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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 16 November 2016**

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 November 2016

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time. I repeat—more in hope than expectation—that, to get as many members in as possible, I would prefer short questions and short and succinct answers. Let us see how far that takes me.

#### Department for International Development (Meetings in East Kilbride)

1. **Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will next meet the Department for International Development in East Kilbride. (S5O-00335)

**The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan):** I wrote to both James Wharton MP, parliamentary under-secretary of state at the United Kingdom Government's Department for International Development, and Rory Stewart MP, minister of state at the department, in August to congratulate each of them on their then recent appointments, and to express the desire to meet to discuss areas of mutual interest. A meeting date has not yet been confirmed, but it has subsequently been discussed and a meeting is intended to be arranged by DFID when Mr Wharton or Mr Stewart visits East Kilbride. Scottish Government officials and DFID officials are in touch on a regular basis but, at present, no meeting has been diarised to take place in East Kilbride.

**Linda Fabiani:** When the minister meets those Westminster ministers in East Kilbride, I ask him to emphasise the sizeable contribution that Scotland makes to the UK international aid budget, much of which is administered from East Kilbride. I also ask him to emphasise Scotland's concern at the UK Secretary of State for International Development's contention that aid funding could be cut unless it proves to be in the UK's national interest. Will he further emphasise that the Scottish Government and those who work in international aid in this country do not consider international aid to be a bargaining chip?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am tempted to say that that was not a short supplementary, Ms Fabiani, but that would be very naughty of me.

**Dr Allan:** I can certainly confirm that, in our contact with the UK Government, we will emphasise the good work that both Governments do on the ground.

As the member has raised the issue, I will comment on the remarks that were made about aid and international development being in the national interest. The Scottish Government sees international development as being part of being a good global citizen. I hope that aid spend by the UK Government, whether by DFID or via other UK departments, will clearly be designed to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries, and will not be tied to the UK's national interest in any selfish way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2 has not been lodged.

### European Union Referendum

3. **Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will next meet the United Kingdom Government regarding the result of the European Union referendum. (S5O-00337)

**The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell):** The Scottish Government has a distinct role in protecting Scotland's economic and social interests and reflecting the outcome of the EU referendum in Scotland. As such, we continue to engage regularly at both official and ministerial level with the UK Government. The next meeting of the joint ministerial committee (EU negotiations) will be next month.

**Mary Fee:** As the minister is aware, the result of the EU referendum almost certainly guarantees the end of the Human Rights Act 1998, which the Tory Government is set to repeal and replace with a British bill of rights. What discussions have taken place to ensure protection of all the rights that are guaranteed through the European convention on human rights and the Human Rights Act 1998?

**Michael Russell:** The standing council on Europe, among other bodies, has discussed human rights and the protection of rights. The issue of social protection features heavily in the First Minister's five tests for future options.

I am very much of the view that the former head of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, Professor Alan Miller, has taken. He has talked of the need to ensure that there is no regression on such matters, that there is continued progress, and that we have the opportunity to be different and to do better. We will keep that very much in mind as we move forward, and I look forward to receiving Labour's support in ensuring that that happens.

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** The minister will be aware of the leaked memorandum that suggests that there is no UK Government plan for Brexit and that it will be another six months before the UK Government agrees its priorities, in stark contrast to the Scottish Government's approach. Will the minister outline his views on that?

**Michael Russell:** I am aware of the leaked memo. Of course, neither the UK Government nor the Scottish Government comments on leaked memos, but I simply say that, from what I have seen to date, the expected timescale of six months appears to be a little hopeful.

### Tourism

4. **Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how important tourism is to the economy. (S5O-00338)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** Tourism, as one of our key growth sectors, is vital to Scotland's economy. In 2015, spending by tourists in Scotland generated approximately £11 billion of economic activity in the wider Scottish supply chain. In 2015, there were 217,000 tourism-related jobs in Scotland, which amounts to approximately 8.5 per cent of employment.

**Bruce Crawford:** As a result of the United Kingdom and potentially Scotland exiting the European Union, and given the projected significant impact on the Scottish economy, does the cabinet secretary agree that the role of the tourism industry in Scotland becomes even more important? Given that, in future, approximately £11 billion of Scottish Government expenditure will come from taxes that are raised in Scotland, does she agree that continuing to grow Scottish tourism through the efforts of VisitScotland will be a vital component of future economic success?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member makes a very important point. Tourist spend recently broke through the £5 billion barrier, and the economic activity that tourism generates will become increasingly important to the economy. Economic analysis by Deloitte shows that every £1 that is invested in VisitScotland generates £39 in gross economic activity, £7 in new money or £3.61 in gross value added. It is clear that tourism is a growing sector and is key to our economy, and the Parliament and Government must recognise the income that tourism will generate from this day forward.

**Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con):** As the cabinet secretary said, 8 per cent of Scotland's workforce is employed in the Scottish hospitality industry and tourism sector, which is vitally important to Scotland's economy. What is the

Scottish Government doing to meet the industry's needs for a fully skilled workforce and quality employment opportunities to increase the attractiveness of working in the sector?

**Fiona Hyslop:** This morning, I was delighted to launch the Scottish Bed and Breakfast Association, which is a new network to support the small accommodation sector in the tourism industry. Some weeks ago, I—together with the Scottish Tourism Alliance and other partners—helped to launch the "Skills Investment Plan for Scotland's tourism sector", which has been put together with the industry, Skills Development Scotland and other players. It is very important to ensure that we have a pipeline and that people recognise the sector as a good career choice. There are extensive opportunities in the sector and we want to ensure that it is an attractive field in which to do business. We also want to encourage the growth of skills in the sector in order to maintain and develop the quality of our offer.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for agreeing to attend the next meeting on 29 November of the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism. Does she agree that marine tourism, which incorporates cruise tourism, is a vital sector in providing future growth and employment opportunities across the country?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I do indeed. The member is a great advocate of the marine tourism sector, which needs to develop and grow. There are challenges in how we do that, but I am delighted to be able to attend the meeting of the cross-party group on 29 November. I am very keen, as the cabinet secretary who is newly responsible for this area, to ensure that we maximise the opportunities provided by marine tourism around our wonderful coast and bring in new income. Recently, I was delighted to open the new pontoon at Fort William, which will provide new opportunities for cruise liners to come to the town.

### Tourism (Highlands and Islands)

5. **David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to VisitScotland and the Highland Council to encourage tourists to the Highlands and Islands, including by ensuring that the north coast 500 route is fully maintained. (S5O-00339)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** The Scottish Government is supporting the north coast 500 by ensuring that the economic benefits are realised through the establishment of a strategic group by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which includes VisitScotland and Highland Council.

Transport Scotland is directly responsible for the 111 miles of trunk roads that form 20 per cent of the route, and we will do all that we can to ensure that those roads are well maintained. Local roads are the responsibility of local authorities, and the Scottish Government has delivered to Highland Council a fair funding settlement of nearly £465 million in 2016-17. The strategic group is meeting today and, given the member's close interest in the subject, I will ask HIE to provide him with an update on the progress that is being made.

**David Stewart:** Does the cabinet secretary share my view that the NC 500 is an iconic route that has provided a welcome stimulus to tourism in the Highlands? Would she agree to meet me to discuss concerns that constituents have raised about issues such as congestion on the route, speeding, provision of signage, off-road facilities and road maintenance?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am interested in finding out more about the route. A number of constituency members have contacted me on the issue, so perhaps we could do something collectively. Interestingly, a survey that was undertaken by North Highland Initiative indicated that more than 85 per cent of drivers on the coast route experienced no congestion on it, but we clearly need to get more information about what is required. It is interesting and important that the Scottish Government asked for Transport Scotland to be included in the meeting of the strategic group that is taking place today, and Transport Scotland is participating in that. If I can find out more about what results from those discussions, I will certainly be happy to meet at the appropriate time.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I share David Stewart's view that the north coast 500 is an iconic route. It has been an excellent vehicle to encourage people to visit the Highlands. Will the Scottish Government join me in asking VisitScotland to specifically promote the route during its advertising campaign in 2017 to ensure that as many people as possible come to the Highlands?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will indeed. The member might be interested to know that the north coast 500 has already featured in most domestic and international marketing promotions. Those include but are not limited to seven regional advertisement features, six direct mail pack features, one Canadian advertising campaign feature, 15 public relations pieces and five press trips that were financed by VisitScotland. The total reach so far of the north coast 500 promotion is more than 900 million people. Promotion is already taking place, but I am sure that VisitScotland will also want to take forward the opportunity that the member mentions.

## **Brexit (Discussions with United Kingdom Government)**

**6. Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** My question is further to Mary Fee's question.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its discussions with the United Kingdom Government regarding Brexit. (S5O-00340)

**The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell):** Last week, I attended the first joint ministerial committee (EU negotiations) meeting in London. I made it clear that membership of the single market and the benefits that flow from it, including free movement of labour, are essential for Scotland's economic prosperity, which is a point that I have made several times previously in my discussions with David Davis, who is the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union.

I am pleased that the process of involving the Scottish Government and the other devolved Administrations is under way, but the UK Government has still not made clear its strategic intentions about whether it wishes the UK to remain inside the single market or be part of the customs union. The Scottish Government will continue to focus on protecting Scotland's economic and social interests, and we will table proposals in the coming weeks to keep Scotland in the single market.

**Mairi Evans:** I thank the minister for that update. I am sure that the Scottish Government will be aware of the reports that have been released recently. A few weeks ago, a study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicted a £25 billion black hole in public finances. Most recently, a report by Hitachi Capital found that one third of businesses across the UK chose not to invest following the Brexit vote, which resulted in investments worth £65.5 billion being lost to the economy. I would like the Government's response to that.

**Michael Russell:** Those reports illustrate what many people, including us, have been saying—that Brexit will have a hugely damaging impact on the Scottish economy. The Scottish Government is working closely with the enterprise agencies and other partners to ensure that there is a strong package of support for Scottish businesses to maintain and stimulate investment. We expect that, through direct action by the Scottish Government under the small and medium-sized enterprise holding fund, a minimum of £250 million will be released to SMEs over the next 18 months, which will stimulate investment.

The Hitachi Capital report highlights that 70 per cent of businesses would be likely to resume investment if uncertainty over the UK's membership of the single market was resolved. That is why the Scottish Government has raised the issue in the chamber and why we will continue to work to ensure that Scotland continues to benefit from the opportunities of the single market. Our priority is to protect Scotland's interests, and we will consider and take all possible steps to do so.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The minister has previously acknowledged that our customs union brings benefits that are in addition to or separate from those that are conferred by the single market. Will he confirm whether there have been discussions of substance with UK ministers on the customs union? If there have been, what approach is being taken?

**Michael Russell:** I very much agree with Lewis Macdonald that the customs union is of strong importance. There have been no discussions of substance on it only because there have been no discussions of substance on a range of matters.

I noticed yesterday that the Dutch foreign minister indicated that Boris Johnson's view of the customs union was intellectually incoherent, and that is correct. One cannot argue for certain things that are being argued for and believe that the customs union will remain in place. It is another area on which we need clarity, because a lack of a customs union would create enormous difficulties.

#### **Independent Scotland (Representation in European Institutions)**

**7. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out regarding what representation an independent Scotland could have in the European Parliament and on the European Council. (S5O-00341)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** The Scottish Government published in 2013 an analysis of the representation that an independent Scotland as an equal member of the European Union would be likely to have in its institutions. The analysis made it clear that, as an independent member state, Scotland would have 12 or 13 members of the European Parliament, which is 12 or 13 more than a non-independent Scotland will have when the United Kingdom leaves the EU.

An independent Scotland that was a member of the EU would also be able to exercise influence through the European Council. The UK Government plans no membership of, no representation on and no influence in the European Council.

**Jamie Greene:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that the response to leaving one 40-year-old, relatively loose economic union cannot be to leave a solid, 300-year-old, long-established economic, social and political union?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I know that Jamie Greene is obsessed but, in the politics of the here and now, our constituents, the people of Scotland, want this Government and this Parliament to stand up for their interests. We have an opportunity collectively to protect Scotland's interests and pursue the best options that we can to ensure that we have a continuing relationship for the benefit of the people of Scotland. We would like to see the Conservative Party standing up for Scotland, rather than kneeling down to Westminster.

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** Is the cabinet secretary any clearer about how the United Kingdom Government intends to ensure that the wishes of the overwhelming majority of Scottish people, who voted to remain in the EU, are respected?

**Fiona Hyslop:** No. The clarity that we and our constituents, the people of Scotland, need is singularly absent. It is now five months since the referendum on the EU and it is only five months until article 50 is due to be triggered. For us to meaningfully take forward the interests of the Scottish people—on tourism, the creative industries and all the sectors that we have debated in this session—we need clarity from the UK Government, or at least some sense of the direction in which it would like to go.

We are prepared to engage constructively with the UK Government, and we have been for some time. We have met it on a number of occasions and we are desperate to move things forward. The lack of clarity that we have had from the UK Government is very worrying. When we have a Foreign Secretary who tells more to Czech newspapers than to the Westminster Parliament or this Government, we have a great deal to worry about.

#### **Promotion of Public Spaces**

**8. Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Valley tourist board and similar bodies in promoting the country's public spaces. (S5O-00342)

**Fiona Hyslop:** VisitScotland actively promotes Scotland's huge wealth of public spaces through its consumer website [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com). VisitScotland has a specific Greater Glasgow and Clyde Valley destination page that promotes key attractions in the area, such as Strathclyde country park and Bothwell castle, and it links to a local



marketing group, visit Lanarkshire, with which it works closely on promoting the area.

**Richard Lyle:** I welcome the work that is being done to promote our excellent public spaces, especially in my constituency. What other projects and initiatives are being delivered to encourage people to visit spaces such as the historic Bothwell castle in my constituency, which the cabinet secretary mentioned and which is an example of the many fantastic places of interest that we are lucky to have in this country?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Historic Environment Scotland has marketed Bothwell castle in its 77 sites guide. To mark the end of the major archaeological programme that was carried out in June 2015, the Bothwell under siege event was delivered to coincide with the last weekend of the excavation.

In 2016, the Folksy Theatre company produced "As You Like It" at Bothwell castle, and it will return in 2017 with "Twelfth Night". All that is to tie in with the year of history, heritage and archaeology that will take place next year.

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** Country parks such as Chatelherault in Hamilton and Drumpellier park in Coatbridge, and the Bothwell castle walkways, are often a target for antisocial behaviour and vandalism. Beyond a police response and investigation, what support can the Scottish Government offer to tourist boards such as that in Greater Glasgow and Clyde Valley to raise awareness of the issue—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is fine; we have got the message.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Celebrating a sense of place and common ownership helps to tackle public disorder. People need to be proud of their local area so that they do not disrupt it, and I encourage visit Lanarkshire and all others who are involved to make sure that that happens.

## Justice

### Police and Fire Services (VAT)

1. **Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what the impact is on Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service of having to make VAT payments. (S5O-00345)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** VAT incurred by Police Scotland is between £23 million and £25 million per annum, and by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is approximately £10 million per annum. The United Kingdom Government has rejected our repeated requests that the police and fire services in Scotland be able to recover VAT. Its position creates a glaring disparity in the treatment of

police and fire services among all the parts of the UK. Such unequal and unfair treatment completely contradicts the repeated assurances of fairer treatment for Scotland that were made by the UK Government.

**Kenneth Gibson:** In their 2011 manifestos, the Tories and Labour supported the formation of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, but they are the first to moan about the resources that are available to those services. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if the Tories genuinely want to represent Scotland's interests, they should join us in demanding that their Westminster colleagues both restore to Scotland the £76.5 million that the Treasury has taken and ensure that the services are zero-rated for VAT?

**Michael Matheson:** Yes, I agree with Kenneth Gibson: the money would be better directed towards keeping the people of Scotland safe. I will reinforce the point that the chief constable made in a submission to the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. He stated:

"Police Scotland was formed in April 2013 we have paid £76.5M in VAT and we remain the only police organisation in the United Kingdom to pay VAT."

The chief constable has been very clear on the point, and the chair of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Pat Watters, has raised concerns with MPs on a cross-party basis about the inequity of the position that we find ourselves in with only Scotland's fire and police services being unable to recover VAT.

Members might also be interested to know that, since Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service were turned into single services, the UK Government has been able to provide other organisations with VAT exemptions. Health Education England, the Health Research Authority, the strategic highways company—otherwise known as Highways England—the London Legacy Development Corporation and academy schools have all been given the ability to reclaim VAT, but Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have not.

I hope that, for once, the Tories in this Parliament will stand up for Scotland's interests, for our police service and for our firefighters by calling for VAT to be reclaimed for those services.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I hope that the cabinet secretary will provide Parliament with all the information when he is making such claims. He cited Highways England and will be aware that it is eligible for VAT refunds on certain services under section 41 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994, but he is asking for exemptions for Police Scotland under section 33 of that act, so he is not comparing apples with apples.

**Michael Matheson:** As ever, the Tories find a way of wriggling out of standing up for Scotland's interests. We are not asking for anything special; we are asking for parity of treatment for our police and fire services. As ever, the Tories are happy to do down Scotland; they are never prepared to stand up for it. VAT is a Tory tax on our fire and police services. That is unacceptable. As ever, the Tories are not prepared to stand up for Scotland's interests.

### **Legal Proceedings (External Jurisdictions)**

**2. Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it can provide to people from Scotland who are engaged in legal proceedings in jurisdictions outside Scotland. (S5O-00346)

**The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing):** It is for individuals themselves to raise and defend legal proceedings in other jurisdictions. In international parental child abduction and child maintenance cases, support is available from the Scottish Government's central authority team.

**Kate Forbes:** Engaging in legal proceedings around divorce and custody in another jurisdiction in the United Kingdom can be challenging, especially emotionally and financially, and can cause significant damage to relationships between children and both parents. How can the Scottish Government better assist parents who are dealing with child contact and residence orders between and across jurisdictions?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I acknowledge the considerable stress that is caused in cross-border cases, including cases across the UK jurisdictions.

The Scottish Government cannot provide direct assistance to parents who are dealing with child contact and residence cases in other jurisdictions in the UK. However, we provide financial support to a number of family support organisations, including Families Need Fathers. In addition, we intend to produce a guidance circular for legal practitioners and others in Scotland on the existing provisions that govern the area in the Family Law Act 1986, which applies across the UK and applies to cross-jurisdiction family actions. We will also continue discussions with our opposite numbers in the UK Ministry of Justice and the Northern Ireland Executive. For example, we have suggested that the relevant form that is used in family cases south of the border could be amended to ask the applicant whether there is a potential Scottish or Northern Irish dimension to the case. I understand that the Ministry of Justice is amenable to that proposal.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Again, I ask for short questions and, if possible, shorter answers, valuable though they all are.

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** Why is there insufficient provision for people following legal proceedings in Scotland? Why has the Scottish Government closed courts and wasted money on nationalisation of the police service, which now costs more than it did before?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I thank Gordon Lindhurst for his question and will try to find my way to its direct relationship with the question that was asked by Kate Forbes, which concerned what we can do to help people who are engaged in legal proceedings in jurisdictions outside Scotland.

Through the modernisation of our courts service, we are ensuring that it is fit for the 21st century. Gordon Lindhurst will be well aware that the operation of the courts is a matter for the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service.

### **Women Offenders (Custodial Sentences)**

**3. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce the number of women being given custodial sentences and how it supports those who have been involved in offending. (S5O-00347)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** I am committed to reducing the high rate of imprisonment—of women and men—in Scotland. That commitment includes an emphasis on improving support for women offenders.

Since 2012, we have invested £15.5 million in community justice services for women, which is supporting the establishment of services that provide holistic multi-agency gender-focused support to address the underlying causes of the women's offending. Those services are intended to reduce further offending and, ultimately, the number of women receiving custodial sentences.

For women who receive custodial sentences, the new model for the female custodial estate will deliver a bold new approach to how women in custody are looked after. It will be underpinned by the ethos that security should be proportionate to risk, that custodial facilities should support recovery and that women should be located as close as possible to their communities.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Studies show that the impact of prison sentences on women is far greater in terms of family life and mental health, especially when they are imprisoned far from home, which causes severe disruption to outside family support. The Scottish Government's plan for local detention centres for women, which the minister mentioned—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can I have a question please?

**Fulton MacGregor:** Does the minister agree that there should be in place a presumption that non-custodial measures will be used, including community payback orders and home detention curfews?

**Michael Matheson:** I agree with Fulton MacGregor. Short-term custodial sentences remove people from their communities, jobs, families and housing—the very things that we know support desistance. We need to make sure that the approach that we take is focused on reducing the risk of re-offending; we know that community disposals are much more effective in reducing the risk of an individual committing offences again in the future.

That is why, as a Government, we are supporting a greater range of non-custodial sentences for both men and women. That is backed up by an additional £4 million of investment in community sentencing provision in 2016-17, on top of the £95 million that we invest each year in community justice services. That is why we will expand the use of electronic monitoring, both as a way of ensuring that individuals are held to account during their sentences, and to support rehabilitation and re-integration into the community.

**Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** It will soon be two years since the cabinet secretary announced that the plans for a new women's prison in Inverclyde would rightly not go ahead, and it is over four and a half years since Dame Elish Angiolini reported to the Scottish Government on female offending. Does the cabinet secretary agree that those lengthy delays in taking further action to reform the way in which we deal with female offenders is unacceptable while female offenders and their families struggle to deal with the many impacts of imprisonment?

**Michael Matheson:** I am afraid that Mary Fee is misinformed. There are no "lengthy delays": there is actually a significant amount of work being taken forward in relation to the five custodial facilities at present, in partnership with the local authorities that have been identified. Some of the planning work for the new national facility at Cornton Vale is already at an advanced stage through the team that has been established under the Scottish Prison Service, and the governor of Cornton Vale is developing those plans in greater detail.

There is a significant change in our approach to custodial policy and it requires careful planning. I accept that Mary Fee wishes to see those things happening sooner rather than later. However, the very significant change that we are taking forward

will result in a need to consider very carefully the approach that we take. I want to assure the member that a significant amount of work has already been undertaken, and work continues to be undertaken, in planning the new facilities in order to make sure that they start to come on stream from 2018 to 2020-21, which was the timetable that we set out when the announcement was made.

### Court Cases (Backlog)

**4. Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to resolve the reported backlog of cases in the Scottish courts. (S5O-00348)

**The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing):** In April 2014, the percentage of sheriff courts offering summary criminal trials at the optimum 16 weeks was 50 per cent. The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service has recently reported that, as at August 2016, the position has improved, with 97 per cent of sheriff courts offering trials within 16 weeks or less.

As I have said already during question time, the administration of court business and performance is the responsibility of the independent Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service. However, the Scottish Government and justice organisations such as the SCTS continue to monitor the volume of cases and to act on court performance through the national justice board and the judicially led local criminal justice boards.

**Rachael Hamilton:** The Justice Committee recently took evidence from Stephen Mannifield of the Edinburgh Bar Association. Mr Mannifield said:

"The closure of Haddington sheriff court in the EBA's jurisdiction has had a massive effect ... Edinburgh is now dealing not only with all the sheriff and jury and more serious cases for the Edinburgh area but with all the more serious cases from East Lothian."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 25 October 2016; c 33.]

That is contrary to the view of Scottish ministers, who have said that there is capacity within courts to deal with currently anticipated cases. Can the Scottish Government explain whether Haddington sheriff court will be opened to help resolve the reported backlog?

**Annabelle Ewing:** The evidence does not bear out what Rachael Hamilton has just said. The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service has confirmed that the closure of Haddington sheriff court has not had a negative impact on the timescale for completing cases in Edinburgh sheriff and justice of the peace courts. Indeed, analysis published by the SCTS earlier this year confirmed that the timescales for both summary criminal cases and civil proofs in Edinburgh sheriff court and the JP court are progressing within the

SCTS's target timescales—that is, 16 weeks for summary criminal cases and 12 weeks for civil proofs.

Following the closure of certain courts, the SCTS has been able to target funding more productively on the maintenance and development of its estate, and consolidation of court business in fewer locations offers greater opportunity to manage business more efficiently, and to call cases in courthouses that are fit for the 21st century and provide proper security and segregation for those who use the courts.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** At yesterday's meeting of the Justice Committee, we heard from Calum Steele of the Scottish Police Federation of problems arising from cases proceeding to court with an insufficiency of evidence. Does the minister accept that that is a problem and that it is putting undue pressure on the court system? If so, what action does the Government propose to take?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I hear what the member has said, but he needs to bring forward some actual evidence. I understand that the statement was made yesterday in committee, and if the member or indeed the person who made it can bring forward some evidence, we will, of course, look closely at it. To date, however, we do not seem to have any evidence to support that statement.

### Scottish Prison Service

**5. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Justice last met the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service and what issues were discussed. (S5O-00349)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** I have monthly meetings with the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, and we discuss a wide range of operational issues at them. My last meeting with the chief executive took place on 3 November 2016.

**Emma Harper:** As I am sure the cabinet secretary is aware, good work is being done at Her Majesty's prison Dumfries. Is it possible for him to tell me when he expects to appoint a new governor?

**Michael Matheson:** I am aware of the tragic death of the governor of HMP Dumfries, Phil Kennedy, in September. At the time of his passing, I wrote personally to Mr Kennedy's family, because I had heard a lot of wonderful things about the work that he had undertaken during his time as governor. Following Mr Kennedy's sudden death, the deputy governor, Mr Hunstone, has been acting as governor-in-charge to provide familiarity and stability for the staff during what I know has been a difficult time.

Early in the new year, the Scottish Prison Service will identify a new governor for HMP Dumfries within the existing H-band pool of staff. The SPS is presently taking that work forward and, as I have said, expects to make an appointment early in the new year.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 has not been lodged.

### Brexit (Implications for Justice System)

**7. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what the implications on the justice system are of leaving the European Union. (S5O-00351)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** As I said in the parliamentary debate on 1 November, Scotland's independent justice system has, for the past 40 years, benefited from EU membership across criminal, civil and family law. Our justice agencies and legal professionals engage directly and extensively with their EU counterparts, for example through Europol and Eurojust.

I entirely agree with the views expressed by the Lord Advocate during his visit to Brussels earlier this month: it is not in the interests of Scotland, the United Kingdom or Europe to turn our back on those measures for effective cross-border co-operation. I plan to meet with leaders of key justice bodies, legal professionals and other key stakeholders later this month to discuss how best we can protect the benefits of EU membership for our independent justice system.

**George Adam:** I have been contacted by constituents who are concerned about implications for the Human Rights Act 1998. Can the cabinet secretary explain how leaving the EU will affect citizens in Scotland?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Briefly, please, cabinet secretary.

**Michael Matheson:** I recognise the concerns that many people have raised with regard to the implications of the outcome of the EU referendum and the uncertainty that has been caused by the United Kingdom Government's approach. The implications of Brexit will depend on the terms of our future relationship with the European Union, but justice and security matters operate within the context of human rights treaties, and EU law is an important source of human rights law. Membership of the EU also brings positive social and economic benefits with regard to, for example, equality rights and social protections. The Scottish Government has consistently opposed the UK Government's proposals for a British bill of rights, and we will continue to argue in support of human rights and of enabling people in Scotland to have their rights protected.

## Gypsy Travellers (Unauthorised Sites)

### 8. Peter Chapman (North East Scotland)

**(Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on Police Scotland's standard operating procedures for unauthorised sites used by Gypsy Travellers. (S5O-00352)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** Police Scotland's standard operating procedures are an operational matter for Police Scotland and fall within the chief constable's responsibilities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Briefly, Mr Chapman.

**Peter Chapman:** In order to move Gypsy Traveller camps on from unauthorised sites, the police have resorted to using the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865. However, the Lord Advocate has issued guidance against the use of that legislation. The main issue for Police Scotland seems to be that neither authorised halting sites nor the existing legislation is a solution to the issue.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Briefly means briefly, Mr Chapman. Could you ask your question, please?

**Peter Chapman:** Why is the Scottish National Party Government pressurising local authorities to waste time and money creating authorised halting sites that fail to solve the problems?

**Michael Matheson:** Providing halting sites for Traveller communities and Gypsy communities is hardly a waste of public resources. I am appalled at the member's views on that matter.

Gypsy communities and Traveller communities have their rights, too, and as a society we should respect that and manage the issues as effectively as we can. Lead responsibility for dealing with the issues at a local level lies with local authorities, and the police can provide assistance to them as and when necessary.

We should not get into a battle of trading the individual rights of one group against those of another. That is divisive, and I hope that the member will reflect on his comments in relation to halting sites.

## Fuel Poverty

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-02504, in the name of Alex Rowley, on supporting local communities. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

14:41

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** In speaking to the motion, I hope that we can build a consensus in the Parliament not only that fuel poverty in Scotland is unacceptable in the 21st century but that we will take the steps that are needed for its eradication.

Like other parties, Labour highlighted fuel poverty in its manifesto in May this year and we committed to a warm homes bill, as did the Scottish National Party. In June, the Minister for Local Government and Housing, Kevin Stewart, told the Parliament:

"We will introduce a warm homes bill. I know that there is cross-party support for that, and we will ensure that that happens."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 2016; c 72]

I very much welcomed that statement, so I was disappointed when the programme for government that was introduced by SNP ministers in September made no mention of such a bill. I was disappointed because of the scale and impact of fuel poverty across all measures of social wellbeing.

Given that the bill has not materialised, Scottish Labour members want to restate our view and get agreement from the Government for a warm homes act for Scotland that can tackle fuel poverty, improve energy efficiency and help to meet our climate change targets. Our main ask of Government today is to reset the fuel poverty target, but we also highlight the challenges that the public, social and private rented markets face and call for parity across all sectors when it comes to energy efficiency requirements.

The 2016 target to eradicate fuel poverty has not been met and that is a source of regret. Although I am sure that others will say more about that target being missed and that Jackie Baillie—who set that target when she was a minister—is very disappointed, there has nonetheless been progress as a direct result of her introducing such legislation.

The evidence supports my view that there has been an underinvestment on what was needed, but progress can be celebrated. In particular, the success of local councils and housing associations must be recognised and built upon. It is clear that the duty placed on public housing bodies through

the housing quality and energy efficiency standards has led to major progress on tackling fuel poverty in the social rented sector. We have all seen programmes in our areas that have included windows, doors, cladding, insulation, boiler replacements and heating systems being put in place.

We also know that councils and third sector organisations have been active in providing information services to householders to promote benefit take-up and to offer energy saving advice to keep fuel bills as low as possible. Indeed, I have been told that, on a scale of 0 to 10 for energy efficiency, the social rented sector averaged 3 when the duty for energy efficiency standards was introduced, and today the figure stands at around 7.5. That is progress, and that progress has improved health and wellbeing and boosted the weekly budgets of families throughout Scotland.

That begs the question: if that is right for the public rented sector market, why would it not be right for the private rented sector market, much of which is publicly funded through housing benefit? What can be done to encourage improvement to owner-occupied homes so that standards improve in our houses throughout the nation?

The most recent house condition survey noted that people in the private rented sector were more likely to cite a problem with their home, such as poor insulation, draughts or inadequate heating, as a reason for not keeping warm in winter whereas social renters were more likely to say that the reason for that was the cost. That highlights how housing tenure differs, and that is why we say that fuel efficiency for the private rented sector must be addressed.

Over the past 10 years, the number of people who live in the private rented sector has doubled to 368,000. An estimated 80,000 families with children live in the private rented sector. As the existing homes alliance has pointed out, the Scottish Government's

"poverty adviser, Naomi Eisenstadt said in her report that 'housing costs push many people into poverty' and 'the focus needs to be on core costs like rent, local property-related taxes and home energy costs.'"

Therefore, as well as calling for a reset of the target for fuel poverty, we are calling on the Government to introduce energy efficiency standards for the private rented housing sector in Scotland so that, no matter whether the landlord is social, private or public, the energy efficiency standards will be the same. It cannot be right that, on a scale of 0 to 10, energy efficiency on average in a council house or a housing association house is 7.5 whereas, in a private sector let, the figure is 2 or 3. That is just not acceptable.

Let us not forget that the average private rent is 86 per cent higher than the average social rent and that, over the past 10 years, an estimated 140,000 private rented sector households have lived in relative poverty.

I hope that the Government will agree that we need clarity not on whether, but on when this will happen. What we are calling for is straightforward—tenants in the private housing sector should have the same rights and support for a warm and safe home as tenants in the public and social sectors have. As I said, those powers will assist in meeting the target that we can all, I hope, sign up to resetting.

The Government has announced its intention to bring forward a child poverty bill. There will be a specific target for tackling child poverty. I agree with that and say to the Government that the same reasoning, and the same principles, for having a child poverty target should apply to resetting a fuel poverty target.

Energy Action Scotland has set out clear recommendations on fuel poverty and has made it clear that

"A new target that is realistic but ambitious must be set. It must be accompanied by a fuel poverty strategy and action plan with costs and timelines. It is essential that there is not a hiatus following the passing of the 2016 target date".

Norman Kerr, the director of Energy Action Scotland, called on the Government

"to widen discussions to include key stakeholders and for there to be a public consultation in order to reset the target as soon as possible."

He also stated:

"The problem of cold, damp and expensive to heat homes must be addressed and there should be no fuel poverty in Scotland."

I agree. However, can we also be clear today that, in addition, the Government must look at the cost of energy?

Unison Scotland issued a briefing this week that stated:

"Fuel poverty is a scandal. There was once upon a time a commitment to eradicate fuel poverty. But while that may seem like a fairy tale dream, thousands across Scotland live the grim day to day nightmare of making the choice between food and fuel. At the same time, we have private companies making millions of profits. This needs to change - we need much more provision of energy as a social good rather than a source of enrichment and should be looking to change our broken energy system."

The Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group has identified energy costs as one of the four drivers of fuel poverty. We must examine what options are available for more public control of energy provision. WWF Scotland, Friends of the Earth Scotland and RSPB Scotland all say that Scotland will have to deliver 40 per cent of its heat

from renewable sources by 2030, in addition to energy improvements to fulfil targets under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. To achieve that, we should be planning a massive expansion of district and communal heating systems and should be working with local government to explore all options for municipal and community energy schemes, building on the good work that is happening in local councils across Scotland.

It is not acceptable that prices are rising faster than household incomes, and unless we address that we cannot begin to eradicate fuel poverty. Scottish fuel bills are up 138 per cent since 2003. We must provide more help for people who are fuel poor to enable them to switch to better tariffs, ensure that their billing is correct and have some form of debt relief. There is also the option to use the new social security powers to explore potential solutions to support people on low incomes to afford sufficient energy for healthy living. All that work needs to happen.

One of the strategic working group's recommendations is that the Government should identify specific measures to support customers in rural and off-gas grid areas who suffer from higher energy costs than the rest of Scotland. That also needs to happen.

Although there will be deep disappointment at the failure to eradicate fuel poverty and meet the target—we need to reset the target—there must be a little satisfaction at the progress on eradicating fuel poverty that has been made in some parts of our society, namely the public rented sector through councils and housing associations.

No doubt we will hear much in the debate about the statistics on fuel poverty and poor housing, but I return to something that I have mentioned previously in the Parliament. Earlier this year, when I was campaigning in Paisley, I met a family who told me that they had moved out of their cold, damp house and into a new housing association house. They made two key points, the first of which was that in the cold, damp house, 25 per cent of their household income went on energy costs whereas in the new house, which had proper energy efficiency measures in place, their energy costs had been reduced to below 5 per cent of their household income. Their second point was that their little girl's asthma problems had meant that when they lived in the cold, damp house they were continually having to make emergency visits to hospital with her because of the dampness; since they moved into their new home, the little girl had not once had to go back to hospital.

The benefits of tackling fuel poverty are there for everyone to see. Shelter Scotland has said that

“for every £1 spent reducing fuel poverty in Scotland, the NHS alone could save 42 pence.”

There are overwhelming reasons for tackling fuel poverty. Let us unite in this Parliament and agree to reset the target and get on with the challenge at hand.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the reports by the Scottish Fuel Poverty Strategic Working Group and Rural Fuel Poverty Task Force; notes that 845,000 households in Scotland remain in fuel poverty and that, since 2003, that number has doubled; agrees with the call from Energy Action Scotland for the Scottish Government to reset its target to eradicate fuel poverty; calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward warm homes legislation in 2017 to tackle fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency; believes that substantial energy efficiency improvements can be made in the private rented and owner-occupier sectors, and that consultation on point of transaction standards must now begin; notes that new powers over the Energy Company Obligation and Winter Fuel payments will bring new opportunities to meet an eradication target, and recognises that a timetable for an effective eradication strategy should be published.

14:55

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** I welcome this debate on fuel poverty. This Government is committed to doing all that it can to create a fairer and more equal Scotland, and ensuring that people no longer live in fuel poverty is central to that. I am sure that the Parliament will support the message in the motion that we must ensure that everyone lives in an affordable, warm home.

Addressing fuel poverty requires a collaborative effort across political parties, across Government departments and alongside other bodies such as the United Kingdom Government, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, energy suppliers, local government and the third sector. As a result of this Government's efforts, we have seen some great achievements. Over a million Scottish households have received energy efficiency measures from a range of programmes and the energy efficiency of our homes has massively improved. Two out of five homes are now in the top three ratings for energy efficiency, with increases of 71 per cent since 2010 and 11 per cent in the past year alone. We now have, proportionately, 35 per cent more homes with one of the top three energy performance certificate ratings—that is, A to C—than exist south of the border.

We have put in place a range of schemes to support those who may have difficulty in heating their homes and, as promised in our manifesto, we will bring forward plans for warm homes legislation in 2017. We have already allocated more than £650 million since 2009 and, as we set out in our programme for government, we will make

available a further £0.5 billion over the next four years to tackle fuel poverty, improve energy efficiency and further distribute low-carbon heat. That means that, by the end of 2021, we will have committed more than £1 billion to making our homes and buildings warmer and cheaper to heat.

We are boosting the budget when we can. This year, we announced a further £10 million for domestic energy efficiency, bringing our budget to £113 million, which we will use to help to reduce the costs of energy bills for householders. Unfortunately, last year, the UK Government, without warning, ended the green deal home improvement fund a year early, depriving Scottish households of £15 million.

We recognise that eradicating fuel poverty requires more than investment in energy efficiency. Above-inflation price increases by energy companies, which are beyond the Scottish Government's control, have greatly impacted on Scottish households. Indeed, if energy prices had risen in line with inflation, fuel poverty levels in 2014 would have been 9.5 per cent instead of 35 per cent. Behind that, as Mr Rowley pointed out, are people. Combined with the interim recommendations of the fuel poverty strategic working group, that is why I advised Parliament that our statutory target to eradicate fuel poverty by the end of November this year was not going to be met.

As Parliament will know, both the strategic working group and the Scottish rural fuel poverty task force published their reports at the end of October, with more than 100 recommendations between them. The expert advice from the fuel poverty strategic working group is that the definition of fuel poverty is crucial to the basis of any new statutory target and that the current definition should be reviewed because it may be unhelpful in ensuring that support is delivered to those who need it most.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Will the minister give a firm commitment that he will reset the target date by which we intend to end fuel poverty? When will he bring that to Parliament?

**Kevin Stewart:** Let me start by saying that I immediately accepted the recommendation to review the definition of fuel poverty and will commission the expert, independent review that the report calls for. Let me be clear that that does not mean that I want to define fuel poverty away—far from it.

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

**Kevin Stewart:** Not at the moment. If the member will let me finish, I will answer her question.

Any changes that come out of the review must be justified, to ensure that those in need receive the most support. Based on that advice, we believe that it is important that we first commission the independent review of the definition, which we expect to be completed in summer 2017. Based on the outcome of that, we will consult on a new fuel poverty strategy, including a new fuel poverty target.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Notwithstanding what the minister has just said, does he accept that whatever target—or however he describes it—he sets, he has made the task much harder for himself by reducing the budget between 2015-16 and 2016-17 from £119 million to £103 million?

**Kevin Stewart:** If Mr Scott had been listening to what I said earlier, he would know that the budget reduction is a reduction from the Westminster Government. Some £15 million, which could have been spent here in Scotland, was ripped out of our budget by the Westminster Government. I hope that Mr Scott will ask his colleagues in London to restore the £15 million, so that we can use it to help families who are in fuel poverty in Scotland.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Kevin Stewart:** Not at the moment.

We recognise the scale of the challenge of effectively tackling fuel poverty. The two expert groups were tasked with providing insights to help us to take the first step in the development of our new fuel poverty strategy, and their recommendations will inform our thinking about an approach to tackling fuel poverty and improving the energy efficiency of people's homes, wherever they live in Scotland. Our strategy will work alongside the actions that we set out in our fairer Scotland action plan to alleviate poverty and tackle inequality.

We will take forward our strategy through Scotland's energy efficiency programme—SEEP—and the related energy strategy, on which we will consult early next year, alongside plans to consult on minimum energy efficiency standards for homes in the private rented sector and regulation for district heating, both of which were mentioned by Mr Rowley.

Work to develop SEEP is under way. Just over a month ago, we allocated more than £9 million for pilot projects this year. We will continue to engage with partners across all relevant sectors, to transform the energy efficiency of existing buildings across Scotland, to help to reduce energy costs and tackle fuel poverty.

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

**Kevin Stewart:** I will.



**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are in your final minute, minister, but you may take the intervention if you want to do so.

**Jackie Baillie:** I will be very quick. I am sure that the minister shares my view that we need clarity. I asked him whether he would reset the target to end fuel poverty. He talked about a new fuel poverty target, which could be entirely different. Which is it?

**Kevin Stewart:** I said clearly that we will review the definition of fuel poverty, through the independent review, and based on the outcome of that we will consult on a new fuel poverty strategy, including a new fuel poverty target. I do not think that I can be any clearer than that.

I invite all members to work with this Government to develop a new fuel poverty strategy for Scotland, which will need to take into account the review of the fuel poverty definition. As part of the process, we will give careful consideration to constructive suggestions that members put forward. In the meantime, we will continue to do what we have been doing well for the past few years: helping Scottish householders to live in warmer, more affordable homes.

I am determined that the Government should do everything that we can to tackle fuel poverty. I look forward to working with all members of the Scottish Parliament and with stakeholders, including in local government and the third sector, because we need a combined effort if we are to tackle fuel poverty.

I move amendment S5M-02504.3, to leave out from “a timetable” to end and insert:

“the two reports have over 100 recommendations, which should be carefully considered as part of a new effective eradication strategy to be published in 2017.”

15:03

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** It is incredibly disappointing to hear the Government trying to hit the brake, when all the Opposition parties in the Parliament are trying to encourage it to hit the accelerator. It is incredibly disappointing that the Government is trying to amend a Labour motion to replace a hard-edged requirement for action with the Scottish National Party's preference for inaction.

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

**Adam Tomkins:** No, I will not.

I welcome this debate on fuel poverty, and I commend the Labour Party for making time available for the debate this afternoon.

It has been pointed out before that, in the Scottish Government's ministerial portfolios, communities and social security sit together, but it

speaks volumes that it is in Opposition time, not in Government time, that we are having a debate that is designed to underscore the essential link between localism and effective anti-poverty strategies. The Scottish Government may believe in a centralised, top-down, one-size-fits-all, nanny-knows-best approach to poverty, but all four Opposition parties in this chamber—from their different political perspectives—can see just how wrong ministers are about that.

We will support the Labour motion, which opens by stating that the Parliament welcomes the recently published report of the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group. That report correctly identifies that fuel poverty has a number of causes, some of which are within the Government's control while others are harder to reach.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Does the member accept that one of the causes of fuel poverty is low incomes and that sanctions that are imposed by the Conservative Government are putting people into fuel poverty?

**Adam Tomkins:** It is interesting that the report notes that 58 per cent of the fuel poor are not classified as income poor. One of the lessons that we learn from a careful reading of the report is that although income is important, thinking about poverty only through the prism of income will lead to ineffective anti-poverty strategies and not to effective ones.

The level of fuel poverty, which is defined as a household having to spend 10 per cent of its income on heating, is far too high in Scotland—on that we are all agreed, even the Scottish Government. The report of the fuel poverty strategic working group notes that the high rate of fuel poverty in Scotland is largely unchanged since 2009—in which case I do not quite know what it has to do with the UK Government's sanctions—and has doubled since the Scottish Government's fuel poverty target was set in 2002. There is, of course, no chance of the Scottish Government meeting that target now.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Adam Tomkins:** Not at the moment.

Our amendment to Labour's motion makes plain what we would do about the situation. We need to introduce a clear target to achieve a transformative change in energy efficiency across Scotland. In our view—this was in our manifesto this year—the target should be for all properties to achieve a C rating or above in their energy performance certificate by the end of the next decade at the latest. In order to achieve that transformational change, significant levels of capital investment will be required. Accordingly,

we would like to see the energy efficiency budget line of the Scottish Government's capital budget allocations increase year on year. That means capital infrastructure investment rising from this year's £80 million—which is under 3 per cent of the budget—to more than £300 million by the end of this parliamentary session, which would be a cumulative rise of £1 billion over the next five years.

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** The member will acknowledge that we heard in the Finance and Constitution Committee this morning about the serious challenges to the Scottish budget that are coming from Westminster, with billions of pounds of cuts ahead of us. Where would the member suggest that the Scottish Government takes money from in order to put it into capital infrastructure investment?

**Adam Tomkins:** I am delighted that Ash Denham has asked that question. We also heard this morning from Professor Anton Muscatelli—although perhaps she chose not to listen to this inconvenient truth—that significant capital expenditure will be on its way. The member can, in her own time, check the *Official Report* to see what Professor Muscatelli said.

People who live in a home with low energy performance are 3.5 times as likely to suffer from fuel poverty as those who live in a home with a high energy performance. Out of Scotland's 2.5 million homes, 1.4 million are below EPC band C and 400,000 are in the worst-rated bands. That is why we strongly agree with the conclusion of the fuel poverty strategic working group that the aim should be to

“eliminate poor energy performance ... as a driver of fuel poverty”.

We recognise that fuel poverty cannot be tackled by improved energy efficiency alone, central though that must be if we are to be successful. That is why we consider that winter fuel payments and cold weather payments, which are among the social security powers to be devolved to this Parliament under the Smith commission agreement, should be protected—albeit that, as we have said before, consideration should be given to the time of the year when the former are paid.

On the role of social security in the context of fuel poverty, I note that the report of the fuel poverty strategic working group states:

“While the social security system can provide immediate and very welcome relief for fuel poor households, long term solutions to raising incomes depend on thriving local economies, supporting well-paid, secure jobs. We also must have the skills and capacity throughout Scotland to take up these opportunities.”

We, on these benches, could not agree more with those observations.

Energy efficiency programmes can assist with local economic development and employment. To achieve those, there is an urgent need to work with the skills and development sectors and Scotland's economic and business development agencies, so that, as the working group puts it,

“there are trained workers coming out of colleges to work in local firms to deliver”

policy goals on energy and fuel poverty.

In particular, the following actions are called for: public procurement for energy efficiency schemes should give priority to local businesses and workers; our enterprise agencies should promote and support local businesses to deliver such schemes; and Skills Development Scotland and Scotland's colleges should collaborate on developing the required skills.

It is important to note that the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group records the

“concern that the reduction in further education college places will have a negative impact on filling the skills gap”,

something that we have been saying on this side of the aisle for some time.

There is, of course, the issue of energy prices. No debate on fuel poverty can overlook that aspect of the matter, so I was particularly pleased to see reported just yesterday that the UK Government is, as we speak, considering new measures designed to cap household energy bills. Greg Clark, Theresa May's Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said that the energy companies

“must treat customers properly or be made to do so.”

I agree with UK ministers that the Government should not shy away from imposing new measures aimed particularly at cutting the number of households stuck on so-called standard variable tariffs, the most expensive available.

I move amendment S5M-02504.1, after first “energy efficiency;” to insert:

“considers that the Scottish Government should set out a clear timetable and target for all properties to reach at least an EPC C rating; notes that this will require close cooperation with local authorities and businesses;”.

15:11

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** I, too, thank Labour for bringing this debate to the chamber. It is clear that there is an unprecedented level of support across the chamber to bring about an end to fuel poverty, and that is welcome.

I want to start by thinking a little bit differently about our housing stock. Many houses and

tenements across Scotland have stood for 100 years or more. Indeed, the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group estimates that 85 per cent of the homes that we will be using in 2050 have been built. With some investment and maintenance, they can remain homes for another century.

In that sense, Scotland's housing stock is not a private asset. We pay to occupy our homes during our lifetime, but they represent vital infrastructure that should last across generations. Therefore, houses are as much part of the public infrastructure as are streets and public buildings, and we should be stewarding them as a public good for future generations. In order to achieve that, we should review the legislation that underpins common property.

As we have heard, the ambitious fuel poverty target set by the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, and taken up by the Scottish National Party Administration, has been missed and has now expired. Across the country almost 50 per cent of Scottish homes fail basic quality standards. That is an incredible statistic. We know from other statistics that more than a third of Scottish households are classed as fuel poor. People struggling to heat their home face higher risks of poor health and lower educational attainment, as well as the added stress of having to make difficult choices between heating and putting food on the table or buying a new school uniform.

In previous sessions of this Parliament, my Green colleagues have had success in encouraging the Scottish Government to take bolder steps to address fuel poverty. Greens have consistently made fuel poverty a priority in our budget negotiations and helped to deliver £77 million more for fuel poverty programmes in the previous session. My colleague Alison Johnstone, along with campaigners such as WWF Scotland, helped to secure energy efficiency as a Scottish Government national investment priority.

My amendment is a call to make that national investment priority a reality. We can do that by accepting housing as one of our most important public assets, by using the policy tools available to us and by making a level of investment that unlocks the benefits of warm homes.

The Scottish Government's current commitment works out at £125 million a year across this session of Parliament. That is useful but, in real terms, it will amount to a standstill investment by the end of this session. To deliver the full benefit that warm homes can deliver for everyone—the benefits of better health, fewer emissions, reduced energy bills and more jobs—Parliament would have to sign off a budget that, as the amendment says, is

“part of a progressive long-term increasing of the fuel poverty-energy efficiency budget.”

Along with public support, the wealth tied up in buildings needs to be harnessed for repairs. The regulation of energy efficiency in private sector homes is vital, and there are a host of ways to make improvements on houses at point of sale affordable.

Part of the cash released when a house is sold could be directed towards improvements by statute. It does not take much in the way of capital gains to accrue the £2,672 that Government statisticians expect it would take to pay to bring the average house in the lowest three EPC bands up to a D rating.

Utilising the wealth that property accrues to make houses warm and watertight would be an excellent use of capital gains. Setting minimum standards across the private sector would affect all houses that fall below the threshold and would mean that requirements for energy efficiency improvements would be priced into the market. Thus, we are disappointed that the SNP manifesto talks only about regulating the private rented sector when the problems are just as acute in the privately owned sector.

The Scottish Greens' manifesto followed the Existing Homes Alliance's recommendation that an EPC C rating be achieved by 2025, so we will support the Conservative amendment. Recent legislation in England and Wales has identified a similar goal—landlords face restrictions on issuing a lease on property that fails to meet basic standards from April 2020.

The UK Government could also help us by ending the madness of applying a zero rate of VAT to new houses, whereas a rate of 20 per cent is charged on repairs to existing homes. Next month, the Swedish Government is due to vote on a proposal to end VAT charges on appliance repairs, and it intends to extend the measure to home repairs. We know that existing homes are the most important sector to tackle, but new-build homes are also worth addressing.

The land reform proposals that we made in our manifesto were designed to deliver thousands more affordable, quality homes for the same amount of cash that the SNP plans to commit. Allowing councils to purchase land for affordable housing at existing-use value rather than at inflated prices after planning permission has been granted would free up around 30 per cent of the cost of an average new house to invest in higher standards. That model was used in the UK until the 1950s, and it is still used in countries such as Germany.

The SNP amendment notes that we have more than 100 recommendations from two expert

groups to consider and commits to the publication of a fuel poverty eradication strategy by 2017. We are happy to support that amendment, too. One of the recommendations was that the definition of fuel poverty should be tightened. That echoes the view of the Government's poverty adviser, Naomi Eisenstadt, that the definition of fuel poverty needs to be updated to ensure that support is better targeted towards those on low incomes. We are open to that change.

**Kevin Stewart:** I thank Mr Wightman for bringing up the point about the definition. The independent review, which will be completed by summer 2017, will help us in our consultation on the fuel poverty eradication strategy, which aims to take us towards the statutory fuel poverty target. Does Mr Wightman agree that it is right that we have that independent review now and that it reports back in summer 2017, before we move to the new statutory fuel poverty target?

**Andy Wightman:** We are happy to support any efforts to ensure that the definition of fuel poverty is better targeted at those on low incomes.

I note that addressing fuel poverty is at least as much about helping households as it is about treating homes. As well as repairing and improving the energy efficiency of homes that are occupied by those in fuel poverty, we need to do much more to address the social and economic problems that cause fuel poverty and are exacerbated by it, which include poor physical and mental health, lower levels of education, social isolation and rurality. That will require a move away from traditional modes of delivering energy efficiency measures towards much greater engagement with front-line services that are able to better identify and support those who are in greatest need.

I move amendment S5M-02504.2, to insert at end:

“; notes the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2016-17 proposal to commit more than £125 million per year over the current parliamentary session, but believes that this falls well short of what is required to deliver the warm homes, better health, fewer emissions, reduced energy bills and more jobs promised by the new National Infrastructure Priority approach, and calls on the Scottish Government to increase funding in the Scottish budget for 2016-17, as part of a progressive long-term increasing of the fuel poverty-energy efficiency budget.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** We move to the open debate. Time is really tight, so I ask members to please conclude within six minutes even if they have taken interventions.

15:18

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I am very pleased to contribute to Scottish Labour's debate on fuel poverty. I declare an interest: I am the

honorary vice-president of Energy Action Scotland. I am proud to be part of such a fine organisation that campaigns to eradicate fuel poverty.

I am also very proud to have been the minister who set the target to eradicate fuel poverty in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. [*Applause.*] I hope that that is not included in my time, Presiding Officer.

Scottish Labour introduced a statutory commitment to eradicate fuel poverty within 15 years. It was bold, it was ambitious and, yes, it was challenging, but not one party said that we could not do it. Every party gave unanimous backing to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, even the SNP. In fact, in committee, SNP members said that 15 years was too long a period and they wanted to do it in eight years. I applaud ambition, but the SNP really has no excuse. It has been in power for almost a decade and has been responsible for achieving the target for two thirds of the time for which the target has existed.

Levels of fuel poverty have more than doubled since we set the target to eliminate fuel poverty by November 2016. Why did the SNP wait until after the Scottish Parliament elections to tell us what everyone knew: that it would fail to meet the target?

Energy Action Scotland, the Government's own fuel poverty task force, has been telling the SNP for a few years now that it needed to accelerate spending if there was to be any hope of ending fuel poverty. Did the SNP listen? “What did the SNP do?”, I hear members ask. It cut the budget for 2016-17 by £15 million. I know that the SNP blames that on Westminster, but if something is important to you, you make resources available.

A couple of weeks ago, the minister announced funding of £10 million, which is of course welcome. I do not know whether or not that money is additional, but let us be honest: taking £15 million away and replacing it with £10 million is still a cut, and therefore deserves no praise.

I turn to the future, and start by thanking the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group and the Scottish rural fuel poverty task force for producing reports with a range of recommendations that provide a helpful framework for proceeding. There are high-level recommendations that are backed by detailed actions, and I do not understand why the SNP Government needs more time to think about the issue before setting a target.

I am old enough to recall when the Government previously tried to reset the definition of fuel poverty. I remember that, last year, a civil servant came to the Energy Action Scotland conference and told us about the detail of the new definition.

The task force is an expert group, so why does the Government need to commission more expert consultation on the matter? Is it simply an excuse to delay?

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

**Jackie Baillie:** I will give way in a minute, because I want the minister to answer a question. The very first thing that the SNP Government needs to do is to reset the target—it should not introduce a new and different target that might say that the Government will halve fuel poverty in 50 years. I want the Government to reset the target to eradicate fuel poverty. Will the minister do that—yes or no?

**Kevin Stewart:** The reason why we are having an independent review is that doing so was one of the report's recommendations, and that is the way in which we will set the definition. We will then consult and introduce a new statutory target to eradicate fuel poverty in Scotland—

**Jackie Baillie:** I have had enough, Presiding Officer.

**Kevin Stewart:** You got an answer.

**Jackie Baillie:** It is very clear—I asked the minister a simple question to which he could have answered yes or no. He said neither; instead, he chose to take up a lot of my time.

We do not need a new target—we need to reset the original target to end fuel poverty. It is important that the cabinet secretary or the minister commits to that on the record before the debate concludes. We need a strategy with actions, lead responsibility—

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

**Jackie Baillie:** No, I have heard enough from the minister already.

I make a plea to the minister and the cabinet secretary. I know that everybody wants to count the number of homes that are improved, the number of energy efficient light bulbs that are distributed and even the width of the insulation that is installed. I understand that the SNP is concerned even with the spaces in a Toblerone bar—here was I, always thinking that the SNP was in favour of more separation and not less.

To be serious, action on fuel poverty should be about the outcomes and not the inputs. We should measure the difference that it makes to people rather than measuring things. Our ambition should be nothing short of ending fuel poverty, and to do that we need a step change in policy.

To illustrate my point, I go back to the minister's announcement. He announced £10 million to secure improved energy efficiency for 14,000 homes. That is great, but at that rate it would take

us 60 years to end fuel poverty. What else did the minister have to say in his release? He led with changing the definition of fuel poverty—that is the SNP's priority. It wants to tinker with the definition, with little indication of the bold and decisive action that is required.

In April, the Scottish Parliament will get a swathe of new powers on taxation and social security—oh wait, we do not want those just yet—and powers over the energy company obligation. That is a real opportunity to do things differently and to recalibrate the system. The question is, is the SNP up to the task? Fuel poverty now stands at 845,000 households. That is a disgrace, and this Government should get on with it.

15:24

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak and I am grateful to Labour for bringing the issue to the chamber. When I think of the issue of fuel poverty, I think in particular of Darren, a young lad in my constituency who I met during the election campaign. At the end of a community event that I was taking part in, he came over to me and said softly but clearly, "Ben, it's brilliant that the SNP are building so many more warm affordable homes, but please make sure the Government keeps spending money on older houses, too—some are still damp and cold sometimes."

I think of Darren and how, together, we have a responsibility to do what we can to get to a point at which every child like him grows up in a house that is warm, dry and safe. I am glad that we feel collective responsibility today. Although I acknowledge that there is always more work that we can do as parties and as individuals, back in the spring I was glad to be able to say to Darren—and I remind members today—that the SNP is absolutely committed to a child poverty bill and a warm homes bill and, as we heard from the minister, those will be delivered in the next few years. That legislation will make a difference and help people. As MSPs, we should all work together to make sure that those acts are as meaningful and beneficial as possible, and I look forward to playing my full part in that.

It is worth repeating that, to date, the SNP Scottish Government has spent unprecedented amounts on action to address fuel poverty and increase energy efficiency. There has been £650 million towards tackling fuel poverty since 2009, and £1 billion more will be invested before 2021 to make homes and buildings warmer and cheaper to heat.

It is my strong view that, as politicians, we must always reflect on the past and consider context

and circumstance as we analyse the present and look to build a better future. We must consider the fuel poverty that exists today as a consequence of the dilapidation and reduction of affordable housing stock in the 1980s and 1990s. We must view it as a result of the pressure of UK Government cuts since the financial crisis of 2008. We must analyse it as a symptom of the destructive effect of years of ideological Westminster austerity, and evaluate it as a manifestation of welfare reform and the persistent negative effects of low pay and growing income and wealth inequality. Those circumstances are sometimes a result of external events, but in many ways they are a result of UK Government policy.

That is why I am proud that, in Scotland, we are taking action to mitigate the effects of those issues and to proactively change the circumstances of today. I am proud that the Scottish Government is using the powers of devolution to address fuel poverty where and when it can. That is why I welcome the Scottish Government's plan to invest £0.5 billion over the next few years to tackle fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency, with a contribution of over £100 million this year alone. It is why I also welcome the fact that the Scottish Government will invest more in meaningful schemes such as the home energy efficiency programmes for Scotland, or HEEPS, which last year saved £8 million in fuel bills and helped 30,000 households. I also welcome the additional £10 million to help families who most need support to keep warm this winter. It will be interesting to see how the trial of that fund goes and whether it can be used elsewhere in Scotland. The Scottish Government is investing heavily to help households in fuel poverty across Scotland; households such as Darren's, who I met during the election campaign and who I spoke of earlier. I welcome that unprecedented investment and support.

Judging by the amendments that have been lodged and by most of the opening remarks—although there was some unhelpful tribalism—it is clear that members are unified in wanting to tackle fuel poverty. We should take strength from that and debate constructively for the rest of the afternoon. We should remember that we achieve more when we co-operate. We should collaborate to tackle fuel poverty, as the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group report and the Scottish rural fuel poverty task force report call on us to do. It is what the experts have called on us to do.

In that spirit, I will mention a recent inspiring example of how collective political effort can make a difference in supporting communities. Last week, my constituents in Lorne Street in Leith received some very good news. After facing eviction by a common landlord for over a year, members of the

community there are all now secure in their homes and looking forward to Christmas.

There has been extraordinary campaigning by the community; cross-party political support from me, my predecessor Malcolm Chisholm, Andy Wightman MSP and others; proactive local authority involvement; action by a dynamic housing association that is taking over the properties; and vital assistance from the Scottish Government and the housing minister, Kevin Stewart. As a team—as a collective—we achieved a positive outcome for nearly 100 people who were in a difficult situation. It was a triumph for the common good.

The people of Lorne Street will always inspire me. The positive outcome last week not only reminded me of what communities can achieve when they take action and support each other, but emphasised strongly to me what we as politicians can achieve when we work together and focus on people instead of party politics. It was collaborative politics at its best.

The title of today's debate is "Supporting Local Communities", so let us take action following the Lorne Street example and work together more to support the communities that we represent. That is how we will make the biggest difference; that is how we will best tackle fuel poverty and all other forms of poverty; and that is how we will build a better and fairer Scotland for all the young people such as Darren, who I met during the election campaign.

15:31

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am pleased to contribute to this debate on an issue that still affects far too many Scottish households. Indeed, figures suggest that one third of households are living in fuel poverty and struggling to maintain their homes at the temperature suggested by the Scottish house condition survey, and the figure is even higher in rural areas. In 2016, that is simply not good enough.

As we have heard, in June the Scottish Government finally admitted that it would not achieve its long-held target to end fuel poverty by November 2016—this month. It is yet to give a new date and an updated commitment to fuel poverty eradication. Until the last minute, ministers gave assurances that the November target was on track, despite expert bodies predicting that the aim was unachievable with the resources that were being allocated to the problem.

Fuel poverty blights more than one third of Scottish households and 11 per cent of homes suffer from dampness or condensation, yet the SNP Government's response is to slash the fuel poverty and energy efficiency budget by more than

13 per cent. It promised £119 million in the 2016-17 budget, yet only £103 million is allocated in the draft budget, which is an SNP cut of almost £16 million—Jackie Baillie is quite correct.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)** *rose*—

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

**Alison Harris:** No, I am sorry; I do not have enough time.

That is despite the fact that cold homes can cause increased costs for the national health service by way of an increase in health issues such as heart attacks, mental health problems and respiratory problems such as asthma. Those conditions are among the many that are made worse as a result of cold, damp homes.

In 2008, Professor Christine Liddell of the University of Ulster reported that for every £1 spent on reducing fuel poverty, the NHS saved 42p. Spending money on homes occupied by pensioners could well lead to even larger savings for the NHS. Children are often affected the most, and health issues can lead to more days off school and lower educational performance, which is a contributor in continuing the cycle of poverty.

As an important means of tackling the problem, the energy efficiency of Scottish houses needs to be improved. Almost 60 per cent of houses fall into performance band D or worse. Improving the energy efficiency of homes to an EPC rating of C or better would transform the lives of many of our fellow Scots, but that needs funding and Government commitment. It needs the Government to engage on improving energy efficiency with owner occupiers and housing providers, public and private, so that no group falls behind because of the nature of their tenancy.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alison Harris:** No, I have no time. I am sorry.

Individuals should be given more information and be encouraged, through grants and loans, to make their homes more energy efficient.

Scottish Conservatives recognise the need to improve energy efficiency in all Scottish homes to at least a C rating, and to provide the capital investment needed to reach that goal. The budget for energy efficiency needs to rise: it needs to be double the proposed investment that the Government has set aside. Conservatives call for the investment of £1 billion in Scottish homes over five years, which could lead to real health, educational and social benefits.

The SNP Government can show far more ambition in how it is going to address the problem. It can set targets and allocate sufficient funding.

It also needs to look at all forms of generating power efficiently to keep bills low. Of course, it can give a clear commitment to protect winter fuel and cold weather payments once they are devolved to the Parliament.

Continued support needs to be given to excellent programmes such as home energy Scotland, which offers free, impartial advice on energy efficiency and points householders in the direction of available grants and other energy support. The help to heat scheme offers free and discounted gas connections to those who are on low incomes and are vulnerable. Those programmes make a valuable contribution to the fight for warmer homes.

Groups such as Energy Action Scotland do a great job in continuing to flag up fuel poverty and campaign for its eradication without fear or favour. It has also called for the Scottish Government to redraw the fuel poverty strategy and reset target dates following the publication in October of the reports from two short-life groups that the Scottish Government set up: the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group; and the rural fuel poverty task force. They are grand titles, but let us begin to see real progress on fuel poverty: progress towards all properties reaching at least an EPC C rating, and progress towards warm homes legislation.

A recent press release from Energy Action Scotland concluded by reiterating:

“People across Scotland will want to know that one day the right that everyone has to be able to live in a warm, dry home at a price they can afford will be a reality.”

The Government needs to do far more to address the problem. It needs to tell us the revised target date and whether it will match the Scottish Conservatives’ commitment to eradicate the problem. We need a response that is not based on the misplaced targets of the past but a realistic, well-funded plan with a clear timetable to ensure that the aim of having all Scottish homes free of fuel poverty is achieved.

15:36

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate about the hugely important issue of fuel poverty. It is clear that we agree across the chamber about the severity of the issue and the urgent need to tackle it.

I also welcome the recent reports and recommendations from the fuel poverty strategic working group and the rural fuel poverty task

force, which will be instrumental for the Scottish Government as it works towards a new strategy on eradicating fuel poverty. As we go forward, it is important to keep it in mind that fuel poverty is a highly complex and multifaceted issue to which there is no simple solution, and which no single agency can address by itself.

That was stated in both reports. The chair of the strategic working group, David Sigsworth, highlighted recent increases in the underlying costs of fossil fuel due to devaluation, as an exacerbating factor, and the Scottish Government does not have control over that. The chair of the rural fuel poverty task force, Di Alexander, meanwhile stressed how the UK and Scottish Governments, as well as Ofgem and other major utility companies, all have “crucial roles to play” in eliminating the scourge of rural fuel poverty.

Multiple recommendations in the reports explicitly identify bodies other than the Scottish Government, such as the UK Government or Ofgem, as the lead organisation or responsible party for an action. I mention that to underline the scale and complexity of fuel poverty, the co-operation across many different organisations and areas that it demands, and thus the limit on what any one body can achieve through working alone.

Where the Scottish Government has influence, however, there can be no doubt that it is ready and willing to play its part. To quote from the report of the strategic working group:

“The high levels of fuel poverty exist despite commendable investment by the Scottish Government in energy efficiency programmes to alleviate fuel poverty.”

The establishment of the two short-life independent strategic working groups, and their reports, as cited in the motion, represent one example of the Government’s serious commitment to do all that it can to eradicate fuel poverty and to increase energy efficiency, particularly in rural communities, where the risk of fuel poverty is unfortunately all the higher.

A few weeks ago, the Government announced an additional £10 million pounds of funding to help families in my constituency of Cunninghame South and across Scotland who most need support to keep warm this winter. Of that £10 million, £9 million will be allocated to housing associations and councils to improve the housing of some of the poorest households and those most in need.

That brings the total amount that has been spent by this Government on directly tackling fuel poverty this year alone to £113 million. The remaining £1 million of that most recent funding is being made available to provide grants to households to help meet the costs of installing energy efficiency measures.

Those are only the most recent actions that have been taken by the Government. I do not have time to cite all the SNP Government’s achievements on this issue since 2007, but a few facts will serve to highlight the work that has been done. Since 2009, more than £650 million has been allocated to tackling fuel poverty; since 2008, more than 1 million energy efficiency measures have been installed in almost 1 million households across Scotland; and, in 2015, more than £8 million was saved in fuel bills thanks to the home energy efficiency programme, which covers 30,000 households.

The Scottish Government has spent unprecedented amounts on fuel poverty and energy efficiency, and is giving more help to people to combat fuel poverty than any other Administration in the UK.

Looking to the future, it is clear that the Scottish Government is focused on building on what has already been achieved. It has committed to making £500 million available to tackle fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency over the next four years. That means that, by the end of this parliamentary term in 2021, the Government will have committed more than £1 billion to making our homes and buildings warmer and cheaper to heat.

Energy efficiency has been designated as a national infrastructure priority. The cornerstone of that, Scotland’s energy efficiency programme, will commence fully in 2018, and pilots are already under way in 11 areas with particularly high levels of fuel poverty.

I will return to the main topic of today’s motion. The Government’s initial response to the recommendations of the working group and task force reports makes it clear that the Government is more focused than ever on eradicating fuel poverty. A key recommendation of the strategic working group’s report was to review the very definition of fuel poverty to ensure that it is as effective and as constructive as possible. The Government has already announced the setting up of an independent expert review to do just that, and I firmly welcome the Government’s decisive response to this, the most fundamental and urgent of the recommendations of the report. Reviewing the definition of fuel poverty is a vital first step in making sure that future action really makes a difference to those who need it most, and will pave the way for close and effective consideration of the other recommendations of the report.

In total, the two reports make more than 100 recommendations, which should now be carefully considered, together with the results of the independent review of the definition of fuel poverty, as the Government develops a new and effective eradication strategy for 2017.



I look forward to supporting the Scottish Government and working with colleagues across the chamber to tackle fuel poverty, taking into account the wider picture of income, energy costs, energy use and energy efficiency, all of which feed into fuel poverty.

15:43

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** After a decade in power, there are no excuses for the SNP's failure to deal with fuel poverty. Today, too many people still have to choose between fuel and food. In October, the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group confirmed what we have known for a long time: the target on fuel poverty will be missed.

The most recent statistics, which are for 2014 and were published last December, show that 845,000 households—35 per cent of all households—were classed as fuel poor. In November, Which? and Unite published details of the amount that customers are overpaying energy companies by failing to switch. Which? said that UK consumers are collectively overpaying £1.4 billion for their energy, while 16 million people—more than half of energy customers—are stuck on standard tariffs. At the Energy Action conference, Unite said that research showed that a move to a publicly owned energy system in the UK would pay for itself within 10 years and could save households around £158 a year on their bills.

The poor energy efficiency of Scotland's existing housing stock is an important issue in relation to tackling fuel poverty and climate change. The vast majority of households who live in the draughtiest, leakiest homes are also living in fuel poverty. Around 50 per cent of Scotland's climate change emissions come from the demand for heat.

In a debate that was led by Labour, we promised a warm homes act to help tackle fuel poverty by driving up energy and insulation standards. The Government also committed to the same legislation, but plans for a bill were missing from the programme for government. By supporting the growth of district heating and renewable heat and by helping to improve the energy efficiency of our homes, a warm homes act would provide the framework for the development of the next generation of domestic renewables and give the renewables industry the confidence and certainty to develop innovative district and micro solutions.

As I have said, our demand for heat accounts for more than half Scotland's energy consumption, yet less than 4 per cent of our heat comes from renewables and only 1 per cent is provided by district heating. Although the Government is right to aim for all new fossil fuel power plants to be

equipped—and existing plants to be adapted—for carbon capture and storage, we could be much more ambitious. We should push for those plants to become co-generating so that we get away from a situation in which, according to Scottish Government figures, only 35 per cent of fossil fuel is converted to electricity, and 65 per cent of that energy is lost as waste heat.

A co-generating plant, where electricity is generated and the heat that is normally wasted and pumped into the sea is instead pumped into neighbouring communities as hot water for district heating schemes, can operate at levels of efficiency that are close to 90 per cent. Such levels of increased efficiency would go a long way towards achieving the Government's target of reducing energy consumption; at the same time, thousands of families in surrounding communities would be lifted out of fuel poverty, allowing the Government to concentrate resources in other areas.

Many rural communities and urban communities that are on the edge of bigger towns are off the gas network. Industry has been critical of the design of energy performance certificates and the standard assessment procedure methodology for more than a decade. The main measure of the EPC is based on running costs, which are unreliable as a measure of energy efficiency in off-gas-grid areas. The current EPC system in Scotland grades houses according to the notional cost of providing energy for heating and hot water per square metre. The SAP methodology does not reflect the efficiency savings that can be made by switching from storage heaters to electric boilers and heating systems. Therefore, we have a situation in Scotland in which local authorities are forced to install expensive storage heaters when building new houses or replacing existing heating systems, rather than installing new technology that would save households money, just because the local authorities need to install the system with the best—yet flawed—SAP score.

In November 2014, *The Telegraph* reported that rural householders had paid more than £40 million into the energy company obligation and yet had received on average less than £2 per household in return. As the ECO is funded via a levy on consumer bills, the cost burden is being disproportionately carried by off-gas-grid consumers who are failing to benefit from those schemes. Now that the Government is taking over responsibility for that scheme in Scotland, I am interested to know how it plans to support off-gas-grid customers.

We believe that the Government could do so much more when it comes to addressing fuel poverty. Resetting the target to eliminate fuel

poverty and bringing forward a warm homes bill next year would be a good start.

15:49

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):**

We are looking at some fairly lengthy reports today, and I fully agree with the Government's view that we need to take time to consider them properly before deciding exactly what action to take.

I hope that we can all agree that fuel poverty is a big problem, and that it is not easy to solve or it would have been solved by now. We got a nonsense statement from Jackie Baillie to the effect that, "You just make the resources available"; actually, she would have to cut the health service, colleges or something else if she wanted to put more money into housing. We cannot just make resources available.

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

**John Mason:** Perhaps Jackie Baillie is going to tell us how to make resources available.

**Jackie Baillie:** If the member was paying close attention, which I would encourage him to do, he would know that we were talking about £15 million being replaced by £10 million. It is a £5 million cut. If the Government cared, it would see that £5 million was small change in its overall budget.

**John Mason:** I would give Jackie Baillie's speeches more credence if she did not demand more money for this, that and the next thing.

Clearly we face a range of moving targets. One of the most recent is the devaluation of the pound, which is likely to lead to higher fuel prices in due course.

I particularly agree with the report of the fuel poverty strategic working group, which talks about the four drivers of fuel poverty: incomes; energy costs; energy performance; and how energy is used in the home. I also agree that all four are important and that we must deal with energy costs, energy performance and the use of energy.

If their home requires major repair work, even people who are on a reasonable income are likely to need a grant or a loan. However, most people should have sufficient income to pay for routine maintenance and their actual fuel costs without needing extra outside help. I think that sometimes we debate issues too much in silos. Of course, in themselves, the living wage is a good thing and sanctions are a bad thing, but they are not stand-alone issues. One of the reasons why those issues are respectively good and bad is that if there were to be improvements, people would be

able to afford to live and pay for a minimum standard of living out of their own decent income.

I was particularly struck by the statement in paragraph 3.1 of the strategic working group's report that

"In some cases, low income households live in social housing with good energy performance, yet are still fuel poor (19% of fuel poor households live in properties rated EPC band B or C)."

The report then goes on to make five recommendations in relation to income—the structure of the report means that they go from recommendation 3 to recommendation 7. Recommendation 3 is to ensure that people get the benefits to which they are entitled; recommendation 5 refers to training places and job opportunities; and recommendations 6 and 7 are more about energy policy and energy projects.

The remaining one, number 4, recommends that we

"review ... welfare and social security policies"

both devolved and reserved, and in particular suggests that the

"Scottish Living Wage and Social Security Policies should work together to ensure a basic ... living standard for every household".

That is absolutely key. Sanctions, for example, are reducing people's income to unsustainable levels. Everyone should have a guaranteed minimum income. We cannot have sanctions and end fuel poverty, which is why I find it so frustrating to listen to the Tories' speeches. They support sanctions, therefore they support fuel poverty. When we as a society impose sanctions on an individual or family, we are deliberately putting them into fuel poverty.

Members who have seen it will know that that is what happened in the film "I, Daniel Blake". It contains moving scenes of the young family moving into what appears to be a fairly reasonable house, but because they have been sanctioned, they have no income and so cannot heat it. To give him his due, Daniel Blake shows them how to use a candle to help keep themselves warm.

I have used this comparison before; as no one has convinced me that it is wrong, I will use it again. If the worst people in our society are criminals and they are guaranteed a reasonable level of warmth in prison, how can we not guarantee the same minimum to every family? As far as I know, we cannot sanction prisoners by switching their heating off. How can we sanction decent families by doing that to them?

I want in the time available to touch on one or two other issues.

**John Scott:** Does Mr Mason accept that his is the party of government and that these are the Government's choices? It has had 10 years to address the problem, and it has failed.

**John Mason:** I think that my main argument is that, although it is not the only factor, income is a key factor. The member's party is very guilty. People need to have a guaranteed level of income that cannot be sanctioned, and his party should be ashamed of the sanctions regime that it looks over.

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

**John Mason:** I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

The pound going down will push up fuel prices, which will hit poorer people even harder.

I believe that Andy Wightman was referring to the private rented sector and owner-occupiers when he talked about repairs and maintenance. I, too, was going to mention those issues, because if we are to improve the housing stock we might need to consider compulsory factoring and having someone in every property who takes the lead in getting things improved.

I note the recommendation in the report that the definition of fuel poverty be changed as it has proved unhelpful in targeting those most in need. That is a valid argument, although some will fear that someone will try to pretend that there is less of a problem than there actually is.

I welcome the Government's commitment not to define the problem away and to have an expert independent review to see how we can make improvements.

There are certain essentials that we should expect in the modern, developed society that we claim to be. Food and clothing are certainly two of those, but warm, dry accommodation has to be included.

15:55

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** Everyone in Scotland should be confident that they are able to heat their homes and that is why I welcome the Scottish Labour Party bringing the issue to the chamber today.

According to the report by the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group, more than a third of households in Scotland, or 845,000 households, live in fuel poverty. In rural areas, fuel poverty levels hit a staggering 50 per cent. Fuel poverty has almost doubled since 2003, and it has risen from the rate of 25 per cent that it was when the Scottish National Party Government took office in 2007.

The Scottish Conservatives have spoken about the issue a number of times, linking it with the much higher chance of people developing mental health problems, respiratory disease and other physical health issues. When it comes to health, research shows that residents with a bedroom temperature of 21°C are 50 per cent less likely to suffer depression and anxiety than those with a bedroom temperature of 15°C. Children who live in damp, mouldy homes are nearly three times more likely to develop asthma symptoms than those who do not.

Certain demographics are more vulnerable than others, and the report "Winter Mortality in Scotland 2015/16" revealed that 2,850 people—the majority of whom were elderly—died in 2015-16 as a result of it being winter. That was the second highest winter mortality rate since 2008-09.

It is clear that, even though the determinants of fuel poverty are not always in the control of the UK Government or the Scottish Government, more radical action needs to be taken. We need clear statutory targets and timetables for action and a transformative policy that gets to the root of the problem, and that is what the Scottish Conservatives have proposed.

As the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group report states, the quality of the house that someone lives in should never determine that they have to pay disproportionately higher bills. More than 40 per cent of social housing falls short of the Scottish housing quality standard and, with regards to all its housing stock, Scotland falls short of the desired energy efficiency standards. For instance, around 60 per cent of Scotland's properties have an energy performance certificate rating of D or worse, rising to 80 per cent in rural areas. The answer lies in investment in energy efficiency measures, not only as a way of bringing down household bills, but as a way of reducing our carbon emissions.

As well as measures by the UK Government, such as the rollout across the UK of free smart meters, which will give consumers more control over their energy use—

**Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Annie Wells:** I am sorry, but not at the moment.

We should have clear targets set by the Scottish Government, as my colleague Adam Tomkins states in his motion.

For instance, the aim of all properties achieving an EPC rating of C or above by the end of the next decade would drastically improve energy efficiency in Scotland. Not only would that save the consumer money, but it would entail the creation of a national programme with the potential

to create 9,000 jobs in Scotland if completed by 2025. As the existing homes alliance points out, such an initiative would create job opportunities across Scotland, unlike other national infrastructure projects.

I welcome the Scottish Government's designation of energy efficiency as a national infrastructure priority, but we need to commit significant levels of capital investment to the project in order to achieve the change that we propose. The Scottish Conservatives have proposed gradually raising the energy efficiency budget to reach 10 per cent of the Scottish Government's capital budget allocations. That would be a bold capital infrastructure investment, which would rise from £80 million this year to £340 million by 2020-21 and would total £1 billion over the next five years. That policy is supported in the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group report.

In addition to grants and loans, we believe that energy efficiency improvements should be reflected in the tax system. Specifically, they could be incentivised through land and buildings transaction tax discounts.

Energy efficiency is, of course, not the only factor in eradicating fuel poverty. That is why I want to reiterate my party's commitment to protecting the winter fuel payment and the cold weather payment, rather than reassessing when in the year the former is paid when they are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Energy companies are also in some way responsible for tackling the issue. That is why I welcome the decision by the UK Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Greg Clark, to probe further into why the big six energy companies are making profits that are higher than they claim they are.

I highlight again the need to address fuel poverty in a bold and transformative way. The Scottish Government has designated tackling fuel poverty as one its main commitments, but we need clear timetables and targets in order to halt the downward trend that we see.

16:00

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I congratulate the Scottish Labour Party on holding this very important debate.

In January this year, the Scottish Liberal Democrats led a similar debate in the chamber and called on the Scottish Government to reverse cuts to its fuel poverty budget and to revise its 2016 fuel poverty target, because it was set to miss it by some margin. However, the call went unheeded and was voted down by the SNP.

We have seen ministers cast aside advice from across the chamber and even from the experts. They repeatedly denied that they were failing to meet their fuel poverty eradication target, but they have failed. There can be no hiding from that fact.

I expect all members would agree that it is, at this point in human civilised development, an absolute travesty that families in Scotland, particularly in our remote and rural communities, still have to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table. We can only hope that, unencumbered by its supermajority, the SNP will now listen to the solutions that are being offered to it from across the chamber.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have sought cross-party support in order that we can achieve a warmer and healthier home for every single person in Scotland, and we do so again today. We must all get behind the plan to introduce a warm homes bill alongside the establishment of catch-up zones to deliver warmer homes in communities that have fallen behind. Winter is coming, so the Government must act quickly to establish a new target to eradicate fuel poverty.

Last year, Citizens Advice Scotland published its report "Still Addressing the Poverty Premium", which brought to light the increased costs that people on low incomes often face. They are punished for not being able to afford internet access to secure the best energy deal, and are further discriminated against through internet-only tariffs. They are punished by energy companies being far more likely to give the best deals to people who can pay by direct debit, which guarantees the companies payments each month from consumers, and they are further punished by using meters, which give them a higher chance of being in financial difficulty: if a person is in debt, that machine can have a voracious appetite. That is yet another frontier on which having resources can lead to savings and not having resources can mean the opposite.

That is why smart meter roll-out is crucial. It is an example of a national infrastructure project that needs to be implemented in order to help people out of fuel poverty. It will help people to save money by showing how much energy they can save and it will make the country more efficient.

That households in Scotland should face such conditions is a national outrage. I am talking about 25 per cent of homes in our nation's capital and a third of homes across Scotland. The World Health Organization attributes 30 per cent of preventable deaths to cold and poorly insulated housing. However, the Scottish Government meets that reality with a £15 million cut to efforts to eradicate fuel poverty.

We do well to remember the multidimensionality of the problem. Fuel poverty is demonstrably symptomatic of, and a contributor to, a wide range of negative social lifestyle factors. Choosing to heat only certain rooms in a home can lead to overcrowding and, with that, the ready exchange of viruses and bacteria. It can also cause a proliferation of damp and rot in rooms that go unheated.

The Marmot review in 2011 reported that fuel poverty and cold housing can have a damaging effect on mental health in all age groups. That reality was underscored by the warm front scheme review, which revealed that following installation of heating and insulation improvements residents were 40 per cent less likely to report higher levels of psychological distress. When the Scottish Government gets round to replacing the mental health strategy—which expired at the end of last year—central to it must be ensuring that the mental wellbeing of our citizenry is underpinned by their having warm and dry places in which to live.

Incrementalism in the fuel poverty agenda has failed the most vulnerable communities in our society. It is time that the Scottish Parliament met the challenge of fuel poverty and brought us closer to fuel parity through a warm homes bill. Only through legislation can we make meaningful progress to eradicate a social condition that should, by rights, be confined to the pages of a Dickens novel. Our ambition in this enterprise must be unfettered, with catch-up zones created through legislation to accelerate progress in our most deprived communities. Every aspect of our answer to the challenge also needs to recognise the very specific needs and circumstances of rural and island communities.

The cost of our inactivity in this area can be measured in human lives, whereas the benefits of action are legion, including a step-change reduction in our carbon emissions, job creation through infrastructure investment and a measurable decline in demand for primary care, with a demonstrable improvement in our mental health. The question should not be whether we can afford to invest in efforts to eradicate fuel poverty, but whether we can afford not to.

16:06

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** There are few things more fundamental to human existence than housing. Indeed, Maslow's hierarchy of needs has housing as one of the physiological needs at the very lowest level of the hierarchy. It is right that we are debating housing issues this afternoon.

I will talk about an innovation in my constituency, but I have first to address some

issues that have been raised in the debate. I was incredulous when I heard Conservative members express concern about fuel poverty without recognising the contribution that their Conservative Government has made to fuel poverty in this country. Much has been made of the Scottish Government not meeting its target, but very few members have talked about the efforts that have been made towards reaching the target. However, the Scottish Government has had its hands tied behind his back because it has been working alongside a Westminster Government that is imposing fuel poverty on our citizens.

Jackie Baillie said that the cap of £5 million is pocket money to the Scottish Government. In the past three months, the Scottish Government has spent £9 million through the welfare fund on crisis grants to support people in adverse poverty, including fuel poverty. What about the families who have been affected by the Concentrix and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs debacle? They have had cuts to their incomes, there is no way forward for appeals and the onus is on them to prove their innocence, which so many have proven. Again, they are families who have been pushed into fuel poverty.

Concern has been expressed about pensioners. What about the 100,000 Scottish women pensioners who are among those for whom the women against state pension inequality—WASPI—campaign was begun? Their retirement plans and income projections have been absolutely slashed by the plans of the Westminster Government. I ask Opposition colleagues, when they come to the chamber to demand more resources and money, to tell us, please, what budget will be cut and where the money will come from. For them to do anything less than that is simply irresponsible.

I want to highlight the BRE Scotland innovation park in my constituency. Formerly the Building Research Establishment, BRE has been on the Ravenscraig site for a number of years and has a demonstration development showcasing how the future of sustainable housing might look. It includes a building of standard four-in-a-block council housing, which is used to demonstrate how a traditional building can have its energy efficiency improved through a mix of insulation, solar power and window systems.

I would invite the minister to come and see the site, but I was there with him just a few weeks ago to see its dementia-friendly building. However, I invite members to come to the BRE site and see some of the wonderful work that demonstrates what can be done. Andy Wightman is right that less than 1 per cent of our housing stock is being replaced each year, so our focus has to be on existing properties.

That project, which is funded by the European Union, has been done in conjunction with Belgium and Sweden and in partnership with Edinburgh Napier University and Historic Environment Scotland. When I was invited to see it earlier this year, I was accompanied by Robin Parker of WWF Scotland, Liz Marquis, who is the director of the Energy Agency, and the policy manager of the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers. They were invited because of their roles in the Existing Homes Alliance Scotland, and we discussed some of the information that they have on fuel poverty.

**Alex Rowley:** I have been to Ravenscraig and visited that project, and I agree with all the positive things that Clare Adamson has said about it. Does she agree that the success in housing in the public and social rented sector needs to be replicated in the private rented sector? Does she agree that irrespective of whether they rent publicly or privately, people should be able to expect a certain standard of energy efficiency?

**Clare Adamson:** I agree that there has to be progress in the private rented sector. That is an issue going forward, but we have improved building standards in those areas. On tenants' rights, I am sure that the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 will improve opportunities for residents to raise concerns with private landlords.

I also want to mention a project that is run by the Energy Agency in Ayrshire. The Energy Agency is a charity that successfully bid for a contract to manage an Energy Saving Scotland advice centre, and the Scottish Government now has it managing the home energy Scotland money in that part of the country. The centre works closely with the general practitioners in its area and takes referrals of people who have problems with their lungs, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma. It works closely with the groups who are most at risk to ensure that they have the best advice and opportunities to access the home energy payments that are available. We all know how important that is. A few years ago, the all-party parliamentary group on respiratory health at Westminster took evidence on the difficulties, and everyone agreed that COPD and asthma are worsened by colder houses, so fuel poverty is certainly a priority. I look forward to working with the Scottish Government to eradicate it.

16:12

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Fuel poverty is one of the biggest problems affecting Scotland today, and it is not getting any better on the SNP Government's watch. With almost 60 per cent of dwellings being D rated or worse for energy

efficiency, is it any wonder that health and mental health problems are on the increase, especially in rural Scotland? Scotland has a higher proportion of households living in fuel poverty than anywhere else in the UK, with 35 per cent of households or, staggeringly, 845,000 households living in fuel poverty. That figure has been reached on the SNP Government's watch. Astoundingly, the number was only 586,000 homes when the SNP came into Government in 2007. Moreover, 229,000 households are now in extreme fuel poverty—from 172,000 in 2007.

As other members have said, the SNP Government should be hanging its head in shame. Some members who are in the chamber will recall MSP and then First Minister Alex Salmond saying on 20 September 2007:

"We are entirely committed to the statutory target to eradicate fuel poverty. That point was made by the minister yesterday."—[*Official Report*, 20 September 2007; c 1970.]

We should compare that commitment with the reality today.

Of course, none of those despairing statistics happen without a reason and—to use a traditional country expression—there is no need to look for complicated reasons when simple ones exist. The simple explanation is that the Government's spending on fuel poverty is reducing. Between the financial years 2015-16 and 2016-17, SNP Government spending on it will fall by £15.7 million, as Jackie Baillie pointed out. Parliament has been told that £119 million was allocated to the problem in 2015-16, but this year's projected figure is £103 million.

All that is bad enough, but the knock-on effects make the failure to address fuel poverty so much worse. I refer, as other members including Alex Rowley have done, to the health of the people who live in fuel poverty. Cold homes lead to respiratory and cardiovascular problems. Temperatures of below 12°C have been shown to place a strain on the cardiovascular system. For every 1°C drop in mean temperature below 5°C, GP consultations for respiratory tract infections can increase by up to 19 per cent. Those are staggering statistics.

It is well known that respiratory diseases are responsible for about a third of excess winter deaths and that cardiovascular diseases are responsible for about 48 per cent of excess winter deaths. Excess winter deaths—there is even an abbreviation for that: EWDs—are three times higher among people who live in the coldest quarter of housing than they are among people who live in the warmest quarter of housing.

Heating is what makes the difference between living in a house or a home. Cold homes are also linked to increases in asthma among children. Children who live in damp and mouldy houses are

between one and a half and three times more prone to coughing and wheezing than children who live in warm, dry homes—I have been there, myself.

Those are some of the facts. I well recall John Swinney standing here in our Parliament saying that the SNP would spend to save. A classic opportunity to spend to reduce fuel poverty is going a-begging here, while our health service struggles with the consequences. I almost feel sorry for Shona Robison, who is constantly firefighting to keep our health service going and deal with winter pressures, while her colleagues in the Cabinet are cutting the very budgets that would help to keep people out of GP surgeries and out of our overburdened and sometimes overwhelmed—particularly in my constituency—hospitals.

The Government needs to wake up and smell the coffee, or join the dots—members may pick whatever metaphor they want. Spending to reduce fuel poverty will be repaid many times over in the health of the fuel poor, who are usually the most vulnerable people in our society, and will massively reduce demand on our national health service.

What is to be done? Adam Tomkins talked about the need for transformational change. I reinforce that view. Starting today, we should set a target for all properties in Scotland to achieve an EPC rating of C or above by 2030. As Adam Tomkins said, we need to commit significant capital investment to such a project, with the share of departmental expenditure limit capital budgets rising to 10 per cent by 2021. We propose that £1 billion be spent cumulatively over the next five years to address the problem, and that people who are on the lowest incomes and who live in the hardest-to-reach homes should be helped first.

Energy-efficiency improvements should attract relief through the council tax and business rates systems—that has been a manifesto commitment of ours in the past. Grants or loans should be made available to deliver the upgrades that so many properties in Scotland require. Winter fuel payments and cold weather payments should be protected when they are devolved to the Scottish Parliament—although that is perhaps a less immediate prospect than was envisaged even a week ago.

We welcome the debate today on Labour's motion, because it draws attention to an issue that the Government is failing to address. It cannot be in anyone's interests, or in any Government's interests, to keep people in the poorest, dampest and coldest housing, yet that is what is happening. After almost 10 years, that is the Government's track record. It is failing the people who are most in need.

I can only hope that today's debate will spur the Scottish Government into action. I again commend the Labour Party for bringing the matter to the attention of our Parliament.

16:18

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

Like other members, I am desperately disappointed that the Scottish Government has failed to meet the target to end fuel poverty, despite a fall in fuel prices as a result of the downturn in oil and gas.

The Labour coalition set targets—indeed, Jackie Baillie set targets—to eradicate fuel poverty, but that Government put in place funding to do so. This Government has been cutting the funding for years, and it included carbon reduction targets in the system. Carbon reduction is a laudable aim, but making it part of the same target has worked against tackling fuel poverty. Funds for insulation and better heating systems are open to all, rather than targeted at the fuel poor.

We also know that those who are struggling to make ends meet have neither the time nor the inclination to search about for schemes and funding. When they find them, they also need money to contribute, which makes such funding unobtainable for them. When someone is struggling just to put food on the table and clothe their children, they have very little time to look for solutions. That is why our response to fuel poverty needs to be proactive. We need advisers getting out to meet people and help them to find solutions, and we also need to provide them with funding.

Yesterday, I heard of a wonderful initiative that is taking place in Sutherland. Every patient who is discharged from hospital is being offered a free home energy assessment. Many of those people will be elderly and will need assistance in dealing with fuel efficiency, energy suppliers and insulation. It is a very simple initiative but it could have an enormous impact on those people.

We all know that the level of fuel poverty is higher in rural areas such as Sutherland. The Scottish rural fuel poverty task force report states that over half of all rural and remote households live in fuel poverty, which is a staggering statistic. There are a number of reasons for that. First, incomes are often lower, with people working a number of jobs, some seasonal, to make ends meet. Many of those seasonal jobs are in the summer, when people do not require the same level of heating, and the people are often underemployed and earning a great deal less when the cold weather sets in, making it more difficult for them to afford to buy fuel. They are also often off the gas grid and therefore do not have access to the cheapest forms of fuel. Being

off the gas grid also means that they do not qualify for the schemes that are available to those who are on the gas grid.

Calor Gas has provided a briefing for the debate. I will not quote from it, but I recommend it as reading, as it shows the disadvantage that policies from both our Governments heap on those who live in off-gas-grid homes and are in fuel poverty. Allowing the big six to provide those schemes immediately pushes those people out of their jurisdiction. Deprivation indicators also do not work as well in rural areas as in urban areas, so people do not qualify although they live in an area of deprivation.

In many cases, people in fuel poverty cannot afford the best alternative to gas, which is oil heating. They cannot afford either to install oil central heating or to fill up an oil tank. The Government's central heating scheme for elderly people would not pay for oil-fired central heating and asked pensioners who had already been means tested to qualify for the scheme to find thousands of pounds to pay the additional cost of oil-fired central heating, which was impossible for them to do. Therefore, they were left—as are many others in rural and remote areas—with electric heating, which is among the most expensive and inefficient forms of heating.

Another reason for fuel poverty is the quality of housing stock and its value. Many of the homes in rural Scotland are stone-built, storey-and-a-half houses that are hard to heat and insulate. We are often told about the high prices that are achieved on the open market for those houses, but that happens only in picturesque areas. For the most part, they have very little value and the cost of insulation is far greater than the finance that could be raised against the value of the houses.

Prices for insulation work on those hard-to-treat houses are high because only large contractors can jump through the hoops that they are required to jump through to become accredited fitters of the insulation. In rural areas, we miss out twice here. Local companies, if they were accredited, would spend their income in local areas, boosting local economies. They would also be cheaper to employ because their workers would be living at home and smaller companies have fewer overheads. That would be a very practical solution that the Scottish Government needs to consider.

Added to the problem is the fact that—as we all know from the weather forecasts—temperatures in the countryside fall way below those in urban areas and there is less shelter from high winds, so the need for heat and better insulation is greater.

The Scottish Government needs to set a new target to eradicate fuel poverty. More important, it needs to try to achieve it. The target cannot be just

a Scotland-wide one whereby treating urban areas becomes the best way to achieve it due to economies of scale. It needs to be set on smaller geographical areas where rural solutions are equitable at least, if not targeted specifically. Living in cold, damp homes affects our health, our ability to learn and our overall wellbeing.

The issue is crucial to all of us. I very much hope that we can set a target to eradicate fuel poverty and that, this time, the Scottish Government will achieve it.

16:25

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this important debate. I think that we all agree that, in 2016, we would expect everyone living in our country to at least have a warm and comfortable home. It is disappointing that we are having this debate again in 2016, as we would expect standards to be better, but they are not for a range of complex reasons.

I appreciate the spirit in which Alex Rowley approached the debate. It is just a shame that it went downhill from there with some of the speeches from others on the Opposition benches. It is utterly absurd for John Scott, backed up by Jackie Baillie on the Labour benches, to lay the blame on the SNP Government for the rise in fuel poverty in Scotland.

Between 2010 and 2013, energy and fuel prices rose at eight times the rate of earnings. That period, and the period since then, has coincided with the Tory party's austerity budgets. It has been cutting people's benefits and plunging people into poverty. I say to the Tory party that it is not the SNP ministers who should be hanging their heads in shame; rather, it is every single man and woman on the Tory benches in this Parliament who should be doing that.

**John Scott:** Richard Lochhead is used to taking responsibility for the actions of Government. Does he accept that the situation that he has described, poor as it is, has happened on his Government's watch?

**Richard Lochhead:** As many members have made plain, a number of factors are behind fuel poverty, many of which are the UK Government's responsibility. Another factor is global energy prices, which I have to accept that perhaps not even the UK Government can control.

Fuel poverty is affecting real people's lives, so it is important that we have a mature and honest debate on the subject. The blame for rising fuel poverty figures over the past few years cannot be laid at the door of any one political party—and particularly not the SNP. Instead, we should



recognise that the backdrop has been record investment by the SNP Government since 2007 in tackling fuel poverty.

I will address most of my remarks to the rural situation in Scotland. I welcome the publication of the task force's report, which addressed the important issue of fuel poverty. It is a pity that, over many years, given how the UK Government has dealt with the big six energy providers, we have not paid more attention to off-grid properties, because they are a neglected problem.

In many parts of rural Scotland, people rely on deliveries of oil to heat their home with or on bottles of gas to cook with, so they do not have the options that people on the mains have, including access to dual-fuel discounts and all the special schemes, tariffs and offers from which they could benefit. Therefore, I argue for a lot more focus on off-grid properties in the times ahead not only from the Scottish Government but especially from the regulator, Ofgem, and the UK Government.

Some of the comments in the briefing from Calor Gas are pretty staggering. It says that the UK Government schemes almost completely bypassed the countryside and it criticises how energy policy and fuel poverty are being tackled in relation to off-grid properties in Scotland. It is important that we address those issues.

In my constituency, 28 per cent of properties are off-grid, compared with the national average in Scotland of 18 per cent. In Moray, we have additional problems that contribute to fuel poverty and wider poverty, including the fact that we have a low-wage economy in comparison with other mainland Scotland constituencies. Family incomes are being hammered by high fuel costs at a time when salaries are lower than they are in other parts of the country.

The figures that were sent to members by StepChange Debt Charity explain the situation, too. It highlights the fact that the number of clients in electricity and gas arrears has risen between 2015 and 2016 in Moray. Whereas 3.6 per cent of people were in gas arrears in 2015, that figure has risen to 9.4 per cent in 2016. Fuel poverty is a real issue that is affecting real people and causing debt in our society.

The housing stock has been mentioned. If I remember my facts correctly, 1 per cent of our housing stock is renewed every year, so the state of our housing stock is an issue that goes back generations. In Moray, 8 per cent of homes have a poor national home energy rating—that is way above the national average of 3 per cent—and 44 per cent of properties have a rating of below 5 on the scale compared with 25 per cent nationally. Therefore, the issue is a particular problem in Moray. As many members have said, the state of

the housing stock poses challenges when it comes to energy efficiency measures. We must pay a lot more attention to such issues.

I see that I am running out of time. I want to mention an issue that has not been raised, which is energy justice, as I call it. Scotland is an energy-rich country. In Moray, we have umpteen wind farms and a lot of development is taking place in connection with the transmission lines that SSE is putting in place towards the Blackhillock substation at Keith. The people of Moray are watching a whole lot of energy bypassing their homes, or being produced near their homes, without necessarily feeling the benefit of it. It must be galling for people who live in fuel poverty and who live near an energy project, whether it is a renewables project or a project that is based on any other energy source, to have to watch that energy being developed on their doorstep or being transported past their home.

Surely we can find a way of making sure that people benefit from having such significant energy resources on their doorstep. We talk about community benefit from renewable energy projects. I would like some of that to be used for micro-energy plans or for introducing schemes to tackle fuel poverty in our rural areas, where much of the energy is produced. The Scottish ministers could make a contribution in that area. I would like to see a publicly owned Scottish national energy company taking a stake in energy projects in Scotland and reinvesting the money in other energy projects to get people out of fuel poverty.

There are some practical steps that we can take in to address the issues that I have identified. We absolutely have to eradicate fuel poverty in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** We move to the winding-up speeches.

16:31

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I thank Labour for holding a debate on this important topic; it is very timely.

It has been quite a mature debate. It is important that we have add-on amendments rather than delete amendments. The Greens will support all the amendments at decision time, and I urge all parties to do the same. Voting against one amendment will simply weaken the approach of others.

The Labour motion scopes out well the nature of the problem and the multiple approaches that are required to tackle fuel poverty. I agree with Alex Rowley—we need to drill down into standards in the private sector. As Mark Griffin said, we must revive the warm homes bill. There needs to be a

transformation in the way in which energy is generated and controlled. In Denmark, which has a fuel poverty rate of only 4 per cent compared with our rate of 30 per cent, many of the district heating schemes are controlled by local councils.

We all agree on the need for a new target to be produced quickly and for a plan for fuel poverty eradication. However, Labour will fail to ask for the resources to achieve that unless it votes for the Green amendment. I respect the fact that Labour set the fuel poverty target in 2001, but fuel poverty shot up on its watch and it has shot up on the watch of every Government since then. Rhetoric should be matched by budgets and action. Labour has repeatedly called the SNP out for giving us words but little action. Voting against our amendment will have the same effect.

The SNP's amendment identifies the on-going consideration that the Government is giving to the eradication strategy and the two important reports that have been produced as part of that process. It is also considering a statutory target. I acknowledge the seriousness with which the minister is approaching the issue, and I appreciate his statement that he will not define fuel poverty away, which is important.

A number of SNP members, including the minister, have talked about the collaborative approach that is required. That collaborative approach needs to be brought to the heart of the Government. I back Energy Action Scotland's call for a cross-departmental group to be set up within the Government to look at the savings that we can make by tackling fuel poverty, including in the area of health. John Scott made that point passionately in his speech.

The Tory amendment sets out the objective, which we share, of getting our national housing stock up to category C by 2025. Adam Tomkins is right to point out that a clear target can lead to transformative change, but that can be achieved only if we are prepared to make the clear budget decisions that are necessary when they are put before the Parliament. Therefore, I ask the Tories to back the principle of increased budget. The Green amendment simply states the reality: that current budget allocations will not be enough to deliver on Labour's approach and the Tories' stated objective. I hope that we can settle on the scale of ambition that is needed and support all the amendments at decision time.

We heard from a number of members about the impact of fuel poverty. Alex Rowley gave a moving example of a family in Fife who spend about a quarter of their income on fuel, and we heard similar examples from other members. In my community, there are large pockets of deprivation in areas where people live in old stone properties off the gas grid. Over time, social tenants have

benefited from internal insulation measures through the ECO programme, but it has left behind many low-income owner-occupiers and tenants in the private sector who are struggling with fuel bills. Many of those families are on pre-payment meters which, as Alex Cole-Hamilton said, have a ferocious appetite, or they are, in the 21st century, heating their homes with open coal fires. When I talk to those families, I find that they are put off by the complexity and the hassle factor created by the confusing array of schemes that exist. Ironically, there is a distillery right at the heart of our community that is belting out waste heat 24/7.

It is clear that we need an absolute step change in how we tackle fuel poverty—one that responds to the circumstances of individual households. Falling into fuel poverty means that people become more vulnerable to the causes of it, which include poor mental and physical health, inability to find work and cramped living conditions that affect educational attainment. Each family's spiral of poverty will continue from one generation to another unless we tackle the problem.

I turn to the practical action that we can take. More resource would enable a co-ordinated street-by-street retrofit scheme to be delivered through the SEEP programme. Taking a street-by-street approach would reduce the hassle and the costs—for example, in areas with tenement buildings, the cost of setting up scaffolding would be incurred only once. Such an approach could also help in areas with historic properties, which require double glazing that fits the planning rules and is high in cost.

A new approach to building maintenance could deliver affordable warmth. It could include new legislation to facilitate common repairs, enhancing the role of home reports and including mandatory energy efficiency measures in the sale of properties with a clear price-tag attached.

The Scotland Act 2016 devolves new powers to Scottish ministers to determine how funds from the UK Government's energy company obligation are targeted. At present, the largest energy suppliers must take action to promote insulation measures and connection to district heating schemes, particularly in low-income areas. We can be much bolder in tackling rising fuel bills by pushing the limits of Scotland's newly devolved powers to create a Scottish fuel poverty scheme that is paid into by those who make the greatest profits from energy sales to support those who are struggling most to heat their homes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. You must close.

**Mark Ruskell:** Presiding Officer—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, you must stop now—I am sorry.

16:38

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

The debate has been useful and I thank Labour for bringing it to the chamber. I thank Alex Rowley and Jackie Baillie in particular for their considered contributions.

Fuel poverty affects a third of households in Scotland, which is a higher proportion—35 per cent as opposed to 15 per cent—than in the UK as a whole. We all agree that there is an issue that needs to be tackled. However, the SNP has dragged its feet. Those percentages could be much better than they are, or we could at least be further down the road in improving matters. As the Conservative amendment states, and as Adam Tomkins made plain, we need to set a clear target to achieve transformational change.

I said that the SNP has dragged its feet. It has had the power to do something—in the private rented sector, for instance, as Alex Rowley highlighted—since the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 came into force. However, instead of acting, the SNP has done nothing except promise a consultation. Meanwhile, things are powering ahead south of the border. Kevin Stewart asked for ideas; perhaps he should look at what is happening in England. From 1 April 2018, properties in the private rented sector there will normally be required to meet a minimum energy performance rating.

The regulations will come into force for new lets and renewals of tenancies with effect from 1 April 2018 and for all existing tenancies from 1 April 2020. That goes far further than anything that we see here. In England, it will be unlawful to rent out a property that breaches the requirement to reach a minimum rating, unless there is an applicable exemption, and there will be a civil penalty of up to £4,000 for breaches. Under separate regulations that have been effective from 1 April this year, tenants can also apply for consent to carry out energy efficiency improvements in private rented properties.

Those are some ideas for Mr Stewart. The Scottish Government should look at those measures when it draws up its warm homes bill. Kevin Stewart is keen on making interventions and I will certainly take one from him if he wants to tell us when we will see that bill. No?

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

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Stewart has responded.

**Graham Simpson:** Oh, absolutely. Here we go.

**Kevin Stewart:** The member will see the bill next year. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will add to that in summing up.

**Graham Simpson:** Fantastic. We got a straight answer from Kevin Stewart—that is a first.

As Adam Tomkins said, capital investment will be required, and it leads to jobs and skills. In my constituency, on visits to Scottish Power's training centre in Hamilton and to South Lanarkshire Council in East Kilbride, I have seen some of the great work that is being done on energy efficiency. I would happily take up Clare Adamson's offer of a visit to Ravenscraig, if that is still on. *[Interruption.]* I see that it is—jolly good.

**Adam Tomkins:** Clare Adamson looks pleased.

**Graham Simpson:** She does.

We would like the energy efficiency budget line gradually to reach 10 per cent of the Scottish Government's capital budget allocations. That would mean capital infrastructure investment rising from this year's £80 million to £340 million by 2020-21. Winter fuel payments and cold weather payments should be protected when they are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

If we keep dragging our feet, that will lead to problems for the people who we are all here to serve. For example, cold homes can lead to respiratory and cardiovascular problems, as Alison Harris and Annie Wells mentioned. As John Scott said, every 1°C drop in the mean temperature below 5°C results in GP consultations for respiratory tract infections increasing by almost 20 per cent. In the 21st century, it is inconceivable that the most vulnerable members of society are at the mercy of cold weather. We are duty bound to stop delaying and to take action now.

Research by the existing homes alliance has found that there are 1.5 million cold homes in Scotland. In 2050, more than 80 per cent of the existing housing stock will still be home to a family, which shows that focusing on new housing alone will not solve Scotland's housing issues.

I am glad that Alex Rowley mentioned tariffs. Only one energy company does not have standing charges, and that should be tackled.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must begin to wind up, please.

**Graham Simpson:** I will.

I repeat that fuel poverty is too widespread for us to carry on as normal. Current strategies have failed. We have called for a transformational change that focuses on energy efficiency and performance, which requires significant capital spend. Half measures will not do if the fuel poverty strategic working group's ambition is to be realised.

16:43

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** It has been a good debate. At times it has been challenging and feisty but, as Mark Ruskell reflected, it has also been mature. Mark Griffin gave a particularly well-informed speech. I confess that the significance of the Toblerone somewhat passed me by.

On a more serious note, I will start by focusing on what we agree on. We all agree that we are in the business of eradicating fuel poverty, because doing that is crucial to making Scotland a fairer country. We all agree that it is scandalous that we have fuel poverty in a resource-rich country—Richard Lochhead reflected on that. Everyone agrees that everyone should have a warm, dry home. I think that everyone agrees on the importance of collaboration across the chamber, collaboration among those in government at every level and collaboration with the social enterprise sector, the third sector, housing associations, landlords, the private rented sector and, of course, energy companies.

We all agree that we have an absolute commitment to a warm homes bill. The Government wants to introduce a warm homes bill in 2017-18—year 2 of the parliamentary cycle. At its heart, that bill must have statutory targets to end fuel poverty. To answer Jackie Baillie's question directly, I suppose that we will indeed reset the target. Acknowledging honestly that the target will not be met this year is not the same as abandoning our ambition to eradicate fuel poverty.

The bill must be underpinned by the right strategy—that is where we will have to learn from the past. When we publish our draft strategy, it will include draft proposals on timescales, targets and actions that will need to be fleshed out, discussed, debated and tested. We will need to consider particularly the challenges for rural Scotland, because we know that in some areas the fuel poverty level is as high as 70 per cent.

There is a lot of work to do. Kevin Stewart outlined honestly and transparently the sequence of events and talked about using the expert group's learning to inform a definition, inform targets, inform a strategy and inform our bill. At its heart, the purpose of doing those things is to ensure that we have the best possible warm homes bill.

**Jackie Baillie:** The cabinet secretary will understand that the minister was asked twice, very clearly, to suggest that he was resetting the date for the target to end fuel poverty, not creating a new target such as halving the fuel poverty level in the next 50 years, which would be unacceptable, to be frank. I am keen to hear the cabinet

secretary say for the record that the Government's ambition is to end fuel poverty and that it will reset the target to do exactly that.

**Angela Constance:** For once, Jackie Baillie and I are at one, as she is at one with Kevin Stewart. It is uncharacteristic for me to be briefer and more succinct than my colleagues, but I am trying hard to do that for her, for absolute clarity.

**Jackie Baillie:** Just say yes.

**Angela Constance:** I am glad that Ms Baillie is saying, "Just say yes."

The scrutiny from, debates with and involvement of Parliament and all our stakeholders are absolutely important as we go forward. I say with respect that, if any of this was easy, the job would have been done by previous Governments and ministers.

As Annie Wells said, not everything is in the control of this Government or the UK Government. The cost of fuel has hampered progress—that is not an excuse but a statement of fact. If fuel prices had risen in line with inflation between 2002 and 2014, the fuel poverty rate in 2014 would have been 9.5 per cent, as opposed to 35 per cent. However, I make it clear that 9.5 per cent would not be good enough and would still be too high.

I say to Alex Cole-Hamilton that we will not cast aside the advice. We want to consider fully the 100 recommendations from the two working groups, including the recommendations on the overall strategy and the findings that were focused on tackling rural fuel poverty. The fuel poverty strategic working group said in its report something that all politicians should reflect on. It is a particularly hard reflection for the Government to make. The working group said:

"high levels of fuel poverty exist despite commendable investment by the Scottish Government".

I do not demur for one minute from the importance of investment, and of course the Government will publish its draft budget in mid-December. However, that quote tells me that what matters is not just the level of resource but the actions that underpin that resource, and that is far more sophisticated than the allocation of money.

I do not want anyone to misinterpret my comments, because I do not demur from the importance of investment for individuals, for eradicating fuel poverty or for our economy. However, the big lesson from the two working group reports is that, despite investing more than any other Government, we still have not eradicated fuel poverty. We therefore have to take a bit of time to learn the lessons from past strategies and failings across Governments and Administrations. We will have to do far more than

just reset a target; the action and the delivery plan will underpin the targets.

I lead on the social justice portfolio and, for me, the issue is about how we reach the poorest in our society. We touched on the definition of fuel poverty, but Mark Ruskell was absolutely right to say that we cannot define the problem away. I was struck that 42 per cent of those who are fuel poor are also income poor. The issue is not that 58 per cent of the fuel poor are not also income poor; it is that, according to the working groups, the definition of fuel poverty is impeding our progress on targeting resources more effectively.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, you must close.

**Angela Constance:** I want statutory targets. I want legislation that underpins action and recognises the action that we need to continue to take in the social rented sector as well as in the private rented sector and with private owners.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I call Pauline McNeill to close for Labour. You have until 5.59 pm.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** Thank you!

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I meant 4.59; I am sorry. I should have my glasses on. I am sure that we would love to be able to listen to you for all that time, but it is 4.59, for the avoidance of doubt.

16:51

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** I begin by thanking all the members and the ministers for their valuable contributions to Labour's debate this afternoon.

Living in Scotland means that everyone has to heat their home in the winter months and, these days, often in the summer months. Today, 34 per cent of Scottish households are in fuel poverty. We are nowhere near the targets that were set by the 2001 act, and 845,000 households are still in fuel poverty. Harsh winters kill, and up to 30 per cent of those winter deaths are caused by cold homes.

Labour's motion is a wake-up call to the Scottish Government. It must take urgent action now to reset the statutory target. I welcome what Angela Constance has said this evening, but a lot of time might have been saved if there had been a clear line in Kevin Stewart's opening speech that, at the sunset of the statutory targets, which have not been met, it is the Government's priority that new targets will be set to coincide with the falling of the previous targets.

I confirm that, as other parties have said, Labour will collaborate with the Government on achieving any new target that is set, but only the Scottish

Government can act. Energy Action Scotland says that the target must be realistic, but it must be set.

In his opening speech, the minister said that he recognises the scale of the challenge and I want a firm commitment from the Government that redefining fuel poverty will not dilute the challenge in any way. I also welcome what Andy Wightman said about focusing on poor households.

We need to see what the statutory targets will be and we need to see them soon. Those who rely on the Parliament to take the matter seriously also need to see them as a matter of urgency.

I express some concern that there has been no attempt to explain why the Government was not prepared, although it knew that the targets would fall this month. However, the Government will get Labour's full co-operation until the issue is properly resourced and properly resolved.

People in extreme fuel poverty account for almost 10 per cent of the figures. As we have heard from Rhoda Grant, Richard Lochhead and others, fuel poverty in rural areas is staggeringly high, at 50 per cent. We know that there are special reasons for that, but it has to be said that, after almost 10 years in charge—during which time the Parliament has been willing to support the Government—the Government needs to recognise that it needs to be more ambitious and commit the necessary resources to this important policy, and it needs to be more determined to meet any new targets.

As Ruth Maguire and others have said, someone's ability to heat their home adequately and run basic appliances without having to consider how they are going to pay for it is a basic necessity. Mark Griffin said that no family should have to choose between heating and eating, but many do.

Alex Rowley said in his opening speech that progress has been made, and that must be recognised, but there must be a new focus on the private rented sector. We believe that that needs more attention and that it should be included in any new statutory targets.

The consequences of not meeting those targets are stark. We have heard that 60 per cent of single pensioners are fuel poor. A staggering figure of 29 per cent of adults of working age are fuel poor. For those with children, the figure stands at almost 20 per cent.

The SNP Government's commitment to spend £103 million to install measures in 14,000 homes will help fewer than 2 per cent of those in fuel poverty. That is not enough. We call on the Government to be more ambitious.

There are many reasons why the targets were not reached, but it is wrong for the Scottish

Government to blame the UK Government without taking some responsibility itself. I agree that the issue is not just about money. It is also about identifying a strategy that targets closely the work that needs to be done.

We have heard that being poor comes at a cost. The poorest households are locked out of the best deals, as Adam Tomkins said. The best bank accounts, borrowing rates and energy tariffs are all reserved for people who are in a position to shop around. People without a clean credit file or access to the internet can expect to pay more for almost everything. Figures indicate that prepayment users pay more than everyone else, and that someone who does not pay by direct debit is worse off by an average of £150 a year.

**Angela Constance:** Does Pauline McNeill acknowledge the actions in the fairer Scotland action plan that are specifically targeted at tackling the poverty premium, including the Scottish Government's commitment to lead an energy summit with big energy companies later this year?

**Pauline McNeill:** I am happy to recognise that, but the public are being seriously short-changed by energy companies, as other speakers have mentioned. That must be acknowledged as a backdrop to this debate. Recent reports show that profit margins are far from the 4 per cent that has been claimed by the industry—I think that Graham Simpson talked about that—and are actually up to 28 per cent. Energy companies—at least the big six—are a major power in Britain, dictating what we pay for energy with little accountability. Tariffs are too complex, and that has led to people distrusting suppliers. I support caps on energy prices, or at least wider price controls.

I want to introduce members to a man called Martin Cave from the Competition and Markets Authority. He was the only dissenting voice in the recent report by that watchdog body. In 2014, there was an investigation into the prices that energy companies charge. The interim report highlighted an overpayment figure of £1.7 billion a year, which is due mainly to the fact that 70 per cent of customers are on standard variable tariffs, which are far more expensive than other tariffs. The CMA wanted to temporarily cap the prices for customers on variable rates. However, after being subject to heavy lobbying, the CMA withdrew that proposal in favour of a much weaker provision to create a list of customers on variable rates so that competitor companies could target them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** You should come to a close now, Ms McNeill.

**Pauline McNeill:** I am pleased to say that Martin Cave would not put his name to the CMA's final report.

In conclusion, we look forward to the Government announcing the refreshed statutory targets to reduce fuel poverty in Scotland. No one should have to choose between eating and heating.

## Business Motion

17:00

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-02516, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

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 Debate: Adoption and Permanence in Scotland

*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 Debate: The Future of Social Security in Scotland

*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 Debate:  
Supporting and Strengthening our Island  
Communities

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 29 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 30 November 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Health and Sport

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 1 December 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

17:01

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is consideration of six Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move en bloc motions S5M-02412 to S5M-02414 and S5M-02513 to S5M-02515, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Sheriff Court Simple Procedure (Limits on Award of Expenses) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Maximum Number of Judges (Scotland) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Courts Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 (Relevant Officer and Consequential Provisions) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

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

That the Parliament agrees that the Protected Trust Deeds (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Protected Trust Deeds (Forms) (Scotland) Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The first question is, that amendment S5M-02504.3, in the name of Angela Constance, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02504, in the name of Alex Rowley, on supporting local communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)



MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

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

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 93, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-02504.1, in the name of Adam Tomkins, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02504, in the name of Alex Rowley, on supporting local communities, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 39, Against 84, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-02504.2, in the name of Andy Wightman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02504, in the name of Alex Rowley, on supporting local communities, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 10, Against 113, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-02504, in the name of Alex Rowley, on supporting local communities, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)

Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

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

### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament welcomes the reports by the Scottish Fuel Poverty Strategic Working Group and Rural Fuel Poverty Task Force; notes that 845,000 households in Scotland remain in fuel poverty and that, since 2003, that number has doubled; agrees with the call from Energy Action Scotland for the Scottish Government to reset its target to eradicate fuel poverty; calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward warm homes legislation in 2017 to tackle fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency; believes that substantial energy efficiency improvements can be made in the private rented and owner-occupier sectors, and that consultation on point of transaction standards must now begin; notes that new powers over the Energy Company Obligation and Winter Fuel payments will bring new opportunities to meet an eradication target, and recognises that the two reports have over 100 recommendations, which should be carefully considered as part of a new effective eradication strategy to be published in 2017.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on the Parliamentary Bureau motions. The question is, that motions S5M-02412 to S5M-02414 and S5M-02513 to S5M-02515, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, be agreed to.

### *Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Sheriff Court Simple Procedure (Limits on Award of Expenses) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Maximum Number of Judges (Scotland) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Courts Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 (Relevant Officer and Consequential Provisions) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

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

That the Parliament agrees that the Protected Trust Deeds (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Protected Trust Deeds (Forms) (Scotland) Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## State of Nature 2016

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-01496, in the name of Angus MacDonald, on the "State of Nature 2016" report. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the report, State of Nature 2016, which is a companion to the report, State of Nature 2013, and makes a continued assessment of the fortunes of wildlife across the UK; understands that the 2016 report looks at the significant and ongoing changes occurring to Scottish nature; believes that, while there have been some conservation successes since 2013, over the long term, 53% of species declined with 40% showing strong declines; notes that the report focuses on eight main habitats of Scotland and highlights some of the pressures on wildlife with numerous examples of how government, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and the public are working together to bring back nature; believes well-planned, targeted and adequately resourced conservation action can turn around the fortunes of Scotland's wildlife and nature, which is vital for society, culture and economy; notes that the State of Nature partnership encompasses over 50 UK research and conservation organisations that together hold an immense breadth and depth of knowledge of the UK's wildlife, including the Bat Conservation Trust, Buglife, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation Scotland, Froglife, Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, Plantlife, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Woodland Trust and WWF Scotland; believes that the report highlights the challenges that lie ahead in conserving Scotland's wonderful nature; considers that the Scottish Government is committed to driving forward the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity and its accompanying Route Map to 2020, and looks forward to the publication of a progress report; believes that there is so much to be proud of in Scotland and so much to protect and enhance, and looks forward to ambitious action being taken to improve the state of nature in the Falkirk area and the rest of Scotland in the coming months, years and decades.

17:08

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** First of all, I want to say how grateful I am to fellow members from across the chamber for supporting my motion and allowing the "State of Nature 2016" report to be debated this evening. I am also grateful to the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy for standing in for the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, who has been at the 22nd session of the conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—or COP 22—in Marrakech. I felt it important to secure a chamber debate on the issue, because the report features information that is critical to understanding the status of our natural environment and highlights the state of biodiversity

across eight different types of habitat that are found in Scotland.

On the surface, the report is far from ideal. In the UK overall, 56 per cent of 4,000 species declined between 1970 and 2013, with a 53 per cent decline between 2002 and 2013. In Scotland, 520 species—9 per cent—are classified as being at risk of extinction.

The report identifies the main threats to biodiversity as climate change, diminished management of farming, urbanisation and non-native invasive species. Together, those factors contribute to Scotland's placement in the bottom quarter of the world's countries for biodiversity intactness. Taking that into account, it is vital that we recognise that measures must be taken to preserve and regrow what biodiversity we have. As we all know, good work is already going on, so there is no lack of trying.

The report also acknowledges measures that can be, and have been, taken to transform Scotland into a global leader in species conservation. It highlights the importance of

"well-planned, targeted and adequately resourced conservation action"

and of collaboration between—to name a few—the Scottish Government, non-governmental organisations and local land managers. There are examples all around Scotland of groups implementing actions to improve biodiversity substantially; I am pleased to say that there are a number of examples in my constituency of Falkirk East that involve volunteers from across the Falkirk district.

For example, the Communities Along the Carron Association—known locally as CATCA—is a group that is comprised mainly of volunteers who are committed to regeneration of the River Carron, of the communities that the river flows through and of the land adjacent to it. Set up in 2010, CATCA—along with several other partners and stakeholders, including Scottish National Heritage, Falkirk Council, central Scotland green network and the Scottish Government climate challenge fund—has embarked on a programme of environmental improvement projects involving schools, community groups, marginalised groups and unemployed adults with various health-related issues. The projects include clearing of litter and log jams to allow the river to flow freely and to increase the chances of wildlife repopulating, improvement of path networks along the River Carron corridor for access and recreation, and biodiversity projects.

All the projects are vital to the environment of that important area. The partnerships that have been built with the agencies are important in allowing people who are unemployed to gain skills

and experience through the work, which enables them to get back on their feet and to increase their employability. It also demonstrates that our natural landscape not only supports wildlife, but supports jobs and economic development. Projects such as the one involving CATCA, the Scottish Government and other relevant parties are central to sustaining our extensive natural resources and our economy.

The examples do not end there. In my constituency, we also have the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Jupiter urban wildlife centre, which sits cheek by jowl with the agrichemical and petrochemical industries in the heart of Grangemouth. It has been a tremendous success and it celebrates its 25th anniversary next May. In the past two months alone, it has attracted 15 secondary school visits and it often has events for children in the summer that are so popular that they are fully booked and have waiting lists. The minister will recall that the Scottish Government was so impressed with the work that is going on at Jupiter that, in his previous role as environment minister—when he was back in the job for 10 minutes—he launched the Scottish biodiversity strategy there in the summer of 2013, along with children from Grangemouth's Sacred Heart primary school. If the minister would not mind passing on an invitation to the cabinet secretary while she is reacclimatising following her visit to Marrakech, I and the Scottish Wildlife Trust would be delighted if she could join us in Grangemouth in May to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Jupiter urban wildlife centre.

Another example is the inner Forth landscape initiative, which is an exciting programme of work that is conserving, enhancing and celebrating the unique landscape and heritage of the upper reaches of the Firth of Forth with 50 discrete but interrelated projects around the inner Forth area.

Further afield from my constituency, another example that is given in the "State of Nature 2016" report is the action that has been taken by RSPB Scotland to realign the coast of Nigg Bay, which lost over 35 per cent of its salt marsh and mudflats between 1946 and 1997. The RSPB pioneered a project in 2003 to rectify that, which reconnected Meddat marsh with the sea for the first time since the 1950s. Within a year, several species of salt-marsh plants and mud-dwelling invertebrates had recolonised the newly re-formed salt marsh and, by 2011, the marsh had been completely transformed into its original state of salt marsh and intertidal mudflats. That project is just one instance of focused action having a significant positive impact on biodiversity for a range of Scottish wildlife.

In order to build on actions such as those that have been taken at Nigg Bay, we must all work

together with the Scottish Government, NGOs and local volunteers to see widespread change across our country, not just in isolated areas.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I have been absolutely fascinated by what is happening in Angus MacDonald's constituency, and by what he has said about it. I am sure that he will be aware that this week's *New Scientist* indicates that, globally, nature is reducing by 2 per cent a year and two thirds of all wildlife have died off over the past 40 years. We face global extinctions. What can Scotland do to lead the fightback for nature not just locally but globally in order to restore some of the environment that our species has destroyed in recent years?

**Angus MacDonald:** I have not seen the *New Scientist* report, but I will try to catch it later and get back to Kenneth Gibson once I have had a good read of it.

"State of Nature 2016" presents a number of warnings about Scotland's biodiversity, but it is important to note that it is not a hopeless case; it is still possible for Scotland to become a world leader in biodiversity and environmental protection. That addresses the point that Kenneth Gibson raised. It is clear that the Scottish Government recognises the importance of taking those actions. It has the 2020 route map lined out to improve biodiversity and to connect Scots with their natural heritage. That is a commitment to ensuring that the environment works together with the economy to maximise the benefits to Scotland in a sustainable way.

If we are to see that plan come to fruition, we must act and safeguard vital funding to protect our wildlife. We must all work together to best utilise our collective talents and efforts. If action is not taken, we could see wildlife that improves the quality of our lives and our posterity becoming extinct.

I am well aware that I am running out of time, Presiding Officer.

In conclusion, Scotland's biodiversity must be made a top priority. It is too valuable to act otherwise. Our natural environment not only helps to sustain 14 per cent of Scotland's jobs; it clearly provides other benefits including cleaner air and water and local flood prevention. Protections for biodiversity go hand in hand to achieve that, and we must all do our part to work together to protect that valuable part of Scotland's natural history.

17:17

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate Angus MacDonald on securing this debate on "State of Nature 2016".

The report should act as a wake-up call for Scotland. Time and again in it we see evidence of a decline in Scotland's biodiversity and natural heritage. We need leadership and a redoubling of efforts on the ground if we are to safeguard and enhance Scotland's wildlife.

There is a lot to digest in the report, but one thing stands out above all the others, and it makes for grim reading: almost 10 per cent of Scotland's species are at risk of extinction. That is an alarming figure, and the details of it are no less grim: 27 per cent of bird species were assessed as being at the highest conservation risk, and almost half showed long-term decline, 13 per cent of plant species are at risk of extinction, and more than half of all Scottish species that have been studied have declined since 1970. On top of that, our native woodland fares little better, with native Caledonian forest covering barely more than 6 per cent of its original area.

Scotland's rating on the biodiversity intactness index sums it all up. Of the 218 countries that were assessed, Scotland ranks 36th from the bottom, which places it in the bottom fifth of all countries. That simply is not good enough.

More attention needs to be given to protected areas, which not only help in preserving our biodiversity, but deliver economic and social benefits. Despite that, a fifth of designated natural features remain in an unfavourable condition. The message is clear: Scotland is facing a biodiversity crisis.

Actions must follow, which means ensuring that the necessary capacity and resources are in place to manage our natural environment properly. That is something that has not always been evident, as we can see from the biodiversity 2020 progress report.

So—what do we do about it? Information is the key to tackling the problems. I noted with interest that the report mentioned that the RSPB's ability to measure relevant data is better at UK level. Agencies and Governments should therefore work together to ensure that there is close co-operation and that resources are shared, where possible.

In Scotland specifically, a good step would be for SNH to look to develop a monitoring system to measure the impact that conservation is having on designated features. We could then benchmark sites as we work towards moving them to a more favourable condition. We must also look to the future beyond the biodiversity 2020 strategy because we cannot afford to be complacent. I agree with the RSPB's call on the Scottish Government to set its sights on ambitious targets for Scotland up to 2030. We must all ensure that when it comes to our natural heritage, Scotland's reach will always exceed its grasp.

17:21

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I offer Angus MacDonald my thanks for bringing such an interesting and important topic for debate, and I apologise for having to leave after I have spoken.

I welcome the publication of the report "State of Nature 2016", which continues the assessment of our wildlife. Such collaborative efforts demonstrate the value of knowledge sharing. It is thanks to the partnership of 50 UK-wide organisations that we have the evidence and the opportunity to assess accurately the gaps where nature is being let down. The report is a comprehensive piece of work that reveals some deeply concerning figures that I expect might surprise many people. The unhappy headlines are that Scotland is ranked in the lowest fifth of all the countries that were analysed in the biodiversity intactness index, and that almost one in 10 Scottish species is at risk of extinction.

As MSPs, we speak proudly of the natural beauty of our regions. Over the summer, I was delighted to visit Glenlude in the Borders and the Nethan Gorge in the Clyde valley, which are home to green woodpeckers, otters and badgers. Scotland's nature is a right that everyone should enjoy, but it is evident that collective efforts must be strengthened to protect it. Evidence suggests that the Scottish Government's route map to 2020 is insufficient to deliver the Aichi biodiversity targets. Although it is a shame that the Scottish Government will not be able to attend the meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the Convention on Biological Diversity next month, I am interested to know what steps it has taken to report to the COP progress in Scotland towards the Aichi targets and how it intends to ensure that it is in a position to implement any agreements that are reached there.

I have spoken before about the need to apply a marine perspective to discussions and debates on biodiversity such as this one. Like Angus MacDonald, I acknowledge the RSPB's work on biodiversity at Nigg Bay and elsewhere. Climate change and human activity are damaging and altering the distribution and composition of marine species, both those under the water and those flying above it. The report states that, over the short term, 50 per cent of marine species have declined in numbers. However, it also states that 50 per cent have seen increases—we can be more optimistic about that. The picture is complex. Scottish seabirds are important globally, but climate change and mismanagement have led to a serious decline in numbers for some species—for example, Arctic tern numbers have plummeted by around 70 per cent. The impacts of migrating food supplies, non-native species and disturbed nesting

and mating areas have taken a toll on seabird colonies.

The creation of a network of marine protected areas has been a progressive step towards achieving sustainable Scottish seas and should be celebrated. However, gaps remain, both in the charting of areas for protection and within the 2020 route map. In my view, the thinking on biodiversity should not focus on MPA sites alone but should be applied to the other 84 per cent of Scotland's seas. Furthermore, regional marine planning is crucial to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in our seas, and must be adequately resourced. Effective and co-operative management on land and at sea will be central to moving towards the Aichi targets and an ambitious action plan for 2030.

The changing climate is one of the greatest threats to our marine ecosystems; conversely, our oceans are one of the greatest natural tools that we have in tackling global warming. The term "blue carbon" refers to stocks of carbon that are sequestered by marine habitats, in some cases keeping it out of our atmosphere for thousands of years. I know that the minister was involved with that issue in a previous role, and I hope that it will be addressed in the new low carbon plan. Improving our understanding of the phenomenon by developing an evidence base and a monitoring system could be a significant step in delivering our national and global climate change targets.

17:25

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** As is customary, I begin by congratulating my friend and Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee colleague Angus MacDonald on bringing the debate to the chamber. Just last week, I led a members' business debate on the relaunch of Scottish Environment LINK's species champions programme. It is heartening that, only a matter of days later, Scotland's biodiversity is once again the subject of Parliament's attention, because the health and balance of our natural environment are hugely important. That is why, earlier this month, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee brought stakeholders together to consider what progress has been made towards meeting our protection and restoration targets and where further action is required. We reflected on the Scottish content of the "State of Nature 2016" report, setting that alongside the findings of SNH's progress report on the route map to 2020 and exploring possible contradictions between the two.

The sense that I got from the meeting—I suspect that my committee colleagues would agree—was that although progress has been made, there is so much more to be done, both to

get a more complete set of indicators and to address some specific threats. A letter from the committee will be winging its way to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, offering its thoughts on those matters. However, as convener, I would not want to pre-empt its content.

Stakeholders identified a number of concerns and issues but, amidst those, it was heartening to hear that progress is being made in at least one area of real contention. Muirburn and its possible merits and demerits is a fascinating subject—I promise—and one that maybe highlights a further complication, namely the absence of objective and comprehensive science to inform how we can best take forward efforts to improve biodiversity and, in the case of muirburn, sequester carbon.

Such is my interest in the subject that I recently spent a Saturday afternoon poring over a series of scientific papers on the issue—perhaps illustrating, as my children said, the rock-and-roll lifestyle of an MSP. I wanted to get a definitive sense of the benefits or otherwise of muirburn in terms of carbon storage and biodiversity, but in comparison with when I embarked on the process, I was left little the wiser. I was therefore pleased to hear stakeholders speak positively about the opportunities that they have had through the moorland forum to feed into the restructuring of the muirburn code, which I hope will bring us to a way forward that takes appropriately balanced account of peatland, soil, vegetation and avian biodiversity.

We will make the progress that we need to make on biodiversity only through genuine partnership working in all its forms. If we need evidence of that, we need only look at the hugely welcome news last week of a study showing that golden eagle numbers across Scotland are at almost historic levels, with a 15 per cent increase since 2003 taking us to an estimated 508 pairs. Many people across Government agencies, charities and—yes—the land management sector have played their part in that achievement, and we should pay tribute to them for their efforts.

That study, however, also threw up some concerning findings. The absence of golden eagles in the eastern Cairngorms is an issue that simply cannot be ignored, especially given the previously identified disappearance of eight tagged birds in the general area.

I will finish on an optimistic note. It is hugely concerning that 504 of the 6,000 species studied in the "State of Nature 2016" report are deemed to be at risk of extinction but, as the RSPB briefing for this debate notes, there are

"many inspiring examples of conservation action that is helping to turn the tide".



With wildlife organisations as active and effective as those that we have in Scotland set alongside an environment committee that, within months of its establishment, has already been shining a light on biodiversity and will continue to do so, and a cabinet secretary who, everyone acknowledges, has a knowledge of and passion for our natural environment, we can and will make the progress that, without doubt, we need to make. Running in parallel with that, we look to the 59 MSPs who have signed up as species champions to play their part.

17:29

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I declare an interest as a farmer, food producer and, given Graeme Dey's speech, a muirburner in the past. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I congratulate Angus MacDonald on securing the debate.

Our precious environment has been most shaped in recent times, first by the last ice age and more recently by man. What we regard as our unique and identifiably Scottish landscape is massively the product of geology, latitude, proximity to the Atlantic, the prevailing winds and climate change.

Man's influence has always been secondary and will remain so, but that does not mean that it is unimportant. In recent times, after the second world war, when we were nearly starved out of the war by German U-boats, the drive in the United Kingdom and Scotland was massively to increase food production. Never again should we allow ourselves to become so vulnerable and so dependent on importing food, so the dash to increase food production defined our post-war efforts in relation to our land during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, until 1983, when, with butter mountains and milk lakes emerging across Europe, the dash for food production came to a grinding halt.

Since 1983, support mechanisms have concentrated more on environmental objectives and less on food production, and rightly so. Hedges are no longer ripped out and peat bogs are no longer drained, as considerations of restoring, repairing and enhancing at least some of the habitats that were damaged in the dash for food production take precedence.

Of course, arguments will continue about food security. Scotland and the UK are both still far short of self-sufficiency in food production, because for the past 40 years our food production and environmental objectives have been driven by a collective European view—a position that is about to change dramatically. Land use goals in the UK and Scotland could change again in the

medium to long term, but that is a debate for another day.

In the meantime, we must focus on continuing to enhance and rebuild habitats. We must note that in Scotland our biodiversity intactness index, as highlighted in the report "State of Nature 2016", is 81 per cent, which puts us 36th from the bottom of the list of the 218 countries that were evaluated. In other words, we are in the bottom fifth of the global index for biodiversity. As Maurice Golden said, that is not a good place to be.

We have lost 44 per cent of Scotland's blanket peat bog; broad-leaved and mixed woodland have fallen by 23 per cent and 37 per cent respectively; and natural and semi-natural grasslands cover less than 1 per cent of our land area. Those and other factors have led to 9 per cent of our species being at risk, as members have said. Some 18 per cent of our butterflies, 15 per cent of our dragonflies and 12 per cent of our mosses, hornworts and liverworts are at risk of extinction in Scotland. Recently red-listed species include the curlew, dotterel, kittiwake and puffin.

On the plus side, overwintering wild goose populations have more than trebled since 1990—of course, that brings problems for the affected farmers. However, wader populations have declined by 50 per cent. Seabirds, too, have generally declined by 38 per cent since monitoring began in 1986.

What is to be done? I think that we are pursuing the right course of action, as the report suggests; we just need to do more of it. Species numbers have always risen and fallen in our land and marine environment, with species becoming extinct long before man's influence. Of course, if we could maintain and support all our existing species worldwide, that would be welcome, but it would deny the existence of the evolutionary process.

We must limit, where we can, man's destructive influence on our different habitats. We must restore and replenish when we can, and we must encourage the custodians of our seas and our landscapes, of whom I am one, to do the right thing where possible.

I am delighted to have taken part in this debate and I support Angus MacDonald's motion.

17:34

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I congratulate Angus MacDonald on securing today's debate.

The "State of Nature 2016" report is significant for Scotland. It is a comprehensive piece of research from 50 leading wildlife organisations. The UK 2013 report was groundbreaking, and it

has been followed up in 2016 with a more in-depth look, including a breakdown across the home nations that means that we can begin to understand even more about the current state of our nature. However, as substantial as the document is, what it has to say is a great wake-up call. More than half of Scottish species have declined since the 1970s, 520 species are at risk of extinction in Scotland and another 6,000 remain on the red list of at-risk species.

Climate change has already had a severely damaging effect on our native species and biodiversity. Changing climates have disrupted mating patterns, hibernation and adaptation, leading to decline in populations. Changing and intensifying land management and land use have also led to much decline in and damage to our biodiversity. As the species champion for the great yellow bumblebee, I spoke last week about how the intensification of farming and grazing and the decline in traditional crofting practices have meant that a species that used to be found across the whole UK is now found on a few of the Scottish islands, with a tiny population on the north Highland mainland.

However, it is not just about declining species. As we have heard, Scotland is broadly ranked in the lowest fifth of countries for our biodiversity intactness index. Our ecosystems have fallen below the point at which they can reliably meet society's needs, and the maintenance and the restoration of our ecosystems are vital to halting the decline—to supporting our flora, fauna and human population and to balancing our carbon budget and enabling us to reach our greenhouse gas reduction targets. To do that, we need to support the recovery of species populations, improve habitat quality and develop green corridors between fragmented areas of natural land.

The creation of a national ecology network would go a long way towards improving the condition of our natural environment. Small-scale changes could be urban green roofs, more tree-lined streets and more grass left for wildflowers; big changes would include the incredibly vital restoration of peatlands—which we have heard about—and an increase in protected areas. We need to put the same amount of effort into our green planning as we put into our grey planning. Green corridors would mean that increasingly isolated semi-natural landscapes and the species that live in them would be connected, cultivating a highway along which wildlife could travel and increasing resilience to climate change.

The truth is that we already know how to restore and support our biodiversity and ecosystems. We also know what the main threats are. We now need to ensure that the policy and regulation are

in place and that firm, decisive action is taken to prioritise the health of our natural environment. This is urgent. The “State of Nature 2016” report focuses mainly on the recent and on-going issues, but the sad truth is that the damage has been going on for years—indeed, decades—and our nation is much poorer in nature. As many have said, we do not own the environment; we keep it in trust for our children.

The report starts at a baseline that shows how much damage has already been done, and the Scottish Government has an international commitment to halt the decline of our environment under the convention on biological diversity. The report “Scotland's Biodiversity—a route map to 2020” runs out in three years' time and we need to look at the bigger picture. The problem will not be resolved overnight. In the words of Barack Obama,

“Our generation may not even live to see the full realization of what we do here. But the knowledge that the next generation will be better off for what we do here—can we imagine a more worthy reward than that?”

It is odd that, despite knowing how important care for our environment is, as a society we seem to be reluctant to implement and take that forward. We have the knowledge and the tools; we need the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to deliver.

17:38

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife (Green)):** I join other members in thanking Angus MacDonald for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I also congratulate the more than 50 organisations that collaborated to produce this timely report. It took more than 7.5 million hours of volunteer time to produce the data, which is staggering. That is a big twitch—a big birdwatch.

The intrinsic value of our nature is truly beyond measure, and we should never deny future generations the opportunity to witness the miracles of this garden planet. However, it is also clear that the future of our human society is inextricably linked to the health of the natural world. The environment in Scotland provides us with free services that are worth around £20 billion a year to our economy. Without pollinators, there is no agriculture; without peat bogs, forests and wetlands, there is no carbon storage; healthy habitats keep our air clean; and our water is stored in the landscape.

Our natural backbone faces major threats in Scotland from climate change, habitat fragmentation, unsustainable grazing, diffuse pollution, poorly located developments, invasive non-native species and unsustainably managed

marine resources and land management practices.

When we think about the twin global threats that we face of climate change and biodiversity loss, it is clear that we have a monumental opportunity to rethink our exploitative relationship with nature. We can think in new ways that connect us back to the limits of the planet in which we live, while recognising that a diverse, healthy environment holds carbon and cushions us all from the environmental shocks far better than a degraded one would do.

To start the transformation, we need a better understanding of the health of nature. A comprehensive set of ecosystem health indicators would give us the dashboard to understand the state of the protected species and the wider environment. For example, soil erosion is an indicator on the dashboard that is clearly entering the red zone. Soil erosion undermines our ability to store carbon and to support soil biodiversity; it also undermines our very ability as a society to maintain our food production in a way that resists the extremes of climate and weather.

Farms can—and should—provide some of the connecting habitats for a national ecological network, which Dave Stewart has mentioned, allowing species to move freely across landscapes, along nature's highways, adapting to changing climates and sustaining the genetic health of their populations.

The central Scotland green network is identified in the national planning framework as a key infrastructure priority. It is time to expand that approach, because ecological networks can do more than create space for nature—they can help to connect our urban spaces with the surrounding countryside. When green spaces are part of our urban environment, they bring all the benefits for our mental and physical health, creating spaces for reflection, walking the dog or teaching a child to ride a bike, while they also define our local landscapes and our sense of place in so many of our communities.

Perhaps that is why the loss of green belt is such a defining environmental issue in so many communities in Scotland today. Around Stirling, where I live, green-belt campaigns dominate concerns. Whether it is the campaign to prevent quarrying on the much loved Gillies Hill, the campaign against the persistent attempts by Graham's Dairies to build on the iconic Airthrey Kerse or the campaign against the Judy Murray-fronted executive housing development at Park of Keir, communities have been fighting green-belt battles—in some cases for generations—to protect the integrity of their places.

Councils have reflected those concerns in democratically agreed local development plans. When ecological networks, such as the CSGN, are reflected in those plans, there should be a hard backstop against inappropriate development.

Until our green belt and ecological networks are given the status that a national infrastructure priority should afford them in the planning system, we will always see the value of capital receipts triumph over place making, particularly when developments come to appeal. Let us ask the question: what can we do for nature? Let us also ask: what can nature do for us? In answering those questions, we may find a way forward to halt biodiversity loss, to make our places resilient to climate change and to reconnect to nature.

17:43

**The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse):** I congratulate Angus MacDonald on securing the debate and I thank all members for their excellent and thoughtful speeches. This has been a welcome opportunity for us to debate Scotland's biodiversity and to consider the overall health of our natural environment.

I remember well launching the biodiversity strategy with Angus MacDonald at the Jupiter urban wildlife centre. That is a wonderful oasis of wildlife in an otherwise industrial landscape, so I will certainly recommend that Roseanna Cunningham visits the centre in her capacity as the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform.

I am pleased to contribute to the debate on behalf of the cabinet secretary who, as members have noted, is unable to attend. Climate change is a real and present threat to biodiversity, as a number of members have mentioned, and the Scottish Government recognises it as a real and pressing challenge. That is why we are making every effort to tackle climate change, and the decarbonisation of energy is just one example of the difference that we can make. It is important that, in addition to the cabinet secretary, other ministers play their role in supporting biodiversity and, through the energy portfolio, I hope to do that.

Claudia Beamish mentioned the positive work of the MPAs and marine planning. However, without action on climate change, we will not achieve our goals on biodiversity. I will cite one example, which is from a *Guardian* article of December 2015 on the decline in seabirds on St Kilda—particularly kittiwakes and puffins. RSPB Scotland's Dr Paul Walton, who many members may know, pointed out:

"This data from St Kilda is really extremely worrying. We are losing whole colonies of these birds now and it's a very serious issue. Frankly, it breaks my heart, it really does. There's a very strong climate change link here that needs to go straight to Paris: what they decide there is going to determine the future of our seabirds. We are clear on what the science is saying, that really big ecology effects of climate change are unfolding in the marine environment around Scotland right now. It's not coming, it's here now."

He was right to highlight the fact that we are seeing the impacts of climate change. That is why it is so important that we maintain our commitment to the Paris agreement. I hope that we are doing our bit in Scotland.

Dave Stewart and Mark Ruskell mentioned green corridors. I certainly recognise that allowing species to move to new areas can help them to adapt to climate change or to escape its effects. That is important, and I am sure that the cabinet secretary will note the remarks about the importance of an ecological network.

Like Angus MacDonald and Mark Ruskell, I am grateful to the consortium of conservation and research organisations that came together to share their knowledge and expertise in preparing "State of Nature 2016". The report highlights the successes that we have had and some of the challenges that are ahead. Scotland's natural heritage is celebrated around the world. In this part of the globe, we are fortunate to have some stunning species and habitats. Who can fail to be moved by the agility of an Arctic skua or a hen harrier or to wonder at the beauty of the machair in full bloom?

Such debates are often characterised by a focus on the more charismatic, larger species of fauna, and it has been helpful to hear a number of members talk about the wider ecosystem impacts on biodiversity. We must be careful not to think only in terms of Scotland's iconic species, because the health of the wider ecosystem is crucial and, without the complex colonies of plants, marine ecosystems, bryophytes and fungi, we would not have many of those iconic species. All biodiversity is important.

Mark Ruskell referred to ecosystem services. We know that green prescriptions can in many cases be far more effective than conventional therapies. As Angus MacDonald put it, action on biodiversity is essential to prevent species and habitat loss, which is an aim that we should all share. Nature-based tourism is estimated to account for as much as 40 per cent of tourism spending in Scotland, so biodiversity is also good for the economy.

Last week, Graeme Dey had a members' business debate on species champions. Like him, I am concerned about the decline in the numbers of some of Scotland's iconic species. The Scottish

Government is determined to tackle the issue of biodiversity loss, which is why we are committed to delivering the goals of the UN convention on biological diversity, as expressed in the Aichi targets to 2020. That international obligation underpins the Scottish biodiversity strategy and "Scotland's Biodiversity—a Route Map to 2020". Claudia Beamish is not here to hear this, but I will outline some of the steps that we are taking to achieve the Aichi targets.

The route map sets out the actions that are necessary for us to meet the international obligations. In September, SNH published two progress reports, the first of which detailed the work that is under way on the actions in the route map. Nearly 80 per cent of those actions are on track to achieve or exceed their targets by 2020. The second report assessed whether Scotland is on track to meet the 2020 Aichi targets, and I am pleased to say that good progress is being made towards meeting our international obligations, although further data that is necessary to properly assess progress on some targets is awaited. I am also pleased that Scotland is again at the forefront of shouldering responsibility by being the only devolved Administration to have yet begun to directly assess our country's progress towards meeting the Aichi targets.

We acknowledge that there are areas that require more work. One reason why we commissioned the work from SNH was to give us a clear picture of the issues that require further attention or increased effort. Maurice Golden touched on a number of concerns that he has in that respect. We understand that we have more work to do in some areas, and we are focusing on that challenge.

Members such as Graeme Dey commented that there appears to be a disparity between "State of Nature 2016" and the SNH progress reports. I must make it clear—I know that Graeme Dey is aware of this—that the reports show two different things. I understand that "State of Nature 2016" provides us with a snapshot of the current situation set against the historical background. In some cases, as members said, it compares the situation now with that in the 1970s. There is considerable value in such an approach, because it shows us the extent to which we are—or are not—making progress in a historical context. Graeme Dey mentioned that the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee would be sending a report to the cabinet secretary on that issue.

The SNH progress reports look forward and estimate our progress towards the 2020 targets and goals that I mentioned. They provide an estimate of Scotland's position in 2020, which is a

different thing, and we must be careful not to compare apples with pears.

Early next year, we will lay before Parliament the fourth report to detail the progress that has been made on implementing the Scottish biodiversity strategy. The reporting will cover the period from 2014 to 2016 and is a requirement of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.

The previous report to Parliament identified areas for further action and led to the Scottish Government and key delivery partners—including many of the organisations that helped to develop the “State of Nature 2016” report—working together to develop the route map. I hope that a similar collaborative effort will accompany the next stage of delivery on biodiversity. We heard from members about a range of biodiversity matters, and I am pleased to hear such enthusiasm and commitment from colleagues on all sides of the chamber. We all have a part to play in delivering more for biodiversity.

Like John Scott, I highlight the contribution that many of our land managers make to protecting and enhancing biodiversity, in a world where we also require an ever-increasing intensity of agricultural production. Approximately 40 per cent of our farmland is managed under the high nature value farming system, which includes crofting, to which David Stewart referred. Many farmers in other areas of Scotland are benefiting biodiversity by participating in the agri-environment climate scheme.

It is easy to focus on the negatives and ignore the enormous progress that we have made on biodiversity in Scotland. I am a glass-half-full kind of person, and I think that we need to celebrate success and use that to motivate us all to achieve more. Graeme Dey gave some good examples, such as the work on the conservation of golden eagles and the changes in muirburn practices. Good work is going on—we just need to do more of it and engage our energies collectively to achieve more for Scotland’s biodiversity. We have a long and successful history of partnership working—indeed, we rely on many of our NGO partners, and on land managers, to help us to deliver the route map actions.

Scotland has a wonderful natural heritage that is a source of great national pride and of natural capital for our economy. As John Scott mentioned, biodiversity supports much of our food and drink industry, generates significant income from tourism and underpins—some would say that it defines—our image abroad in many ways.

Scotland is breathtaking in its beauty and extraordinary in its complexity, and biodiversity is of singular importance to the people of Scotland. I urge members to support the work that is under

way to deliver on the 2020 targets and I call on those who can make a difference for biodiversity to do just that. It is clear from the sentiments that have been expressed on all sides of the chamber that we have a strong group of committed members who support nature conservation, and I very much welcome that.

*Meeting closed at 17:52.*



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