed on the basis of prejudice. The crime must be dealt with; we also need to tackle its root causes, which are prejudice and inequality. If we do not do so, we will not achieve truly cohesive communities in which individuals and groups can live in peace, benefit from diversity and work together to build a better society. As we know, prejudice acts as a barrier to cohesion and hate crime is quite simply an attack on it.

Scotland is a diverse, multicultural society and its diversity is a strength. We need to make those words a reality. We have a proud history of welcoming people of all faiths and nationalities to Scotland, from Irish immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries and Italians during the pre-war period to people from India and Pakistan post world war 2 and, more recently, Syrians who are fleeing war and terror. Scotland's response to the people who have come here has demonstrated the best of this country as we have stepped up to the plate and reached out to people who are most in need of our help.

Attitudes have changed. The most recent Scottish social attitudes survey, which was published in September, found that there has been a decrease in discriminatory attitudes among Scots to all equality groups. Nearly 70 per cent of the people who were surveyed thought that Scotland should do everything possible to eradicate prejudice. We should celebrate such changes in attitude.

However, there are concerns. It is important to look at the granular detail in the evidence that comes from the Scottish social attitudes survey and elsewhere. We know that around a fifth of people in Scotland still think that it is acceptable to hold prejudicial views sometimes. Many people are still expressing concerns about the impact of immigration, and some say that they would not want a member of their family to marry someone from a certain background. In addition, attitudes towards transgender people and Gypsy Travellers are simply not improving fast enough. Although I remain confident that the upward trajectory of more positive attitudes will continue, I know that that will happen only if we take a multidisciplinary, multifaceted approach. We must continue to talk up the benefits of equality, diversity and inclusion in our society, and we must never hesitate to shine a light on prejudice where it exists.

In Scotland, we are fortunate not to have seen a rise in the incidence of hate crime following the European Union referendum, unlike in other parts of the UK. However, we must remain vigilant, avoid complacency and recognise that developments have caused anxiety among the 181,000 EU nationals who have made Scotland their home. We understand that, and I reiterate

what the First Minister and many members of the Government and the Parliament have made crystal clear. We say to them: "Scotland is your home, you are welcome here and we value the contribution that you make to our country; our country, which is now your country." That should be the strong message that we send to EU nationals living in Scotland and to those from across the planet who have made their life in Scotland either through choice or through circumstance. The UK Government could take one simple step right now to ease the minds of EU nationals who have made Scotland their home: it could guarantee their residency status. We will continue to call on the Prime Minister to do the right thing and give that guarantee.

We must also recognise that tackling hate crime is about more than reporting a crime to the police, crucial though that is, particularly considering the work that we need to do to encourage and support people to report crime. The point that I want to make is about the importance of equality. Equality is at the heart of our mission to create a fairer Scotland, and it is imperative that we do that for all who have made their lives in Scotland.

Since 2007, we have invested over £195 million, through the equality budget, in promoting equality and tackling discrimination. We have strengthened the law to tackle hate crime and we are engaging with communities all over Scotland, working with them to make their lives better. We will also ensure that our education system plays a full part in tackling discrimination in all its forms, with all teachers getting equality training. As many members will know, we are refreshing our approach to the national anti-bullying strategy, which will include an explicit commitment to address prejudice-based bullying in all its forms. We have also produced a race equality framework, we are taking radical steps to advance lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex equality and we are working hard to level the playing field for disabled people. We will introduce the disability delivery plan in the very near future.

We want to advance opportunities for everyone. I hope that that is a sign of the society that we aspire to be—one in which no one is held back and in which Scotland's core values of equality, fairness, social justice and dignity are translated into real lives and real action for everyone who lives here. The report of the advisory group on hate crime, prejudice and community cohesion makes it clear that it is everyone's issue and everyone's business; it is not a matter for just the Government or the Parliament, important though our responsibilities are. An important recommendation in Dr Morrow's report is that public education should be undertaken to improve the understanding of the nature and extent of hate

crime. That is critical to addressing the underreporting of hate crime.

We will launch a campaign next year to raise awareness of the impacts of hate crime and the support that is available in communities for those who experience hate crime or prejudice, or for those who fear it. That is just one step and I will provide a fuller response to the advisory group's report and set out an inclusive and wide-ranging approach to tackling those issues.

It is incumbent upon us all to challenge prejudice, discrimination and hate crime, and we accept the amendments lodged by Annie Wells and Pauline McNeill to today's motion. The motion commits us to work together and we must work together if we are to create a Scotland—one Scotland—in which there is no place for hatred or prejudice.

Nelson Mandela challenged hate throughout his life. He once said:

"No-one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and, if they can learn to hate, they can be taught love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

I hope that we will move forward in that spirit in today's debate, which will inform our actions to create a fairer and more equal Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament condemns all forms of hate crime and prejudice; welcomes the recent report of the Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion; thanks the group for this work and the recommendations made, which will inform future action in this area; notes its view that the current approach to tackling hate crime is appreciated; agrees that Scotland has a long history of welcoming people of all nationalities and faiths; considers that non-British EU nationals living in Scotland are welcome here, they belong here and that their contribution is appreciated; commends the role of Police Scotland and third party reporting centres in responding to reports of hate crime, and encourages people to report all hate crime whenever and wherever it takes place, and agrees to work together to stand up to, and eradicate, hate crime and prejudice in Scotland.

15:21

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): We are all in agreement today that hate crimes in Scotland, as well as across the UK, should never be tolerated and that, as politicians, we should do all that we can to ensure that everyone living here feels welcome—including EU and non-EU nationals.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Annie Wells: I have just started, so please let me make some progress.

Hate crime is not limited solely to race and nationality. Hate crime comes in many forms, many of which are on the increase and are vastly underreported. As well as those that are racially aggravated, there are hate crimes based on religion, disability, sexual orientation, transgender identity and those that are classed under the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012.

I want to ask why the Scottish National Party has become so obsessed with linking hate crime to Brexit, despite Police Scotland reporting that there was no increase in the number of hate crimes reported in Scotland this summer. In fact, the number of hate crimes in Scotland actually fell in the aftermath of the EU referendum. I do not want to undermine in any way the importance of this debate and of race crimes in general. There have been alarming incidences of racially aggravated hate crime reported in my constituency, as well as in other parts of the UK, but it is important to make that point on behalf of the 1 million people in Scotland, and the 17.5 million people in the UK as a whole, who voted to leave the EU. It is dangerous to continually link the Brexit vote to hate crime and it completely undermines those who voted that way.

Tom Arthur: Will the member give way on that point?

Annie Wells: I want to make progress.

Voting to leave the EU and addressing hate crime are not mutually exclusive. I would like to remind the equalities secretary and the First Minister to look at their own party—Alex Neil and the secret few who voted to leave the EU on 23 June—before wagging their fingers at the UK Government and the Scottish Conservatives. That is before I mention the estimated 400,000 SNP supporters who backed Brexit.

I am proud that people in this country tolerate one another's beliefs and actively celebrate society's diversity. As the Government's motion rightly points out, Scotland has a long history of welcoming people of all nationalities and faiths. Figures from the Office of National Statistics show that more than 7 per cent of the Scottish population was born outside the UK and that nearly 6 per cent of the population holds non-British nationality.

The Prime Minister has already spoken on the issue, stating that she fully expects and intends for the status of EU citizens to be guaranteed. The only situation in which that would not be the case is if the future rights of UK citizens were not protected elsewhere in the EU. At the Conservative party conference last month, Ruth Davidson made a positive case for ensuring that EU citizens are made to feel welcome in the UK.

Why does the SNP continue to scaremonger about that issue?

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):

Does the member have any idea when Theresa May will give confidence to EU nationals living in Scotland and the rest of the UK and say that they are welcome and that they will be able to continue to live and work here?

Annie Wells: As I say, we have not actually done anything to trigger article 50 yet, so we do not know what the other EU countries are going to say either. We can say that the Prime Minister has stated that it is her full intention and expectation that EU citizens will be protected. That is what I can say about that. I do not think that any of us in the chamber can say any more at the moment because nothing has been done yet.

To move away from racially aggravated hate crime, I would like to bring attention to other forms of hate crime that have been so conveniently ignored by the SNP. The report by the independent advisory group, which was welcomed by Angela Constance, raises a number of issues regarding Scotland's tackling of hate crime—namely, that although racially aggravated hate crime has not increased, the number of hate crimes reported relating to disability and sexual orientation are rapidly on the increase.

The "Hate Crime in Scotland 2015-16" report noted that although race hate crime has decreased by 3 per cent since 2014-15, sexual orientation hate crime has risen by an alarming 20 per cent. That is backed up by the TIE—time for inclusive education—campaign's research, which reported that 64 per cent of LGBTI youth reported being bullied as a result of their gender identity or sexual orientation and that a shocking 37 per cent had attempted suicide at least once as a result of the bullying.

Although I welcome the great work that has been done by the Equality Network and Police Scotland in a programme that intends to provide training for police officers as LGBTI liaison officers, more needs to be done.

When the advisory report itself states that schools need to be better equipped to tackle LGBTI bullying, the Scottish Government should, at the very least, open up the debate about inclusive education as a legislative measure.

We need more than the First Minister tokenistically attaching herself to LGBTI campaigns and then doing nothing in the way of following through with policies.

Furthermore, I want to talk about hate crime directed at transgender people specifically. The advisory report flags important issues regarding transgender people: according to statistical

analysis, hate crime against transgender people is notably underreported in Scotland as compared with England.

Another figure that I am sure will raise concern is that disability hate crime has risen by an alarming 14 per cent in the last year alone—another form of hate crime that continues to be underreported. Frank Mulholland QC warned the SNP-led Government in 2014 that not enough was being done in terms of law enforcement and that disabled people were not confident enough in the system to report such crimes.

Another issue that I would like to raise is online bullying. It is an issue that we can all agree has grown exponentially in the last decade, so why are we still awaiting the Scottish Government's updated internet safety action plan—last published in 2010?

Given the SNP's rhetoric and its obsession with trying to link racial hate crime with Brexit, it is no surprise to learn that participants in the study felt that some types of hate crime received more attention and were better understood than others.

That is why I call on the SNP Government to stop the Brexit bashing—the end goal of which we all know—and to address the hate crimes that it has so conveniently turned a blind eye to.

Disability hate crime is on the rise and sexual orientation hate crime is on the rise. The motion—

Angela Constance: Will the member take an intervention?

Annie Wells: I am actually just at the end of my speech—sorry.

The motion raises a very important issue regarding deplorable acts of racial hate crime but I say to the SNP, please do not try to capitalise on a trend that has not even been seen in Scotland to try to further the case for your independence drive.

I move amendment S5M-02364.2, to leave out from "agrees that Scotland" to "responding to reports of" and insert:

"suggests that further action be taken to address the underreporting of disability, sexual orientation and transgender hate crime; agrees that Scotland has a long history of welcoming people of all nationalities and faiths; considers that both non-British EU nationals and non-EU nationals living in Scotland are welcome here, they belong here and that their contribution is appreciated; commends the role of Police Scotland and third party reporting centres in responding to reports of hate crime; supports the continued cooperation with third party organisations in training police officers to tackle LGBTI".

15:28

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I recently had the pleasure of discussing the equality agenda with Tim Hopkins from the Equality

Network. He reminded me how far we have come on lesbian and gay equality but also how far we still have to go in respect of transgender and bisexual people. I thank the Equality Network and the whole third sector for the work that they do every day not just to promote equality but to provide basic support in the fight for justice on behalf of minorities and underrepresented people in Scotland.

As a demonstration of how far we have to go in every area of equality law, the crime statistics in relation to disabled people are horrifying. Although I have some criticisms of the Scottish Government, I will not lay any blame at its door when it comes to how disabled people have been treated in Scotland.

Reports indicate that disabled children and young people are three to four times more likely to be abused or neglected than their non-disabled peers are. As has been mentioned, the number of attacks on disabled people in general has increased by 14 per cent, and half of disabled women have experienced domestic abuse. Those figures are staggering and horrific.

Incidents of Islamophobia have tripled—a majority of Scottish Muslim pupils have experienced it and are frequently called names such as “terrorist” and “the Taliban”. Sikh and Hindu pupils often suffer the same abuse, for reasons that I am sure that I do not need to go into.

One third of transgender people experience abuse but, alarmingly, 80 per cent of that abuse is not reported. According to the Equality Network, only one in 10 hate crimes is reported. For the first time, however, more lesbian, gay and bisexual people have said that they are satisfied than have said that they are dissatisfied with the police response, so it is important to note that there are areas of progress.

The theme of underreporting is prevalent in the report that we are discussing. Third-party reporting appears to be completely underused, which is why Labour believes that the Scottish Government must do more to resource the system in general, so that people have the confidence to come forward. We want to encourage more diversity in the justice system so that people feel better represented. Schools are also at the forefront of teaching children that difference is to be understood and respected, and that needs to be applied in wider society.

We live in extraordinary times, when the question of race has probably never been so topical and the equality agenda has never been so diverse. Indeed, there is no time more extraordinary than today, as we are only just waking up to smell the napalm. This morning,

David Duke, the former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, tweeted:

“GOD BLESS DONALD TRUMP! It’s time to do the right thing, it’s time to TAKE AMERICA BACK!!!”

I am sure that, like me, many members are bleary-eyed from watching the dreaded American result come in. My brilliant former intern Rachel Craig posted on Facebook this week that, as a young Jewish woman, she is proud to be American. She said that prejudice is not fun: America is a country of immigrants and there is no room for Trump rhetoric, which is the antithesis of the principles on which America was founded.

The global backdrop is entirely relevant in assessing current attitudes to race and immigration. Foreign interventions have had a direct impact in bringing about the refugee crisis. In my first speech in this session of Parliament, standing right where I am now, I said:

“Even the brilliant Stephen Hawking cannot explain the horror of the Trump phenomenon, but we had better try to understand it because, unfortunately, it might happen.”—*[Official Report, 2 June 2016; c 39.]*

Today, the world is dealing with the consequences of failing to try to understand such seismic events.

The Scottish Government motion focuses on the independent advisory group’s report on hate crime, prejudice and community cohesion and proclaims

“that Scotland has a long history of welcoming people of all nationalities”.

That is generally true, and we are proud of our local government colleagues in Glasgow in particular for the role that they have played in that respect. The city that I represent has recently accepted 35 young people from the Calais camp. However, we must recognise that the story is not always as we would like it to be. Many Irish Catholic immigrants have historically faced direct discrimination in Scotland, and we must be honest in appraising the difficult issues in the debate.

In celebrating our achievements, we must note that, although Scotland has half the number of foreign-born people that England has, there are similar attitudes to immigration here. A YouGov poll for the BBC that was conducted last year found that 49 per cent of people in Scotland—exactly the same percentage as in the rest of the UK—thought that immigration was an issue and wanted to see less of it. Those results make for uncomfortable reading.

There are many myths about immigration—for example, there is no correlation between high levels of immigration and lower wage growth. According to Ipsos MORI, British people think that there are twice as many immigrants in the UK as there actually are and that the number of Muslims

is four times the actual figure. The head of Ipsos MORI stated:

“These misperceptions present clear issues for informed public debate”.

Through the Labour amendment, we want to add a few points that we think are worthy of mention, on issues such as the role of the media and encouraging more diversity in the criminal justice workforce. The recent decision to allow Muslim women to wear the hijab as part of their police uniform will be a positive step if it encourages such women to come forward and serve in our police force.

We will support the Government motion and the Tory amendment, although I am not sure that Annie Wells’s speech bore complete relation to that amendment. However, she made a valid point with regard to the headlines that suggest that hate crime levels have reduced in Scotland since the Brexit vote. It is true that race crime levels have decreased by 3 per cent, which is welcome, but it is way too early to draw any direct conclusions from that, so we should refrain from doing so.

I welcome the debate. We will vote with the Government and the Tories at decision time.

I move amendment S5M-02364.1, to leave out from “commends” to “reports of hate crime” and insert:

“agrees that the media has a critical role in shaping social attitudes, and appreciates the role of education in raising awareness to counteract negative stereotypes; supports a zero-tolerance approach to hate crime across Scotland; understands the need to increase diversity within the workforce of the criminal justice system; commends the work of the third sector in raising awareness, tackling prejudice and promoting equality; further commends the role of Police Scotland and third party reporting centres in responding to reports of hate crime and stresses the need for more resources to be allocated to them”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, in which speeches will be of about six minutes. I have a wee bit of time in hand to make up for interventions if members take them, but do not go over the top, Mr Dornan.

15:36

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I do not understand why you named me there, Presiding Officer.

I said to Annie Wells on the way into the chamber that I would try not to have a go at her but, unfortunately, I have to pick up two aspects of her speech. She seemed to say that, when we attack the impact of the Brexit vote, we attack people who voted no. There has never been any suggestion of that. We have attacked the language that has been used by certain people, mostly down south, who campaigned for no. That

language has created some of the culture that we have seen over the past year or so. Two separate things are involved.

Annie Wells criticised the Scottish Government and the First Minister for a lack of action and for signing up to something then not doing anything about it. However, in May, the ILGA—the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association—said that Scotland is the best place in Europe for gay, bisexual and lesbian people. We are at 94 per cent on the ILGA’s measure, but the UK as a whole has dropped to 82 per cent, which is below Malta. I therefore do not think that Annie Wells’s argument stands up. I am more than happy to take an intervention from her on that.

Annie Wells: The point that I was making in relation to LGBTI issues was about the time for inclusive education campaign, which has been running for more than a year. The Scottish Government has paid lip service to that for more than a year. I do not want just words on a bit of paper; I want proper action on inclusive education in schools.

James Dornan: I support the campaign for more inclusive education in schools, but it is a wee bit unrealistic to expect a result from a campaign that has been going for only a year and which started from nothing. If I am correct, that campaign is already having close conversations with members of the Government. Plans are afoot, although I am not aware of what is happening.

My next point follows on from the discussion that we just had. If there is one thing that the past year has reinforced for us as politicians, it is the importance of using words carefully. The cabinet secretary talked about the language that the First Minister used the morning after the Brexit vote, when she told people that Scotland is their home and that their contribution is valued. We should compare that with some of the frankly xenophobic and racist language that is being used by politicians down south. Unfortunately, the use of that did not finish after the horrendous yes to Brexit vote in June.

Last month, the hashtag #WeAreScotland swept across social media in response to a xenophobic and divisive suggestion by the Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, that businesses should list any foreign workers and should be encouraged to hire British workers in order to reduce net migration. Those proposals were met with anger not only across Scotland but across the business community.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I seem to recall that 50 per cent of SNP members support those measures. I accept that James

Dornan might not particularly appreciate them, but it seems that members of his party do.

James Dornan: I am now thinking of just saying anything that comes into my head, because nothing that I know of in reality is anywhere close to the point that Liam Kerr espoused.

The business community was outraged and senior figures said that the plans were completely irresponsible and would damage the UK economy, because foreign workers are hired to fill gaps in skills that British workers cannot fill. So damaging and divisive were the plans that Amber Rudd's own back benchers were deeply critical and sceptical. Our First Minister responded that she would absolutely stand four-square behind any company that refused to comply with a request to publish details of foreign workers.

Since then, Amber Rudd has somewhat backtracked on the proposals, but the damage has been done. When senior politicians spout such xenophobic rhetoric, we should not be surprised when we see a rise in hate crimes that are targeted at non-UK EU nationals who choose to live in this country. The reports of members of the Polish community who were attacked so brutally that they had to be hospitalised—in one tragic case, someone died—should send a massive warning to the UK Government that we need action to encourage inclusivity of our communities, not deeply divisive policies that can only harm the colourful tapestry of life in this country.

In sharp contrast, I was deeply heartened by the Scottish people's response. The #WeAreScotland hashtag was not simply a three-word sentence; it was used as a way for people up and down the country to tell their story and tell others what makes Scotland their home, why they came here—it was clearly not the weather—and how much they love being Scottish, regardless of their varied and diverse ethnicities. Scottish nationals responded with statements of warmth, of welcoming and of thanks for foreign nationals who choose to bring their skills and culture here and greatly enrich our economy, culture and communities.

The truth is that, after the Brexit vote, many people contacted my office because things were so bad. My Westminster colleague Stewart McDonald and I had to send a letter to all the EU nationals in our constituencies to let them know that we are aware of their concerns, that we consider ourselves lucky that they have made Glasgow their home and that we are happy to welcome them for as long as we can. The unfortunate thing is that how long that will be for is not in our hands; it is in the hands of the Tory Government.

Surely no member of this Parliament can deny that one of the catastrophic fallouts of Brexit has been the rise in hate crime, but the problem is not just Brexit. The charity Muslim Engagement and Development, which is UK wide, noted the rise in hate crime towards members of the Muslim community after the Paris attacks. Devastatingly, those attacks seemed to trigger an upsurge in crimes that were aimed at people of the Islamic faith, with graffiti on businesses, verbal attacks in the street and, in some cases, worse. Although the hate crime figures after the Paris attack were much higher UK wide than they were in Scotland, the victim trends were similar across the board. Muslim women in particular were being singled out because it was easy to identify them if they were wearing a hijab.

Let me be clear that Islamophobic hate crime is not the only religion-based problem in Scotland. I will not get into the age-old one that we have had for a long time, but there have been a number of anti-Semitic incidents across the country. Verbal attacks and neo-Nazi salutes are not acceptable in Scotland in 2016. No person—be they Muslim, Jewish, Christian or of any other religion—should live in fear of physical or verbal abuse because of their beliefs.

Although Scotland woke up this morning to one of the biggest election shocks in recent history, we must accept the democratic will of the American people. However, reports of fear and alarm are already pouring out of the Muslim and immigrant communities across America and we are seeing social media posts of people removing their hijab for their safety.

Such fear and intimidation have no place in this open and inclusive Scotland. I am confident that everyone in the chamber will support me in that and support the Government motion. There will be no building of walls here in Scotland. Let us send out the message loud and clear from this place that Scotland is your home and your contribution is valued.

15:43

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Today's debate on preventing and eradicating hate crime and prejudice provides a welcome opportunity to raise awareness about, and to endeavour to address, that vexing issue. Sadly, an array of attitudes and behaviours can be categorised as "hate crime". In the time that is available to me I will focus on three particular aspects.

The first is termed "revenge porn", and involves sharing intimate images without consent. The Justice Committee of session 4 tackled the issue in its final bill, in March this year. It was described

as one of the most insidious crimes and one that can have far reaching and lifelong consequences for its victims. Members of the committee heard evidence from witnesses that revenge porn can have a “devastating and humiliating effect” on people’s lives.

Witnesses also stated that a specific offence to tackle the issue would

“send out a clear message that society does not tolerate that behaviour, clear up uncertainties about whether the behaviour is legal or not, and might have a deterrent effect.”

It is therefore welcome that, once the act comes into force, it will criminalise non-consensual disclosing of, or threat to disclose, intimate photographs or films, thereby providing a deterrent to misuse of modern technology for dissemination and promotion of revenge porn. Activities that can be described as revenge porn have quite rightly received a considerable amount of media attention during the past few years.

In contrast, the second form of hate crime that I want to highlight involves disabled people and has been less prominent in the public eye. It is very much present in society today and includes wide-ranging instances of ridicule and abuse being directed at disabled people. Those who have been targeted include elderly people. An old woman who relies on a walking stick was the subject of a torrent of abuse without any provocation, and had her handbag knocked off her seat while she was travelling on a train. Veterans who have disabilities have been openly mocked and jeered, and people who have learning difficulties have been made fun of and bullied.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I am pleased to hear Margaret Mitchell call out some of the crimes that are faced by people who have disabilities. In the light of that revelation from Margaret Mitchell today—I know that she has a long-held commitment to the matter—will she commit to signing my motion in Parliament this week on the United Nations report that condemns the United Kingdom Government for its treatment of people who have disabilities?

Margaret Mitchell: I will look at addressing such crime wherever it goes on and I will make a point of looking at Christina McKelvie’s motion. However, it is unfortunate if we seek to make political points when talking about a subject that, so far, we have been united in condemning.

Clearly, abuse of disabled people is a form of hate crime that is totally abhorrent and is perpetrated by cowards. There is surely, therefore, a compelling case to be made for such verbal abuse to be made prosecutable, as a priority. Furthermore, it is also worth pointing out that there

is no statutory aggravator for an offence that is aggravated by prejudice relating to either age or gender. That needs to be explored further.

The third aspect that I want to cover is religious hate crime, which is traditionally a persistent form of hate crime in Lanarkshire and west and central Scotland. There are encouraging and successful initiatives going on in those areas that are aimed at tackling sectarianism, including remarkable projects such as one that is being run by the Machan Trust in Larkhall. The project, which has been running for many years, sees children and young adults of all religions coming together to participate in harmony on collaborative activities.

Despite all that, it is deeply depressing that reported instances of religiously motivated hate crime continue in 21st century Scotland. One particularly vile example took place a month or so ago and involved the targeting of the Coatbridge cenotaph: vandals sprayed pro-IRA graffiti on the memorial. Such a deeply offensive display of wanton vandalism united the whole community of Coatbridge, together with people in neighbouring communities, in condemnation of the act. Although there is certainly a balance to be struck when deciding whether to give air time to the vandals responsible, it is important that such acts be publicly condemned.

As 11 November approaches, such crime is set in stark contrast with the reverence and respect that millions of people throughout the UK show when they attend remembrance Sunday services every year. I look forward to paying my respects this Sunday, at that same Coatbridge cenotaph, which is one of countless memorials located in villages and towns nationwide that serve as a constant reminder of the debt of gratitude that we owe those who have in present and past conflicts paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedoms.

In conclusion, I say that there has to be a two-pronged approach to preventing and eradicating hate crime. The first prong involves awareness raising, condemnation and education. The second prong is to ensure, when all else fails, that incidents of such entrenched unacceptable behaviour, in whatever form it exists, are disposed of with the full force of the law. As the Law Society of Scotland has pointed out, what is required is a review of the crowded landscape of legislation, statutory aggravators and common law as they apply to hate crime at present.

15:50

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): The rise of hate up to and since the Brexit referendum has caused us all to rethink our place in this United Kingdom, and it has reminded us that we cannot be complacent in

anything that we do. Now that we know that the next President of the United States is a right-wing reactionary who mocks people who have disabilities, believes that he can do what he likes with women and creates an atmosphere of fear of immigrants and immigration, I am reminded of famous words that were written in 1883:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

It is 27 years since the fall of the Berlin wall. We should be breaking walls down, not building new ones up. Using words that were nowhere near as elegant as those of that poem, but which had the same message at their heart, I spoke at the SNP conference this year, which took place after one of the most right-wing, reactionary, negative and hate-filled Tory conferences that I have ever witnessed. I said that those who have come to our shores to seek a better life belong here, just as much as anyone else does. I also said that, if someone has chosen Scotland as their home, they are Scotland; if they have chosen Scotland as their place to study, they are Scotland; if they have chosen Scotland as their place of sanctuary, they are Scotland; if they have chosen Scotland as the place to bring up their children, they are Scotland; and that, if they have chosen Scotland as their place to do business, they are Scotland.

We all share in the riches of one planet. What right has any one of us to exclude someone else from doing the same? We are a country that stands opposed to hatred and that stands firm against abuse. However, in that opposition, we must be consciously aware of our own surroundings and our own context. Everyone in this chamber is, quite rightly, held to a higher standard and is subject to a more intense level of public scrutiny than others. However, that does not excuse the violent and hateful abuse that is often aimed at public officials, especially through Twitter and other social media. I have experienced it personally; no doubt, many other members have experienced it, too, and will have been subjected to various forms of abusive allegations, sexual harassment and hate crimes.

The Minister for Transport and the Islands gave the ultimate reply to someone who told him, "Go back to where you came from." He said, "Aye, right. I'll be on my way back to Glasgow, then." It was the most uniquely Scottish reply—sharp, braw and based in absolute truth.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service produced a report that brought together figures on race crime and crime that is motivated by prejudice related to religion, disability, sexual orientation and transgender identity. In 2015-16,

3,712 racial charges were reported, which was a few per cent down on the year before and the lowest number reported since 2003-04. That is progress, but it still represents an awful lot of people being abused. Also in 2015-16, there were 1,020 reported charges of sexually oriented crime, which is an increase of 20 per cent, and is in line with an overall annual increase that is, I hope, the result of a rise in reporting since 2010.

Those reprehensible crimes and attitudes that pit Scots against each other based on nothing more than their differences represent tribalism at its worst. Tribalism can become ingrained very quickly. It is passed down as an accidental by-product of one's environment. It is an attack on anyone who does not quite fit into someone's preconceptions of what a person should be. If a person is deaf, is blind, is in a wheelchair, has special needs, is elderly, is gay or is transgender, some small-minded people—including the President elect—will object to their differentness.

In a healthy society, we celebrate difference and we know that people from every kind of background add to the rich tapestry that is humankind—I stress the "kind" part of that word because I want a caring, compassionate Scotland that does not want to victimise anyone. Victimisation is born out of fear. It is the school-bully syndrome: a person lacks confidence and security in themselves, so they hit out at others in order to compensate. Those that use that fear to incite hatred are the most reprehensible.

Ridding ourselves of such prejudice and hate crime centres on a shift in culture. We need to do more at school, with families and in communities, to build people's confidence, especially in young people, so that they are able to shake off generations of being told that they are a useless waste of time, will never amount to anything and might as well accept that a life on benefits is all that they are good for and that they would maybe get on one of those poverty porn television shows. That is where attitudes start to go wrong. If a person is brought up in such an environment, where only their own kind—whatever they perceive that to be—is acceptable, what inevitably follows will be strife, pain, anguish and, of course, criminal behaviour, leading to a culture of hate.

It is beholden on every single one of us to rout out those old patterns and to replace them with a relaxed, open, friendly and non-discriminatory set of values. As recent events have shown, there is no place for complacency. Clearly, more effort needs to be made. A range of actions can be undertaken to try to eradicate such prejudice but, once again, it must all start at home and in nursery school. We need to teach our kids that the world is full of different people just as it is full of different cultures, religions and races.

I support the TIE campaign in its work to ensure that homophobia in all its forms is challenged, and I urge the Scottish Government to support it, too.

Diversity and difference make Scotland flourish. I call on us all, and our Scottish Government, to do what we can to eradicate hate-based discrimination. Here is to difference and to welcoming everyone.

15:56

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): We live in fragile times. I cannot be the only person who feels that, following the past 24 hours, they have become more fragile still. I am happy to speak in the debate and to take the opportunity to emphasise the importance of recognising the existence of hate crime and prejudice, and to affirm the need for us all in Scotland and beyond to tackle them.

I was privileged to attend the launch of hate crime week in Glasgow. I highlight that among the wonderful and inspiring speeches were the Purple Poncho Players—a theatre group from the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living—who got in everyone's faces with brilliant sketches condemning discrimination and mocking people who mock the disabled.

The consequences of Brexit are not yet fully understood. We know that many people who voted to leave do not hate and are not bigots, but there is a fear that perhaps, as some people have suggested, troublingly, Brexit did not create division but revealed it, and that those who feel hate feel emboldened to shout their hatred more loudly than they did in the past.

We must fear the division that seems ever more evident in our world. It matters—the future feels so much more insecure than it ever has before in my adulthood. I always believed that my children, who are now at the beginning of their adulthood, were living in a world that was much safer than mine. I fear for their generation that they are living not in a safe world, but in a frightening one.

I do not want to overstate the case or suggest that we are on the edge of a precipice, but I want to share my thoughts on the importance of vigilance and of being energetic in understanding and tackling hate crime and discrimination. I hope that members will forgive me for sharing with them an experience that had an unbelievably powerful impact on me. I recently had the privilege of visiting Bosnia as the guest of the charity Remembering Srebrenica to learn more about the genocide that took place there only 21 years ago.

Bosnia is a beautiful country and its people are welcoming. Sarajevo is a city with a proud history and a population of diverse faiths living together

side by side. Bosnia, which was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was, within our recent past, a holiday destination for people from across Europe and beyond. In our recent visit, we learned of the horrors of war—of a city under siege for 47 months and of abuse and slaughter of innocent victims. We heard of the United Nation's soldiers' inability to intervene and to act when they saw the systematic killing—ethnic cleansing—that was driven by the desire to eradicate a people because of their background and their beliefs.

Learning about the genocide by the Serbs, seeing the mass graves and hearing about the overwhelming grief of families and the courage of those who are still taking on the forensic work of identifying the remains of loved ones and those who are still seeking to heal the wounds of war, are important in themselves, for it is a stain on all of us that the genocide unfolded as the international community stood by, almost shrugging its shoulders. It saw the war as something inexplicable—a civil war among people who somehow historically were always that way inclined. That was to our shame, so we need to do all that we can to support the work of Remembering Srebrenica Scotland to talk about genocide denial and ensure that our young people understand what happened on our continent. To be opportunistic, I say that I hope that the minister will be willing to meet me to talk about precisely how we could support that work.

If members are ever given the opportunity to go on such a visit, I urge them to do so. I raise that experience not to overstate the challenges that we face, but to reflect on the central lessons for all of us from what we heard from the mothers of Srebrenica and from the courageous young men who gave testimony on their survival of the genocide. They spoke of how their crisis did not emerge in one day, and they spoke of the horror of their experience of realising that their school friends, their neighbours and those with whom they had lived in comfortable co-existence now wielded guns against them. Their understanding of that horror emerged step by step, slowly over time, with the denigration, scapegoating and dismissing of people. It is those steps that lead to the chaos that drives people to the inhumanity of genocide.

That is why we need to confront hate crime. We must ensure that people are supported to report it, and that those who would seek to divide our communities are left in no doubt that such behaviour is unacceptable. We need to educate our young people about the danger of the use of the word "hate" against any group, whether on the basis of its members' identity, their faith, their sexuality, their gender or their disability.

We must also guard against complacency. I know that there is unity across Parliament in our yearning to tackle the issue. We want communities in which we celebrate our diversity, rather than defining ourselves by our differences. I know that in my city and in communities across Scotland, the United Kingdom and far beyond, there are inspiring examples of kindness, compassion, empathy and determination to tackle the discrimination that too many of those who seek refuge with us face because of the groups that they are part of and because, not least, of their courage in speaking out and demanding justice.

I say this gently and trust that we can all reflect on it: we must not rewrite our own history to feed a narrative about Scotland's perceived difference from its neighbours in the debate about Europe. Scotland has been welcoming, but even a cursory look at our history allows us to understand that that has not always been so. Although many Scots are horrified by the denigration of immigrants across Europe, we know that immigrants and EU citizens in Scotland are not always immune from such abuse. We also know that there are many people across the rest of the UK who are as repulsed by the language and vocabulary of the bigots and racists as we in this country are.

We should not underestimate the importance of the advisory group's report or of the debate. I wish all power to the Government in the actions that it takes—I and my party will support it in progressing that work. The police, the justice system, our public services and education must look forward to being part of a system that is fairer to all. In this very fragile world, we need to stand strong in our love of and commitment to humanity; otherwise, this world will become more fragile still.

16:04

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): "Hate" is a much-used word; I would say that it is a misused word. We have talked about hate crime in the Parliament a lot—indeed, we talked about it very recently. Maybe the question is whether things are getting better. In some ways, perhaps they are, but at some point we must understand the statistics. As with rape, sexual abuse and child abuse, the willingness of people to come forward will be reflected in increased numbers.

When we last debated this issue, I talked about the role of newspapers. We might not purchase them, but they are visible on the news stands for everyone to see. As I said then, they might have passed some legal test, but as far as I am concerned, they have spectacularly failed any moral test with the picture of intolerance that they paint and the way in which they normalise hate.

There has been a rise in the number of abusive crimes against homeless people, and those crimes manifest themselves in different ways, such as the spikes that are put down to stop rough sleeping. We have seen the vilification of various groups, and I have set these out in heavy inverted commas in my speech: asylum seekers; refugees; people being called junkies or scroungers; the disabled; Gypsy Travellers who, as the cabinet secretary pointed out, still encounter systematic abuse; and transgender people. Islamophobia, too, remains a major issue.

I will—I hope—speak with some good grace about the Conservative Party amendment, although I think that the same good grace was singularly absent from its proposer. The Scottish Greens will support that amendment and indeed the Labour Party amendment at decision time but, like the cabinet secretary, I would like to be able to share with my neighbours who are EU citizens not the words of that Conservative amendment but the guarantee that they are respected. I want to say to the Spanish neighbour who has been here for 15 years and has been a valued member of the community, "You are valued, and you can stay here." Sadly, such guarantees are lacking at the moment.

We have seen the rise of the right across Europe, and members such as Christina McKelvie have talked about the role of social media in that respect. We have to be aware of relatively innocent-looking comments on such media from groups such as Britain First; they are luring people in, but we need only scratch the surface to see the hate that is there. I join Christina McKelvie in roundly condemning the disgusting abuse that female colleagues, in particular, get, and I think that any sane person would do likewise.

The report mentioned in the motion talks about the definition of hate and says:

"Using the language of 'hate' ... sometimes leads to a lack of recognition of what has transpired, as ... neither victim nor"

the accused recognises what has happened as being "based on ... hate". It also recommends the development of clearer definitions and terminology, and education

"to improve understanding of the nature and extent of hate crime."

In that respect, I welcome the cabinet secretary's comment about teacher training, which is absolutely vital, and the references made by other members to LGBTI and disability training. In his introduction to the report, Dr Morrow talks about "public education". Again, I welcome next year's campaign and am happy to lend it my support.

The issue of criminal aggravations has been mentioned by a few people, and there is an on-

going debate on whether gender should be included on that list. The report says:

“the Scottish Government should consider whether the existing criminal law provides sufficient protections for those who may be at risk of hate crime, for example based on gender, age or membership of other groups such as refugees and asylum seekers.”

In a member’s bill that went through Parliament in 2008 and 2009, Patrick Harvie argued that, before long, consolidation legislation would be needed to make the various strands of hate crime coherent and—more important—to overcome the administrative problems caused by the piecemeal approach. The same position was adopted by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and indeed the Justice Committee in 2009. I am grateful to the various organisations that have provided briefings for us, one of which, from the Law Society of Scotland, picks up on that point and says:

“There could be potential benefits in consolidation of all hate crime statutory aggravations and substantive statutory offences within one piece of legislation”

which would lead to

“ease of use and simplicity of reference.”

I hope that that issue will be picked up.

Moreover, the Lord Advocate’s guidelines, which are mentioned in that paper, talk about the perception that is associated with such crimes. That is very important for individuals, and it comes from knowledge. Finally, the Law Society highlights the learning possibilities that come from post-legislative scrutiny.

Of course, laws are one thing; what is very important is the lived experience of our citizens. The report on hate crime says:

“These experiences can be one off and open or hidden and frequent.”

There is a range of experiences, and, in that respect, I found the example given by Enable Scotland with regard to bullying very compelling. Enable quotes an individual as saying:

“That day on the bus, nobody came to my aid. The whole bus was full but nobody helped me. After that day I closed myself off and didn’t leave home for a month.”

It might be difficult for individuals to challenge such behaviour, particularly in a physical way, but we must challenge it.

In the previous session, the Equal Opportunities Committee looked at the issue of loneliness and isolation, and although it was a small part of what emerged, bullying was nevertheless a feature. Similarly, with regard to its own research, the Equality and Human Rights Commission said:

We hope that this work will help to inform any reforms of the Personal and Social Education (PSE) curriculum moving forward.

The Equality Network has provided a number of statistics, as have many of the people who have given us briefings. It said that 64 per cent of LGBT respondents and 80 per cent of trans people have been the target of hate crime. The most depressing thing in the statistics was the statement that, although those are high percentages, they are not out of line with other recent surveys. That is deeply depressing.

Public transport is one of the areas in which there are challenges. It is important that providers of public transport are aware. I make a plea: driver-only trains will not help that. It is clear that there is a very important role for the guards—for the health and safety people—on trains.

Social media have been touched on. It is clear that there needs to be education associated with that.

Bullying also takes place in the workplace. I simply remind employers of their duty of care to their staff. Experience shows that there is an important role for unions and staff associations in the workplace in support of avoiding such incidents cropping up. It is clear that peer support is important.

Hate crime is not simply associated with urban areas, of course. It is reprehensible regardless of where it takes place, but there are additional features if it takes place in a rural area. In particular, if an ethnic minority individual is the recipient of hate crime in a rural area, they are often isolated from the wider community and family support.

I conclude with the words:

“No two individuals are ever the same—embrace individuality and help put an end to Hate crime”.

That was not said by a philosopher; it is on Police Scotland’s website. The role that Police Scotland and third party reporting organisations have played is commendable.

It is important that we all stick together on the matter and encourage people to come forward.

16:11

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): There is absolutely no place for hate crime or prejudice in our 21st century Scotland. We can no more and we will not indulge the bigots as they practise their intolerance and bigotry only to accuse others of being more intolerant and bigoted than they are. We must show that there is a better way. At a time when other parts of the world are becoming insular and some nations’ views are hardening, we need

to show leadership and that there is still a bright light out there. We must show that progressive politics can be a way forward. Everyone in Scotland must be empowered to achieve their potential, irrespective of their race, faith, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. Everyone has the right to be safe and to feel safe in their communities.

The Scotland that we all know has a very long history of welcoming people of all nationalities and faiths. As the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, Angela Constance, said:

“As a nation, we have a long history of welcoming people of all nationalities and faiths, and we are committed to supporting their integration into our communities. That has assumed even more importance in the aftermath of the EU referendum”.

We need only to look at the 1,000 refugees who have settled here since October 2015 to see our openness and willingness to help people to integrate and become part of Scottish life. We have seen the success of that locally in my Paisley constituency, as families have been welcomed in our community. However, countless EU citizens have come to my constituency office after the Brexit result and asked me what their future holds. They have committed themselves and their families to our nation and contributed to it. We need to ensure that, as a nation, we continue to be welcoming and open, and that we do not descend into the hate-and-blame culture that there has been in other parts of the United Kingdom. However, we cannot remain complacent; we must always look to be better.

In 2015, the Scottish Government commissioned a report to consider the issues of hate crime, prejudice and community cohesion. Recommendations for improvement were made.

That brings us to today. There are many forms of prejudice. It can be abusive and lead to hate, but it can also be a physical barrier. A disabled person can have difficulty in gaining access to most aspects of life that others take for granted, whether that is access to employment, a building or transportation. Those things are all connected, of course. Without one, another cannot be achieved.

Many members will know that my wife Stacey has multiple sclerosis and mobility problems. When we go out, we tend to go to places where we know that there will be access. If we use her manual chair, things tend to be easier—not for me, but we all need a fitness programme. With the manual chair, we can access a train without help and, nine times out of 10, I can find a way to push our way just about anywhere.

Of course, that is not the point. The point is how Stacey and others manage it on their own. How can we ensure that all our people have access to all the same buildings and services and to employment?

Stacey often says to me that people with disabilities tend to be forgotten. They have a very active network of organisations working to improve things, and they tend to be very reasonable. Unlike other groups, they try to find solutions to problems in a very practical and reasoned manner. The problem with that is that they tend to be taken for granted by transport companies, entertainment venues and public organisations.

How many times have we seen a wheelchair user denied access to a bus or having to organise a train journey four hours before they actually have the journey? There is no spontaneity for the average wheelchair user—no quick wee train journey down to Largs on a lovely summer's day, and no chance of being late for work and making a last-minute dash.

There are solutions. One would be for access panels throughout Scotland to be made statutory consultees in the planning process, so that they are in at planning level to ensure that buildings can be fully accessible. We could also ensure that transportation organisations consult them about service plans and rolling stock, whether rail or road. The reason why I welcome this debate is that it has given me an opportunity to discuss these issues and ensure that the voices of my disabled constituents are heard.

All that is against the backdrop of Tory so-called welfare reforms. The report of the UN Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities' inquiry into disability rights and welfare reform said that

“The roll out of those policies included the issuing of statements by high-ranking officers that the reform was aimed at making the welfare system fairer to taxpayers and more balanced and transparent and reducing benefit fraud. Persons with disabilities have been regularly portrayed negatively as being dependent or making a living out of benefits, committing fraud as benefit claimants, being lazy and putting a burden on taxpayers, who are paying ‘money for nothing’ ... the inquiry collected evidence that persons with disabilities continue to experience increasing hostility, aggressive behaviour and sometimes attacks to their personal integrity. The inquiry also found no substantiation of the alleged benefit fraud by persons with disabilities.”

A more cynical man than me would call the reforms a form of discrimination and prejudice. Some might even go so far as to call them a hate crime.

The type of Scotland that I want to live in is one that does not care where someone lives or comes from, what lifestyle choices they have made or even what football team they support. The Scotland I want is one that tolerates everyone and offers opportunity for all. It will not happen

overnight, but we must face the challenge to ensure that we pass on that bright light to the next generation of young Scots. During these dark times, we must continue to believe that there is always a better way forward.

16:17

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western)

(LD): This is not the speech that I planned to give this evening, nor is it the one that I wanted to give. I reflect that, despite the rancour and deep divisions that often characterise debates in this place, there is a real connection tonight between the substance of the motion and the amendments, and the sheer revulsion at the result that we have witnessed in America today.

Yesterday, I described Brexit as a multifaceted act of political vandalism. It is certainly that, yet it is as nothing compared with the jarring, visceral and largely unexpected lurch to the politics of prejudice that our American cousins have embraced. Members across the chamber will have shared my view and watched aghast as state after state turned its back on an offer of hope and inclusivity to embrace a prospectus of cold misogyny, racism and discrimination.

It is not statesmanlike or diplomatic for a parliamentarian to rail against the victor of such an important international contest, but I feel neither statesmanlike nor diplomatic when it comes to addressing the hate-filled doctrine that has swept much of the continental United States these past 24 hours. It is a doctrine that represents the very antithesis of the Government motion and the amendments that are before us this evening, and it is a doctrine that relies on the demonisation of the other—the threatening outsider. It is a doctrine that plays to the very worst demons of our souls. Seizing on the realities of huge swathes of the American population who, when asked by pollsters, would say, “Folks like me were better off 50 years ago,” Donald Trump’s task was blindingly simple. Find any number of groups among the dispossessed and the marginalised to blame for that. Play to every fear. Stereotype and prejudice, and do so with abandon.

The politics of prejudice represents the very worst tendencies in the conduct of human affairs. It thrives on a primeval reversion to tribe that seeks out weakness, difference and non-conformity and then endeavours to drive them out, to persecute and to malign. We may unite in condemnation of the emergence of that politics in America today, but we would do well to reflect on its existence in these islands as well. If the calamity of last night’s events induces us to answer one challenge in ourselves, it must be the eradication of prejudice wherever it may be found in our nation.

If we accept that prejudice stems from the stigma that is attached to a group for its differences, a reinforcement of stereotype and a subliminal attempt to further marginalise it, we do not have far to look for examples. That challenge exists, for example, in the bigoted and inaccurate remarks about gay promiscuity in discussions about licensing for prophylactic HIV medication—something so effective that it is akin to a vaccine and which, had it been discovered in the 1980s, would be in the water supply. That stems from a popular prejudice from bullying in school, and that is why all parties in this Parliament have rightly supported the TIE campaign for inclusive education.

That challenge exists in the hate crime, abusive language and barriers to employment that are still faced by those who are affected by disability in our society, and it exists in the racism that is faced by refugees, Gypsy Travellers and migrants—yes, even here in Scotland.

Prejudice also germinates wherever we create a different class of person by dint of culture or policy. It exists for our talented female workforce, who are still paid measurably less than their male counterparts, still managed out or passed over as a result of pregnancy and still excluded from boardrooms across Scotland. It exists for our young people, whose hourly rate for work at entry level shows that it is valued less than that of older workers with the same experience, and who are still seen as responsible for antisocial behaviour in our communities even though they are more likely to be the victims of it than the culprits. Finally, it exists for our prison population, who are disenfranchised from the democratic process while they are incarcerated and set at an immediate disadvantage in relation to housing and employability on liberation.

It is incumbent on us as legislators, opinion formers and leaders to root out the folds and tears in the fabric of our society where people are forgotten, marginalised and subjected to prejudice and ultimately hate, and to bring change through policy and by example. Bobby Kennedy said that each time someone

“stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

I hang on to that last sentence and see its prescience tonight. It gives such comfort in this dark awakening for our world.

Let us unify today in the best way that this Parliament does; across the benches, let us support the motion and amendments. Let us and this be the catalyst for our fight against prejudice

at home and, by so eradicating it here, let us turn our eyes west to the challenge of its revival overseas.

16:23

Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): Politicians have a voice and the things that we say and do can shape the way society thinks about the issues of the day. That is a benefit, but it is also a responsibility. Wherever possible, we should use our platform wisely to point the way to a better society.

During the EU referendum, some politicians were not wise or careful, fanning the flames on immigration in order to generate votes for the leave campaign. Nigel Farage's "breaking point" poster was a low point in a campaign that I feel had no high point. A tactical decision was made to turn what should have been a vote on the EU into a vote on immigration.

A UN body has commented that British politicians helped to fuel a steep rise in racist hate crimes during and after the EU referendum campaign. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination said:

"the Committee is deeply concerned that the referendum campaign was marked by divisive, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric, and that many politicians and prominent political figures not only failed to condemn such rhetoric, but also created and entrenched prejudices, thereby emboldening individuals to carry out acts of intimidation and hate towards ... minority communities and people who are visibly different."

Hate crime in England has gone up as a result. In the week before and after the vote on 23 June, a year-on-year increase of around 42 per cent was recorded. Jon Burnett, a researcher at the Institute of Race Relations, said:

"The upsurge in attacks against eastern Europeans should come as no surprise, given the way that they have been portrayed repeatedly as scroungers, cheats and, ultimately, threats. This depiction, which intensified in the build-up to the referendum, of course predated it. The hate crimes are a product of a politically constructed climate which has been years in the making."

Members should contrast that with the actions of the Scottish Government, before and after the EU referendum, to make clear that EU citizens are welcome. On the day after the referendum, the First Minister said to EU nationals who live in Scotland:

"you remain welcome here, Scotland is your home and your contribution is valued."

There seems to be no evidence that the increase in hate crime in England is being replicated in Scotland, but I sound a note of caution. As the independent advisory group on hate crime, prejudice and community cohesion said in its report, some victims simply do not want

to report crimes to the police. I have anecdotal evidence of that. A family business in my constituency recently received a series of anonymous letters telling the family to go home. Family members have also experienced people saying that to them in person on the street. They have not reported any of that to the police and they told a neighbouring shop owner, "It will pass."

The independent advisory group reported:

"many people who experience hatred and prejudice on a daily basis said that it would be impossible to report them all to the police. Many participants reported that people subject to repeated incidents of prejudice or hate crime internalised such behaviour as a 'normal' experience of everyday life and developed coping strategies to deal with these that do not include contact with Justice agencies or support services."

Police Scotland is working on encouraging victims to report incidents directly, through a form on its website, or through a network of third-party reporting centres that it supports and maintains.

The independent advisory group said:

"The Scottish Government continues to articulate a clear commitment to building a positive country which celebrates diversity, and the authorities are committed to taking hate crime seriously and to responding to it."

It also said:

"The global and media context is a crucial driver shaping the perception of safety for particular communities (such as Muslim or Jewish communities). Experiences of and anxiety about hate crime were both heightened during or following particularly high profile international events".

It concluded,

"the public narrative around migrants and asylum had significant consequences for people in local communities."

That underlines the point that, although the Scottish Government and its partners are committed to advancing equality and eradicating prejudice, by strengthening the law, running education programmes and working towards a situation in which all police and fire service recruits receive equalities training, the wider context is not under the Scottish Government's control.

Comments, speeches and leaflets from politicians create a climate that has real consequences for communities. I hope that the xenophobic rhetoric that is emanating from UK political discourse ends now, before more harm is done.

16:29

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I became a member of this Parliament after having had quite wide and varied life and career experiences, the majority of which were happy and positive. However, like many members, I have come across and experienced a wide range of prejudice.

I grew up in the west of Scotland, where sectarianism was fairly rife in our communities. Although I did not understand the murals on the gable ends, I knew that on one street people wore green and on the other they wore blue, and God forbid that they get that wrong.

When I went to high school, I discovered that being called gay was not a compliment. There were virtually no ethnic minority students in my school and I used to wince when, on the way home, I heard the abuse that the owners of the local convenience shop had to endure day in, day out.

Naturally, I thought that, as I moved into adulthood, life would be different, because adults know better—right? However, during my career I have sat in recruitment meetings and heard people say things like, “We have a pile of responses to the job advert. Let’s take out all the ones with foreign-sounding names—that will make life easier for us.” I also have friends who have been beaten black and blue as they have walked home from a night out and who have been abused in a supermarket for holding the hand of the one they love.

The point of those anecdotes is to demonstrate that prejudice and bigotry are often born out of plain ignorance as well as a deep, genuine hatred that is passed on from one generation to another. Hate crime often derives from prejudice, but prejudice often derives from stigma.

As the co-convenor of the Parliament’s new cross-party group on LGBTI+, I hope that the chamber will forgive my indulgence if I focus on that subject. As my colleague Annie Wells pointed out, according to the Crown Office, sexual orientation-aggravated crime is not only rising but is the second most common type of hate crime in Scotland. Worryingly, the Equality Network’s 2015 equality report points out that 97 per cent of LGBTI people in Scotland have personally faced prejudice or discrimination. Let us take a moment to think about that. It means that nearly every LGBTI person in this country faces or has faced some form of harassment or discrimination, from homophobic comments to acts of physical violence or discrimination when accessing services, in school or at their place of work. As I said to the Standards and Public Appointments Committee last week, it is true that LGBT acceptance has soared in our society—Scotland is a very inclusive place—but that does not equate to true equality.

As a society, we are still quick to label people and put them in boxes. “A Review of the Evidence on Hate Crime and Prejudice”, which was published recently by the Scottish centre for crime and justice research, points out that the list of protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010

does not always line up with the definitions in Scots hate crime law. Therefore, as policy makers, our task is quite complicated and is more difficult than just making a list of people not to discriminate against.

When we categorise people, even to protect them, we are attributing labels that cannot, by their nature, be applied to everybody. Therefore, the language that we use when discussing hate crime is important. Let me explain what I mean by that. When we discuss, for example, how to protect minorities from hate crime, we are addressing the symptoms of prejudice, not removing its root causes. We must stop painting the picture that the LGBTI community—along with many other so-called minority groups—is a legal and cultural exception to the norm. We should instead work towards a system of law that works for everyone by default. We must do everything in our power to drag the legal, educational and public service systems into the 21st century, which means not just paying lip service to those communities.

What can be done? Plenty of legislation has been passed by Holyrood and Westminster for the prevention and eradication of hate crime. However, as the Law Society of Scotland has pointed out, it is “scattered across numerous statutes”. The Law Society further points out that, if the law were consolidated in one place, that might improve clarity and access to justice for all. We should consider that.

Hate crime rarely happens in isolation, yet we still know very little about it and the people who perpetrate it. Much more research is needed into how hate crime intersects with other social issues such as poverty, ethnicity and religion. There also need to be far greater efforts to open the channels of communication between the affected communities and public authorities. That is why I am encouraged that Police Scotland is training more than 60 officers to work with the LGBTI community to prevent hate crime.

However, this is no time to pat ourselves on the back and say, “Job done.” The Equality Network points out that

“We need to find out whether restorative justice is being used effectively for different kinds of hate crime”.

Tackling online hate crime and criminalising threatening communication, in particular, are two areas in which Scotland has more room for improvement.

Hate crime is everyone’s problem, whether it is anti-semitism, anti-Islamic sentiment, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia or sectarian bigotry.

James Dornan: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I am in my closing seconds.

As members of the Parliament, we have a role to play with the language that we use and how we treat each other when we have political differences that give way to heated debate in the chamber and online. The more we work together in tackling prejudice, the more inclusive society will become and the greater the opportunities will be for everyone.

16:35

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

Given the events that have unfolded in the past 24 hours in the United States, let me join those across the chamber who have spoken about the relevance of us having this debate today.

President-elect Donald Trump is certainly not the outcome that I had hoped for. The news that Trump will become the next President of the United States fills me with sadness and disbelief—disbelief because Trump led a hate-filled and fear-based campaign that was filled with misogynistic and racist rhetoric and which has served only to divide people.

For all of us who care about equality and fairness, today is a dark day. It is upsetting to know that a man who, in the course of his campaign, espoused backwards views about women's rights, said that he would ban Muslims from entering his country and mocked people with disabilities can become leader of the United States and, seemingly, have those sentiments condoned. It beggars belief. There will be many Muslims, LGBTI people, other minority groups and women in America today who are worried about the future direction of their country.

If the US election tells us anything, it is that prejudice towards minority groups remains a live issue in the western world and it should be a stark warning to all of us against any complacency. I welcome the recent report by the independent advisory group on hate crime, prejudice and community cohesion, which highlighted that very issue. The report tells us that much of the experience of hate crime remains hidden to the public because many victims decide not to report due to fear of further violence or retaliation. Many other victims describe what looks like a degree of acceptance of certain abuse due to a feeling that it is simply "part of life".

Hate crime is not an inevitable part of life. Prejudice and social isolation of certain groups have a long-term damaging impact on society and tackling those issues must be a priority concern for us all. A zero tolerance approach will help to give victims the confidence that they need to come forward and report by giving them certainty that their reporting will make a difference and that support will be given to them. Scotland's Crown

Office and Procurator Fiscal Service already takes a zero tolerance approach and Scottish Labour wants that to be extended across our justice system and beyond.

The independent advisory group's report makes a series of recommendations about the scope of hate crime, particularly in relation to the category of gender. Consideration of misogynistic hate crime was recently adopted by police in Nottinghamshire, and I have previously asked the Scottish Government whether it considers Police Scotland to have adequate powers to handle such instances of crime. I look forward to the Government's response to those issues in light of the report, and I hope that the minister will today outline that response, alongside a deadline for action in response to the report's recommendations.

Persecution of minority groups in Scotland is a real and growing problem. Race crime remains the most commonly reported hate crime in Scotland and it is growing across the UK. As we have heard, the number of reported disability crimes has increased, too; that number has more than tripled since 2010 and it is up 4 per cent on last year. Instances of hate crime based on a person's sexual orientation have more than doubled since 2010, and have increased by 20 per cent in the past year alone. That situation is simply unacceptable.

One family in Central Scotland recently brought to my attention the situation of their teenage grandson, who is being bullied at a school near to where I live due to a physical disability. The family was happy for me to mention that today, but asked me to say nothing more due to a fear of his identity being revealed.

We have also heard, via the TIE—time for inclusive education—campaign, shocking details of those who have been victims of homophobic bullying in schools. My friend and colleague Councillor Ged Killen at South Lanarkshire Council has spoken about his experience of being bullied at school simply for being gay.

During the debate, I have had in my mind my young constituent, my friend Ged Killen and others who have shared their lived experience with me, because there are real people behind the hate crime statistics and real lives that are affected by instances of prejudice-based bullying.

Specifically on the issue of homophobia, LGBTI groups and in particular the TIE campaign have been keen to address the occurrence of bullying and harassment in schools. I am pleased that several colleagues referred to the TIE campaign, including Annie Wells and Alex Cole-Hamilton. I was particularly pleased to hear Christina McKelvie, who is a big supporter of the TIE

campaign, adding her voice and asking the Scottish Government to do all that it can to support the campaign.

Far too many young people are reporting issues of bullying due to their sexual orientation. No young person should be made to feel isolated, ashamed or persecuted because of their sexual orientation.

The TIE campaign research is remarkable; anyone who reads it finds it sobering. It includes the information that more than half of teachers have never even heard of or read current Government guidance that is designed to tackle homophobia in schools, as well as survey data from pupils showing that 27 per cent of LGBTI students had attempted suicide at least once.

The Scottish Government should act on the powers that it has to influence how the teaching curriculum and training materials are exercised when it comes to education on the matter. Taking forward a strong ethos of equality, starting with our young people, is a good way to start moving towards the permanent eradication of such prejudice from our society.

Building those positive attitudes throughout society will complement the work that our justice system—particularly Police Scotland—and third sector support groups carry out every day in tackling hate crime where it occurs.

I echo the calls from the advisory group on enhanced resourcing for the third party reporting centres, and recommendations that Police Scotland reviews action steps to improve their effectiveness.

I hope that the Government will consider its role in working with partners in the justice system and in education to improve how hate crimes are recorded and I hope that the minister will be able to provide some clarity on those issues in closing.

I hate to come back to Donald Trump, but his election reminds us that views that we might have hoped were consigned to the past are not necessarily as unacceptable in today's world as we like to think.

There can be no room for complacency. It is my hope that we can positively take forward the issues raised in today's debate by working together across the chamber in order to enact real change in people's lives during the lifetime of this session of Parliament.

16:42

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

People are not born full of hate; they are not born homophobic or racist; and they are not born with despicable, demeaning views about the disabled.

They learn it somewhere—perhaps in our communities, through entrenched, historical views that, I hope, will disappear some day soon. That point sprang to mind when I listened to the cabinet secretary's quotation at the end of her speech. I will come back to that later.

I was encouraged to think that perhaps those old-fashioned views are leaving us when I attended the Scottish Youth Parliament reception in the Scottish Parliament last night. Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament from Moray and from Shetland showed me the responses to recent surveys about young people's opinions in local communities, including young people's priorities. Emmie Main from Moray and Kelvin Anderson from Shetland both told me how high up tackling hate crime was on their agenda in Shetland and in Moray, as well as with young people across Scotland. That can give us some encouragement today, when we have heard about some pretty horrific things happening throughout our communities.

I am pleased to close for the Scottish Conservatives and I thank all members for their contributions. There is a clear consensus in the chamber that hate crime must be overcome once and for all. Prejudice and bigotry of any kind has no place in our society and I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to tackle this pernicious problem.

I want to dwell for a short time on some of the speeches that we have heard. Mr Dornan spoke about his experiences in Glasgow. Margaret Mitchell looked at three specific aspects during her speech and she gave us a stark example of unacceptable behaviour involving vandalism and graffiti of the cenotaph in Coatbridge and how that offensive action spreads through the community. That is completely unacceptable.

I enjoyed Johann Lamont's comments about the Purple Poncho Players, and her compelling and moving account of her recent visit to Bosnia where she learned about the horrors of war that people had experienced there.

John Finnie and Christina McKelvie mentioned the impact of social media and the unacceptable hate that can be directed at people and politicians in particular; John Finnie made the point that female politicians are often targeted. I totally agree with what they said. None of us would condone what is said to politicians online, but some people see us as fair game. Whether or not any of us agrees with that, we would all agree that our staff are definitely not fair game, but they are often included in some of the vile hatred that is expressed online simply because of who they are employed by and what they do in this Parliament. That is completely unacceptable. I know that we

as individuals all support our staff, but we perhaps do not say it enough in the chamber.

I was shocked to hear George Adam mention Paisley in his useful contribution, although he tends to do that every now and then. He also mentioned his wife Stacey and spoke about their experience of getting around town. I was interested to hear Stacey's view that

"people with disabilities tend to be forgotten."

I hope that, given the speeches from Mr Adam and other members, Stacey and others do not feel that their Scottish Parliament forgets them, because they are an important and integral part of Scotland's life.

Jamie Greene mentioned how great it is that the Scottish Parliament now has a recognised LGBTI cross-party group. He also said that acceptance of the LGBTI community has soared, but we must remember that that does not always translate into true equity and equality.

I join the cabinet secretary in extending my thanks to Dr Duncan Morrow's advisory group, which has looked extensively at the current state of hate crime, prejudice and community cohesion in Scotland since it was convened last year. The group's report highlights a number of concerning issues, not least that many people in minority communities have accepted that a certain amount of abuse is almost part of daily life.

We have heard many worrying statistics in the chamber today. As Monica Lennon pointed out, the rise in the number of charges involving disability, sexual orientation and transgender identity may—although it is disappointing—at least demonstrate that some victims are more willing to come forward. However, many others for many reasons do not come forward, and it is incumbent on us all as parliamentarians to issue a clear call to let them know that their experiences will be taken seriously as they progress through the criminal justice system.

We also need to ensure that such cases are handled sensitively. Annie Wells and Jamie Greene mentioned the introduction of LGBTI liaison officers by Police Scotland, which is a positive step in that direction. It is particularly welcome that those officers have been trained by the Equality Network, which helps them to become alert to nuances of such incidents.

Dr Morrow emphasises that, although the justice system can punish and deter hate crime, it alone cannot instigate the required cultural change that will

"ensure positive and informed attitudes and behaviour within society".

I refer to my earlier remarks in that regard. That is an important point, and it reinforces the idea that a criminal remedy must be part of a multipronged approach to tackling hate crime. Central to that strategy is the need to increase awareness of what constitutes a hate crime, given that the perpetrator and the victim may not recognise that the experience or actions are based on or motivated by hate.

How long do I have, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): You have seven minutes in total, so you have another minute and a half.

Douglas Ross: Thank you.

Dr Morrow and his group recommend that the Scottish Government should take the lead in developing a clearer definition of hate crime, which should be accompanied by greater public education. Parties all round the chamber can support those recommendations, and we will work collaboratively with our SNP colleagues and other members in those areas.

Ash Denham acknowledged that, in the intervening period since the EU referendum, incidents of hate crime in Scotland have not increased, which we welcome. It would be remiss of politicians to try to establish a direct link between incidents elsewhere and the referendum outcome, and the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and COPFS have repeatedly sounded cautionary notes about forming conclusions based on monthly fluctuations in the figures. However, we need to send a strong, unequivocal message that both non-British EU nationals and non-EU nationals living in Scotland are welcome here and that they should be afforded the same dignity and respect that they have always had. We heard that from Conservative members yesterday during the health debate, and I reiterate it today.

The cabinet secretary and Alex Cole-Hamilton delivered quotations as they concluded their speeches, so I will do the same. Martin Luther King said:

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

There have been many positive contributions today. I hope that the consensus in the chamber sends a positive message to the people of Scotland that their Scottish Parliament sheds some light on the darkness of unacceptable hate crimes.

16:50

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing): I, too, welcome the contributions to the debate from members right across the chamber, almost all of which have been

positive. There is broad consensus in the Parliament not only that hate crime, prejudice and, as Margaret Mitchell specifically referred to, sectarian behaviour are not acceptable in Scotland, but that each of us must do all that we can to prevent and eradicate such hateful behaviours. As Christina McKelvie said, we must be on our guard and be vigilant.

Everyone has the right to be safe and to feel safe in their community. There is no excuse for any form of hate crime, which is never acceptable and will never be tolerated in this country. Scotland is a diverse multicultural society, and that diversity is a strength, not a problem. As has been highlighted this afternoon, Scotland has a long history of welcoming people of all nationalities and faiths, including those seeking refuge and asylum from war and terror elsewhere in the world. That is who we have been, it is who we are and it is who we continue to want to be. We want an open, inclusive and respectful country—a civilised country in what is, as Johann Lamont said, an increasingly frightening and fragile world. To respond to Johann Lamont's request, I am sure that the cabinet secretary would be happy to meet her to discuss her ideas for ways in which we can all move forward together.

Understandably, we had many references to the international aspect. Alex Cole-Hamilton referred to the perhaps challenging events that are happening furth of Scotland, and Ash Denham made an eloquent plea about the importance of the language that is used by politicians. We all have a responsibility to set the tone.

Before I pick up on some specific points that have been raised, I want to stress a few things about reporting, a common theme that has been mentioned by many members. Anyone who believes that they have been a victim of hate crime should report that to the authorities. Police Scotland supports a national third-party reporting infrastructure to facilitate the reporting of hate crime. I say to Pauline McNeill that Police Scotland has been reviewing the network to ensure that there is adequate geographical coverage across Scotland and that there are sites that cater for particular community needs. The staff at the sites have received additional training from local officers to ensure that they can assist victims or witnesses in submitting a report to the police. In addition, hate crime can be reported online through the Police Scotland website. However, I undertake to ensure that, after the debate, we ask Police Scotland what more it can do in that regard.

As a general comment, and picking up on some of the points that Monica Lennon made, we of course continue to reflect on Dr Morrow's

recommendations in the round, and that work is on-going.

I was concerned to note the comments in the Equality Network's submission for the debate in which it pointed to its recent survey of LGBTI people's experiences of hate crime. The survey found that some 70 per cent of LGBTI people who had been the victim of a hate crime did not report the incident that they experienced to the police. Therefore, more work is obviously needed on that. I will ensure that the concerns that have been raised by the Equality Network as a result of its recent survey, which also covered experience of the broader justice system, are brought to the attention of the police and the relevant services so that we can reflect on what more we need to do to deal with that clear gap in how people feel about the system that is there for them.

Awareness raising plays a critical role, which is why I hope that all members will welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement today of a new awareness-raising campaign on the effects of hate crime on individuals and communities, which is to be launched next year. I hope that the whole chamber will be able to get behind that important campaign.

In the time that I have available, I will focus on a few of the specific points that members raised in addition to the reporting of hate crime. I will perhaps not get round all the points, but I am happy to respond to members if they wish to write to me.

We will continue to work closely with all the relative organisations to ensure that we better understand and seek to address the key priorities for LGBTI communities. It is fair to say that the Scottish Government has made significant progress over recent years, but we are by no means complacent and we recognise that there is always more to be done. I welcome Jamie Greene's role as co-convenor of the cross-party group on LGBTI+, on which I am sure he will do an excellent job of work.

Monica Lennon: Will the minister give the chamber an update on the TIE campaign, which several members have mentioned and which has a lot of support? Is the Scottish Government moving towards supporting the campaign?

Annabelle Ewing: I was just about to get to that very place. The Deputy First Minister, as education secretary, is carefully considering what more the Scottish Government can do in terms of the campaign. We will continue our work on that. The cabinet secretary advises me that the respect me national anti-bullying campaign is being refreshed to ensure that it includes prejudice-based bullying, whatever form it takes. That work

is on-going, and I am sure that Monica Lennon will welcome it.

Mention was made of the important issue of disability hate crime and the underreporting that we still see, for which there are a number of reasons. We continue to work with disability organisations. Members including George Adam picked up on this in the debate, but an impact of the UK Government's approach to welfare reform has been the negative stereotyping in press reports of disabled people as benefits cheats and scroungers. That has had the consequence of an increase in incidents of disability harassment as reported by disabled people to our external partners. As the cabinet secretary said, we hope soon to bring forward a disability delivery plan to advance equality for disabled people. It will include a commitment to continue to tackle hate crime by working with disabled people's organisations such as Enable, including on the key issue of bullying, which Enable highlighted in its helpful briefing for the debate.

George Adam and Christina McKelvie mentioned the recent UN report—Christina McKelvie has lodged a motion on that very subject. The report's conclusion is that the UK Government has breached disabled people's rights. We await with interest what the UK Government will do about that.

Brexit and the position of EU nationals in Scotland were also mentioned. I agree entirely with James Dornan's comments about the significant anxiety felt by EU nationals in our country. I also entirely agree with John Finnie's statement that the UK Government should take a lead. It has responsibility to set the tone, and by condoning what is, in effect, a bargaining-chip approach—Conservative MSPs have not challenged that in the debate—they are sending a very dangerous signal to society at large and a very worrying signal to EU nationals in our country, who have chosen Scotland as their home and whom we value very much indeed.

Scotland has been on a journey and we agree that we have much further to go if everyone in Scotland is to enjoy true equality and equality of opportunity. The reality is that we are all human beings and we have fundamental rights. It does not matter where we came from or who we love; we all deserve to be treated with basic human dignity and we should all be able to get on in life and enjoy everything that life has to offer. Vigilance is required at all times, and this Government is committed to doing everything that it can to ensure that Scotland continues on the journey so that equality becomes a reality for everyone.

Business Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-02411, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 15 November 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Single Market & Trade (EU Referendum)

followed by Election to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 16 November 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Culture, Tourism and External Affairs;
Justice and the Law Officers

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 17 November 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: How
Scotland's Innovation Centre
Programme is Driving Innovation in
Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 22 November 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 23 November 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Education and Skills

followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 24 November 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.45 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move en bloc motions S5M-02272 and S5M-02276, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2016 Amendment Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Treatment of Scottish Fiscal Commission as Specified Authority) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.—[Joe FitzPatrick]

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-02364.2, in the name of Annie Wells, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02364, in the name of Angela Constance, on eradicating hate crime, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-02364.1, in the name of Pauline McNeill, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02364, in the name of Angela Constance, on eradicating hate crime, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-02364, in the name of Angela Constance, on eradicating hate crime, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament condemns all forms of hate crime and prejudice; welcomes the recent report of the Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion; thanks the group for this work and the recommendations made, which will inform future action in this area; notes its view that the current approach to tackling hate crime is appreciated; suggests that further action be taken to address the underreporting of disability, sexual orientation and transgender hate crime; agrees that Scotland has a long history of welcoming people of all nationalities and faiths; considers that both non-British EU nationals and non-EU nationals living in Scotland are welcome here, they belong here and that their contribution is appreciated; agrees that the media has a critical role in shaping social attitudes, and appreciates the role of education in raising awareness to counteract negative stereotypes; supports a zero-tolerance approach to hate crime across Scotland; understands the need to increase diversity within the workforce of the criminal justice system; commends the work of the third sector in raising awareness, tackling prejudice and promoting equality; further commends the role of Police Scotland and third party reporting centres in responding to reports of hate crime and stresses the need for more resources to be allocated to them; supports the continued cooperation with third party organisations in training police officers to tackle LGBTI hate crime, and encourages people to report all hate crime whenever and wherever it takes place, and agrees to work together to stand up to, and eradicate, hate crime and prejudice in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-02272, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2016 Amendment Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-02276, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Treatment of Scottish Fiscal Commission as Specified Authority) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

International Credit Union Day 2016

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-01664, in the name of Ruth Maguire, on celebrating international credit union day 2016. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that 20 October 2016 is International Credit Union Day; understands that the event, which has taken place every year since 1948, commemorates the credit union movement's impact and achievements and aims to raise awareness of what credit unions do; notes what it sees as the important role that is played by these not-for-profit financial cooperatives in providing effective and affordable financial services for over 217 million members in 105 countries; considers that they are a force for positive economic and social change and that they empower people and communities and encourage entrepreneurship; acknowledges the reported strong increase in membership in Scotland over recent years, with the latest figures suggesting that they have 383,000 members, which includes a marked increase in junior members, and welcomes the manifesto commitments of all parties to strengthening and growing the role played by credit unions in providing financial services in Cunninghame South and Scotland.

17:03

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I begin by thanking all the members who signed my motion, which has allowed the debate to take place, and all those who have stayed to take part.

The role of credit unions in reducing poverty and the impact of financial worries is well recognised and has been described in reports by organisations from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to the Social Market Foundation. I am proud to mark international credit union day 2016, which took place on 20 October, with this members' business debate in our Scottish Parliament. International credit union day has, since 1948, been celebrated worldwide on the third Thursday of October, and it exists to mark the achievements of the credit union movement to date, as well as to raise awareness and support for its work today and in the future.

Owned and controlled by members, and with membership based on a common bond, credit unions are underpinned by the co-operative ethos of people helping people, and are committed to maximising the quality of service that is provided to members—not the extent of profit that is provided to shareholders.

I recently met representatives of StepChange Debt Charity, which does excellent work in my constituency of Cunninghame South and, indeed, across Scotland. They told me that they often refer

clients to credit unions and are strong supporters of their ethos and work, and that they view them as being a more sustainable and sensible way for people to get credit than other sources.

As well as providing affordable loans, with fairer conditions and longer repayment terms than payday lenders, credit unions also empower communities and encourage individual entrepreneurship; indeed, they are often termed "community banks"—a description that well reflects their nature and purpose.

Credit unions provide effective and affordable services for more than 217 million members around the world. Because they are a real force for positive economic and social change, it is encouraging to note that they have a thriving presence here in Scotland. There are 103 credit unions in Scotland, with a combined membership of more than 383,000, which works out at roughly 7 per cent of the Scottish population. That is by far the highest percentage of the nations of the United Kingdom. Even more encouragingly, that current figure reflects a strong increase in membership in Scotland in recent years, and is partly the result of a marked increase in junior members.

I am also pleased to note that several Scottish credit unions have recently participated in the United Kingdom Government-funded credit union expansion project to further develop their reach and impact, and that six will now proceed to the next phase of the project, which will further develop and diversify their operating model and make them more competitive and efficient by, among other things, enabling them to take advantage of a market-leading banking app and improved digital access channels.

In Cunninghame South, the Kilwinning-based 1st Alliance (Ayrshire) Credit Union has been supporting a diverse range of savers and borrowers in the Ayrshire community since 2004. It currently has more than 3,000 members, with £2.3 million in savings and £1.9 million out on loans. I am delighted to note that 1st Alliance has recently been awarded a 5-star rating from the Fairbanking Foundation for its personal loans. I am also pleased to share with the chamber that 1st Alliance is working constructively to deal with some of the challenges that are presented by welfare reform. Its partnership working with North Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council and six social landlords, in which the credit union has trusted-partner status, means that the services of the credit union can be used to help tenants who are in arrears or facing eviction. At the same time, the partnership benefits social landlords, because they are assured of receiving the rent that they are due. It also provides budgeting accounts for people who have problems managing their money, which has proven to be extremely helpful in the

light of welfare reform, which has meant that payments have moved from being fortnightly to being monthly for some folk, for example.

I know that members across Scotland will be able to draw on excellent examples from the areas that they represent, and I look forward to hearing more examples of good practice in the course of this evening's debate.

I applaud the support that parties across the chamber have given to credit unions in previous sessions, and I welcome in particular the recently launched junior savers fund, which works with 10 credit unions to develop relationships with local schools. That progress is great, but there is still much to be done to make Scotland even more of a credit union nation.

It is encouraging to note, too, that the recent manifestos of every party in this chamber included a commitment to supporting and expanding the role of credit unions in Scottish society. Equally, it is good to note the substantial cross-party support that was gathered by the charter that was published by the Scottish section of the Association of British Credit Unions last year.

Among other things, the charter calls for employers to be encouraged to partner with credit unions; for people's financial health to be improved by the encouragement of regular saving and responsible borrowing; for a stronger credit union presence to be developed in schools; and for the capacity of credit unions as providers of affordable credit in our society to be promoted and supported. I look forward to working with members across the chamber to achieve those aims during the parliamentary session.

I have finished a little ahead of time, so I will give a quick plug to the cross-party group on credit unions, which has already received good support from across Parliament. Anyone else who wishes to join would be most welcome.

17:09

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

I thank Ruth Maguire for securing the debate and for giving us the opportunity to celebrate international credit union day 2016, which allows us to discuss and to acknowledge the importance of the credit union movement for Scotland and the people of Scotland and to highlight the future benefits that credit unions can deliver.

Credit unions play a unique role in offering savings, loans and a range of services to their members that might not otherwise be available to them, or if they are available to them elsewhere, the credit union offers them on affordable terms.

With membership of about 380,000 in Scotland, credit unions play a leading role in their

communities. As Ruth Maguire said, they are often thought of as community banks. Scotland benefits from proportionally higher credit union membership than the rest of the UK—indeed, it has the fourth-highest level in Europe.

I am pleased to say that credit unions in Scotland have benefited from measures that have been taken both in this Parliament and by the United Kingdom Government. For example, as Ruth Maguire mentioned, the UK Government announced an ambitious credit union expansion project with up to £38 million being allocated to further development of credit unions across the UK. Many credit unions in Scotland have benefited from it. The credit union expansion project was designed to identify mechanisms to reduce the cost of lending, to assist credit unions to develop new products jointly and to implement a new operating system based on the system that a number of UK banks use, thereby enabling real-time processing of payments and other transactions. Those are all very welcome developments that will widen the reach of the credit unions in Scotland.

In my region, Stirling Credit Union has been credited as being one of the most innovative and forward-thinking credit unions in Scotland. It was established in the late 1990s as a simple means for Stirling Council employees to save and to borrow at affordable levels. Since that time it has expanded, and it is now a community credit union that includes individuals who work in Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Lanarkshire. Its expansion has been very welcome in the local community, and it has recently been successful in encouraging local businesses to take up payroll-based savings schemes, which are important because it is often the case that individuals who save in that way are better savers and the money that they save helps to improve their credit rating. It can help in other areas, too—for example, when people are looking to save for a mortgage.

The Stirling Credit Union has also established a junior savers scheme, such as Ruth Maguire mentioned, which has expanded to include primary and secondary schools. Introducing schoolchildren to finance and to saving at an early stage is a very welcome step because it means that in their lives beyond school, they will be familiar with both those concepts.

I offer my congratulations to the many people across Scotland who have made credit unions a success. It is my pleasure to support the motion in the name of Ruth Maguire, and I look forward to supporting the continued leadership of the Scottish credit unions.

17:13

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Ruth Maguire for securing what is, I think, the annual debate on credit unions. It is very welcome. I declare an interest as a member of the Blackburn, Seafield & District Credit Union, where my mum is a volunteer.

We all understand that credit unions are a great facility that provide local and very much needed low-cost banking and financial services in our communities. Despite the best efforts of the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer to put some smaller credit unions out of business with reforms that members have mentioned, they have overcome what has been a very difficult period for some of them.

In my region, West Lothian Credit Union has just announced that it has given out £10 million in loans to the local community, which is a fantastic achievement. The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities and I were delighted to attend its celebratory event. It and other credit unions are always innovating and trying to bring in new products, for example by going into schools. West Lothian Credit Union recently opened the cashtray savings account to help people to stop smoking. They also offer prepaid debit cards, free wills and, of course, loans at much cheaper rates of finance than the likes of Provident Personal Credit, Wonga, KwikCash and Brighthouse. That is critical.

Credit unions have more than 1.2 million members across the UK and, as has been said, more than 350,000 in Scotland. Those numbers are good, but there is so much more that we can do in respect of the untapped membership out there. Just 7 per cent of our population are members of such ethical financial co-operatives; the figure should be much higher. We need to create an atmosphere and a culture in which credit union membership is the norm. Baby accounts, children's accounts, young savers accounts, holiday loans, white-goods loans, Christmas clubs, school clubs, mortgages and business loans are examples of products that could and should be provided and taken up by many more people, but for that to happen, we must all promote the credit union ideal and, where possible, follow up our warm words with action and—crucially—budget. Investment in credit union development is truly preventative spend, from which all of us will benefit.

I pay tribute to all credit unions across the world, and to the people in our communities who, day in and day out, provide essential lines of credit to our constituents, to our families and friends and, indeed, to ourselves.

17:16

Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): I join others in thanking Ruth Maguire for bringing the debate to the chamber and enabling us to recognise the great contribution that credit unions make.

In celebration of the sector's positive economic impact in financial services and social change, the theme of this year's international credit union day was "the authentic difference". The continual growth of Scotland's credit union sector has led to an increase in membership. Credit unions are owned and controlled by their members. Because they are owned by their users, unlike other institutions, which are owned by stakeholders and investors, credit unions put their emphasis on providing the best possible service to their members instead of just increasing profits.

The most recent figures published by the Bank of Scotland reveal that Scottish credit unions have more than £562 million in assets, that they have given out £296 million to members in loans and that they hold £484 million in savings. Credit unions are protected by the financial services compensation scheme, which means that exactly the same protection is afforded to money that is held in a credit union as would be afforded to money that is held in a normal bank.

It is right that Scotland's credit unions be recognised for the work that they do and their success here in Scotland and in a wider, global context. As has been said, the 100 credit unions in Scotland have a membership of more than 387,000, which represents 7 per cent of the population. The fact that that percentage is higher in Scotland than that in the rest of the UK shows that the uptake in Scotland has been positive.

In 2015, the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd accepted the outstanding membership growth award from the World Council of Credit Unions and, in February this year, the Scottish Government published a report on the work of Scottish credit unions. The report highlights the success of Lanarkshire Credit Union's interesting savvy savers project, in which it was able to help more than 7,000 primary and secondary school pupils save more than £650,000. Savvy savers works in 74 primary schools and five secondary schools in South Lanarkshire. It employs full-time school project workers to promote education on financial responsibility, forward planning and money management in an effort to tackle poverty. That is just one example of the way in which credit unions can work with schools to increase the financial awareness of future generations.

Last year, ABCUL produced "Scotland's Credit Union Charter", in which it suggested changes that we, as parliamentarians, could make to help

Scotland to become a credit union nation. Among the suggestions were that we could encourage

“all employers to partner with credit unions to make saving and repaying loans via payroll deduction a standard workplace benefit for people across Scotland”,

and that we could promote

“credit unions as providers of affordable credit for people from all walks of life.”

I think that those are good suggestions that we could take forward.

It is also important that we in the chamber recognise our local credit unions. In my Edinburgh East constituency, there is the Castle Credit Union, which I know has been working hard to help the community flourish. As our local credit unions grow, more money is brought into communities, and that is obviously a benefit to all of us across Scotland.

17:20

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): It is with great pleasure that I participate in this debate. I thank Ruth Maguire for lodging the motion and giving Parliament the opportunity to express our appreciation for and raise awareness of the credit union movement’s critical work both in Scotland and internationally.

And what a movement it is, having begun around 1852—or even in 1844, according to one analysis—with the simple idea that people could pool their money and make loans to one another along the principles of co-operative interdependence, a community-first mentality and a volunteer management structure. I note that there are now perhaps 57,480 credit unions in 105 countries around the world, and collectively they serve 217.4 million members and oversee \$1.79 trillion in assets.

With that international footprint, international credit union day, which took place on 20 October, is vital not merely for reflecting on credit union history and achievements but for promoting the credit union ethos and raising awareness. It is a day to honour those who have dedicated their lives to the movement, to recognise the hard work of those who work in the credit union industry and to show appreciation for the members.

Interestingly, the first credit union day was in 1927, on the birthday of America’s apostle of thrift, Benjamin Franklin, who early credit union founders believed symbolised

“the life and teaching embodied in the spirit and purpose of credit unions.”

However, that day folded because people were too busy to celebrate.

The motion asks us to commemorate the “impact and achievements” of credit unions. Since the Credit Unions Act 1979 was passed, which gave a common regulation framework for the movement, the credit union philosophy of mutual self-help has gone from strength to strength. At the macro level, more than 1.2 million members in the UK have recognised the value of credit unions and have savings approaching £1.1 billion with them. As we have heard, there are in Scotland about 100 credit unions with a combined membership of more than 387,000 or, as has been said, about 7 per cent of the population.

I cannot really talk about Cunninghame South, as the motion requests, but I can talk about the north-east. Drilling down into the north-east region, I can say that the Angus, Tay Valley, Dundee, Grampian, North East Scotland and St Machar credit unions provide a vital service, offering easy-access savings accounts and ultimately, given the interest rate cap at 3 per cent per month on the reducing balance, a responsible alternative to the high-interest payday loan companies that can place individuals and families under a burden of debt for many years.

The largest credit union in the north-east, Grampian Credit Union, is one of the leaders in Scotland, with innovative saving schemes and loan programmes. It leads the way in the field of payroll saving schemes, with more than 30 companies and organisations including NHS Grampian, Aberdeen City Council, VSA, the University of Aberdeen and Aberdeen Foyer all signed up to its staff saving schemes. Those schemes have proved to be an easier way to save and evidence has shown that they make better savers.

It is clear to me—and, judging by the contributions from around the chamber, everyone here—that credit unions really do make “the authentic difference”. Even though we in this chamber often have authentic and deeply felt differences, I have no doubt that in supporting this motion, we, like the credit unions themselves, share a “common bond”.

17:24

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I, too, welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate on international credit union day and I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing the issue to Parliament. The debate gives us the opportunity not only to celebrate credit unions’ “impact and achievements” in Scotland and worldwide but to raise awareness of their work and to encourage more people across Scotland to become members and utilise their services.

Scotland has a long history in financial services and a proud record of community spirit and co-operative ventures. The credit union movement brings both of those together. It benefits many people across our society and provides benefits to our economy.

Scotland's credit union movement is growing. There are now more than 100 credit unions across the country with a total of 388,000 members, and they manage savings that are worth more than £400 million.

Several credit unions operate in my constituency. They operate in Easterhouse, Haghill and Dennistoun, Cranhill, and Carntyne and Riddrie. All provide local services to support people who often may not be in a position to benefit from standard banking or financial services. I am a member of Glasgow Credit Union, which is one of the largest in the country.

Scotland needs a variety of financial service offerings to ensure that all people in society can access both saving and lending services that are suitable to their needs. Credit unions offer that in complementing traditional services. They also have the great advantage of typically operating with a local focus and with ownership structures that are based on co-operative principles. That gives them resilience and a firm grounding in the communities that they serve.

New models of saving and lending are an important part of ensuring the financial health of everybody in society. That is recognised by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which recommends credit unions and the role that they can play in reducing poverty.

Credit unions are more than a service to borrowers and savers. A thriving and growing credit union sector in Scotland can play a major role in bringing more people actively into the economy, and building strength and resilience in areas that are too often excluded from economic activity. They provide a role in supporting entrepreneurship and the development of microbusinesses across Scotland. Our economy as a whole needs that to drive our aspirations for inclusive growth.

As the motion clearly reminds us, credit unions are an international phenomenon. One of the most famous credit unions is Grameen Bank, which was founded in Bangladesh by Muhammad Yunus, who was later awarded a Nobel peace prize for his work in establishing microcredit facilities among poor women in Bangladesh. That shows that the financial services model that credit unions use can deliver results in supporting financial independence for the most marginalised groups. I worked in Bangladesh at the time when Grameen Bank first achieved international recognition and

witnessed at first hand the tremendous impact that it had on individuals and communities.

Over the years, Scottish Governments of all persuasions have provided support to help to develop the credit union sector, and all parties support taking steps to encourage its future growth.

The credit union movement in Scotland looks for support in a number of practical ways. It encourages employers to engage with the movement and to offer payroll deductions services for employees for savings and loan repayments to credit unions. It encourages schools, colleges and universities to teach about credit unions and financial management. The significant rise in young people who are becoming members of credit unions is to be welcomed. Early education in financial management and co-operative principles is a benefit to our society and our economy. The credit union movement also promotes credit unions and supports the development of their capacity to play a more substantial role in offering financial services.

By raising awareness of credit unions through such debates, we can all play our part to help to make Scotland a credit union nation.

17:28

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): As other members have done, I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing this members' business debate to the Parliament to mark international credit union day. I look forward to working with her in her role as convener of the cross-party group on credit unions. I am particularly pleased to speak in the debate as a new deputy convener of that reformed cross-party group and as a member of the Scottish Co-operative Party MSP group in the Parliament.

As all members know, credit unions are co-ops, which means, of course, that they are owned by their membership. That is a very inclusive model, which is a significant and important point. Obviously, the main emphasis will always be on providing the best service for their members, and not on profit.

I wish Lanarkshire Credit Union a happy 25th birthday. I am looking forward to attending its birthday party on Friday night to help it to celebrate all the hard work that it has done over the past 25 years. I am definitely looking forward to some cake at the party after a long week in the Parliament.

We all know about the importance of credit unions in Scotland. In difficult financial times, they help people not only to save for the future but when they are most in financial need.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Is the member aware of the wee Glasgow loan initiative, which is run by Glasgow City Council along with Pollok Credit Union and BCD Credit Union, and which offers people low-cost loans so that they are not preyed on by lenders of payday loans? Does she agree that that kind of initiative should be supported across the country?

Claudia Beamish: I thank the member for that important intervention. Other members have also highlighted the issue of payday loans. The heavy advertising of them on television seems to have diminished, but it is shocking how those lenders prey on vulnerable people.

Credit unions are truly for everyone. Whether someone joins a credit union through their work or goes to their local credit union to get a loan, they are joining the 387,000 people who are already members in some way, shape or form. It is true that many people across Scotland are only a few pay days away from being in financial trouble, and being a member of a credit union can help people to prepare for the unexpected.

At the start of the year, I was delighted to visit the newly established outreach branch of the Lanarkshire Credit Union in Carluke. Lanarkshire Credit Union worked closely with the local community council to provide a service to local people, who did not necessarily know about credit unions. By setting up an outreach branch, the credit union has enabled local people to use its facilities without the having to deal with the geographical challenges of setting up a permanent office. The credit union has had the help of volunteers—we should recognise that that is often the case with credit unions. We need to be mindful of people in rural areas where there can be geographical difficulties.

This summer I was pleased to meet Alison Dowling from the Capital Credit Union, whose common bond area covers Midlothian and the Scottish Borders, which is in the region that both the minister and I represent. Alison Dowling told me that even though there was difficulty in setting up an outreach branch in the Borders—like the one in Carluke—people in the Borders could still be members of the credit union. Things such as online banking and payroll deduction have meant that it has become easier to join a credit union.

Ash Denham and others have mentioned support for young people. To be competitive about it, I was pleased to read that growth in the number of junior savers is higher in Scotland in comparison with other parts of the UK. Ash Denham mentioned that the Lanarkshire Credit Union teaches about debt and how to manage finances in a fun way. I hope that that is happening in other parts of Scotland. The sharing of models can be invaluable, and the cross-party

group on credit unions can certainly help with that. Members have brought forward a lot of exciting and valuable suggestions for future agendas.

As we have heard, the theme of this year's international credit union day is "the authentic difference", which celebrates the positive impact that credit unions have on financial services and social change. I truly believe that they have a lot to celebrate.

17:32

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing this important motion to us tonight. The motion talks about commemorating the impact, which is significant, and the achievements, which I would say are many, of credit unions.

Like others, I declare an interest. I am a member of the Scottish Police Credit Union. Indeed, in the roll-out from what was formerly the Strathclyde Police Credit Union, I was the first member in the north of Scotland as we trialled the system of payroll deduction. An important way to encourage membership is to have employers play a role in deductions from salary.

The significant strength of the credit union system is the common bond, whether it is one of geography—where often credit unions play a significant role—or a bond within the workforce. I commend the work of trade unions and staff associations with employers in connection with that model.

The ethos, which as been mentioned, of people helping people is highly commendable. Not-for-profit co-operatives seem to me a very attractive basis for going about business, in that the benefits are retained and indeed shared. Ash Denham and Claudia Beamish highlighted the phrase "authentic difference". What a significant contrast there is with the banking industry, no member of which is likely to win the fair banking award that was referred to. That once-honourable profession has been largely discredited by greed and by an ethos that is the complete reverse of that which underpins the credit union.

Credit unions are about effective and affordable financial services, and the motion details their global reach. On a day when we have all had a lot to say about the United States, it was compelling to read that US employers can offer credit union membership as a condition of employment. That is an interesting departure from what some might expect.

I am particularly interested in credit unions' reach into our more vulnerable communities and the role of volunteers, which our colleague Neil Findlay talked about. There are a number of credit

unions in my area, and the fact that they will pitch up at the local community centre at a known time is an important factor. I welcome the increasing membership of credit unions and particularly the junior membership, which a number of other speakers have mentioned. If that leads to a lifelong connection with the credit union movement, it can only be a good thing. Why is that important? It is because of the effect on young people's attitudes to money. Savings are respected, and the lending is responsible and not exploitative.

I am particularly delighted that this is a non-party-political debate. I commend Conservative colleagues for their comments. The fact that support for credit unions is part of every party's manifesto is significant and it shows that people recognise that they are a force for positive economic change.

Another factor that we must not lose sight of is that credit unions empower people and communities. The motion mentions

"growing the role played by credit unions",

and they are capable of more. Historically, the credit union movement has come up against resistance from the big banks. We have heard of the excellent work that credit unions have done to counter payday loans and store cards and, importantly, encourage people not only to borrow but to save as they are borrowing.

Credit unions are a valuable and very ethical part of civic Scotland and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about them tonight.

17:36

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I declare an interest as a member of Capital Credit Union.

I, too, congratulate Ruth Maguire on securing this debate and on the re-establishment of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on credit unions, which was a well-respected CPG in the previous session of Parliament.

I am really glad that the Scottish Government is giving about £200,000 of funding to support credit unions in establishing schemes in schools and helping children to understand the importance of saving and managing money. That is vital work in our communities, especially as it is often the most vulnerable people, who find it most difficult to balance their cheque book, who can get the greatest advantages from a credit union in their community.

A lot has been said about the benefits of credit unions. I thank the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd for its briefing for the debate, but I also

want to talk about the smaller Scottish League of Credit Unions, which works closely with one of my local credit unions: Wishaw Credit Union. The strength of the league is that it supports community-focused credit unions whatever stage of development they are at. It recognises and respects the different needs and aspirations of individual credit unions and will not seek to impose a particular model on its members.

It has come out so much in this debate that credit unions are of their community. Some will do outreach and some will do different types of work in their community. I was really interested to hear earlier from Neil Findlay about the anti-smoking projects; he also mentioned volunteers, who are hugely important. That is another reason why it is so important for credit unions to engage with our young people. The volunteers in our credit unions are ageing, unfortunately, and we need young people to come on board and fulfil that role as well.

The Scottish League of Credit Unions concentrates on the key themes of education through group training sessions using materials that are provided to its members; advice on legislative, compliance and financial issues; networking for credit unions to come together and share good practice; facilitation where its members want to co-ordinate with each other to achieve common goals; representation at the local, Scottish and UK Government levels and in other credit union organisations; and the promotion of credit unions in our constituencies.

It is important to note that credit unions are different and they approach people differently. One in your area, Presiding Officer, which I covered previously, is East Kilbride Credit Union. On its website, it welcomes everyone and provides its vision, its mission statement and its commitment to its members.

Credit unions are now financially secure: the financial services compensation scheme is associated with them and they are covered by the Prudential Regulation Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority.

That security is important, not just because payday lenders prey on people in difficult situations. I remember the collapse of the Farepak savings scheme. Although a banking technicality meant that people who had paid into the scheme by direct debit were able to recover some of their money, many people lost money that they thought was safe. It is important that people know about the financial security of credit unions.

However, the new approach places a burden on volunteers, who have to know financial regulation and take part in modular training schemes from the Chartered Banker Institute. Members' money

is used to train volunteers, and that is a concern, because we want credit unions to continue to be sustainable and to provide a wonderful service in our communities.

17:40

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): I thank Ruth Maguire for lodging her motion. We have heard excellent speeches from members across the Parliament. Like John Finnie, I am delighted that the motion and the debate attracted genuine cross-party support.

Credit unions play a vital role in our economy by providing a range of ethical financial products and services to a wide range of customers, many of whom face financial exclusion. Like other members, I congratulate the people who developed the movement in Scotland. I wish Lanarkshire Credit Union a happy 25th birthday—Claudia Beamish might pass that on when she attends the birthday party.

Credit unions are part of a dynamic, growing and increasingly global movement for change, as Liam Kerr, Dean Lockhart and other members said. The World Council of Credit Unions estimates that there are approximately 60,000 member-owned, not-for-profit financial co-operatives worldwide. As Claudia Beamish said, the co-operative model operates for the benefit of members on a not-for-profit basis. That is a key and important part of the approach and ethos of credit unions.

As Ruth Maguire and other members said, Scotland has a good pedigree when it comes to this more inclusive way of doing finance. For more than 45 years, credit unions have proudly served our communities, providing members from all walks of life with more than basic financial services. As Ruth Maguire and Ivan McKee said, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has pointed to the role of credit unions in reducing poverty.

In my new role, I have been pleasantly surprised to learn that the proportion of people who are enrolled in a credit union is significantly higher in Scotland than it is in England and Wales. According to Bank of England data, which a number of members cited, the proportion in Scotland is 7 per cent, whereas in England and Wales the comparable figures are 1.5 per cent and 2.6 per cent, respectively. The sector deserves a lot of credit for identifying and exploring need in Scotland and for its reach here.

The figures indicate that there is great potential for growth in England and Wales, too. It is important to highlight that on the occasion of a celebration of the role of credit unions world wide.

As I think Neil Findlay said, there is room for further expansion.

As we heard, around 100 credit unions are operating across Scotland, with a combined membership of 387,000, assets of £560 million and aggregate lending of £296 million to members—at least, those are the figures that I have to hand. It is right that the Scottish Government is committed to working with credit unions to support and promote their important work.

That is why the Scottish Government established the credit union working group in October 2014, under the chair of Fergus Ewing, who was Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism at the time. The group included credit unions, their representative bodies, advice services and the Accountant in Bankruptcy. It considered a wide range of topics and identified two key priorities for strengthening Scotland's credit union movement: first, to help credit unions to play a fuller role in the delivery of financial education—we heard some great examples in that regard—and secondly, to support the expansion of payroll deduction schemes as a standard workplace benefit. Ruth Maguire, Dean Lockhart and others referred to that.

On financial education, I agree with members that it is vital that children grow up with an understanding of money and saving. The junior savers schemes that credit unions run in partnership with schools are an excellent way to teach children aspects of numeracy and social studies in a real-world context, as well as helping them to develop a culture of saving and responsible borrowing.

As Claudia Beamish highlighted, it is great to see such positive growth in the number of junior savers. We believe that the schemes embed a savings ethos among pupils at a young age by holding regular collections of children's savings in the school, often with the incentive of saving towards a school trip or another goal. By running the schemes, credit unions play a vital role in helping to educate children in money matters, often incurring a financial loss themselves. We should recognise that the role that credit unions play is not always without cost to themselves.

Delivering on the credit union working group's recommendation to explore the development of junior saver schemes, the Scottish Government announced a new £300,000 funding scheme in March that is aimed at supporting credit unions to develop sustainable junior saver schemes in schools across Scotland. Credit unions were invited to bid for funding over the summer, and in September the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities announced that 10 credit unions are set to receive

Scottish Government funding to launch new junior saver schemes throughout the country.

Each credit union is aiming to set up at least three new junior saver schemes in its local community, and the Scottish Government will work closely with them to share learning from those schemes with the sector. Funding is also being made available to support the production of a junior savers toolkit, which is being produced by the credit union sector and Education Scotland working in partnership. The toolkit will bring together best practice, providing a useful resource for all credit unions in Scotland well beyond the life of the funding. It is hoped that it will have a legacy value. With Education Scotland as a key partner, we will ensure that the toolkit is consistent with the curriculum, helping pupils to develop a broadly based financial capability focusing on understanding competence, responsibility and enterprise, which will make the offer of junior saver schemes even more attractive to schools.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): As the co-convenor of the cross-party group on co-operatives, I am delighted that the minister recognises the close connection between credit unions and the co-op movement. Does he acknowledge that the world's first recorded co-op was established in Fenwick, in my constituency, in 1761, some 83 years before the one in Rochdale? That is a continuing source of pride for my constituents in Fenwick.

Paul Wheelhouse: Fenwick deserves a round of applause. I am delighted to acknowledge that there is such a long history of the co-operative movement in East Ayrshire, and I welcome Willie Coffey's remarks in support of Fenwick.

Ash Denham and other members have referred to payroll deduction in the context of "the authentic difference", and it plays an important role. The second key priority identified by the credit union working group is support for the expansion of payroll deduction schemes, which credit unions see as key to ensuring a more sustainable future. Such schemes offer a convenient way for employees to save into a credit union account directly from their salary, which, in turn, helps credit unions to build a wide and varied customer base of borrowers and long-term savers. In order to further that aim and demonstrate support for credit unions, the First Minister has written a letter, which is available for credit unions to use, that encourages employers to partner with a credit union to enjoy the benefits of payroll savings for both staff and the organisation.

The Scottish Government's business pledge includes a recommendation that employers, under their workforce engagement commitments, should offer payroll deduction savings as a standard workplace benefit. That is yet another reason to

encourage the business pledge. In addition, in the coming months, following a recommendation in the credit union working group's report, the Scottish Government will develop a package of resources for credit unions to use when they are engaging with employers to make setting up payroll deduction schemes a smoother process for all parties. Payroll deduction schemes are an excellent way of bringing wider benefits to the workforce, and the Scottish Government believes that employees can take advantage of payroll deduction. Last month, on international credit union day, we invited our credit union partner into the Scottish Government offices to raise awareness of that important employee benefit among our staff.

John Finnie and other members have referred to the accessibility of credit unions. The debate is taking place at a time of contraction in the number of bank branches. Credit unions, which are locally based, community based or workforce based, will be able to extend the reach of financial services to those who are affected by branch closures.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving financial wellbeing and reducing income inequality to create a wealthier and fairer Scotland for all its citizens. I am delighted that we have had such a positive discussion around the role of credit unions in that capacity. Members across the chamber recognise the huge contribution that credit unions make by providing responsible and ethical financial services that strengthen the financial capability of communities and change individual lives for the better, as members have said. We will continue to support that important work and raise the profile of the credit union movement in Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:49.

Correction

Humza Yousaf has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):

At col 2, paragraph 4—

Original text—

Secondly, we were elected on a manifesto promise to do what we are doing with BTP integration, and I remind the member that we got more votes than his party and the main Opposition party combined.

Corrected text—

Secondly, we stood on a platform to do what we are doing with BTP integration, and I remind the member that we got more votes than his party and the main Opposition party combined.

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