



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Thursday 24 November 2016**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 24 November 2016

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

## General Question Time

### Homelessness

1. **Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it calculates the level of homelessness. (S5O-00385)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** The Scottish Government collects homelessness data from local authorities. That data collection provides detailed information on homelessness applications by individual households. Information on the number of applications under the homeless persons legislation and the assessment decisions on those applications is published biannually, along with a range of other data, to help to calculate the level of homelessness in Scotland.

**Ivan McKee:** Officially, over 750 people slept rough on the streets of Glasgow last year. Local authorities have a statutory duty to house homeless people, but last winter Glasgow City Mission presented to Glasgow City Council 202 rough sleepers who were refused accommodation. Threatened with legal action, the council then found accommodation for 98 per cent of those individuals. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that local authorities meet, without having to be threatened with legal action, their statutory obligation to find accommodation for rough sleepers?

**Kevin Stewart:** As Ivan McKee has pointed out, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide as a minimum temporary accommodation, advice and assistance to all applicants who are assessed as being homeless. Glasgow City Council has a duty to provide housing and homelessness services in its area; I know that the Scottish Housing Regulator has been working with the council to help to improve delivery of homelessness services in the city.

The Government is working to increase housing supply in Glasgow and across Scotland in order to improve the housing options that are available.

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** Figures for the number of households that are in temporary homeless accommodation show a 1 per cent increase between March 2015 and March 2016. The March 2016 figure shows that 10,555 households were in temporary accommodation,

which represents an increase of almost 2,000 since 2007. I recognise that there will always be a need for temporary accommodation, but how does the minister intend to ensure that it is not used as a long-term solution for homelessness?

**Kevin Stewart:** There has been a continuing fall in homelessness applications to 34,662 in 2015-16, which is down 1,287 on the previous year. That represents a decrease of 4 per cent. Of those applications, 28,226 households were assessed as being homeless or potentially homeless, which is down 1,589 on the previous year and represents a decrease of 5 per cent.

Our key action in Parliament is to increase housing supply. We intend to deliver 50,000 affordable homes, including 35,000 for social rent, during the current session of Parliament, which will help the situation greatly. As I have said, we have housing options hubs across Scotland, which are working to try to alleviate homelessness throughout the country. I hope that their success continues and that we continue to see decreases, as we have done in the past year.

### Police Station Closures

2. **Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government, in the light of its review of the Police Scotland estate, what impact the potential closure of stations will have on public confidence in the police. (S5O-00386)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** The Scottish crime and justice survey suggests that the majority of people feel that the police are doing a good or excellent job in their local area. The Police Scotland estate strategy, which the Scottish Police Authority approved on 24 June 2015, seeks to remodel the police estate to make it fit for the policing needs of the future.

The Scottish Police Authority has made it clear that local police commanders will play a leading role in deciding whether any changes to the police estate are compatible with maintaining an effective local police presence. Engagement will be undertaken by local policing teams to ensure that future decisions are built on local consultation of communities and partners.

In many cases, the approach that is being taken is to seek alternative shared accommodation with partners in the same locality. There are already a number of positive examples of that in locations including Livingston and Baillieston.

**Richard Leonard:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. The cabinet secretary wishes to decentralise the power to cut police services but not the power to control police services. Shotts police office serves the communities of Shotts, Allanton, Harthill and Salsburgh. When the public counter in Shotts police station was closed in

February 2014, a promise was made to the community that, for reasons of public safety, as long as the prison was there, the police office would be there. Will the cabinet secretary remove Shotts police station from the hit list?

**Michael Matheson:** Richard Leonard should engage with Police Scotland on that matter. If he does so, he will find that there has been no decision made on any of the police stations that have been mentioned at the present stage of the estates review. Local commanders will consult locally on the best approach.

Police Scotland is considering Shotts police office because the existing facility is too large, and it is currently looking for alternative accommodation in the Shotts area. It intends to continue to have a presence in Shotts, so if moving is not feasible it will try to draw other partners in to share the facility in Shotts itself. If Richard Leonard is keen to make sure that the views of the local community and local elected members are heard in the process, the way to do that is to engage with local commanders through their consultation exercise in order to allow local decisions to be made on the best approach to take.

It is also worth keeping it in mind that the purpose of the estates review is to make sure that the estate is effective and reflects demands on the police service. That is why, in the vast majority of cases, Police Scotland is looking to relocate to shared premises.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree with Assistant Chief Constable Andy Cowie who told the Local Government and Communities Committee yesterday that services are delivered by people and not by buildings, that the public want to see officers on the streets and that, following the review,

“Service provision will be enhanced through investment in better located accommodation.”

**Michael Matheson:** I agree with ACC Cowie on that. He is leading the estates review for Police Scotland, which is very clear that the review is not about removing police officers from local communities, but is about making sure that a police estate that has evolved over a hundred years reflects the changing nature of the demands on the police service. For example, the vast majority of contact with the police is now through the 101 call system, which reflects the changing nature of people’s engagement with the police service. We need to make sure that we have a police estate that reflects that change while at the same time being able to support police officers in undertaking their roles effectively. As Andy Cowie highlighted, it is not about seeking to remove

police officers from local communities; it is about making sure that we have an estate that is effective and reflects the needs of local communities. The decision-making process will be driven by local needs based on the views of local commanders once they have consulted local communities.

### **European Union Referendum (Impact on Local Government)**

**3. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact leaving the European Union will have on local government. (S5O-00387)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Local government has the same ambitions as we have for stronger communities, a fairer society and a thriving economy. We will work in partnership with councils to respond to the implications of the EU referendum outcome. The Scottish Government is exploring all options to protect Scotland from a hard Brexit that economists say will cost 80,000 Scottish jobs. Our five key interests are democracy, economic prosperity, social protection, solidarity and influence.

European funding is important to local government: the 2007-13 programmes of the European regional development fund and European social fund awarded £158.3 million to Scotland’s local authorities, which was spent in the years 2007 to 2016.

**Gil Paterson:** I thank the minister for that answer. We know that the EU plays an integral part at all levels of government in helping to deliver important projects. Will the minister provide an update on the position with regard to payment of EU structural funds once the UK leaves the EU.

**Kevin Stewart:** Since the outcome of the referendum, we have urged the UK Government to provide clarity and certainty about those vital European funds. The UK Government guarantees that have been offered to date on European structural funds provide that all contracts that are entered into before the point at which the UK leaves the EU will be guaranteed, even when those payments continue beyond the EU exit point. However, the UK Government has provided absolutely no certainty or clarity on replacement funding arrangements for those schemes once the UK has left the EU.

On 2 November, my colleague Derek Mackay, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution, announced that the Scottish Government will pass on in full to Scottish stakeholders the EU funding guarantees that the UK Government has offered. That will protect all spending commitments in schemes that are

entered into from now until the point at which the UK leaves the EU. That provides certainty on more than £700 million of EU funding for Scotland.

#### **Autumn Statement (Oil and Gas Sector)**

**4. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of the autumn statement on the oil and gas sector in Scotland. (S5O-00388)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown):** I was bitterly disappointed to learn that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has provided no substantive measures to support the oil and gas sector—a sentiment that I am sure is shared by the hundreds of thousands of people who are supported by the industry, in particular those in the north-east of Scotland who have been hardest hit during the downturn.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution wrote to the chancellor outlining urgent measures that should be considered for inclusion in the autumn statement. Those proposals focused on increasing activity in late-life assets, protecting critical pieces of infrastructure and increasing exploration. Without greater investment and activity, we risk losing vital capacity and skills that will support production and ensure that we maximise economic recovery from the North Sea. The Scottish Government will continue to do everything within its powers to support the industry and its workforce through these challenging times.

**Gillian Martin:** Oil & Gas UK has made specific requests to the UK Government for measures to allow the industry to continue with exploration in these difficult times. What impact could the lack of action in facilitating that exploration have on the future supply of oil and gas and the industry as a whole?

**Keith Brown:** One of the major impacts will be that fewer people will be supporting the infrastructure that is already there, which brings into question the viability of that infrastructure. We may have a situation in which fields are left redundant before the point at which they should be. That is a vitally important consideration. On that particular issue, some months ago I met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who assured me that, back in June, the UK Government realised that it had not acted quickly enough on the matter and would now do so. However, we have had no action whatsoever in relation to loan guarantees for those vital pieces of infrastructure.

Above that, the UK Government holds the tools for tax and tax concessions in relation to exploration. The UK Government had a chance yesterday to pay back an industry that has put billions into the UK Treasury and which—

according to the Treasury's own forecast—will put more billions back in, and yet it did nothing. The Scottish Government, unlike the UK Government, will continue to support the oil and gas industry wherever we can.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I share the cabinet secretary's disappointment at yesterday's autumn statement. The oil and gas industry is hugely important to the north-east and to the economy of Scotland as a whole.

Does the cabinet secretary therefore agree with Labour's proposals for a UK offshore investment limited to look at the assets to be supported with public investment? Will he make common cause with us in taking on the UK Government to try to have that proposal agreed?

**Keith Brown:** The Scottish Government has provided a vast range of support measures, such as the transition training fund; the money that we announced this week as part of the Aberdeen city deal for the oil and gas technology centre; and the energy jobs task force. If there were to be further investment—we have asked for that investment to take the form of tax concessions in relation to exploration—the UK Government has the tools to do that. Were it to show any willingness, we would of course look at what we could do in order to support that. However, it is quite evident from the way that things are just now that we are not seeing that support from the UK Government. We will continue to support the industry in the ways that I have described and to look at other ways in which we can provide support.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Given the cabinet secretary's points about the importance of the UK Government changing its position from the one that it announced yesterday in the autumn statement, will he seek an early meeting with either the Chief Secretary to the Treasury or the relevant UK Government minister to press the points on action that many of us on all sides of the chamber want to see in relation to decommissioning and the late-life asset transfer that is so important for the future of the industry?

**Keith Brown:** Yes. We will seek a meeting of that type for me or the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution that will centre on those points. Tavish Scott has raised previously the issue of having the right tax regime to encourage exploration and the full exploitation of remaining fields. Those are the main asks, but the one that we have asked for before, which the UK Government admitted that it had not taken action on sufficiently quickly, is about the industry's ask for loan guarantees for infrastructure. That will form the centrepiece of what we ask for. We will continue that dialogue and I am happy that we will have the support of the Liberal Democrats in doing so.

### Private Car Parks (Regulation)

**5. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met industry and consumer stakeholders to discuss the regulation of private car parks. (S5O-00389)

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** I most recently met citizens advice bureaux to discuss private parking practices last month. Transport Scotland met representatives of the parking industry, Citizens Advice Scotland and Trading Standards Scotland on 31 August to discuss how we can deliver improvements to private parking practices across Scotland. A further meeting with the industry and consumer stakeholders is scheduled to take place next week.

**Murdo Fraser:** On Monday, I was contacted by a 90-year-old lady from Comrie who had been hit with a £100 penalty notice from the inappropriately named company Smart Parking. When she parked in the Kinnoull Street car park in Perth, she keyed her number plate into the ticket machine but inadvertently entered a capital O instead of a zero—and she got a £100 fine. Such a case is all too typical of the hundreds of live constituency cases that I have regarding this one car park. Does the minister agree that such actions by the company are an utter disgrace and, given that he has the powers to act on the matter because it is devolved and under the competence of the Scottish Parliament, will he agree to meet me to discuss how we can work together to try to clean up practices in this industry?

**Humza Yousaf:** Of course I will agree to meet the member. I have written to him on the issue and we have had an exchange of parliamentary questions on it. He probably knows the process, but I reiterate that a working group is looking at the matter. He knows that there are some complexities, depending on which route we choose to take—whether it is keeper liability, charters or education—and that the working group is examining those issues. We are also keen to hear the United Kingdom Government's approach to the matter, so a meeting is taking place today between my officials and UK Government officials.

Once next week's meeting with the industry and consumer stakeholders has taken place, I will ensure that the member is informed about it by Transport Scotland officials and informed by me on the back of that. However, I am happy to take on the issue, which I know has affected the member's constituents on many occasions.

### Welfare Reform (United Nations Report)

**6. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish

Government what its position is on the recent United Nations report on the impact of welfare reforms on disabled people in the United Kingdom. (S5O-00390)

**The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman):** The UN report, which was published at the beginning of November, concludes that there is reliable evidence that the UK Government's treatment of disabled people has led to "grave or systematic violations" of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The evidence that that rests on is drawn from a variety of policies that the UK Government has pursued, including abolishing the independent living fund, the introduction of the bedroom tax, the work capability assessment and changes to the personal independence payment.

The Scottish Government has been consistent in its opposition to those policies and we agree with the UN's conclusions and are pleased that the UN report acknowledged the very different approach that we are taking. However, and perhaps more important, I am pleased that the UN in its conclusions gives disabled people the recognition that they deserve for the considerable suffering that they have endured for many years. It is indeed a great pity that the UK Government continues to refuse to see and hear the real damage that it is doing to our fellow citizens.

**Christina McKelvie:** As the minister stated, the UN report states that there is evidence that the UK Government welfare reforms have led to "grave or systematic violations" of the rights of persons with disabilities. Which violation of the UN code does the minister think is worse: imposing the bedroom tax on poor people or taking away the independent living fund for disabled people?

**Jeane Freeman:** I think that the member knows that I cannot possibly choose between two such appalling policies that have negatively impacted on so many disabled people. Last night, I had the privilege of attending the Disability Agenda Scotland reception, hosted by my colleague Neil Bibby, on the report "Equal? Still not, why not?" That organisation has pointed out, as we found in our social security consultation, the severe mental distress that is caused to individuals and the real damage that is done to them as a result of the UK Government's policies and how it is pursuing them. In addition to the policies that Ms McKelvie mentioned, I am particularly disappointed by the UK Government's continued refusal to step back from its cuts to employment support allowance, given that it trumpets so loudly to us about the benefit of helping people into work. That is a real disappointment and I hope that the UK Government will reconsider that policy.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Before we come to First Minister's questions,



members may wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery His Excellency Mr Torbjörn Sohlström, ambassador of Sweden to the United Kingdom. [Applause.]

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Engagements

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

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00514)

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

**Ruth Davidson:** In yesterday's statement, the Minister for Transport and the Islands said that ScotRail had "learned lessons" from the chaos that passengers have endured, but he left a series of questions unanswered. He said that ScotRail is well under way to implementing 250 action points for improvement, but he will not tell anyone what they are. That is not for the first time. A month ago, he told MSPs on a parliamentary committee that he would come back to them with an answer. Yesterday, when asked again, he had nothing more to say.

Can the First Minister give a commitment today? Will her Government publish those 250 action points?

**The First Minister:** Yes. ScotRail will publish them within the next few days.

**Ruth Davidson:** I appreciate the clarity. Of course, it would have been better if the transport minister had been able to give the same clarity yesterday.

As we are making progress, let us keep this going, First Minister. We are told that there are 250 action points but we are not going to be told—well, we want to be told—when they are coming.

Let us look at another point on timing. We are told that work is well under way to deliver the actions. How can we judge that when, yesterday, the transport secretary ducked the question on the timescale? The public want to know when things will get better. We asked yesterday, but we got no answer from the minister.

The First Minister has given me one answer today that the transport minister could not give yesterday. Let us go for two out of two. What is the deadline for the improvements? Will the First Minister give us the answer today that the minister could not give yesterday?

**The First Minister:** The improvements cover a period of time. A summary of all the action points is already on ScotRail's website, which any member of the Parliament and any member of the public can read. The full detail of each of the—to be precise—246 action points will be published

over the next few days. They cover improvements to infrastructure, improvements to the ScotRail fleet and improvements to operations. All that is backed by an investment of £5 billion over the remainder of the decade in improving our rail services.

On the timescale, Humza Yousaf made it clear yesterday that we are pressing ScotRail to deliver on-going improvements to its performance. The contract that is in place sets a target for ScotRail of making sure that 91 out of every 100 trains run within the recognised industry standard for punctuality. At the moment, ScotRail's performance is 89 out of 100, which is not good enough. The various action points that are covered in the plan are about improving the service and beginning to have improvements in that service immediately. We should all get behind the transport minister as he seeks to achieve that.

**Ruth Davidson:** We were doing so well. We have a Government that is only now, a month on, starting to reveal the improvement plan that a month ago it said that it would get on with.

This week, the Government floated an alternative plan—it raised the question of a public sector operator running the rail system. We need to ensure that any such options are realistic. What is the earliest date that such an operator could take over our rail system? If, as the transport minister says, the rail network does not give a poor service, why does she think that such an operator is necessary?

**The First Minister:** We had a commitment in our manifesto to make sure that there was such an option. We have not had the powers to do that previously, but we now have the powers. We said that we would make sure that there was an option for a public service bid to be able to compete for the franchise when it is next up for renewal.

I know that the Tories are no friends of the public sector. Privatisation is and always has been the Tories' watchword, but we want to ensure that a public service bid is able to compete the next time that the franchise comes up for renewal. As Ruth Davidson is aware, the earliest that that could be is 2022.

We will start making plans now to ensure that such a bid is possible, which is why Humza Yousaf has, as he said in the chamber yesterday, invited the transport spokespeople from all the parties to a meeting to start talking about how that can be delivered. I hope that all members welcome that. It is yet more evidence of the action that the Government is taking to improve our railways.

**Ruth Davidson:** Even the First Minister would admit that this week the rail network has been in a shambles. Commuters standing on platforms have

watched as the Scottish Government has blamed the train operator for the mess, and the train operator has said that the Scottish Government is responsible for how many seats are available and therefore for how much overcrowding exists.

The contract has at least six more years to run. The question that passengers want an answer to is pretty simple. After they have seen the events of the past week, how can they have any confidence at all over the next six years that the deal will work?

**The First Minister:** First, on capacity in our railways, we are working towards plans that will deliver 200 new services, 20,000 more seats per day and better journey times. That is what we are purchasing with the £5 billion of investment that we are putting into our railways. I should say that about 60 per cent of the costs of running our railways in Scotland are met from Government funding, compared with about 20 per cent south of the border.

Although performance on our railways, as I and the transport minister have said, is not as good as we want it to be—we are determined to see it improve—the performance of trains in Scotland is slightly better than the Great Britain average. We take our responsibilities seriously, and it would be better for all members to back the transport minister as he works to ensure that ScotRail is delivering the standard of service that the travelling public have a right to expect.

### Engagements

2. **Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-00554)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Among other things, I will be in Cardiff tomorrow for a meeting of the British-Irish Council.

**Kezia Dugdale:** Today there was more delay and disruption on Scotland's rail network. At one stage this morning, one third of trains were running late. Yet again, thousands of people were delayed in getting to work. Earlier this week, the transport minister, Humza Yousaf, said that it was not a poor service, and in her answer to Ruth Davidson, the First Minister did what her Government always does: she blamed Labour and then talked about England. Does she really think that the thousands of people who were delayed at Glasgow Central today care about what happened in 2002 or what is going on in Cornwall this morning?

**The First Minister:** I am not particularly interested in what is going on in Cornwall this morning, but I am very interested in what is going on in Scotland. As members are aware, this morning there was a points failure that affected

services to and from Glasgow, which has now been rectified.

I regret any delay and disruption and we apologise—as I did last week—to anybody whose train was delayed because of that points failure. Unfortunately, such things happen on our railways. What is important is that ScotRail communicates properly with the travelling public and that we make sure that we invest in our infrastructure to reduce the chances of such things happening in the future. That is why the investment plans for operations, infrastructure and the fleet are so important. We will continue to take our responsibilities seriously.

When I talk about performance under Labour, I am not suggesting in any way that that should excuse poorer performance now. I do that simply to put today's performance into context. For the most recent period, ScotRail's performance was 89.8 per cent. It should be higher than that, but it is higher than it was in any year under the previous Labour Administration. I say that simply to put the figure in context.

We will continue to make the investment and do the work that is necessary to improve our rail services. That is what the travelling public have a right to expect from us.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I am sure that that will be of great comfort to the people who were stranded on platforms this morning. However, I am glad that the First Minister agrees with me that the service that Scotland's commuters are receiving just is not good enough, and that she thinks that passengers deserve better.

In January, the price of regulated rail fares is due to rise. A passenger using an annual season ticket to travel between Edinburgh and Glasgow will have to pay £71 more next year. That makes people even angrier. I think that passengers deserve a break, which is why today Labour is publishing a plan to freeze all regulated rail fares next year. Surely the First Minister agrees with us that people deserve a break. She has the power to give them one, so will she back Labour's call for a 2017 rail fare freeze?

**The First Minister:** Of course we will consider any proposal that is put forward. We will particularly look to see how that proposal would be paid for, because it is important that we can implement and deliver the investment package that I have spoken about. Of course we do not want rail fares to increase any more than is absolutely necessary. That is why, at the moment, increases in rail fares are at their lowest level since powers over the railways were devolved to the Parliament in 2005. Peak-time rail fare increases are limited to inflation and off-peak rail fare increases are actually limited to inflation

minus 1 per cent. That is the discipline that we exert on rail fares. We will consider any proposals but, above all else, we will ensure that we have fairness around the funding of our railways so that we can carry out the investments that are required to make sure that standards improve.

**Kezia Dugdale:** Our proposal is a serious one, with the means to pay for it contained in it. We asked the Scottish Parliament's independent experts to cost it for us, and they have estimated that it would cost as little as £2 million, which is the equivalent of two months' profit for Abellio. People are fed up with expensive, overcrowded and unreliable trains. The Scottish National Party is desperate to talk tough about what action it might take in 2022, but passengers who have been left stranded on freezing platforms this morning need a break now. Does the First Minister not agree with me that, after weeks of misery, passengers in Scotland deserve to know that there is light at the end of the tunnel with a fare freeze in 2017?

**The First Minister:** I have said that we will look at any proposal that is put forward, and I will stick to that commitment. However, we have already been bearing down on rail fare increases. As I said to Ruth Davidson, a much bigger proportion of the funding of our railways in Scotland comes from Government funding, rather than rail fares, than is the case south of the border, and I think that that is right and proper. We will also make sure that we plan the investment that is required to improve the infrastructure, the trains and the operation of our trains so that the kind of delays that we are talking about are not seen in the future. That is the responsible action that we will continue to take, and it is the action that the travelling public have a right to expect. We will look at the option of a public service bid in future, but right now we will continue to focus on making the improvements that people want to see.

**The Presiding Officer:** We have a number of constituency supplementaries today.

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** What is the Scottish Government's response to the news of the proposed closure of the Kwik-Fit Insurance Services contact centre in my constituency?

**The First Minister:** I am of course aware of the proposed closure of the Kwik-Fit Insurance site in Uddingston, with the possible loss of more than 500 jobs, and my thoughts are with all the workers who are affected at this time. The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy, Paul Wheelhouse, has already spoken with senior management and is looking at options. He has underlined our full support for the Uddingston site and its workforce and has said that we are committed to working with North Lanarkshire Council and others to do all that we can to retain

jobs. Scottish Enterprise is working closely with the company to consider all possible avenues for support, and we will continue to engage throughout the consultation process. It is important that we give the site and its workforce the full support that they need and deserve at this difficult time, and we are absolutely committed to doing that.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** As a result of some very unsatisfactory clinical outcomes at the maternity unit at Caithness general hospital—indeed, one mum, Eilidh McIntosh, had to endure her labour in an ambulance on the road between Wick and Raigmore—it appears that NHS Highland is proposing, without public consultation, next week to downgrade the Caithness general maternity unit to a midwife-led unit, with Raigmore becoming the hub.

Knowing that childbirth can quickly become life-threatening, not only to the mother but to the child, is the Government happy that Caithness and Sutherland mums with difficult deliveries might have to face a two-and-a-half hour blue-light drive to Inverness, which could be considerably longer in winter? Will the Government—and, I hope, the First Minister—join me, Caithness residents and local councillors in asking for a full public consultation before those changes are automatically imposed?

**The First Minister:** This is very important issue. Edward Mountain raised the case of an unsatisfactory ambulance journey, and I make it clear that the standard of care received in that case fell way below what we rightly expect for women in Scotland. I also make it clear that I expect both NHS Highland and the Scottish Ambulance Service to act on the findings of the investigation and to make improvements to local services to ensure that mothers and babies can be transferred safely and comfortably whenever they need to be.

On the more general issue, as Edward Mountain is aware, NHS Highland published a report into the safety of maternity and neonatal services at Caithness hospital, and it will further consider that report, which was triggered by the death of a baby in Caithness maternity unit in September 2015, later this month. The medical director will recommend that, on the basis of the report's findings, Caithness maternity services should be reconfigured and that the facility should operate as a midwife-led community maternity unit. The recommendation is being made on the ground of safety, and is supported by external review. That is the reason why NHS Highland is not proposing to consult on the decision, which will not come to ministers. However, NHS Highland is also proposing to consult widely on proposals to

strengthen services at Raigmore and to provide facilities for parents to ensure that local concerns are addressed.

I hope that all members will recognise that, where a report makes a recommendation based on patient safety—and the report in question is clearly based on patient safety—it is incumbent on the local NHS board to act accordingly.

**Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware of this week's announcement that a buyer has been found for the Fort William smelter and hydroelectric plant, and the surrounding land, which are currently owned by Rio Tinto. Can she provide an update?

**The First Minister:** Rio Tinto informed its workforce and the stock exchange yesterday morning that it had reached an agreement to sell its shareholding in Alcan Aluminium UK to the GFG Alliance in a deal that is being supported by the Scottish Government. The sale is great news for the local community and especially for the more than 150 people who work at the Fort William aluminium smelter. The uncertainty hanging over the workforce since the strategic review was announced in January has been lifted, ending an anxious wait for the workforce and all those whose livelihoods depend on the business. The deal not only safeguards the existing jobs in Lochaber, but has the potential to create hundreds more through planned investment in new facilities, and I hope that everybody across the chamber will warmly welcome it.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Is the First Minister aware that cuts are being made to mental health services by West Dunbartonshire health and social care partnership as a result of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's budget cuts for next year? Is she further aware that the SNP group leader voted with the unelected health board appointees in favour of those cuts, while Labour councillors voted against, and does she agree with the Scottish National Party group leader's actions in voting for cuts to mental health services in my area?

**The First Minister:** Greater Glasgow and Clyde's budget is not being cut next year. It is increasing in line with the budgets of other territorial health boards. The reason for that, of course, is that the Government is committed to continuing to increase the NHS budget overall over this session of Parliament by £500 million more than inflation, which is a bigger commitment than Labour made in its manifesto. That is the reality of the situation.

I am not aware of the particular local issue that Jackie Baillie raises. If she wants to write to me about it, I will make sure that it is looked into. As I have said before, the health service faces real

pressures because of rising demand, but we are determined to work with the health service to give it extra resources so that it can meet those pressures. Within the overall NHS budget, we have made clear our commitment to increase funding for mental health services.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** At this very moment, the City of Edinburgh Council is meeting to approve its local development plan—a document that will see thousands upon thousands of new homes built in my constituency, putting intolerable pressure on health services in Kirkliston, South Queensferry and Corstorphine. The plan will also lead to further choking of arterial routes that are already ranked as the most polluted and congested in Scotland, and the tearing up of much-loved green belt and natural heritage in areas such as the Cammo estate.

I accept that there is a housing crisis in this country, but there is a housing crisis of a different kind in my constituency. The citizens of west Edinburgh are on their knees, groaning under the weight of new houses that we are forced to endure. Will the Scottish Government introduce a new planning bill that seeks to rule out development in areas in which it is not sustainable and which compels developers, through section 75 orders, to build things such as new health centres and roads infrastructure in the first phase of development? Will the First Minister define once and for all what is meant by “green belt” and protect areas such as the Cammo estate for ever more?

**The First Minister:** I am more than happy to look into the detail of the issue that Alex Cole-Hamilton raises but, as I listened to the question, I was struck by two things. First, he appeared to be criticising the Scottish Government for a council’s desire to build more houses. Given that many Opposition members frequently criticise us for—according to them—not building enough houses, that seems to be a rather contradictory attack on the Government. Secondly, it seems to be entirely on its head for a member of a party that usually accuses the Scottish Government of centralising decision making to ask us to pass legislation to restrict a council’s local decision making.

We will continue to make sure not only that the planning system operates effectively and that local communities’ concerns are taken into account, but that we can see an expansion in house building, which is much needed across the country.

### **Cabinet (Meetings)**

**3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-00531)

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

**Patrick Harvie:** The Cabinet has not left itself much time between yesterday’s Westminster budget statement and the introduction of a draft budget for Scotland for next year.

Yesterday’s statement at Westminster was accompanied by a great deal of rhetoric about protecting people who are just about managing, but it contained a great deal more good news for the wealthiest. Some 85 per cent of the income tax cuts over the course of the rest of the Parliament will go to the richest households. Although people have been given some light relief through the changes to universal credit, only a tiny fraction of what has already been taken away from them will be restored. The uprating of the so-called national living wage—the upper band of the minimum wage—will not get anywhere close to the real living wage, nor will it protect younger workers, who at the moment are the most exploited in our economy.

The Scottish Government can take action on all those fronts. Does the First Minister agree that the Scottish budget must not only avoid reproducing the same unjust policies that are being pursued south of the border, but result in a cumulative benefit to Scotland that closes the inequality gap and leaves far fewer people in Scotland genuinely struggling?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I agree with that. Our budget will, of course, be published on 15 December.

It is important to talk about the context for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government of what the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced yesterday. It does not surprise me that Ruth Davidson did not want to mention the autumn budget statement earlier because, even after the additional capital funding that was announced yesterday, from which we will benefit through consequentials, by the end of this decade our budget will be 9.2 per cent lower, in real terms, than it was when the Tories took office. The £800 million that was announced yesterday will mean that, instead of our budget being £3.3 billion lower by the end of the decade than it was when the Tories took office, it will be £2.9 billion lower. The Tories want us to be thankful for that.

In addition, the fact that the universal credit situation will remain largely unchanged means that yesterday’s autumn budget statement was a case of taking money away from the poorest to give it to the richest in our society. We saw the Tories showing their true colours.

We will set out our budget plans in full on 15 December, but we have already said that we will not pass on a massive tax cut to the 10 per cent

top income earners in the country. Given that our budget is being hammered by the Tories, public services are being hammered and the UK Government is borrowing an additional £100 billion because of its Brexit recklessness, this is a time to protect our public services and to protect the vulnerable, and that is what this Government will do.

**Patrick Harvie:** I share that goal, but I hope that we can move away from the language of “passing on” tax cuts from south of the border. The chancellor down south does not set tax rates and bands for Scotland; it is the Scottish Government that will set those. There is therefore no question of passing on. It is about deciding what is right for Scotland from first principles.

It seems pretty clear that specific actions must be taken if we want the Scottish budget to have the effect that the First Minister says that she wants to achieve. For example, we should be saying that all workers, and not just workers over 25, will get the genuine living wage—and there should be the kind of conditionality for Government support on that that the Scottish Government has shied away from. We should be using capital spending to cut people’s living costs, through areas such as energy efficiency. We should be using devolved powers to top up benefits. A top-up of child benefit could lift tens of thousands of children out of poverty in Scotland.

We absolutely must avoid protecting wealthy people such as ourselves and have progressive tax policies that save money for people on lower incomes and raise money from people who can afford to pay more.

Does the First Minister agree that it is dispiriting to hear the Labour Party, for example, say that it is middle earners who will benefit if we raise the higher rate? Higher-rate taxpayers are on high incomes. Should we not expect people on high incomes to pay a bit more?

**The First Minister:** I agree with that last point. Higher-rate earners earn more than £43,000 a year. My judgment is that it is not right to give a large tax cut to the top 10 per cent of income earners at a time when people at the bottom end are suffering so much and there is so much pressure on our public services. That is the judgment that we make. It is dispiriting, especially after some of the rhetoric that we have heard from the Labour Party in this Parliament, that John McDonnell said that Labour agreed with the tax cut for top earners.

Patrick Harvie will appreciate that I will not go into all the detail today on other points that he raised, because the finance secretary will set out the budget in due course. However, on energy efficiency, this Government has invested heavily

and will continue to do so. We will continue to do everything that we can to mitigate the effect of welfare cuts. I hope that everyone in this Parliament—perhaps with the exception of the Tories—will welcome the fact that we have managed to confirm that our work programme will not have sanctions attached to it, which I think will be warmly welcomed.

On the minimum wage and living wage, although we do not have the power to set the minimum wage we have made it very clear that we want the extension of the real living wage—I have already extended it to 40,000 social care workers.

Those are the kinds of action that we will continue to take, to help the people who are most in need and to protect our public services. When we publish the budget, I hope that all members will back it.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** The First Minister is aware that NHS Ayrshire and Arran has—going back many years—a less-than-good track record of disseminating information and acting on information gained and lessons learned from critical incidents and significant adverse events. A pattern of failure for too many bereaved families is well established.

I welcome the review into baby deaths at University hospital Crosshouse, but we have been here before and the questions remain. Given that lessons have not been learned and acted on in the past, does the First Minister really believe—and can she guarantee—that the outcome of the inquiry into baby deaths at Crosshouse will deliver improvements for the people of Ayrshire and my constituents?

**The First Minister:** I think that it is fair to say that changes have been made. The earlier review to which John Scott referred is the review of NHS Ayrshire and Arran’s adverse event management, which I instigated in 2012 when I was health secretary.

Some of what we heard this week is deeply concerning. That is why the health secretary has asked Healthcare Improvement Scotland to review the cases that have been highlighted in Ayrshire and Arran—and, indeed, other cases that HIS thinks it necessary to review—and to report on whether the correct processes and procedures were properly followed. Healthcare Improvement Scotland will report back at the earliest possible opportunity, after which the health secretary has offered to discuss the findings directly with the families concerned.

I give the member and the Parliament an absolute assurance that if there are lessons to be learned or improvements to be made we will not hesitate to act.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** The justice minister has instructed Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland to review undercover policing in Scotland. This week, it emerged that one of the key officers who is working on the review is Stephen Whitelock, who was previously deputy director of the specialist force that was responsible for carrying out the undercover policing activity that he is now reviewing. Will the First Minister step in and remove Mr Whitelock from the inquiry? If not, the inquiry's credibility will be in tatters when its work has barely begun.

**The First Minister:** I will fully consider the issue that Neil Findlay raises. More generally, as he said, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has directed Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to undertake a review of undercover policing in Scotland. It is important that we allow that review to proceed and then act on any of its findings. We all want to ensure that people can have confidence in that review, so, of course, we will consider any issues that are raised that might damage that confidence. Therefore, without saying any more about it today, I will consider the issue that has been raised and get back to the member in due course.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** With the Brexiteer chimera of £350 million a week for the national health service being replaced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday with £225 million a week of new borrowing, is it not now much more difficult for Governments north and south of the border to deliver social justice, given that our economy is being burdened by debt of that magnitude due to the incompetence of the Tories?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I think that that is absolutely correct. Yesterday, perhaps for the first time, we started to see laid bare the true cost of Brexit. Rather than there being the promise of £350 million extra a week for the national health service, we saw that the additional borrowing alone that has been caused by Brexit will amount to £225 million a week. That is the Brexit con that so many people in the Conservative Party have presided over. That is why I am determined that we will continue to explore every option to protect Scotland's interests and, in particular, to protect our place in the single market, because that is how we will minimise the costs of Brexit that are being imposed on us by the Conservative Party.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Last month, the First Minister voted for a Green amendment in this chamber that set out clear red lines in relation to the protection of Scotland's public services and environment from the comprehensive economic and trade agreement and the transatlantic trade and investment partnership trade deal. Yesterday's

vote in the European Parliament confirmed that there will be no scrutiny of those deals by the European Court of Justice, even though the Scottish Government's written answers confirm that CETA poses a potential threat to our NHS and our protected foods.

Will the First Minister release legal advice that points to the damaging impact of the trade deals? What action will she take to ensure that Scotland's voice and values are heard in Europe at this critical time?

**The First Minister:** The member is aware of the position that is laid out in the ministerial code around legal advice.

Secondly—this is a matter of regret to me—we do not have direct power over trade agreements such as CETA and TTIP. However, I absolutely agree with the member that it is incumbent on the Government and the whole Parliament to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard. As I have said previously, we have concerns around some of the contents of those trade deals, particularly with regard to the threat to public services, including the NHS. We have argued that there should be an explicit exclusion for the NHS and public services in such agreements. We also have concerns about the investor-state dispute settlement process.

We will continue to argue the case that Scotland's concerns should be taken into account, and we will absolutely ensure that Scotland's voice is heard on these matters.

#### Autumn Statement

4. **Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the autumn statement. (S5F-00552)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The autumn statement starkly set out the cost of Brexit to the United Kingdom's economy and public finances, with economic growth and tax revenue revised downwards and borrowing and inflation up. In responding, the United Kingdom Government had the opportunity to end its failed austerity policy. Instead, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has continued with the cuts that are reducing budgets for public services and cutting the income of families across Scotland. Although the small increase in capital investment that was announced yesterday is welcome, it simply reduces the cuts that were put in place by the chancellor's predecessor. By the end of the decade, our capital budget alone will still be around 8 per cent lower in real terms than it was when the Conservatives came to power in 2010.

We will publish the Scottish draft budget next month, and it will set out the measures that we are taking to support our economy, tackle inequality and invest in public services, underlining the very

different approaches that our two Governments take.

**Bruce Crawford:** Does the First Minister agree that the full extent of the Tories' reckless gamble with the nation's future is now laid bare for all to see in the autumn statement, with, as she says, slower growth, higher inflation and lower tax revenues? Does she also agree that the bombshell projection that the UK debt will increase by a staggering £220 billion by 2020 if there is a hard Brexit makes it an absolute imperative that Scotland is able to remain in the single market by whatever means?

**The First Minister:** The Tories do not like hearing that, because what we are hearing now is the reality of their recklessness on Brexit. One hundred billion pounds of additional borrowing, debt increasing by around £200 billion, the debt to gross domestic product ratio hitting 90 per cent, lower growth, lower wages and a squeeze on living standards—that is the price of the Tory Brexit that Ruth Davidson and her colleagues seem to be so enthusiastic about now.

The Tories in Scotland might be the born-again Brexiteers, but this Government will continue to stand up for Scotland's interests, we will continue to seek to protect our place in Europe and we will continue to find ways to protect our place in the single market. That is what we need to do to protect jobs, to protect public finances and to protect the living standards of people around this country, because none of those things is safe in the hands of the Tories.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** If the First Minister wants to find Brexiteers, all she has to do is look at the Scottish National Party benches behind her.

For Scotland, the chancellor's autumn statement delivers £800 million in extra capital spending, £74 million in extra resource spending, an extra £3.3 million for Scottish charities, a freeze in fuel duty, an increase in the personal allowance to help the lowest earners, an increase in research and development spending, and a city deal for Stirling and Clackmannanshire. However, Bruce Crawford seems to have forgotten about that in his question. All that is part of the fastest-growing economy in the G7, so why cannot the First Minister for once stop being so miserable and just welcome the good news?

**The First Minister:** I think that most of the misery yesterday came from the chancellor, not from anybody on the Scottish National Party side. I remember the days when Murdo Fraser used to aspire to be a serious politician; now he is simply delusional.

The facts speak for themselves. Let us take account of the £800 million extra in capital and the

£74 million extra in revenue; let us factor all that in and see where we end up. We end up in a position in which, by the end of the decade, our budget will not be £3.3 billion lower than it was when the Tories took office, as we were expecting. It will just be £2.9 billion lower than it was when the Tories took office, yet the Tories expect us to thank them for that. That is the price of allowing the Tories to run our economy. The difference between Murdo Fraser and the Conservatives, and those of us on this side of the chamber, is that we think that we would do a better job of running our economy ourselves. That is the choice that we face.

### Children (Activity Levels)

**5. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking in light of recent reports that Scotland's children are some of the least active in the world. (S5F-00513)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Some of the findings of the active healthy kids Scotland report card 2016 are disappointing and we want to do much more to challenge sedentary behaviour and to increase the physical activity levels of children. However, as the report recognises, we have a strong legislative framework and infrastructure in place that underpin our plans. Through the active Scotland outcomes framework, we are committed to providing even more opportunities for children to be active, building on our massive investment in school sport and in sports facilities since 2007.

I am sure that the member shares my disappointment that the United Kingdom Government watered down its recent childhood obesity strategy and I hope that he will lend his party's support to our call for further restrictions on junk food advertising before 9 pm to significantly reduce children's exposure to the marketing of unhealthy food.

**Alexander Stewart:** I welcome the Government's efforts to encourage physical activity. However, according to the Scottish health survey, since the Scottish National Party came to power it has managed to increase the number of children meeting physical activity guidelines by only a few per cent. Does the First Minister admit that not enough progress has been made on that?

**The First Minister:** I readily acknowledge that we have to do much more. However, let us look at, for example, the percentage of children who are doing two hours or two periods of physical education. In 2005, that was less than 10 per cent of our children; this year, that figure has gone up to 98 per cent. That is just one example of the progress that is being made. We are also investing heavily in local sports facilities.



The report that the members' question refers to—the active healthy kids Scotland report card—found that we score very well in policies and facilities but we need to do much more with regard to children's actual physical activity. Indeed, that is one of the reasons why we are supporting the daily mile in our schools, which is a fantastic initiative. We will continue to ensure that those facilities and our investment translate into actual improvements, and I hope that, on what is an issue of importance not just now but for the future, people across the chamber will get behind us.

### Nuisance Calls

**6. James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to tackle the problem of nuisance calls. (S5F-00534)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I know the significant harm that nuisance calls can do, particularly to the most vulnerable people in our society. Much of the power to tackle the issue lies with Westminster; indeed, we saw some positive action last weekend.

Nevertheless, I believe that more can be done to tackle the issue. In June, the Scottish Government held a summit with representatives of United Kingdom regulators, telecommunications companies and consumer groups on the practical steps that can be taken and, on the back of the ideas that were generated at that summit, we outlined in the programme for government plans for a nuisance calls commission, which will meet for the first time next week. Of course, there are no easy solutions, but the response from the members of our commission—which, I say again, is made up of regulators, business, consumer groups and the UK Government—shows that there is a willingness to make a difference in order to protect consumers and tackle unscrupulous business practice.

**James Kelly:** I am sure that the First Minister will agree that nuisance calls are unacceptable, particularly as they are often used to target old and vulnerable people. The scale of the problem in Scotland is highlighted by UK statistics that were published earlier this week by *Which?* magazine, showing that Scottish cities occupy three of the top four places in terms of the proportion of nuisance calls that people receive. In Glasgow alone, more than half of all incoming calls to trueCall customers were regarded as nuisance calls. Will the Scottish Government make use of its new consumer powers and publish a bold action plan that will, by supporting the provision of call-blocking technology, put pressure on businesses to protect consumers and help vulnerable people?

**The First Minister:** I broadly agree with everything that James Kelly has said. I absolutely

agree that nuisance calls are unacceptable, especially when—as they tend to do—they target older and more vulnerable people. Obviously, much of the action that can be taken on the matter is reserved to Westminster, but that does not mean that we will not explore what action we are able to take.

James Kelly is right to point to evidence that nuisance calls are higher in number and more of a problem in Scotland than they are in other parts of the UK—although I should say that there is no clear explanation for why that is the case. He is also right to point out that we will be getting more powers over consumer policies. We are actively looking at how we can use those policies in a way that contributes to tackling the problem. Obviously, call-blocking technology is one of the areas that not just the Scottish Government but other Governments are looking at. I am very happy to continue a dialogue on the subject with any member who has an interest in the issue, as we seek to work out how best we can tackle what is an unacceptable and—I think most people agree—growing problem, in particular for older people in our communities.

### Nurseries (Speech and Language Development)

**7. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister, following the recent call by Save the Children, what action the Scottish Government will take to increase the number of teachers and other staff working in nurseries with specialist training in speech and language development. (S5F-00517)

**The First Minister:** Our national practice guidance, which was published in 2014, focuses on the communication needs of babies, toddlers and young children in a variety of settings, and makes recommendations for best practice. Of course, we are already committed to expanding free early learning and childcare, including to the most vulnerable two-year-olds, and to providing by 2018 nurseries in the most deprived areas of Scotland with an additional graduate or teacher with early learning expertise.

In addition, the investment for delivering early learning and childcare entitlement will support delivery of different models of provision, including holistic delivery models. For example, the Woodburn family learning centre in Midlothian has co-located early learning and childcare with other services for children and families, including speech and language therapists.

**Daniel Johnson:** The First Minister has restated her commitment to expanding childcare. The Labour Party shares that aim. Is it not the case, however, that over the past five years Scotland's nurseries have lost more than 900

teachers under her Government? How does she square that fact with the promises that she has just made?

**The First Minister:** We are not committed just to expanding early learning and childcare in the future; we have expanded them. Not too long ago, of course, we published the financial review of the expansion of that policy to date, which showed that, if anything, the Scottish Government has overfunded that commitment for local councils. We are, of course, working with local councils now to plan further expansion.

The commitment on extra teachers or graduates in nurseries in deprived areas is important, as is the flexibility that will be encompassed in the expanded provision, because it gives us the opportunity to look at different models of provision, such as the one that I cited in my earlier answer.

There is no doubt at all that the key to solving the problem is early education. That is why it is important that we look at expanding not just its quantity, but its quality. The Minister for Childcare and Early Years, Mark McDonald, is absolutely focused on doing both.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** That concludes First Minister's question time. We will move on to a members' business debate on a motion that was lodged by Miles Briggs, on disability access to Waverley station. We are trying to get new members of the public into the gallery, so I ask those who are leaving to do so as quickly and quietly as possible. There will be a short delay while we wait for the gallery to be cleared.

## Edinburgh Waverley Station (Access Arrangements)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-02131, in the name of Miles Briggs, on Edinburgh Waverley station access arrangements. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament is aware of the ongoing concerns of residents in Lothian and visitors using the drop-off and pick-up arrangements at Edinburgh Waverley railway station; notes that previous taxi ranks within the station were removed in 2014 when vehicles were banned from the station, which means passengers have to leave the station to get a taxi, or be dropped off, on neighbouring streets; is aware of the particular concerns of older, disabled or blind travellers who may find it difficult and inconvenient to get to and from the station; is further aware that the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee investigated this matter in 2015 and suggested that it was "essential that suitably located, accessible taxi facilities are available at Waverley"; welcomes the work of the Edinburgh Access Panel and other stakeholders in seeking to persuade the ScotRail Alliance to improve the current arrangements, and notes the continuing calls for a suitably located, accessible taxi rank and drop-off and pick-up point to be reintroduced at Edinburgh Waverley station without further delay in the interests of all travellers using this key transport hub.

12:51

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, for the time that was given to allow my constituents to join us in the public gallery.

I thank colleagues from across the chamber who supported my motion. I also thank the thousands of constituents across Edinburgh and Lothian and beyond who signed my petition, either off or online. Both those actions demonstrate the real public interest and anger surrounding the topic.

I welcome to the public gallery a number of my constituents who have been campaigning on the issue, including Dennis and Pat Wilson, Ian McInnes and Moira Vaughan of the Edinburgh access panel, which has done such a huge amount of work, as well as representatives of the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance.

All of us can agree that blind, disabled, infirm and elderly residents should have the same access to transport services as anyone else in Scotland. However, I am sad to say that, since the taxi ranks were removed from Waverley station in 2014, many of those people feel that they have become second-class citizens when it comes to accessing the station.

Blind and disabled people who were used to some of the best drop-off and pick-up arrangements in the country feel that they have been badly let down and that their independence has been totally undermined. Disabled constituents tell me that navigating their way around Waverley station and trying to find the lifts and the escalators can be extremely difficult and frustrating and, in some cases, dangerous, as the escalators pose a particular challenge for guide dogs.

I am sorry to say that some disabled constituents have told me that they have decided to avoid Waverley station altogether as they do not want to have to rely on assistance from others. In many cases, it has only been because of the kindness of fellow Edinburgh residents and the city's fantastic taxi drivers that they have been able to access the station and get on to train services at all.

Handicabs (Lothian) can be used by disabled travellers—Edinburgh users have told me that the services that it provides are excellent—but its services have to be booked two weeks in advance, which removes the option for more spontaneous travel. Perhaps after the week that the Minister for Transport and the Islands has had, he would prefer to know the movements of everyone in Scotland two weeks in advance, but—this is the question that I put to the minister today—why should the disabled, blind, and elderly residents that I represent across Lothian have to plan their travel arrangement two weeks in advance?

The Handicabs service for drop-offs faces being made less accessible if the drop-off point is moved to Calton Road when the south ramp space is utilised for platform extensions.

Disabled visitors to the capital are usually unaware of the Handicabs service. Many tourists coming to Edinburgh for the very first time have faced standing outside in all weathers on neighbouring streets waiting for taxis, often having struggled outside in Market Street or Princes Street with heavy luggage. Some visitors have had to queue for long periods, especially during the festival, which hardly creates a good impression of our capital city.

I remain very concerned that the decision to remove the taxi ranks in 2014 was implemented before adequate alternative arrangements had been put in place. That is deeply regrettable. Back in the summer of 2015, a parliamentary committee looked into the issue and called for action on better access provisions, but we are still waiting for those to be delivered.

Last week, I met Network Rail representatives and Waverley station management at the station

and they briefed me on their plans, which were confirmed in the press on Monday, for a new taxi rank at the New Street car park. That is welcome news as far as it goes, but it will offer only a limited improvement for able-bodied travellers, as it is just a taxi pick-up rank and not a place where passengers can be dropped off within the footprint of the station. It will also be considerably further away from the central parts of the station compared with previous ranks, so there will still be real challenges for blind, disabled and infirm travellers, who will need to use a number of lifts or staircases to get to their platforms and the station's central concourse.

Therefore, I will continue to press rail bosses to look at additional and improved drop-off and pick-up arrangements and to work with the Edinburgh access panel and other stakeholders to achieve that. Specifically, I hope that a north ramp option for taxis will be reconsidered, as other ways of getting deliveries into the station can be found, thus freeing up that area. I urge Network Rail to explore all possibilities around that.

Responsibility for ensuring equality of access to transport services ultimately lies with the Scottish Government and the Minister for Transport and the Islands. There are questions to be answered as to why it has taken more than two years—since the taxi ranks were removed—to come up with the limited proposals for a pick-up rank at New Street, which will not be in place until towards the end of next year. The Scottish Government should have been doing far more to ensure that Waverley station is made truly accessible for all travellers. It is, after all, a strategic national transport hub, a gateway to Scotland and one of the busiest stations in the country.

When the minister recently launched Scotland's first accessible travel framework, he said fine words, stating:

"It's important for us to confirm the commitment to making it easier for those with a disability to travel."

I agree. I know from the meetings that I have had with the minister that he genuinely wants to see progress on the issues. I call on him to put those words into action at Waverley station and press Network Rail to make further improvements that will make the station's drop-off and pick-up arrangements truly fit for purpose and genuinely accessible for all travellers, including blind, disabled and elderly residents.

12:56

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank Miles Briggs for bringing the debate to the chamber. I apologise to him and to you, Presiding Officer, because I will have to leave after my speech to go to the Conveners Group meeting.

I pay tribute to Ronnie Wilkes and Johann Hutchison, who are two campaigners who work to improve the rights of passengers. Johann is a constituent of mine and a wheelchair user, Ronnie is blind, and both are regular train users. They worked with my colleague Sarah Boyack during her time in this Parliament and I have been working with them over the past few months. In September, we met senior officials of ScotRail at Waverley station to discuss a range of issues relating to disabled travel and access in and around the station.

We must recognise that, if we were going to plan and build the major railway station for the capital city, we would not build it where it is now, at the bottom of a steep valley between Princes Street and Market Street, where access issues and layout restrictions hamper every move—although, as the old gag goes, it was really considerate of them to build the castle next to the railway station.

Any work at Waverley is challenged by its geography, but that should not prevent us from doing everything possible to improve access at the station for all passengers. There is without doubt a need for improved taxi services and access to allow passengers to transit through the station and beyond to their destination. As a daily commuter, I find getting to and from platforms and dealing with platform changes frustrating and often unclear. For passengers with mobility problems, those who use wheelchairs and those with a visual impairment, the frustration must be even greater.

The taxi rank issue is important, but Ronnie and Johann have also raised with me a host of other issues. They have suggested a possible further drop-off point on Calton Road and simple things such as putting a seat and Braille panel at the help point in the station, changing the rail information desk to a rail information and access desk so that disabled travellers know exactly where to get help and advice, and developing a passenger buddy system with volunteers to assist passengers who need help to access services, transit through the station or get to a bus or taxi.

Ronnie and Johann have suggested that we look at the use of new information technology and phone apps to make the whole train journey experience better, ensuring in particular that the passenger assist service works as it should. I know that new mobile phone apps are being trialled and I look forward to their roll-out if they are successful. They have also suggested a scooter hire system at stations, so that people with limited mobility can enjoy this great city just like everyone else. There is a host of other suggestions that I will not go into at the moment.

If members think that the past few weeks have been bad for passengers, think how bad the

experience of late trains, cancelled services and overcrowded carriages is for our disabled friends and relatives.

I hope that the rail authorities can advance the work of the group that is already set up and the suggestions that have come from my constituents. We all want to see a railway that is accessible for everyone in Scotland.

13:00

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** I thank my colleague Miles Briggs for bringing this debate to the Scottish Parliament and I pay tribute to his efforts to ensure that taxis can once again enter Waverley station. He has eloquently set out the most important aspects of the issue.

It is, of course, more than two years since the public outcry when taxis were stopped from entering the station. I welcome the announcement that taxis will again be able to pick up passengers near the station, but we are only halfway there; I am unclear why Network Rail did not go the full way and provide a full service for passengers by allowing them to be dropped off as well. It is also disappointing to note the distance of the rank from the previous ranks in more central parts of the station, which has been mentioned.

This is a vital service for many different people. Taxi pick-up and drop-off facilities are vital for disabled and elderly people. Let us also think of the tourists—some 4 million visit Edinburgh every year, many of them using Waverley station. As someone who has used rail services in many parts of Europe and other countries, I understand the difficulty when one arrives in a station. It can be quite confusing and unclear if things are not signposted, and some cities are better at providing that than others.

Edinburgh is a gateway to other parts of Scotland: 60 per cent of the visitors who come here travel on to other parts of the country. Taxis are key to making their journey easy and making the country accessible to them. Travellers often arrive—as I have in other cities—unsure of their whereabouts, which is why the position of the new rank is regrettable; it is about 500 metres from the station platforms. I encourage Network Rail to reconsider and to ensure that effective signage is provided to guide travellers to where they need to go—signage that is easily understandable to those for whom English is not their native language.

Finally, on the timing of the new proposals, as far as we know, the new rank will open in autumn 2017. It would be good to have more specific information on that, as my understanding is that that would mean missing the Edinburgh festival season, which in the main runs throughout August. If the rank is to open after August 2017, it will miss

the 70th anniversary of the Edinburgh international festival, which would be a crying shame.

Therefore, I close by asking the transport minister to try to accelerate the provision of services prior to that date next year.

13:04

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** I extend my thanks to Miles Briggs for bringing the motion to the chamber and allowing us to explore this issue further.

Edinburgh Waverley is an important transport hub for people across Scotland and beyond. The station has 18 platforms in use and around 30,000 passengers a day passing through. With so many passengers, it is essential that there is full and easy access to and from the station each day for every passenger.

Unfortunately, passengers with disabilities find manoeuvring around Waverley station's facilities to be a severe challenge at the best of times. Additional help can be requested by phoning for assistance before they arrive at the station but, despite such schemes, many passengers feel overlooked and forgotten.

To put the issues in context, I will share the example of the Paralympian Tanni Grey-Thompson. In 2012, she highlighted her experience of having to throw her wheelchair off the train at her station and then crawl off, because her booked assistance did not turn up. That is not a good situation for anyone to be in. Recounting her experience to the *Telegraph*, she said:

"as a disabled person travelling you always have an element of fear, feeling very uncomfortable, of panic, of just wondering whether you're going to get off. I think it is fair that a lot of disabled people feel like second class passengers because they don't have the same treatment as everyone else. I don't expect to be swept in to first class and treated better than everyone else—I expect to have the same experience, and that is often just not the case."

No one should feel the need to worry about accessibility. All passengers should have an easy and accessible experience at Waverley station and elsewhere in Scotland.

Previously at Waverley, passengers could be picked up and dropped off at platform level, but the closure in 2014 of the indoor taxi rank has led to increased worry and inaccessibility for those who struggle to travel. Passengers in any direction now face a time-consuming route through the station, going in and out of lifts in order to reach street level to get a taxi. As we all know, lifts can break down, which can cause extra delays. With the decrease in accessibility due to the taxi rank closure, the unease of disabled passengers has only increased. Waverley station was originally developed and built in 1854. It is historically

significant and has its geographical challenges. However, that should not mean that there is no room for improvements.

As we heard, this week Network Rail announced its intention to situate a new taxi rank in the New Street car park. The design of the rank is scheduled to be completed in May, and we believe that the project completion date will be some time after that. However, the proposed taxi rank will still require passengers with disabilities to navigate across the station and take a lift to New Street, and—as has been mentioned—it will be only for pick-ups and not for drop-offs. Despite attempts to alleviate the stress for passengers, the new scheme, as far as I can see, does not do much to change the current status and level of accessibility. Neil Findlay, who is unfortunately no longer in the chamber, made several good suggestions for improvements that could perhaps be taken forward.

I would be the first to admit, as an able-bodied person, that we sometimes struggle to understand the challenges that passengers with disabilities face. I suggest that the executives at Network Rail spend even a day on crutches or in a wheelchair, with a couple of heavy suitcases, navigating through the station, getting on and off trains and going up to try to hail a taxi while waiting in the freezing cold. That might give them some perspective on the issue.

I am convinced that a solution could be found to make the station fit for the 21st century, so I call on Network Rail to be more creative, to find that solution and to make the investment so that all passengers can use the station with ease.

13:08

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I congratulate my colleague Miles Briggs on bringing the debate to the chamber and I commend him for his work in raising the profile of the issues surrounding access to Waverley station here in Edinburgh.

Waverley is Scotland's largest main-line station and is second only to London Waterloo in the United Kingdom. The annual rail passenger usage for the station in 2014-15 was over 21 million. It is the very definition of a rail hub, connecting passengers from across Scotland and the United Kingdom. The station, which is of such importance to us in Edinburgh, should and must ensure that commuters and visitors alike have easy access, as accessibility is essential.

The short-term decision back in 2014 to ban taxis from the station was, I believe, the wrong one to make at that stage. It was short-sighted to ban taxis from picking up and dropping off passengers inside Waverley, and the ban has provoked a

huge reaction from individuals who have to use the station. I believe that it was a knee-jerk reaction that has had huge implications.

As has been pointed out already in the debate, the withdrawal of the previous option has affected many elderly, disabled and infirm people and has had massive consequences for mothers with prams and buggies and for other individuals and groups, arriving at the station, who find access difficult. For example, if someone is unfortunate enough to be visually impaired or blind and requires the support of a guide dog, a simple arrival at the station can turn into a nightmare. I am not surprised that many people have said that they will not use the current facilities because they are fearful and anxious about accessing them. We should be tackling that for those individuals.

It is extremely disappointing that there is now no access to taxi ranks on the same level as the platforms and that passengers have to make their way up staircases to get a taxi and arrive at the station at inaccessible drop-off points. Currently, passengers must locate lifts and escalators that, as we have heard, do not always work, which is just not good enough.

Although I welcome Network Rail's announcement that there will be a new taxi rank in New Street, it has taken far too long for us to get to this point. Almost a year and a half ago, the Scottish Parliament's Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee indicated that there should be a suitably located taxi-access facility at Waverley station. Even after a two-year delay, the rank at New Street will only partly address the problems that have arisen, because it is proposed that the new taxi rank will be only for taxis that are picking up passengers, which means that the problems that have been highlighted will remain unsolved for passengers who arrive at the station. I echo others' calls in the debate for the Scottish Government to fulfil its obligation to ensure equal access to transport services in the station.

The Scottish Government and Network Rail must work together urgently to improve access at Edinburgh Waverley railway station for passengers, particularly those who require extra assistance, to ensure that it remains a real rail hub and works for everybody in the community.

13:12

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** I thank Miles Briggs for introducing the debate, which is on a matter that is very important to the Scottish Parliament. I welcome his constituents—and those of any other member—and campaigners who are in the public gallery.

I understand from what Miles Briggs said that he recently met Waverley station's manager and had a walk-round tour of the station, during which he was given detailed information on the range of improvements that have been delivered by the ScotRail Alliance, in partnership with the Edinburgh access panel, over the past couple of years. However, I echo what I think almost every member has said: the current situation at Waverley station is suboptimal and not appropriate for people who have accessibility issues.

Miles Briggs was kind enough to quote me on the Scottish Government's accessible travel framework, which I was delighted to launch a couple of months ago and which confirms our commitment to addressing accessibility issues across the different modes of transport. That is of paramount importance to the Government. Having spoken to Network Rail, I believe that it echoes our view.

I will try to address some of the issues that have been raised in the debate. A number of speeches shared common themes. Ash Denham was absolutely correct to say that even for those of us who are able-bodied, navigating, especially at peak times, from one end of Waverley station to the other can be an uncomfortable experience. She was right to ask us to imagine what that is like for people who are not able-bodied and who might have also to contend with suitcases or other luggage and accompanying children, for example. That provides an important context for our understanding.

There have been some major access improvements in Waverley station. In 2012, as we know, escalators and lift access to Princes Street and Market Street were installed as part of a £130 million investment to upgrade the station. I know what Alexander Stewart meant when he said that lifts can break—that kind of access is not a solution, in itself. However, it is fair to say that access improvements have been made.

It is important to highlight what was missing from the speeches, however—I do not think that there was any malice in that—which is the reason why the taxi rank was removed. Mr Stewart called it “short-sighted” and “a knee-jerk reaction”. Having spoken to Network Rail, I understand that the rank was removed because of a directive from the UK Government on counterterrorism measures. Most people would see that as a reasonable directive, when one thinks of what happened with vehicles at Glasgow airport.

If one travels to Glasgow Queen Street or Glasgow Central stations, it will be clear that there are not many stations that are as busy as Waverley that allow taxis to come into the concourse of the station. The decision was taken not for cosmetic or aesthetic reasons, but because

of a directive from the UK Government that highlighted Waverley station as being one of the stations in the UK that had to make the improvement. Government directives are best not ignored—especially when they are to do with counterterrorism. That context is important.

All that being said, members are entirely correct to ask what suitable alternatives could have been put in place, knowing that the directive was coming. I want to congratulate the Edinburgh access panel on its work. I know that it has been working closely with the ScotRail Alliance to put its case forward on what can be done better.

There have been improvements that I and other members have mentioned. I know that Neil Findlay has had to leave, but I would be interested to receive a copy of the suggestions that his constituents have made. If they have not been fed in to the ScotRail Alliance, they should be. Some of them are eminently sensible.

The close collaboration between the ScotRail Alliance and the Edinburgh access panel has led to the announcement that was made earlier this week about the creation of a taxi rank within the New Street car park. Gordon Lindhurst asked why it will be a pick-up only rank. That is because there is insufficient space for more, at the moment. The next stage is detailed design work on timescales, which members mentioned, and on what more can be done to improve accessibility. Once that detailed design work is done, it will be fed back to the Edinburgh access panel for its thoughts.

**Miles Briggs:** I have listened to what the minister has had to say and I am grateful. One of the key issues that I have been pressing is that none of the options that has come forward takes into account disabled and blind people going through the station. They are being kept out of the station. I have spoken about Handicabs and its role. It, too, will soon be excluded from the station. I want to see a bespoke opportunity for people who are disabled and blind to access train services.

I invite the minister and all the representatives who have an interest in the issue to visit the station with me, so that we can say to Network Rail and to the station management that the situation is not good enough and they have to go further. They need to look again at what has been put in place and at what we now have to wait another year for. There is an opportunity to allow disabled and vulnerable people to get into the station far more easily than they currently can.

**Humza Yousaf:** I would have no hesitation in meeting Miles Briggs, his constituents, the access panel and anyone else to discuss—I stress again that direct access right into the station might be difficult because of the directive from the UK

Government—whether that can be worked around, taking into consideration space constraints and restrictions. As Neil Findlay said, we would not choose again to build the station where it is, if we had the chance.

The detailed design work by Network Rail has been done in conjunction with the Edinburgh access panel, whose members will be able to feed in regularly. That touches on a point that I want to make—and which Gordon Lindhurst made very well—about whether the timescale can be expedited. There is a particular need for that in relation to the Edinburgh festival, which is such an important occasion and event. I will certainly ask Network Rail if that is possible. The design phase will set out the timescales, and Gordon Lindhurst made a very valid point about the work taking place at a very important time for the city.

In conclusion, I thank Miles Briggs for bringing the debate to Parliament, and I thank the Edinburgh access panel, the RNIB and the many other stakeholders who have been involved. There is a route forward that will go some of the way to addressing some of the issues. Clearly, there are more issues that need to be addressed. I will meet Miles Briggs and anyone else who is interested and I will ensure that Network Rail continues to be engaged. I hope that we can find a solution that is optimal for everybody—those who are able-bodied and those with disabilities.

13:20

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## **Island Communities (Support)**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The first item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S5M-02686, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on supporting and strengthening Scotland's island communities.

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** As a boy who was born and bred in Glasgow, I cannot claim to have an island heritage, as some members in the chamber can. I have often said that my heart truly belongs to Glasgow, but as a result of recent visits that I made across the islands in May and the summer months, Glasgow might just have to get used to sharing my heart with many of our islands.

Those visits to 18 of Scotland's islands—I have many more to go, of course—showed the extent of the contribution that our islands make to Scotland's cultural and economic wellbeing. Many members across the chamber know about that. I was delighted to be able to meet some members during my visits to those islands. I met Kate Forbes on Skye and Raasay and Kenny Gibson on Arran. Liam McArthur was kind enough to give me a cup of tea and a biscuit on Orkney; that said, he publicly went on to ask for millions of pounds for Orkney, so it was the most expensive custard cream that I have ever had.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Is it not the case that Glasgow as a city has shown us the way on the value of islands with the tradition of travelling doon the watter?

**Humza Yousaf:** Yes. I thought that Stewart Stevenson was going to come in on the custard cream, so I am somewhat disappointed by his intervention. However, he is right to have made that point about Glasgow leading the way.

Scotland's islands are, of course, key to maintaining and nurturing the health of Scotland's second language. They play host to a myriad of musical and cultural festivals, which are often borne and supported by their local communities, and they are home to 16 of our world-famous whisky distilleries and to some of our most stunning scenery.

It would be a very brave person who would pick out one of our islands as the most beautiful, and I will certainly not do that. However, one of the highlights of my visits was a sun-kissed day on Raasay. That demonstrated that tourism, which is essential to our country, is supported by our islands.

The contribution and interests of our islands have rightly been championed through the our islands, our future campaign. I pay tribute to the three wholly island councils that have led it. In 2014, we published our response, "Empowering Scotland's Island Communities", in which we set out a comprehensive package of actions and measures to empower Scotland's island communities.

I am determined to ensure that the actions that we take forward in the Parliament meet the needs and interests of all who grow up, live and work on Scotland's islands, as well as those who provide services and run businesses on them, many of whom I managed to visit during my island tours. That is why at the earliest opportunity I prioritised meetings with constituency and list MSPs and council leaders. As I have said, I have visited islands in every single one of the six areas whose local authorities have responsibility for island communities.

I am keen to hear contributions from across the chamber on the benefits, opportunities and, of course, challenges that are sometimes associated with island life.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I am grateful for the tone of the minister's remarks. With his responsibilities for the islands, will he take into account the public service requirements, particularly in relation to the health boards? The general practitioner vacancies that we face across all our areas are considerable. Will he outline what his Government will do to address that specific issue? In many ways, the recruitment challenges facing the islands—and, in fairness, the broader Highlands and Islands area—are unique.

**Humza Yousaf:** Tavish Scott makes his point very well. He will know our views on the issue. I hope that he has been given some assurance by our work on health board reorganisation, although I appreciate that that might not be enough for him. His point was well demonstrated to me when I went to Raasay, where there was a robust discussion between the local community and the health board on out-of-hours nursing provision. I am well aware of the health boards issue and will try to address it, if not later in my opening speech, certainly in my closing speech.

I should say that, when I went to Shetland, Tavish Scott was not there to offer me a cup of tea or a biscuit, so that matter is outstanding.

Over the next year, the Government will bring forward an islands bill. I was delighted to be able to announce that that bill would be introduced in year 1 of this parliamentary session, reflecting a key commitment in "Empowering Scotland's Island Communities". We consulted on the proposals at



the end of last year, and many members contributed to the consultation.

The bill will focus on island proofing, a unique concept that will ensure that the legislation that is passed in the Parliament is not detrimental to our island communities but instead—I hope—adds benefit to them. It will also focus on a national islands plan; statutory protection for the Western Isles Scottish Parliament constituency boundary; flexibility to create one or two-member wards for island communities; and the extension of powers, primarily relating to the Zetland County Council Act 1974 and the Orkney County Council Act 1974.

I intend to continue engaging with local authorities and communities throughout the bill process to ensure that it stays focused on their needs and interests. I am even willing to consider the Japanese Remote Islands Development Act 1953, which David Stewart MSP raised with me at the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee on Tuesday.

I know that other parties had similar commitments to islands legislation and island proofing in their election manifestos, so I am keen to make the process as consensual as I can, leading to a piece of legislation that I hope that we can take forward together in this Parliament.

This summer, I have worked with local authorities to establish the newly created islands strategic group. I was keen to expand the membership of the island areas ministerial working group of the three wholly island councils to include representatives of Argyll and Bute Council, Highland Council and North Ayrshire Council. The new group will help to shape the bill and, indeed, the national islands plan, and I look forward to receiving its guidance and input. We have had one meeting; a second will, I hope, take place soon.

Together, the bill, the plan and the strategic group form a powerful triumvirate of actions that will help to strengthen and support the unique needs and interests of Scotland's islands.

I will touch on some of the challenges and opportunities that our island communities face. A common thread through all the islands that I visited—people on every single one of the islands that I travelled to talked to me about this—were the issues of depopulation and migration.

Growing the islands' populations is, of course, crucial for their economies and the sustainability of their communities. Clearly, we need to give young people and young families more reason to stay on the islands. The presumption against the closure of rural schools helps with that, as does our investment in modern apprenticeships and our work to cut youth unemployment, while investment in social housing through the rural housing fund

and the recently announced £5 million islands housing fund will help to create more affordable homes.

We also need to ensure that migrants can continue to come to our islands to work in key sectors. During my visits, I travelled to many businesses, including a fish-processing business that relied very heavily on European Union migration; of course, other sectors, such as hospitality, agriculture and care, also rely heavily on migration. As we all know, immigration is reserved to the United Kingdom Government, but we will continue to press it for a migration system that meets all Scotland's needs, including those of our island communities.

The islands brief and responsibility for it lie with the transport portfolio because connectivity is so important to our islands. The Government has made a clear commitment to our ferry services, investing a record £1 billion in port infrastructure, vessels and services since 2007. On my first day in post, the £900 million contract to operate ferry services on the west coast of Scotland was awarded to CalMac Ferries; it came into effect on 1 October.

We will maintain the road equivalent tariff on the west coast, which has resulted in lower fares and increased passenger numbers. We have begun to progress our commitment to reduce fares on ferry services to the northern isles. I will shortly report on the findings from the recent consultation. I consider it important to progress a scheme that reflects the wishes of those who use the ferry services. We want to get the scheme right, but there is no easy answer in terms of finding an algorithm, a process or a mechanism that reduces ferry fares to the northern isles. We could not just replicate RET across the northern isles to the same effect, because that might increase fares on some of the routes.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Like my colleague Tavish Scott, I welcome the tone of much of what the minister has said. I appreciate that he might not be able to provide the detail this afternoon, but can he at least offer some reassurance that the scale of the reductions on the west coast will be replicated in the reductions that we look forward to seeing on the northern isles routes?

**Humza Yousaf:** Liam McArthur makes a fair point. At this stage, I can say that we look to make a significant reduction—that is what the island communities would expect—but I cannot say that the reduction will be exactly the same as the reduction that island X is benefiting from. However, he will know that I will be keen to keep him and his colleague Tavish Scott up to date on those conversations.

Of course, ferries are not the only way to connect to our island communities. Aviation is also incredibly important, and we are committed to continuing the air discount scheme, through an investment of £8.5 million, at the current 50 per cent discount rate, to make air travel to and from the islands more affordable. I also agreed at the most recent meeting of the islands transport forum that we would consider extending the scheme to business travel following the autumn statement, and I thank the islands for putting together a proposal on how they think that that could work.

Sticking with the theme of connectivity but focusing on a different kind, I note that members throughout the chamber have been active in lodging questions on digital connectivity, which is high on the agenda for those who live on the islands. One of the most common themes on almost every island that I visited was digital connectivity, which is arguably most important on the remotest islands. It gives communities and businesses the potential to transform their islands.

We are determined to ensure that every premises in every part of Scotland has access to superfast broadband by 2021. It is fair to say that, if it was left to commercial operators, there would be a severe lack of coverage and, in some places, no coverage whatsoever. Our digital Scotland superfast broadband programme is helping to bring that connectivity to places where it would not otherwise go. Across the Highlands and Islands as a whole, at least 84 per cent of premises will have access to fibre by the end of 2016. However, we have to try to get ourselves into the most challenging and remote islands. That will most certainly be a challenge.

We are also taking forward our considerable plans on mobile phone connectivity. We are working with the industry—there is an industry-led approach to that.

I turn to energy, renewables and, in particular, wind projects on our islands. I was delighted to be able to see the European Marine Energy Centre for myself, having heard about it in the chamber on many occasions. A number of the islands that I visited are ploughing a lot of investment, time, expertise and knowledge into renewable energy schemes. Rapid growth by the 2020s could result in economic benefits that are worth up to £725 million for local communities.

We are doing all that we can with the powers that we have. Members will know about our community and renewable energy scheme. However, larger-scale island projects need a route to market that recognises their distinct characteristics and addresses barriers to development. We came close to achieving that through the Scottish islands renewables delivery forum, with unprecedented co-operation involving

the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments and the island stakeholders, but the UK Government has changed its earlier commitment to provide a minimum allocation for wave and tidal stream technologies. Its decision to consider withdrawing support for island wind is enormously frustrating and disappointing, coming as it does at a crucial time for both marine and island wind projects. We will continue to press the UK Government and UK ministers to deliver the support that our islands need to realise their renewables potential.

On top of that, there are questions over Brexit. The issue was mentioned to me during a ministerial working group meeting. I will continue to work on that with local authorities, but it is fair to say that our island communities have benefited from EU support, be it financial or otherwise, so I am keen to work with them when the Scottish Government is involved in discussions with the UK Government and directly with the EU.

In concluding, I will touch on a couple of points very briefly. The Crown Estate and promises of the devolution of powers over it were mentioned in the manifestos of parties across the chamber, including ours, following on from the Smith commission agreement. We will continue to press the UK Government to devolve those powers—discussions on the transfer scheme are on-going as we speak. The issue is of interest to all local authorities, and the three wholly island councils have approached me about a potential pilot. I am open-minded about that, as is the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, but it is fair to say that there are some legislative obstacles that may get in the way.

I am over time, so I conclude by saying that I am excited about the year 1 islands bill and about the idea of island proofing in particular. I know that members will have many questions about and make many contributions to the debate. There are some concerns about health boards and about what we are doing with regard to the enterprise and skills review in the Highlands and Islands, and I will address those in my closing speech if I can.

I look forward to working with members across all parties to deliver for our islands. Our island communities will expect no less. There is an exciting future for island communities—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, minister.

**Humza Yousaf:** —not just from this Government but as a result of co-operation across the chamber.

I move,

“That the Parliament recognises the significant contribution that island communities make to Scotland’s cultural and economic wellbeing; commends the role of the

Our Islands, Our Future campaign, led by the councils of Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles in championing islands' interests; acknowledges that there is more to do to address some of the challenges faced by Scotland's islands, including remoteness, declining populations, connectivity and creating sustainable economic development, and notes the establishment of the Islands Strategic Group, the Scottish Government's forthcoming Islands Bill and proposals for a National Islands Plan, which will seek to strengthen and support the unique needs of Scotland's island communities."

14:46

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** For any MSP who represents the Highlands and Islands, yesterday was bittersweet. It was sweet in so far as we learned the wonderful news that the smelter in Fort William is to be sold to a company that will not only maintain it but possibly expand it, which will secure existing jobs and could lead to increased employment in Lochaber. I apologise for digressing momentarily from the islands aspect of the motion but, given its importance to the region, I felt it only right to mention that briefly. I acknowledge the role that Fergus Ewing played in achieving that outcome and thank him for all his work behind the scenes.

However, yesterday was bitter, too, because we learned that the governing board of Highlands and Islands Enterprise is to be scrapped and that a new overarching Scotland-wide agency will replace existing agency boards. That is not mere administrative tinkering; it is the death knell for HIE as we know it. That is nothing short of shameful. Yesterday was bittersweet—in a single day, the Scottish Government gave with one hand but took with the other.

The Conservative amendment was drafted before that news emerged. We refer to

"significant concerns that a new national board for HIE ... may lead to a centralisation of services at the expense of the local skills, knowledge and expertise of HIE."

**Humza Yousaf:** I will address some of those arguments in my closing remarks but, when Donald Cameron describes the process as centralisation, it is worth pointing out that phase 1 of the enterprise and skills review mentioned that a new vehicle should be set up for the south of Scotland. The Government has said that HIE will remain and that service delivery on the ground is important and will remain. Does Donald Cameron not think that people on the ground will be more interested in the service that is delivered than in where boards sit?

**Donald Cameron:** The board of HIE is what is important; it is that which gives voice to local people on the ground. It is ironic for the Scottish Government to hold a debate that is entitled "Supporting and Strengthening Scotland's Island Communities" on the very day after it has

announced its scrapping of the HIE board—an institution that has done more than any other to support and strengthen island communities over the years.

That heralds the next step in the Scottish National Party's centralising agenda. On one level, I find that strange; I have seen the SNP island membership close up as a candidate in places such as Skye, Orkney, Shetland, Bute and Mull. Whatever differences we have had over the constitution, I have never been in any doubt that they were local activists pushing local issues. In the short time that I have been an MSP, I have been impressed by the vigour with which SNP MSPs who represent the islands have campaigned in the chamber on local matters. That is why I find the SNP Government's centralising instincts so puzzling and so out of kilter.

Sadly, we know that that is where—inexorably—the Government is travelling. Yet again, the cold grey hand of central Government reaches out—this time to threaten an institution that has without doubt been a force for good in our islands, not least because it has a unique role in community development and business development.

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

**Donald Cameron:** I would like to make progress.

The expertise in the HIE board might be lost through centralisation.

Island communities are an asset that we must value and strengthen for their current and future residents and for Scotland more broadly. The islands are essential to Scotland's identity and economy and they are as cherished as my own hands are to me.

In my maiden speech, I quoted the words of John Donne:

"No man is an Island, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main".

I still take that to mean that the lives of those who inhabit the periphery of Scotland are as important as the lives of those in the towns and cities of central Scotland, and nowhere is that truer than on our islands. They may be physically separate from the mainland, but that is all.

We must create a fair and diverse economic environment for the whole of Scotland in which there is parity between north and south, east and west, and island and mainland. At present, that does not exist. In general, economic growth is not evenly spread across the country. What better reason could there be for having a dedicated regional board to promote enterprise in the Highlands and Islands? It is clear that we need to

do more to encourage existing and new island businesses to develop, thereby continuing to make our islands attractive places in which to work and live.

While many island businesses might be small and have only a few employees, those small enterprises still have a significant role to play in sustaining island communities. A crucial aspect of that is to develop new areas of activity that embrace an island's particular assets: its culture, language, heritage and landscape, and even its remoteness. Many successful businesses have embedded those assets as core elements of their offering.

**The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan):** I thank the member for mentioning the small businesses that flourish on the islands. Does he sympathise with a number of those businesses, which have contacted me and other members who represent the islands to express concerns that many members of their workforce who come from other European countries lack certainty about their future residency in this country?

**Donald Cameron:** I accept that there is uncertainty, and I express my support—as I did in the debate on health—for people who are European Union nationals living and working in Scotland.

Those small businesses have embedded the assets that I described as core elements of their offering, which gives them a competitive advantage over businesses on the mainland. The remote and rural nature of islands might present many challenges, but there are entrepreneurs with vision who have made a virtue of the location and the environment, such as the Isle of Harris Distillers Ltd gin company, Hebridean Sea Salt, Harris Tweed and the Ethical Shellfish Company on Mull, to name but a few.

Social enterprise also has a place in the island economy. The connectedness of communities means that such businesses arise through identifying the specific needs of the people who live there. That brings economic benefit and social cohesion.

It is a truism that building the appropriate infrastructure to support economic growth is crucial to success, but it bears repeating. Every business needs appropriately skilled staff and to be connected to its markets digitally and physically. Reaching customers requires robust and reliable communications, including broadband and transport networks.

We cannot ignore the challenges. There are some 93 inhabited Scottish islands, with a population in excess of 103,000. Although—as the minister pointed out—there has been some growth

in recent years, there have also been significant population decreases. In Argyll and Bute's islands in particular, that decrease has been severe.

We need to retain people, but we also need to attract them. People are the heart of a community: they live and work there and believe that they and their children have a future in that place. If that belief is not there, communities languish and eyes turn to the horizon. Parents want better for their children, and young people will leave the islands because they cannot see a sustainable future for themselves and their families.

A recent survey by the Scottish Islands Federation ranked the importance of the challenges from the perspective of islanders. It will come as no surprise that lack of broadband is one of the biggest barriers to development. Other islanders mentioned housing. A business owner on Mull was recently asked what single thing she wished for to transform her commercial diving business. The answer was affordable housing, which would allow her to attract appropriately skilled employees to live and work on Mull.

Despite those challenges, island communities rate highly, year on year, in happiness surveys, with the Western Isles at the top of the list. In response to its recent advert for a teacher, Muck primary school was inundated with applications from around the world. Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles have been named as the best places in which to bring up children.

Although the Scottish Government has proposed additional powers and functions for island councils, we must turn words into action. For the first time, the Government is to bring forward an islands bill, which will at last acknowledge through primary legislation the significant place of island communities in Scotland's national identity.

Strategies to strengthen island communities will not come without a broad and inclusive discourse, so it is worrying to find that almost a third of people surveyed said that they felt that the islands have a limited voice on local and national issues. We must strive to give island communities their own voice and the confidence to speak up, then we must listen to what is said.

That takes me back to HIE, which has been instrumental in providing that voice for the islands. Having its own board allows HIE to advocate for the region as a whole; without it, HIE will be swallowed up in the machinery of central Government. There is widespread support for HIE across all parties, and members will voice that support more eloquently than me during the debate.

I address my closing remarks to the SNP MSPs who represent the islands, as they will know that

HIE has worked for decades across island communities to buttress often fragile economies. As an agency, HIE has built up huge reserves of local knowledge and skills; it is not perfect and we must not sentimentalise it, but it has quietly and slowly helped business to flourish by applying an understanding of how resources can be best used locally among the small communities in which it operates. Please do not stand by and watch it vanish.

I move amendment S5M-02686.2, to insert at end:

“; acknowledges the contribution of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to business development in island communities, and notes significant concerns that a new national board for HIE, Scottish Enterprise and other agencies may lead to a centralisation of services at the expense of the local skills, knowledge and expertise of HIE.”

14:56

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I would like to start by paying tribute to our island councils for promoting the vision of the our islands, our future campaign. They have worked across three council areas, recognising the differences in their communities, but choosing to work together to benefit the people whom they serve.

Our islands, our future has a defining factor running through it. It is subsidiarity: decision making being as local as possible. We in the Scottish Labour Party agree with that principle and believe that we should empower communities and local government to make decisions that reflect their specific needs. Our islands work together in many ways, but none of them is saying that decisions that are made for one island group will work for another group. They want to be allowed to make their own decisions and to serve the distinct needs of their local communities. Since I was elected to serve the Highlands and Islands, I have heard over and over again the complaint that policies that have been made with urban areas in mind have been foisted on rural areas for which they are not suitable and can sometimes be detrimental.

The island councils' campaign has forced the Government to consult on legislation, and we will gauge the Government's commitment to empowering island communities by the shape of that legislation. Sadly, nothing that the minister said in his opening speech suggested where those powers will lie. The principle of devolving power is not something that this Government practices; we have seen from it only increasing centralisation.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Will Rhoda Grant accept at least that the Government stopped ring fencing for local

authorities and that local authorities have more power than they had before 2007?

**Rhoda Grant:** Sadly, nothing is ring fenced because there is nothing to ring fence. Local authorities' budgets have been cut year on year, which is disempowering island communities. Those communities used to have seats on the police and fire boards, but those positions of influence have gone.

We had the historic concordat that went with the non-ring fencing. It was sold as freeing up councils to make their own decisions locally, but in practice it left councils able to deliver only more and more cuts. In fact, the councils are at the point now where they are able only to implement their statutory duties, which have been passed on to them by the Government and Parliament. The concordat has not worked.

Now we hear rumours that even some of the statutory duties that are currently in place will be removed from councils, which will disempower them even more. I therefore do not think that it is cynical to question what new powers will be devolved to our islands, because none has been so far. How can the Government look both ways at once? Its rhetoric of empowering communities is good, but its practice is the absolute opposite. The devolved powers have to be real, measurable and able to deliver change.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise is a case in point. It is sad that the Government is going to downgrade HIE. It will be governed by a board that will serve the whole of Scotland—so much for serving the Highlands and Islands. If the board has no understanding of the needs of our remote island communities, how on earth can it support them to grow their economies? The Government has to come back from that wrong-headed decision, listen to the concerns that have been expressed pretty much unanimously throughout the Highlands and Islands and give us back our board. If it is serious about empowering communities, it has to show that now and step back from that desperate decision.

Transport is essential to our islands; they depend on ferries and flights to connect them to the rest of the country, but islanders get very little say in service design and mainland links. Decisions are made in Edinburgh by people who have little or no understanding of islanders' needs or wishes. Surely our island councils are in a prime position to advise and influence those decisions.

When the new ferry between Stornoway and Ullapool was being planned, the council and the local community asked for two smaller and faster ferries to allow more sailings at peak times. That was absolutely ignored by the Government. Since

then, we have seen instances in which a second boat would have been put to good use, especially during dry docking for maintenance of the fleet. Our island communities must be involved in those decisions, not just consulted and then simply ignored.

The amendment in my name talks about the issues that lead to depopulation of the islands. Those issues can affect our rural mainland areas, too. We debated fuel poverty last week, so I will not rehearse that subject: suffice it to say that our islands suffer among the highest levels of fuel poverty, and we need to address that.

Islanders also pay a premium on goods and services because of distance, transportation costs and the road equivalent tariff not being extended but being taken away from commercial vehicles. At this time, we are looking forward to Christmas. People who live in urban areas pop to the shops for their Christmas shopping, but people who live on islands must often resort to mail order to get everything that they need. Many of the companies that deliver to islands charge a premium, and others will not deliver at all because of the added costs. People who need to buy off-island would appreciate being able to do that online, but they suffer poorer broadband connections and download speeds, which prevents them from shopping around.

Island living is wonderful, but it has its challenges, and those challenges lead to depopulation. St Kilda holds a strange fascination for people who come from remote communities. I share that fascination. I wonder at the desperation of the people of St Kilda, who left their homes en masse because they could no longer survive due to dwindling numbers. I wonder what went through their minds as they reached that awful conclusion. I sincerely hope that no other island communities will ever face that decision in the future. It is our job to make sure that they do not. We have to support vibrant island communities and create jobs and services that are fit for purpose. We need to provide transportation and connectivity links that allow the islands to communicate with the rest of the country and way beyond.

Who would not want to live on an island? Donald Cameron made a point about happiness surveys. Who would not want to enjoy the quality of life there and also be able to build a future for themselves and their families. We know that local people are much better at finding solutions because they know the challenges. Those on the outside looking in can only have their own preconceptions, and those are seldom borne out in reality.

If the Scottish Government is serious about empowering island communities, it has to pull

back on its decision on HIE and it has to devolve powers rather than centralise them.

Actions speak louder than words. I move amendment S5M-02686.4, to insert at end:

“; recognises that more must be done to address issues that can lead to depopulation, including fuel poverty, high living costs and poor access to essential services, which disproportionately have an impact on the islands; believes that island communities should be involved in decision-making with regard to transport links and that there should be full and meaningful consultation with local people and businesses, for example, communities in Arran and Ardrossan must be involved in any changes to their ferry services, and further believes that powers being removed from local government will impact disproportionately on islands and their ability to make decisions and that the disempowering of Highlands and Islands Enterprise will impact on home-grown solutions to boost islands' economies.”

15:03

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Twelve months ago I participated in a similar debate about empowering our island communities. I am always pleased to do so, but it strikes me that little has changed in the intervening period, save for the ministerial name on the motion.

I very much welcome Humza Yousaf's appointment and the approach that he has taken to the role. He cannot be held personally responsible for many of the criticisms that I will outline this afternoon, but it is up to him to make the progress that his predecessors failed to make: progress on reducing the cost of accessing our lifeline ferry and air services; progress on radically improving broadband and mobile coverage; progress on radically reducing levels of fuel poverty; and progress on genuinely abandoning the top-down, one-size-fits-all, centralising approach to legislation and policy-making.

As I said in the previous debate, establishing this Parliament was supposed to be about power being devolved within and not just to Scotland. I recognise, as all good Liberals do, that power rests with the people: it is passed up and pooled only by consent and where necessary. It is about giving people and communities the tools and flexibility that they need to shape their own futures, and about trusting them to take decisions that meet their needs and circumstances.

That concept seems to sit uncomfortably with SNP ministers. It jars with the narrative of one Scotland speaking with one voice, which we hear when the SNP talks of the interests of the people of Scotland, as if those people are homogeneous, and any contrary view is somehow by definition less Scottish or un-Scottish. That has allowed for the relentless removal of powers and decision making from our island communities over the past nine years.

Of course, the three island councils have—to their enormous credit—sought to address that through the our islands, our future campaign, which I am pleased to say has prompted the Government to propose an islands bill and an islands plan. Interestingly, when Tavish Scott and I made a similar case for giving more powers and responsibility to the islands that we represent, we were denounced as troublemakers by Nicola Sturgeon and others in her party.

I welcome the change in tone from the SNP, but what has the U-turn in rhetoric delivered in practice? Orkney and Shetland remain the only island communities that are excluded from the Government's cheaper ferry fares scheme. All island businesses still face higher air fares thanks to the SNP Government's cut to the air discount scheme. Police in all three island communities continue to grapple with a botched centralisation that undermines the ethos of community policing that is the hallmark of island forces. To be fair, those are now long-standing examples of this Government's failure to walk the walk on strengthening our islands. Has anything changed more recently? Sadly not.

**Humza Yousaf:** Liam McArthur is being most ungenerous. The air discount scheme went from 40 per cent to 50 per cent. I am amazed that he did not compare the digital connectivity figures from when his colleagues were in government in the Liberal-Labour Executive to what they are now. In fact, in 2017 the coverage in Orkney is expected to be 75 per cent and 80 per cent. Will he be a little bit more generous and say that progress has been made in some crucial areas?

**Liam McArthur:** I will turn to those things in a minute. Humza Yousaf has pointed out that digital connectivity in Orkney is 10 per cent below what it is in the rest of the Highlands and Islands and 20 per cent lower than the nationwide figure.

While his officials have been busy finishing his islands bill, Mr Yousaf's ministerial colleagues have been busy driving a coach and horses through the concept of island proofing. The First Minister's attainment fund ignores the needs of children in poverty in Orkney and other island communities. Why are they less deserving of the additional support that their counterparts in communities in the central belt receive? Meanwhile, health ministers are developing plans that could see island health boards submerged within larger mainland boards. That would inevitably see the specific needs and interests of patients and health staff in Orkney relegated in importance. That will be fiercely resisted in the community that I represent.

On economic development, yesterday the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills confirmed, as Donald

Cameron pointed out, that any vestige of local autonomy and accountability within HIE is to be abolished. It is against that backdrop that the minister, whom I like and respect enormously, has his work cut out to demonstrate to a sceptical public in Orkney and other island communities that island proofing will be more than a box-ticking exercise. It will require a different way of doing things. It will require recognition that ministers do not know best, that one size does not fit all, and that island communities must be allowed both the power and the resources to make decisions that best reflect their needs.

By way of encouragement, let me offer a few examples of where early action might be taken to help to build public confidence that the bill and the plan can usher in a different approach from the Government. The minister knows about the chronically high proportion of households in the northern isles and Western Isles that find themselves in fuel poverty. I urge him to ensure that when the Government updates its fuel poverty strategy next year, it allows maximum flexibility for communities to adopt approaches that work in the circumstances that they face. That must include scope within building regulations to allow insulation measures to be maximised first, not just in housing but in public buildings. It is encouraging that heat pumps are to be used in the new Balfour hospital in Kirkwall, but covering the roof in solar panels that will never be connected, rather than increasing insulation of the building, makes no sense, and I am sure that Mr Yousaf would agree with that.

We also need to establish catch-up zones by targeting additional resources at areas with the highest levels of fuel poverty. I hope that the minister will, similarly, lend his support to catch-up zones for broadband and mobile coverage in island areas. Despite welcome investment, a quarter of households and businesses in my constituency—more than the 16 per cent across the Highlands and Islands as a whole—still have no access to fibre broadband. In addition, 2G—let alone 4G—remains a distant hope for many. Those are now essential services, so before promising the next upgrade to those who already have decent provision, I urge Mr Yousaf to guarantee that those who have poor service or no service at all will have first call on any future funding.

Finally, the minister needs to take an urgent look at what is happening in care services in Orkney. He will be aware that direct payments are supposed to be funded from savings that are released in other areas. To be frank, that just does not work in smaller island settings, where alternative providers rarely exist. Orkney now has the highest level of self-directed support anywhere in the country, which is leading to service growth

rather than simply to reprovisioning. The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, which will come into force shortly, may tip over the edge a service that is already struggling to cope. That is another example of where genuine island proofing is desperately needed. I hope that the minister, along with his health colleagues, will agree to meet me and Orkney health and care to discuss possible solutions.

There are issues that I have not covered, notably in relation to powers over the sea bed, but my colleague Tavish Scott will return to those in his winding-up remarks. In the meantime, I hope that the minister—whom I have enjoyed working with closely in recent months—now has a clearer sense of the scale of what is needed from him and his Government. We need urgent action to reduce costs on our lifeline transport links, a commitment to test legislation and policy robustly in terms of their effects on island communities, and a move away from the “One Scotland” mindset so that we trust people—in particular, islanders—to take decisions that best reflect their interests and circumstances.

I move amendment S5M-02686.1, to leave out from “, and notes” to end and insert:

“; further acknowledges the Islands Strategic Group and the forthcoming Islands Bill but notes the financial and administrative powers that have been removed from island communities, including Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, since 2007; agrees that the centralisation of key public services and functions has reduced local accountability to island communities; calls for an active islands plan to provide a framework within which the unique interests across island communities are considered, and further calls for the decision by Scottish Ministers in 2011 to exclude isles-based businesses from the Air Discount Scheme to be reversed and for ferry fares on routes serving Orkney and Shetland to be reduced from 2017, in line with existing reductions on west coast routes.”

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** We move to the open debate. We are a bit tight for time, so I urge members to try to keep their remarks a bit shorter than they originally intended, and then we will have room for debate and discussion.

15:11

**Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I have had a connection with the Scottish islands for my whole life. Not only did I spend all my holidays on my granny’s croft on Lewis when I was growing up, but I was named after Loch Maree, which is well known for its islands as well as its beauty. Over 100,000 people live in our island communities and the vast majority of them live on the 87 inhabited islands in my region. I am therefore delighted and proud to represent most of our islanders and most of our islands.

I welcome the Government motion’s recognition of the contribution that our islands make to Scotland’s culture and economy. The islands punch above their weight in their influence on our culture. In fiction, islands are often places of magic and wonder, and it has been noted that writers such as Compton Mackenzie, Robert Louis Stevenson, J M Barrie and George Orwell spent formative periods in the Hebrides.

The islands also punch above their weight in their contribution to the Scottish economy. We are well aware of the significance that the spectacular island landscapes have for Scottish tourism. We are also well aware of the islands’ contribution to our whisky industry. The world-famous brand names, such as Laphroaig from Islay, Talisker from Skye and Highland Park from Orkney as well as many others, speak for themselves. However, the islands’ contribution to Scotland’s economy stretches much further than that. In Shetland alone, more fish are landed than in any other port in the United Kingdom. In fact, Shetland lands more fish than England, Northern Ireland and Wales combined—a fifth of the UK total, which was worth £61 million in 2015.

Our islands have enormous energy potential. Although there is frustration with grid constraints, which are of course controlled by the Westminster Government and which mean that it is hard to export that particular asset, the level of innovation on energy storage is unparalleled and I have no doubt that that knowledge will be exportable at some point. On top of that, we should consider all the distinctive products that come from the islands, such as Orkney beef, Harris tweed and Stornoway black pudding, to name but a few.

Island life can be challenging, and connectivity is the key. Travelling any sort of distance can be complicated, time consuming and expensive. Island life revolves around ferry and flight timetables. The Scottish Government has already done a great deal for our island communities and it has promised to do more. Thankfully, in Scotland, we have a Government that delivers on its promises. It has protected discounts for air travel to the islands, and RET, which has been a great success, has now been rolled out to all the routes in the Clyde and Hebrides network. That is increasing visitor numbers and will stimulate local economies. The Government has frozen the cost of ferry fares for the northern isles of Orkney and Shetland and in the coming months will look at a variant of RET that works for them.

The Government is delivering on 100 per cent broadband connectivity to all of Scotland, not just the islands. It will also island proof legislation; I hope that that will cover policy, too, but at least the ambition to look at island proofing legislation is there. The Government is ensuring that our island



communities are empowered through the islands strategic group, which will include all the islands, not just the Western Isles and the northern isles. The Government is delivering on land reform, where the islands are leading the country. Approximately 70 per cent of the people in the outer Hebrides live on land that is community owned. The Government will ensure that Crown estate devolution will benefit the island communities as well as the coastal communities.

Island life can be difficult, but islanders take that challenging life in their stride and have become determined and resilient people. As I often say, necessity is the mother of invention, so entrepreneurship flourishes in the islands. I note the concerns expressed in the Opposition amendments with regard to the changes proposed for Highlands and Islands Enterprise, an organisation that does fantastic work to ensure a sustainable economic future for my region. That scaremongering is not helpful. Nothing will change on the ground. I think that HIE will benefit from Scottish Enterprise's expertise in attracting more international support.

**Rhoda Grant:** What is the need for a board at all, if nothing changes on the ground and it makes no difference to the people it serves?

**Maree Todd:** The delivery and the people on the ground will be exactly the same. What will improve is the connectedness between HIE and Scottish Enterprise, which will bring benefits in terms of international support, attracting inward investment and enabling exports. The advantage goes both ways. I regularly highlight in Parliament the fact that necessity is the mother of invention and that sometimes, because of the challenges that we face in the Highlands and Islands, we are ahead of the pack in creativity and innovation. The rest of Scotland would benefit from looking north a bit more often, and I hope that the changes will encourage more of that. We can lead the way to sustainable economic growth for all of Scotland.

With regard to the Conservatives' amendment, I have to say, as I have said many times before, that I can hardly believe their lack of self-awareness. The biggest threat to the skills, knowledge and expertise of HIE comes from their party's recklessness on Brexit, which is highly likely to damage the economy in the Highlands and Islands and which will cause a loss of people and of funding.

There will be no quick, easy solution to the challenges that face island communities, but I believe that what we have seen is a determined Government showing a firm commitment to taking on those challenges and developing our islands, so that our island communities will be able to reap the benefits in the future.

15:18

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I noted down the remarks that the minister made when he opened the debate today. He said, "I was born and bred on a Glasgow estate, so I cannot say—", and my heart stopped for a minute. I thought that we were going to have another Humza moment. I thought that he was going to go on to say that he cannot say that he is an expert on islands, just as he cannot say that he is an expert on transport, but he did not say that.

**Humza Yousaf:** It is nice to see Mr Ross in the chamber for once.

**Douglas Ross:** It is nice to see Mr Yousaf too. We have been competing for the newspaper columns this week, I see.

I was going on to say that, if Mr Yousaf was not an expert when he was given the position, he certainly tried to increase his knowledge with the summer tour that he did around our beautiful Scottish islands. As someone who has the great honour and privilege of representing the Highlands and Islands, I know the uniqueness of each island and what each island can offer to Scotland and to the UK as a whole. It is something that we can celebrate and something that we are right to debate in Parliament.

I agree with other members who have, rightly, praised the three island communities and councils for their efforts on the our islands, our future campaign. They took the lead, towards the end of the referendum campaign in 2014, and put a marker down to say that, regardless of the result of that referendum, more needed to be done to highlight the issues in the islands and to ensure that we in this Parliament create laws appropriate to the individual aspects of island work.

So far—barring a couple of points that Maree Todd made—it has been a consensual debate, and I expect that to continue. We all want to see the best in our islands. However, given that the SNP has been in government for almost 10 years, SNP members should not be too prickly when criticisms are made of the proposed islands bill and of aspects of what goes on in the islands. When devolution was delivered in 1999—the process has been continued by successive Governments—many people expected changes. Nearly 10 years after the election of an SNP Government, we have still not had the island proofing or the improvements in our islands that we and many others expected. It is right that we make such observations and that, as a Parliament, we try to improve things.

**Humza Yousaf:** Mr Ross said that it is amazing that no progress has been made on island proofing in the past 10 years. Was there a commitment on island proofing in his party's

manifesto for the most recent election or in any of its manifestos for elections to the Scottish Parliament?

**Douglas Ross:** What I was saying was—

**Humza Yousaf:** Yes or no?

**Douglas Ross:** The people in the islands look to their Parliament to improve things for them, and I think that, since devolution was delivered, and especially over the past 10 years, they think that not enough has been done. That is why the our islands, our future campaign was launched—people in the islands thought that not enough was being done and wanted more to be done in their local communities. The campaign is supported by all the parties in the Parliament, and we can move forward with it.

Mention has been made of digital connectivity, the road infrastructure and more devolution from the centre to local communities. Although those issues are acute in the islands, they are the same issues that we face across the Highlands and the country as a whole. Highlands and Islands members raise those issues, but they are also raised by every one of the 129 members who have been elected to the Parliament. The problems in the islands are bigger, but the same problems are experienced by people across Scotland. Liam McArthur made the point that, as far as digital connectivity is concerned, the Orkney Islands are 20 per cent behind the rest of Scotland. The same problems are shared, but they are almost always far more acute in the island communities.

I will briefly mention the great work that is done by HIE, which I have seen for myself in Moray and across the Highlands and Islands. It is right that we lodged our amendment, because yesterday's announcement is troubling people. Maree Todd said that she noted the concerns, but then went on to dismiss them completely. That is unwise, because there are genuine concerns about the changes to HIE in the communities that we both represent, and I have heard nothing from any SNP member to reduce those concerns; perhaps the minister will have something to say in that regard when he sums up the debate. We will look at that closely.

In March 2016, in a press release entitled "Empowering our islands", the Scottish Government made an announcement about the feedback to its consultation on the proposed islands bill, to which it received almost 200 responses. In that press release, the Government highlighted the fact that

"a 'one size fits all' approach to legislation, policy and services does not take the unique requirements of life on Scotland's islands into consideration."

I worry that, if we move to a centralised HIE, accountability to the island communities will be

diminished significantly. That is why Conservative members have concerns about the proposals, and I believe that many other members are concerned about them, too.

There are many issues that I would like to pick up on. For example, across Scotland there are concerns, shared by the island communities, about the centralisation of the police and accountability to local communities. Councillors from Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles used to have influence by virtue of sitting on the Northern joint police board, but that has been taken away.

I would like to have spoken about tourism in our islands and how it can be helped rather than hindered, but I understand the time constraints.

I will end on a positive note. Living on our islands brings challenges, but there are also many benefits and opportunities. We must be careful that we do not look only at the things that are wrong on our islands or the aspects of island life that are difficult. We must look at the positives so that we encourage people to move to the islands and to stay there. Any island proofing that we, as a Parliament, along with the Scottish Government, can move forward with will be a benefit to everyone who lives on the islands at the moment and to people who are considering moving there in the future.

15:24

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Given the huge diversity of the islands, the focus is often on geographically distant communities, such as those in Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides. Such communities are undoubtedly impacted by their distance from mainland facilities, but every island is unique and faces its own set of challenges.

As the member for Cunninghame North, I represent the isles of Arran, Cumbrae and Holy Isle, which have just over 4,600, 1,400 and 31 inhabitants respectively, and have very distinctive characters.

Holy Isle is owned by the Samye Ling Buddhist community, whose settlements on the island include the centre for world peace and health. On the island's southern end lives a community of nuns, who are undertaking three-year retreats. The remainder of the island is treated as a nature reserve, with its wild Eriskay ponies, Saanen goats, Soay sheep and the rock whitebeam tree, which is unique to Holy Isle and Arran.

Great Cumbrae and uninhabited Wee Cumbrae together boast a castle, a lighthouse, the cathedral of the isles, a Field Studies Council centre, the

sportscotland national sailing centre and the famous crocodile rock.

Great Cumbrae, which is known to Glaswegians by its town, Millport, is Scotland's cycling island. Like all island communities, it has challenges. However, the community is ambitious. It is seeking to develop a community care hub on the island and, together with Largs, to attract the para world sailing championships.

The SNP manifesto contained a clear substantial promise to empower island communities. The newly-elected SNP Government has wasted no time in living up to that commitment. After only three months in government, a consultation on an islands bill had been carried out, and a dedicated islands strategic group has been formed, which includes North Ayrshire Council and covers the Cumbraes and Arran.

I welcome the approach that is being taken. The SNP Government is under no illusions about the importance and scale of the improvements that are required if we are to better serve our island communities. It is vital that issues that affect island communities continue to be actioned under existing frameworks and ministerial portfolios as we progress. Tavish Scott talked about health in that context.

My constituency can supply an obvious example of the importance of making the right decisions at ministerial level. One objective in the manifesto for the islands is to

"invest in quality ferry services; keep ferry fares as low as possible, and provide concessionary travel for our older people".

We talk about "lifeline" ferry services for a reason. Over the past few years, the SNP Government has driven massive improvements in our ferry services to Arran and Cumbrae. The introduction of the road equivalent tariff led to a huge reduction in ferry fares. That and the current freeze have resulted in a significant increase in passenger and vehicle numbers. The number of summer sailings has increased, and the new £12.3 million hybrid ferry MV *Catriona*, which serves the Lochranza to Claonaig route, entered service in September and has increased comfort and capacity while reducing emissions. I was delighted that the minister was there for the launch of the new ferry.

A new £47 million ferry is being built in Port Glasgow to serve the Ardrossan to Brodick route, which means that two vessels will sail the route all year round. That will be another massive boost. Meanwhile, a new £28 million harbour in Brodick is being built and will be completed in the spring. That will greatly increase the number of vessels

that can dock, and the terminal building and access from the car park will be improved.

As a consequence of investment by the SNP Government, Arran's economy grew by a thumping 10 per cent last year—that is more than China's growth rate. The 182-year old ferry route between Brodick and Ardrossan has seen, and should continue to see, further improvements, which will benefit the local economy of Arran as well as Ardrossan on the mainland. An Ardrossan harbour task force was set up, with a view to making investment to serve Arran. However, Associated British Ports has put in a hostile bid to move the service from Ardrossan to Troon, which would mean a journey of 18 nautical miles—50 per cent longer—with increased sailing times and ferry prices and fewer sailings. That would impact on capacity, affordability and competitiveness. It would also damage the North Ayrshire economy to the tune of some £4.7 million a year, making it harder for North Ayrshire Council to service Arran and costing 165 jobs in Ardrossan.

Troon harbour does not even have a railway station, whereas at Ardrossan harbour the train comes right up to the ferry terminal. To move the ferry to Troon would go against the Government's manifesto commitment to make public transport accessible to older people. Older people make up a significant proportion of Arran's residents and visitors. For those reasons, among others, I am confident that the impending Scottish transport appraisal guidance will only serve to highlight that Ardrossan is the best berthing place in Ayrshire for the lifeline Arran ferry service.

Of course, Arran is not all about ferries. It is a beautiful island—"Scotland in miniature", as it is often called—with feisty people, who support the July 2013 undertaking by the SNP Government that islands should enjoy the

"maximum degree of local decision making".

Island folk want to make things happen. We have strong businesses, such as Arran Aromatics, Taste of Arran and the Auchrannie Leisure resort. According to Cottages and Castles, which is an accommodation provider, things are going well: bookings have rocketed and are up 47 per cent this year.

A new distillery will be built in south Arran, which represents a £10 million investment, while the distillery in picturesque Lochranza invested in new facilities in what was a record year for visitors.

Significant progress is being made on superfast broadband, although it is not yet delivered to the standard that we expect. Mobile coverage is another issue. Two years ago, the UK Government wrote to me saying that Arran is not a priority in that regard. I ask our Tory colleagues

who aspire to represent Arran and other islands to speak to their UK colleagues about that.

On 28 October, Glenkiln Hydro power plant opened. It will generate enough electricity to power up to 500 homes and will provide 15 per cent of Arran's electricity.

I have tried to get across how important it is to island communities that, irrespective of their size or remoteness, their voices are heard, whether through island proofing or through the existing framework. The islands bill is clearly a step in that direction because it will give island communities more input in decision making. It is about time that more tailor-made policies were put in place for our islands.

**The Presiding Officer:** I urge all members who have not yet spoken to think ahead and try to lose a paragraph from their speeches.

15:30

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** We would all agree that Scotland's islands are a vital part of the mosaic that gives Scotland its character. Our islands are renowned all over the world for their beauty, rich culture and heritage. When tourists talk of Scotland, they admire the Highlands and our cities including Edinburgh and Glasgow, but for those who have visited the islands, the taste and experience of the islands leave the longest-lasting impression.

My appreciation of the significance of our islands has deepened since I married into a family from the Isle of Lewis. From my not-frequent-enough visits there, I have learned that although there is pride in the beauty of the islands, their community and culture, there is sometimes also a deep sense of frustration that the platitudes and inaction that emanate from Parliament often make it hard to sustain that unique way of life. If we are to truly value the contribution of our islands, we have to recognise that action is needed to avoid those island communities turning into living museums—quaint and fascinating for tourists, but struggling to provide a future for the local young people who are truly their lifeblood.

All our islands have distinct contributions to make, but in the case of the Western Isles, there is an added imperative in that they are the bastion of Gaelic as a living, working language. The islands need to thrive in order for the language to thrive.

I want to draw Parliament's attention to an excellent blog that was written by Torcuil Crichton, who members will know as the Westminster editor of the *Daily Record*. A native of Lewis, a one-time resident of Skye and someone who is steeped in the culture and heritage of the islands, Torcuil tells us about a friend of his who, as a young man on

Skye in 1996, could afford to build his own home. He did it with a rural housing grant and a mortgage two-and-a-half times his annual salary. That opportunity just would not be available to islanders these days.

Today's motion is well-meaning. It would be a worthy statement of intent from a newly elected Government that needs time to develop its ideas and its programme. However, the reality is that it is an account of a Government that has been in office for nearly 10 years. Perhaps it would be better to judge the Government's motion not by what it says but by what it does not say. As I have said already, we need more specifics on the housing crisis, which is one of the forces that is driving depopulation; more proposals for job and wealth creation, in order to give young islanders a future; more recognition of fuel poverty, inequality and the cost of living on the islands; and more mention of the erosion of local services and the sense of disempowerment that comes from remoteness—not just geographical remoteness but the sense of being removed from decision making in Parliament.

Today, I want to highlight one of the dominant political issues on the island of Arran, in the region that I represent. I want to make sure that the concerns of the people of Arran are heard. Arran is different in many respects from Scotland's other islands, but it, too, suffers from remoteness and reliance on a lifeline ferry service. As Kenny Gibson said, there is a proposal to change the ferry service from Brodick so that, after 177 years, it will go to Troon rather than Ardrossan. As we have heard, that would at a stroke increase the length of the journey from 21km to 29km, with a return journey taking 50 minutes longer, and it could reduce the frequency of sailings. Foot passengers would face a 15 per cent increase on return fares, and islanders working on the mainland would have to pay an extra £299 a year for a five-day commute. Car and driver return fares would increase to £47.29—an increase of more than 20 per cent, which equates to a £2,493 annual increase for a five-day commute.

There is no evidence that Troon would be a more reliable option for ferry sailings. The vast majority of ferry cancellations at Ardrossan are due to fog and high winds, but the same fog and high winds affect other Clyde ports, including Troon. Any change of destination would create problems for the residents of Arran and for North Ayrshire Council—as Kenny Gibson mentioned—which is the local authority that covers Arran and provides lifeline services for the island. Troon is across the local authority boundary in South Ayrshire. Ardrossan has immediate access to rail services—unlike Troon—and has better road links to Glasgow, Edinburgh and their airports. All those

links are vital for the tourism industry, which is a major part of Arran's economy.

Islanders working on the mainland might need to reassess their job situation due to the increased travel costs, as might those who live on the mainland but work on Arran. Private and public investment in the regeneration of Ardrossan would be undermined at a stroke, and the regeneration around the marina in Ardrossan would be thrown into doubt. In short, Arran is an island that is facing an unexpected and unnecessary economic and social challenge. Although it might be a different challenge to some of the broader challenges that our islands face, it is a challenge that could be easily resolved.

Members across the chamber should give a commitment—as in the Labour amendment—to hear the concerns of islanders and to keep that ferry going from A to B—from Ardrossan to Brodick. I urge the minister and the Scottish Government to show their commitment by listening to the islanders of Arran and the people of Ardrossan about that important issue.

15:36

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate, even though the south of Scotland is not known for its islands. However, the remoter parts of the rural south-west have occasionally doubled for Scottish islands. Perhaps most famously, parts of Galloway, including Creetown and the Isle of Whithorn, featured as the fictional Summerisle in the original film of "The Wicker Man". More recently, the villages of Port Logan and Portpatrick appeared as the fictional island of Ronansay in the BBC series "Two Thousand Acres of Sky".

There are many similarities between the challenges that the most remote parts of the south-west face and those that many of Scotland's island communities face, to the extent that I sometimes feel that the only thing that we are missing is being separated from the mainland by water.

When I returned to Scotland with my husband, we seriously considered settling up in Islay. We were attracted by its beauty as well as by the sense of community, although ultimately we decided to return to my home of Dumfries and Galloway. That consideration was enough to convince us that opting for island life would not be an easy choice.

With that realisation in mind, I recognise that, however remote we in the south might feel, the unique characteristics and variety of Scotland's island communities are important and need to be recognised. The islands constitute a diverse archipelago that has different priorities and needs.

I therefore welcome and support the Government's undertaking to create a national islands plan, as well as to establish the islands strategic group, which will be chaired by the islands minister and on which every island local authority will be represented.

The specific challenges that island communities face have been addressed by others in the debate. I will pick up on a couple of issues that are as familiar to me in Galloway as they are to residents of Islay or Stronsay. One area of interest is the devolution of Crown Estate incomes to island and coastal councils. Marine assets are crucial to those councils, so it might make sense for them to have control over the revenue that is raised through the Crown Estate and to be accountable for how it is invested back into their communities.

I will touch on fuel poverty, because the combination of hard-to-heat, hard-to-treat houses and the higher costs of supply that are associated with off-grid fuels such as liquefied petroleum gas presents a situation to many of our island communities that is familiar to the remotest parts of my region, too. The Government's commitment to a holistic approach to tackling the problem of island fuel poverty is welcome. I was particularly pleased to see the inclusion of microgeneration schemes for off-gas-grid homes in the national warmer homes scheme, as that will apply to island homes and to remote mainland homes.

I welcome the work, which is outlined in the Government's March 2016 progress update, on a bespoke approach to promoting our islands as tourist destinations. It makes sense to invest extra effort in marketing destinations that certainly have a strong brand but which take a bit more effort to reach. I am certain that tourism can continue to grow and be a great sector for our islands, as it has been in the south.

I confess that my interest in the issue lies also in my hope that there might be scope to apply some of the good practice that is developing with regard to national policy, the devolution—not centralisation—of powers and a specific focus on the challenges that are unique to island life to similar issues that affect the most rural parts of the south of Scotland. For example, we have for some considerable time looked in envy at the work of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and hoped for a similar agency to do similar things in our region.

This spring, we started to make progress with the reclassification of the nomenclature of territorial units for statistics—or NUTS—2 designation and the prospect of unlocking greater European structural funding, only to be confronted with Brexit. The issues of depopulation, demographics, fuel poverty and connectivity that have been highlighted this afternoon are very

much issues that we have in common with our island communities.

The debate is about Scotland's island communities and the Government's strategy to embed island-friendly policy at the heart of national decision making. As I have said, I very much support that approach. As a member who is interested in issues of peripherality and rural connectivity but who does not represent any inhabited islands, I will watch progress in the hope that there will be lessons to be learned and good practice that can be applied to other parts of Scotland. After all, if Galloway can pass for an island on the big and small screens, we might also be able to benefit from some of the good things that we have heard about in the debate.

15:42

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** I welcome the debate, not least because it gives me the opportunity to challenge members with my favourite pub quiz question: where in Scotland can one find an island in a loch on an island in a loch on an island? I see Humza Yousaf preparing to do some research.

I congratulate the island authorities on their smart and effective our islands, our future campaign in the run-up to the independence referendum. The campaign also reflected a more historical analysis of the distribution of political power across the British Isles.

The historian James Hunter tells a story that sums up much of the relationship between the Highlands and the rest of Scotland. Hunter recalls:

"In the run-up to the 1979 devolution referendum, an old man in Sutherland, a man who couldn't have been more pro-Highland, told me he'd be voting to keep the status quo. 'Why?' I asked. 'Well,' he said, 'in London they don't give a damn about Highlanders, but in Edinburgh they hate us.'"

Much of that ill feeling has deep historical roots in the tendency of authorities in Edinburgh to dictate the fate of those living elsewhere in Scotland. That is why the our islands, our future campaign is so important: it recalls the success of Shetland in the 1970s in securing the Zetland County Council Act 1974 and the findings of the Montgomery committee more than 30 years ago, which argued for precisely what the island authorities are arguing for now.

The campaign led to the fabled Lerwick declaration. It sounded very grand, so I decided to have a wee look and find out what it was. To my disappointment, I discovered that it was no more than the spoken thoughts of the then First Minister, Alex Salmond, who, in a speech in Lerwick on 29 July 2013, said:

"There is a hugely important principle behind all this and one which matters in all parts of Scotland so let's call it the Lerwick Declaration.

We believe that the people who live and work in Scotland are best placed to make decisions on Scotland's future—that's the very essence of self-determination for the nation and therefore it follows as night follows day that we support subsidiarity and local decision making."

Such a statement falls short of normal definitions of a declaration but, nevertheless, what was in effect the Scottish Government's response to the campaign at that stage was widely welcomed by island authorities.

However, just as the people who live and work in Scotland are best placed to make decisions on Scotland's future, so, too, are the people who live and work on Skye, Mull and Arran best placed to make decisions on the future of Skye, Mull and Arran.

Across Europe, such communities typically enjoy substantially greater autonomy than is the case in Scotland. Furthermore, the ambitions that are being developed for island communities and authorities are exactly the same kind of ambitions as we should be developing for all communities and authorities across Scotland.

Notwithstanding the important and distinctive needs of islands and island authorities, some of which are highlighted in Opposition amendments that we will support, it is clear that more powers, greater fiscal autonomy and strengthened local democracy are ambitions that we should seek to achieve for all communities throughout Scotland.

My amendment to the motion, which was not selected, highlighted the importance of decentralising the governance of Crown property rights and interests once they are fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament. I remind members that the Smith commission recommended that the two substantive reservations in schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998 on the management and the revenues of what is currently referred to as the Crown Estate should be done away with and that the Scottish Parliament should have full devolved competence over management and revenues. The Scotland Act 2016 devolves the former, but not the latter. That is a major flaw in any claim that the 2016 act has delivered the Smith commission proposals in full.

Notwithstanding that failure, the 2016 act amends the Civil List Act 1952 to the effect that the revenues shall be paid into the Scottish consolidated fund. That is progress, but it will lead to potential difficulties when, for example, a harbour authority in Shetland relies on revenues that are derived from new developments on Crown land but cannot directly secure those revenues and instead presumably has to enter into a

complex arrangement with the Scottish ministers to secure them.

That leads me to my closing point. Commitments have been given by previous Governments, other parties and, most recently, the First Minister in Kirkwall on 1 June 2015. She said:

“coastal and island councils will benefit from 100 per cent of the net revenue generated in their area from activities within 12 miles of the shore”.

Those are not the same words as Mr Yousaf used in his opening speech. I would be grateful if, in concluding, the minister could confirm that the First Minister’s statements of June 2015 remain the Scottish Government’s position. I also ask the minister whether the Scottish Government continues to make the case to the UK Government for the repeal of paragraph 3(3)(a) of part I of schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998.

15:47

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I rise as a member of the only political party to be represented in the Parliament that owns its own island. That island is Eilean Mòr MhicCharmaig, which is off the coast of Argyll. We were gifted it 30 or 40 years ago, I think. Over many years, members of the party have gone there and started to rebuild the one building that is on it. The island does not count for very much—it is not populated or economically valuable.

I propose that, economically, our islands are the most valuable part of Scotland. I know that that might seem a slightly challenging and interesting thing to say. We think of the islands as soaking up our resources and being subsidised by us but, if we think about them in a different way, the contrary view is true, and the most valuable island of all—uninhabited as it is—is Rockall. Rockall is so valuable because its existence as part of our territory is responsible for our having about a quarter of our offshore economic area. With other islands, it gives us the opportunity to harvest the seas, including the fish, and to access oil.

**Andy Wightman:** Does Mr Stevenson claim that Scotland should have sovereignty over Rockall? It is a disputed territory, and it was the subject of the last and most recent act of colonialism by the British Government.

**Stewart Stevenson:** If I recall correctly, Rockall came into the UK in 1955—I will be corrected if necessary. I think that, de facto, it is accepted that it creates that position.

I make the general point that every part of Scotland makes a unique contribution, and we should not forget that the islands make their own unique contributions.

The minister referred to a visit to the sun-kissed island of Raasay. I must say that my greatest memory from my visit there, which was thoroughly enjoyable, is of the midges. The population of Raasay remember with some horror Dr Green, who owned the island and kept it and the economy in thrall. That situation was repeated elsewhere—for example, when Malcolm Potier owned Gigha, the island could not make progress.

Islands have been one of the areas where community buyouts have transformed prospects. South Uist is an example; the island of Gigha is another.

For my part—I have just done some quick arithmetic—I appear to have been to 20 populated islands, which is far from the whole panoply of our islands. My father was born and brought up on Eilean nam Muc, which is of course not really an island—in English, we know it as the Black Isle. Indeed, not all things that are called islands are islands; Harris and Lewis are examples of that. Many characteristics of bits of the mainland are also characteristics of islands.

I want to talk a wee bit about transport, because I have hobby-horses that I want to get off my chest, particularly on aviation. Many of our islands are served by small aircraft that use aviation gas, or avgas as it is called in the trade. Avgas is VAT-able, so the island services in the Orkneys and the Shetlands, and those out of Oban to the islands, have to pay VAT on their fuel. That is inherently unfair, because the big aircraft do not pay VAT on aircraft fuel. We should look at that issue.

Similarly, we have restrictions on the aircraft that can serve our islands, which makes it more difficult to expand air services. In Norway, single-engine aircraft can operate full services in instrument conditions and service very small communities, but that is not permitted in the UK, even though the American aviation authority shows that the safety records of single-engine aircraft under a maximum take-off weight of 4,700kg are better than the safety records of multi-engine aircraft in that category.

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I understood that the Civil Aviation Authority was changing the regulations for single-piloted planes, which would benefit the Highlands and Islands.

**Stewart Stevenson:** The CAA already applies an exemption for single-piloted planes in Orkney and Shetland. That is helpful, but single-engine planes would transform the prospects of some places that are not on the network.

I am conscious of your strictures, Presiding Officer, but let me take a wee bit of an issue with Donald Cameron. On the issue of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise, he sees gloom, but I see opportunity. I am the only

constituency member to have both Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise operating in my constituency. [*Interruption.*] I beg your pardon; I have been corrected—they both serve Mr Gibson's constituency, too.

The people who are in the Scottish Enterprise bit want to be in the HIE bit. If we can transfer some of HIE's culture and practice to Scottish Enterprise, we will end up in a much better place than we have been in. I do not think that it is gloom and doom. I will campaign for the board meetings and the headquarters to be in Inverness and not Glasgow or Edinburgh.

15:53

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** It appears that there is broad consensus in the chamber that island communities are unique but very fragile in comparison with the rest of Scotland. They show us the importance of resilience and a real sense of community spirit, and that strength and unity within the community is something that we should try to concentrate on and export from the islands across all Scotland.

We all seem to agree that the islands should have further powers, but information on the proposed bill from the minister is rather notably and disappointingly vague. There is no indication about what powers should be devolved to our islands. I look forward to knowing what the proposals are and, when we know what they are and if we believe that they will benefit the islands, I assure the minister that we will support him in his drive to achieve that. More autonomy for island communities will allow them to champion the issues that they face, giving them better access to markets, transport and health. That would attract talent to the islands, which would replenish populations that are, in some cases, declining.

I want to look at four areas, if I may, but first I declare an interest in a farming partnership.

The first area is farming. Farmers on islands face large challenges due to not only the geographical location but the landscape. One of the main sources of income is the rearing of stock, which is often taken to the mainland and finished by other farmers. It is not always possible to finish stock on the islands due to the short grazing seasons and harsh, wet winters. There is nothing that we can do about the weather, but we can try to level the playing field for farmers who live and work on the islands. They can be at a disadvantage because they have to move stock from one island to another not only when they are selling it but when they are grazing it. If we can help them with the transport and ensure that movement restrictions do the job that they are

supposed to do without creating another layer of complexity, that will be a real benefit.

If the Government wants to empower island communities, it should explore options to assist farmers in making their businesses a success. We should look at specific issues that could be addressed under the new and progressive agricultural policy that will be required post-2020.

It is not just farmers who face challenges living in island communities. As we have heard, our islands are falling behind when it comes to implementing superfast broadband. In the Western Isles, only 40 per cent of premises have access to fibre broadband. The lack of sufficient access to broadband means that we do not attract businesses or people to our islands. We must have broadband in the islands in order to have communities there and to get people to stay. The resource is needed not only by businesses but by children as they go through their education.

Lack of broadband is not the only problem that islands face; it is one of a few. Another is development costs. For example, the costs of house building are probably 30 per cent higher on Iona and Coll than they are in urban areas of Scotland. That deters new entrants to the islands and it deters people from developing. We need to look at ways of reducing the costs so that we can encourage new housing on the islands.

We also need to look at health, which is a real issue. For residents who live in remote locations, a visit to see a doctor or a commute to a local health service or hospital can be a daunting and difficult experience, and changes to services on the islands can cause great upheaval. As the minister will know, there are plans to redesign services on Skye and Raasay, which I believe he visited in the summer. The move to having one hospital will mean that there is a lot more movement on Skye, and on Raasay, where there is no GP and there is not going to be one, there is concern about what local people will have to do to get medical care when the ferries stop in the evening. Let us be honest with ourselves: if we could not get to see a GP in the evening when we have a problem, we would be concerned as well. We need to address that. We need to work with island communities and give them special cognisance when it comes to providing healthcare. That can be done in the bill, as has been suggested, by giving them more autonomy.

There is one other issue that I want to mention. I will keep my comments brief because I am mindful that the Presiding Officer will be looking at me as far as time is concerned. I do not believe that the proposals to change Highlands and Islands Enterprise are right. Stewart Stevenson was right to say that it should remain in the Highlands, but it should remain in the Highlands with its own board.



It has served the Highlands well and has been of great service to the islands as well. It would be a mistake to centralise it and take control away. I am afraid that, when we come to discuss the proposal at later stages, we will oppose it, because we do not believe that it is in the interests of the Highlands and Islands.

There are a lot of things that we can work on together. There are positive areas that need to be addressed. I stress to the minister that we need to look specifically at broadband—I know that the Government is doing that—at opportunities for farmers, at healthcare and at the idea of trying to make it more affordable for people to build houses on the islands if we are to retain populations there.

15:59

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Sadly, I have no islands in my constituency. In fact, I do not think that I even have an island in the River Clyde, of which I have a part. For a Glaswegian like me, going to an island is great, be that Millport on Cumbrae, Rothesay on Bute, or Arran. For me at least, and for many other city dwellers, the pressures of life reduce as you cross the sea to an island. We know that there are great pressures for people living on the islands but, for the rest of us, there is something great about being detached, and that is a huge attraction for tourists.

Why do I want to speak in this debate, as a city MSP? I am sure that other members of all parties know their islands much better than I do. Stewart Stevenson says that he has been to 20 inhabited islands; I think that I have been to about 35. It is worth stating that many people in Scotland's cities and elsewhere on the mainland have a strong commitment to our islands. Maybe we have family ties, or we go on holiday to the same island every year or just visit islands very occasionally. Many of us believe that islands are a key part of our national culture and I cannot imagine a Scotland without islands.

We were asked to skip a paragraph, so I will skip the one about the definition of islands, as I was going to argue that Skye cannot be an island because it now has a bridge to the mainland.

There are huge contrasts between our islands. Cumbrae and Lismore are relatively close to Largs and Oban with fairly short and dependable ferry crossings, whereas the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland are obviously much further from the mainland, have larger communities within them, and are clearly more self-sufficient. Having been a few times to the Western Isles before I ever got to Shetland, I was struck by the big difference between the two groups, especially how cosmopolitan Lerwick is.

Even neighbouring islands can be very different from one another. A few years ago, I split my summer holiday between Coll and Tiree. Coll is hilly, with very few people and a small shop that was open only half the day. Moving on to Tiree was like arriving in a big city by comparison. I could not believe how well stocked the Co-op there was in comparison to what I had just experienced on Coll.

Another year I was on the Small Isles, where the ownership models are very interesting. The four Small Isles have four different models: Muck has a traditional landowner; Eigg is a community trust buy-out; Rum, I think, is owned by Scottish Natural Heritage; and Canna is owned by the National Trust for Scotland.

Clearly, we cannot discuss islands without focusing on transport. I was as delighted as anyone when CalMac won the bid for the Clyde and Hebrides routes. I am a supporter of the European Union, but it has not been perfect, and perhaps one of the advantages of leaving could be that we are less tied into competitive tendering. The road equivalent tariff has long made sense to me and we should consider it one of the Government's big successes that it has been rolled out so far.

**David Stewart:** The European Union's Teckel exemption allows public sector organisations not to tender and there are UK cases to establish that, so I ask the member to look at that particular point.

**John Mason:** We have had quite long debate on that subject, but I think that there are areas where the EU could give us a bit more room for manoeuvre.

We certainly should learn from neighbouring countries with islands. This summer, I was in Ireland, where they seem to have a more free market system for island ferries; you can get on one ferry and see another one competing by racing across the sea to the island. Perhaps more interesting was when I visited the Faroe Islands and saw the use of tunnels there. We have tended to build causeways and sometimes bridges to link islands together or islands to the mainland. In the Faroe Islands, they clearly use tunnels to a greater degree. I know that that has been suggested for Orkney and I suggest that we consider tunnels as a serious possibility if we are looking to replace ferries with fixed links in the future.

During the previous session of Parliament, I was on the Equal Opportunities Committee for part of the time. We carried out a study on age and isolation that included visits to both Islay and Easterhouse to see how isolation in an urban setting compared to isolation in a more rural or island one. I think that most of us on the committee were struck by the very strong sense of

community in the island setting, perhaps more so than in an urban setting such as Easterhouse. The island folk faced the greater challenges in such issues as transport and even professional isolation. If there is only one doctor or one teacher in an island community, they can be very isolated.

Another paragraph that I will skip over is about the question of centralisation. The Government has been good at getting rid of the ring fencing that was a problem when I was a councillor. That has freed up the island councils and, in fact, all councils.

Finally, both the Government motion and Labour amendment mention “declining populations” or “depopulation”. As a city dweller, I believe that that problem is something that we all need to take seriously. I like living in the city, but it would not be good for the country if everybody lived in the cities. We need strong rural and island communities. One of the saddest stories of depopulation and evacuation has been that of St Kilda, to which Rhoda Grant referred. I loved the island when I visited it and it is now a world heritage site, but it has no permanent population and is dominated by a military base, which is very unsuitable. Yet the island has been a tourist attraction for over 100 years, with potential for more, so I finish with a challenge. We must not allow any more of our islands to be completely depopulated—it should be a national priority to stop that happening, and we might even consider repopulating some of our islands, including St Kilda.

16:05

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

I begin by saying:

“the Board’s overall purpose ... must be to enable the Highlands”

and Islands

“to play a more effective part in the economic and social development of the nation. It has never been more important than today that all the country’s resources should be fully exploited, and the Highlands”

and Islands

“have much to contribute. This is not a case of giving to the Highlands”

and Islands;

“This is a case of giving the Highlands”

and Islands

“a chance to play their full part in the future of Britain.”—  
[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 16 March 1965; Vol 708, c 1086.]

Those are not my words, but the words of the iconic Secretary of State for Scotland, Willie Ross, speaking in the House of Commons during the second reading of the Highland Development

Scotland Bill, which set up the groundbreaking Highlands and Islands Development Board in 1965. Willie Ross was cast from the same mould as the great Tom Johnston who, as Secretary of State for Scotland under Winston Churchill, brought hydro power to the glens in the Highlands in the 1940s.

Of course, much has changed in our island communities since Willie Ross’s stirring speech echoed across Westminster. We have seen changes such as the discovery of oil and gas; the development of the University of the Highlands and Islands, with five of its 13 academic partners wholly based on the islands; the common agricultural policy; the minimum wage; and the air discount scheme that Tavish Scott brought in when he was Minister for Transport. We have also seen the introduction of route development funding, the road equivalent tariff, the rural fuel rebate and European structural and investment funds. Whether the policy in question originated in Brussels, London or Edinburgh, the end result was a win-win for island communities. To echo the EU’s global Europe 2050 vision, policies should not be “territorially blind”.

However, some things have not changed. Last month, at a conference that was organised by Shetland Islands Council and the Committee of the Regions, the 2011 EUROISLANDS study, which analysed island communities across the EU, was debated and discussed. The common characteristics are that islands have below-average connectivity; their GDP is below the European average; economic convergence there is slower; numbers of job and career opportunities are low; and services there are of variable quality and high cost.

As a counterweight, the 2012 Geospec survey concluded that islands have close-knit communities; high-value natural capital; and the potential for renewable energies. It also noted, however, that islands experienced higher vulnerability to climate change through heightening sea levels and an increased likelihood of storms.

I believe that the time is right for a new islands act that builds on best practice from Scotland—as exemplified by the our islands, our future campaign, which has been mentioned often today—and that looks to Europe and beyond.

Perhaps the best exemplar that I can find for future legislation is Japan’s Remote Islands Development Act of 1953, which was one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to recognise the distinct status of island communities. As a result of that act, the Japanese island of Okinawa, which has close ties with UHI, became a prefecture—the first level of jurisdiction and an administration division in Japan. Perhaps, in

winding up, the minister could comment further on best practice, which he has briefly mentioned already.

Nearer to home, it is worth stressing that there is nothing new in the argument for strengthening our island communities. The Montgomery committee, which reported in April 1984, recommended consolidating, developing and extending the powers of island councils. One of the key elements of the Treaty on European Union was the principle of subsidiarity: taking decisions in a localised, decentralised way.

So, what would an islands bill look like? I strongly support—as other members have said today that they support—the work that is carried out by the three islands councils of Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland that has led to the our islands, our future campaign. On Tuesday, I met Councillor Angus Campbell and Councillor Gary Robinson, the respective leaders of Western Isles and Shetland, to discuss their campaign.

However, new powers need new financial muscle. Real devolution means resource-based control: transferring control of the sea bed from the Crown Estate to island authorities and onward to the community land and harbour trusts. New powers need strategic decision making in the planning, designing and commissioning of mainland-to-island ferry services, and the recognition of island status in the Scottish constitutional set-up.

As well as gaining new powers, we must keep what works well. As the old cliché says, if it ain't broke, why fix it? That is why I want to see HIE's headquarters remain in the Highlands and Islands, with a single HIE board and chief executive, and continued decentralisation of staff in our island authorities. The bigger picture is that we need active Scottish Government and Westminster Government commitment to the relocation of public sector jobs to our island communities—for example, of Office of Communications jobs to the Western Isles, of Marine Scotland jobs to Shetland and of the Crown Estate's HQ to Orkney, as a starter for 10.

"Consultation on Provisions for a Future Islands Bill" makes interesting reading. It is clear that there is support for the principle of island-proofing to fight isolation, remoteness and peripherality—a key tool for empowering the islands. The UK, of course, has adopted the principle of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which we need to act on. There is also strong support in the consultation document for a national islands plan to provide structure and clarity on setting objectives, monitoring and reviewing. The key will be who is accountable.

I will finish my speech as I started, by quoting Willie Ross in the 1965 debate about the Highlands and Islands. He said:

"No part of Scotland has been given a shabbier deal by history from the '45 onwards. Too often there has been only one way out of"

the

"troubles for the person born in the Highlands"

and islands

"—emigration."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 16 March 1965; Vol 708, c 1095.]

Those who are entrusted with carrying out the duties in the new islands bill might find themselves involved in a date with history—being part of the history of Scotland. All that we need, in the words of Sir Walter Scott, is the "will to do" and the "soul to dare."

16:11

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** First, I refer members to my register of interests.

Can I say how pleased I am to be taking part in this debate? As a proud Hebridean, hailing from just outside Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis and with Hebridean genes going back hundreds of years, I care passionately about the islands, their culture, their language and their future. So, I was delighted in 2014 to see the "Empowering Scotland's Island Communities" prospectus agreed by all three island councils and the creation of the Scottish Government's dedicated ministerial post, which were two positive steps forward. The post of minister for the islands provides a clear focus on island issues and a voice within the Government for all 93 of Scotland's island communities.

Our islands have a great deal going for them, but they are never short of challenges to overcome. One of the most pressing issues is the projected decline in population, particularly in the Western Isles, so it is imperative that it and the imbalance in age profiles, which sees a rising older population and a decreasing younger one, are addressed with bold, new initiatives.

The 2014-based projections predict a severe decline in the population of the Outer Hebrides of 13.7 per cent—the largest projected percentage decline in Scotland. If we look at broad age groups, we see in the nought to 15 age group, a 28 per cent decline—the largest decline in Scotland; in the working-age population, a 21 per cent decline—the largest decline along with that for Inverclyde; and in those of pensionable age, an 11 per cent increase. By 2039, the Outer Hebrides is projected to have the second-highest percentage of people of pensionable age and over in Scottish council areas, at 33.2 per cent. In

addition, the Outer Hebrides is projected to have the lowest percentage of children in the nought to 15 age group, at 13.6 per cent.

Although that is undoubtedly the most significant long-term challenge, there are of course a number of other, shorter-term challenges that must be addressed. As we have heard, the need to provide superfast broadband, through schemes such as the digital Scotland superfast broadband scheme, in each village in the Hebrides is a must, coupled with improved mobile coverage—the sooner, the better for that, and I was pleased to hear the minister's commitment to that in his opening speech. It is clear that high-speed broadband could transform small communities the length and breadth of the west coast and the northern isles, relieving them of their reliance on more traditional industries, such as crofting and fishing, and widening their horizons to allow a more entrepreneurial spirit to thrive. We could have communities that are thriving rather than just barely surviving, and a renewed entrepreneurial spirit would ensure that depopulation is reversed.

Of course, ensuring that our island economies flourish needs everyone to work together. That is why, like others, I was outraged when the UK Government betrayed the Hebridean communities earlier this month with the shock move to delay a decision on the vital contracts for difference announcement on renewable energy, which has a knock-on impact on the urgently needed interconnector. The prospects of building major wind farms on the islands will be seriously jeopardised if the final outcome is to deny a financial incentive to counter the higher costs of exporting electricity across the Minch.

As we know, the UK Government previously backed a proposed guaranteed payment of £115 per megawatt-hour. It has now scrapped the subsidy for onshore turbines, with a possible exception for island-based wind schemes. Such uncertainty, as if we did not have enough of that, and a further indefinite delay on the contracts for difference and the related plans for a subsea cable to transfer the wind farm electricity to the mainland, which hinge on the proposed wind farm development going ahead, will have a major impact on the islands' economy.

The reality of course is that renewable energy from the Scottish islands would be cheaper than offshore energy. However, the UK Government has not chosen the best value-for-money option and will instead procure the most expensive energy sources. The UK Government has completely failed to understand that the islands are the very place that could be the renewables powerhouse for the country.

With appropriate investment in grid infrastructure and generating assets, renewable

energy in the islands could see economic benefits of up to £725 million, including up to £225 million in community benefits. The UK Government has the chance to redeem itself, so let us persevere in hope; otherwise we will see a complete betrayal of the people of the Western Isles.

There are many other challenges facing the Western Isles and northern isles. You only have to skip through the *Stornoway Gazette*, the *West Highland Free Press* or *The Oban Times* to get a flavour of the issues that are affecting our west coast islands, and I am sure that it is the same in *The Shetland Times* and *The Orcadian*.

But there are lots of positive developments, too. I was lucky enough to be at two major festivals in Stornoway this year: the Hebridean Celtic Festival—or HebCelt—coming-of-age event last July generated well over £2 million for the island's economy; and the Royal National Mòd in Stornoway in October generated close to £3 million for the island economy over the nine days that it ran.

The future is bright for our islands if there is consensus in this chamber, and I was pleased to hear Edward Mountain offer to work together on a number of issues.

The forthcoming islands bill, the islands strategic group and the proposals for a national islands plan all give me heart for the future.

Let us all work together to reduce the challenges our islands face to ensure lasting benefits for all our island communities for generations to come.

16:17

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. As a member for the West Scotland region, I have the pleasure, along with the constituency and other regional MSPs, of representing two islands of notable size and population: Arran and Great Cumbrae. Between them, they have a population of around 7,000 people, depending on the time of year; it swells in the summer to a five-figure number.

When we think about our island communities, we should think about them not just as places that we pop along to with our families on a sunny summer Saturday afternoon. It is important to recognise that they also play a huge part in the Scottish economy.

That is why it is important that we support our island communities and recognise that, because they are not part of the mainland, we may sometimes need to take additional measures to ensure that they are afforded the same standards of living as those on the mainland.

Take the island of Arran: what immediately draws me to it is not necessarily always the warmth of its climate but the warmth of its community spirit and its people. By its very nature, however, an island comes with its fair share of logistical problems. The cost of living is often higher and is increasingly becoming unbearable for some. For example, the cost of bringing fuel across from the mainland means that islanders often pay up to 20p more per litre for petrol than, for example, customers in Ardrossan. It is not just about filling up your car; it is also about keeping warm. Higher heating fuel costs mean that 62 per cent of island households have to spend over 10 per cent of their income to keep their houses warm, and a quarter of island households have to spend at least a fifth of their monthly income on heating. I really hope that the islands bill will take that into account.

While it is good to see that supermarkets such as the Co-op have invested in Arran, many people still prefer to take their cars to the mainland to stock up on petrol and groceries, despite the added cost of getting there and back.

Living on an island also comes with healthcare issues, as my colleague mentioned. At a recent surgery on Arran, I met a retired GP who said that he is genuinely concerned that there is not a pipeline of GPs who want to live in our island communities. We know that in the Western Isles, the national health service struggles to fill around 30 per cent of its consultant vacancies. In many cases, islanders are forced to make the crossing to the mainland to access medical care. Members will remember that a week ago I asked the First Minister a question about waiting times. A gentleman who lived on Arran had a significant wait, much of which was because of the difficulty in scheduling an appointment that worked around the ferry timetables. The automatic generation of appointments did not take into account the patient's physicality, where they lived or the logistics of getting to and from the mainland hospital.

That leads me nicely to transport connectivity. A lot has been said already about the Ardrossan ferry service and, for the sake of time, I will not repeat too much of it. It is excellent to see genuine cross-party support in the chamber for keeping the terminal in Ardrossan for the long term. I penned a question for general question time today, but unfortunately we made it only to question 6. I asked the Government whether it would take into account the possible negative impact on the economy in Ardrossan if there was a move to Troon. I am glad to say that I received a response, which my office has just sent me; I thank the minister for it. It says that the study will look at the economic benefits, public benefits and the needs of ferry users. In that very short response,

nowhere does it say that it will look at the negative impact that such a move would create.

**Humza Yousaf:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jamie Greene:** Perhaps the minister could respond when summing up.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** Minister.

**Humza Yousaf:** I reassure Jamie Greene that the socioeconomic impact of any ferry change, whatever decision is made, will be part of the study.

**Jamie Greene:** I thank the minister for that reassurance and I hope that he will listen to the words of all parties across the chamber regarding the genuine concerns that we have about the potential move.

Connectivity is an area of great interest to me. In my work as the digital economy spokesman for my party and as a Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee member, I have met a number of organisations to look at innovative ways of reaching the last 5 per cent of households that do not have fast broadband. I have met the leading mobile companies to discuss mobile coverage and spoken to them about the difficulties of reaching our rural and island communities. I am liaising with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on that and I welcome the UK Government's £1 billion investment in digital infrastructure that was announced yesterday.

It is not all doom and gloom. There are some great success stories, many of which have been named already: Arran Brewery; Arran Aromatics; the Isle of Arran Distillery with its fantastic new 14-year-old malt; Paterson's Shortbread and so on.

I hope that the islands bill will honestly address the needs of our islands and I hope that the Government has listened hard to the debate, in which a number of excellent points have been raised. I hope that the Government will look more closely at how we can help island families with the cost of living and at how we can ensure that we can continue to bring skilled workers to places such as Arran.

16:23

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** Unlike my city colleague John Mason, I have an island in my constituency, in the middle of Hogganfield loch.

My interest in this debate is the huge potential contribution that the islands can make to Scotland's economy. Scotland is a land of plentiful natural resources, and by far a disproportionate amount of those resources are located on or

around our islands. There are the Shetlands, floating on oil; Islay, home of the malt—apologies to Speyside, but you cannot beat the peat—Orkney, with its vast renewables potential; and the beautiful island of Skye, which is an established tourist destination and has the potential to grow much more. In fact, a recent poll by Rightmove found that Skye was the most desirable place in the UK in which to live.

Across all 93 of Scotland's inhabited islands, huge potential exists to invest, develop and grow, so that they can contribute to Scotland's future. In term of gross value added per capita and the value of exports, many islands contribute far more than the Scottish average.

Island communities around the world have specific challenges and opportunities, and, as is often the case, international comparisons are instructive. The Baltic island of Saaremaa is Estonia's largest. It is about one and half times the size of Skye, with a population of 30,000, which is three times that of Skye.

Saaremaa is connected to the mainland by ferry for most of the year. I say "most" because in the winter the Baltic freezes and the ice is thick enough to allow even large vehicles to drive across a makeshift road to the mainland. Twice daily flights from Tallinn provide a faster connection. Saaremaa has a thriving tourist industry and is home to several spa hotels that cater to visitors from Scandinavia, Germany and Russia, all of which are a short flight away.

However, my visits to Saaremaa were not just to enjoy the local hospitality. I went there because the island contains several factories, one of the largest of which employs around 300 people and manufactures the wiring systems that provide the power and communications connections inside commercial jet engines. In fact, every time we take a flight, it is more than likely that there are Estonian products connecting the engine. We can give thanks to the good people of Saaremaa for keeping us safe at 30,000 feet.

Saaremaa shows that islands can take part in the most advanced technologies and not just those that are enabled by local natural resources. They can compete and create value across all sectors. When we talk about our island communities, it is too frequently in conjunction with the challenges that they face of lack of connectivity and population decline. However, given what can be achieved elsewhere, we should not set our sights too low when mapping out opportunities for our islands.

The island of Eigg is an example closer to home where much progress has been made that, importantly, has been driven by local people. After years of instability, neglect and lack of secure

tenure, in a groundbreaking move, the Eigg Heritage Trust was able to purchase the island in June 1997, ushering in land reform in Scotland and giving islanders control of their future for the first time.

As the trust's information makes clear, it

"was established to provide and create opportunity for economic development, housing and infrastructure, whilst conserving our natural and cultural heritage to ensure that development takes place in a sustainable way. The Trust has been successful in these aims with the Island now a vibrant and attractive place to live and work, having a growing and forward-thinking population ... recognising the importance of Eigg's unique identity to its continuing growth and success."

The population of Eigg is small, but it is growing strongly, which is a demonstration of the renewed attractiveness of the island. That points the way to what can be achieved at community level, not only on our islands but across many of our communities.

The Scottish Government has shown its commitment to Scotland's islands. It has supported ferry services through a record £1 billion investment in port infrastructure, vessels and services since 2007. There has been the roll-out of RET across the Clyde and Hebrides network and a commitment to reduce fares on ferry services to Orkney and Shetland. There is a commitment to deliver 100 per cent superfast broadband access by the end of 2021. That is essential to support not only existing businesses and the tourism industry, but the growth of new businesses, and to realise the potential for remote working and learning across our island communities.

The Scottish Government is continuing to press the UK Government to deliver a viable package of support to facilitate the vital grid connections to Orkney, Shetland and Na h-Eileanan an Iar. Those island groups have the potential to supply up to 5 per cent of total electricity demand in the UK market by 2030.

The establishment of the new islands strategic group delivers on a key manifesto commitment and builds on the work of the our islands, our future campaign. The Scottish Government will take forward a new national islands plan and an islands bill that will support our island communities in fulfilling their economic potential. Across Scotland, we see opportunities to grow our economy and our population, leveraging our natural and human resources to build a fairer, wealthier and greener society. Our islands have a huge role to play in that, and there is great scope to realise much more of that potential.

16:28

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I start with one plea to us all: can we stop using that word “connectivity”? It must be one of the worst words and bits of jargon that any of us uses in politics today. When Alasdair Allan, Liam McArthur and I fly home tomorrow morning, it will not be on a connectivity Loganair flight to the islands; it will be on a connection.

**Liam McArthur:** We hope.

**Tavish Scott:** Yes—we hope. Maybe we could drop that one bit of jargon that has become beloved of all politicians of late.

Humza Yousaf opened proceedings by saying that his heart belongs to Glasgow. I suspect that, after this week, it certainly does not belong to Abellio, so it must be a relief to him to come to the chamber this afternoon to talk about islands. If he is up in Shetland for the Highlands and Islands convention in February, if not before that, he is very welcome to come across to Bressay for tea and a reestit mutton bannock at any stage. I will not take the cheque that Liam McArthur demanded from him for a custard cream in Kirkwall earlier in the summer.

I will go through issues that have been raised by members across the chamber. Some started with transport, which was the right thing to do because, for all islands—certainly those that I represent—transport connections are the most important aspect of island life. I welcome the word “significant” that the minister used in his opening remarks when talking about ferry fares for the northern isles being reduced in line with those for the west coast. That is an important step forward, and we wait to see the detail. I hope that he can introduce that once we have clarity on the Scottish budget.

I am going to disagree slightly with him when he says that he wants to reintroduce ADS. He is not reintroducing it, because it was already there. Indeed, Stewart Stevenson, when he was the first SNP transport minister back in 2007, carried on the scheme that David Stewart mentioned in his earlier remarks. If the minister, in his consideration of the issue, can bring back the scheme that Stewart Stevenson carried on with, we will all be extremely pleased, and that would be an important step forward for island life.

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

**Tavish Scott:** I would be happy to.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You could not resist, could you, Mr Stevenson?

**Stewart Stevenson:** I may be corrected, Presiding Officer, but was not the discount 40 per

cent in those days? It is now 50 per cent, so I do not think that Mr Scott would want to go back to what I had.

**Tavish Scott:** For businesses we have to go back, because businesses do not get any reduction. The point that we are seeking to make is that we in the islands want the reintroduction of the discount for those categories of passengers as well.

There has been brief mention of the Crown Estate, which the minister also mentioned in his opening remarks, and that is important. What the islands want is what the Smith commission agreed, which was a good piece of work, because it was agreed across all the political parties. I was pleased to work with John Swinney and Linda Fabiani as the SNP representatives, and with Patrick Harvie and other colleagues from the Greens on that. What the Smith commission said on the Crown Estate assets was:

“Following this transfer, responsibility for the management of those assets will be further devolved to local authority areas such as Orkney, Shetland”

and the Western Isles. That is an important principle that we agreed, so I look forward to the Government achieving that. I heard the minister say that there are some legislative obstacles to that, but I am sure that a clever and able minister such as the one whom we now have will get round those legislative obstacles. What I hope is not happening is an internal civil service fight—as I have been told—over whether it happens as a pilot and when. I know that people in the islands are not too bothered about all that internal Government stuff, as I am sure the minister entirely appreciates. What we want is that a thing that was, for once, agreed on a cross-party basis, comes to fruition.

There has been less mention this afternoon—possibly understandably—of our primary industries, so I want to take a minute to mention both fishing and agriculture. The key change that we are going to see on fishing, whatever else happens with Brexit, is that the industry wants the removal of the detested common fisheries policy and to have instead a Scottish Government fisheries policy. I support that and believe that it would be an important step forward. There is also an important point about landing more fish and having access to markets, which is a different debate and one that we will have in many more places in the coming years, I have no doubt. I encourage the minister to work with his colleagues on achieving that and to have some initial work done on that.

On agriculture, there will be a meeting tonight in Shetland with national representatives of NFU Scotland about the light-lamb market. That is one of the most pressing issues, not just in my

constituency but, I suspect, in Alasdair Allan's. I know that there is also a pressing issue for many colleagues in the Highlands and Islands about market failure more generally and about the changes to sterling and the impact that that has had on the marketplace. One area of Government policy that the minister might seek to address quickly in his winding-up speech is on areas of natural constraint. We would look for that policy to be introduced to the advantage of the Highlands and Islands—the islands in particular—given that that is what it is meant to do.

I want to make two more points. We very much support the principles behind the proposed islands bill. That is an effective and important step forward, but the minister will have to deal with the concerns that we all have—the island councils included—about losing powers: for example, the suggestion that local health boards could be lost to a centralised structure.

The reason is simple. The island that I live on does not have a community nurse at the moment and I am in daily communication with the chief executive of our health board to try to sort that out. It is a tricky issue, because the community nursing structure faces recruitment challenges, but it is easy for me to speak to that person. If we were to be subsumed into a wider board, however, that would be much more difficult, and it would not matter whether it was me, the island council or any other representative who was taking up those important issues.

There has been some discussion about HIE, but I think that the point is very simple. The HIE board keeps a single-minded focus on the Highlands and Islands. Whatever else might be said—I understand why the minister might have other arguments that he wishes to deploy—that superboard will have responsibility for Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and others, so it will not have the same single-minded focus on the Highlands and Islands, which is what many of us are concerned about. Many members of the minister's party are concerned about that, too, even although they might not say it in so many words.

Many members have given the example of the project on mobile coverage and broadband, and they have been absolutely right to do so, because it is right that it is happening. Who is providing the single-minded focus to deliver on that commendable project? HIE. I hope that the minister will bear that in mind when changes to the HIE board are considered.

I commend the debate as a useful exercise in raising many issues that are important to the islands, and I encourage the Government to

progress those issues, which have mattered to many of us for many years.

16:35

**Rhoda Grant:** It has been an interesting debate that has, sadly, highlighted the Government's tendency towards centralisation, rather than its commitment to devolving power to the islands. It is as true for the islands as it is for the rest of Scotland that people should make decisions as close as possible to where they have an impact. The fact that the Government does not hold to that principle is clearly shown by its actions, and it is hard to believe that an islands bill—or, indeed, island proofing—will have any impact on what it does to devolve powers.

Many members have spoken about HIE. It is clear that people are very concerned about what the Government is doing. Donald Cameron mentioned the decision about the Lochaber smelter: HIE was involved in that process. It is true that Fergus Ewing was involved in it, too, but HIE was at every meeting and it brought a local focus to proceedings. If we lose that local focus, we will lose everything. David Stewart quoted Willie Ross, who set up the Highlands and Islands Development Board. I do not think that Willie Ross would have believed that it would be a Scottish Government that would dismantle its successor body. It is a very shabby deal indeed.

Emma Harper talked about south of Scotland enterprise. I know that Colin Smyth and other colleagues have fought hard to have a south of Scotland enterprise, but if it does not have the necessary powers or the local focus, it will not work. People including Emma Harper might not be being sold what they believe they will get, because they fought for something that would be like Highlands and Islands Enterprise. What they are getting—and what we in the Highlands and Islands will get if the Government's proposals go ahead—is something absolutely different. We need a local body that focuses on creation of wealth throughout our communities, but especially in our islands, which are at a disadvantage.

The Labour-Lib Dem coalition looked at civil service jobs, which David Stewart mentioned. When we create or move civil service jobs, we should look to the remote rural areas and islands. Tiree has benefited from having the crofting housing unit located there. Its well-paid jobs underpin the local economy, and the people who have them do not move away. They are qualified and educated, so the Government gets more for its money in such areas. People who are currently overqualified want jobs that will allow them to live on their islands. HIE was at the centre of such initiatives, so I appeal to the Government to look again at its decision, because we will not get such



focus and support if we do not have an organisation that is based and rooted in our communities.

Needless to say, transport, ferries and flights have taken up quite a bit of the debate. Liam McArthur asked the minister how we would reduce ferry fares to the northern isles, and the minister said that he is looking at that. However, he does not need to examine the issue overly closely. He need not reinvent the wheel. We all know that RET is not in place on the Barra to Oban route because it is too long, yet users of that route benefit from the discounts that are enjoyed by people on the other islands. If RET was in place on that route, fares would increase. There is a way of getting around the problem and giving islanders affordable fares. I suggest that the minister consider that. He does not need to look at a whole new system; he just needs to think about replicating that one.

A number of members mentioned the Arran ferry service and the need to protect the link with Ardrossan, because the alternative is longer journeys, less access to public transport and more expensive fares, because of RET and the longer journey.

Aspect that are sometimes missed are cultural links and jobs. When a ferry route changes, it makes life difficult for the people who work and commute. I appeal for the CalMac board to have islanders on it. Bodies that serve our islands, especially ferry operators, should have on their boards people who represent the islands. Those boards are important.

We have talked about the air discount scheme and RET, which have been removed from businesses. That approach taxes not only businesses but all islanders through the goods and services that are taken to the islands. Indeed, people who leave the islands to use health services are taxed for using transport. I suggest that the Government look urgently at the issue and consider how to free up local economies.

Members talked about fuel poverty and access to health services, and Neil Bibby talked about the importance of Gaelic in the culture of islands in the west and some of the Argyll islands. We need to ensure that such issues are taken into account. Broadband could be a game changer for our island communities, who should be first in the queue, not last, when it comes to such services.

Empowering our island communities is a bit like motherhood and apple pie: who could possibly disagree? However, the point of empowerment is that we hand over powers that we hold. That appears to be the stumbling block for this Government. When mainland local authorities complain to me that they are being disempowered

while islands are being empowered, I ask them to point me to one power that has been handed to our islands. My remark is always greeted by silence, because people cannot think of one. Therefore, I say to the Government that it does not need to wait for a bill before devolving powers. It should simply give the islands the powers that they can have now and it can consider expanding those powers through legislation, where that is needed. Actions speak louder than words. Let us see some action.

16:41

**Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):**

Members will have noticed that I have had on my lugs this afternoon. That is because I wanted to make sure that I could hear all the debate. My hearing is not the best—I blame long days in tractors in my youth as the cause of that.

I welcome the consensual approach to the debate. It is important that members of the Parliament can work together across party lines with an agreed approach, whenever that is possible. I think that most speakers, including the minister, have taken such an approach today.

The number of people on Scotland's islands is relatively small, at just over 100,000, or around 2 per cent of the population. In all honesty, until I looked that up I thought that the figure was much higher, but there we are—that is what it is. Only four islands have a population that is greater than 10,000, and those four islands' populations make up more than 60 per cent of the total island population. Nevertheless, there are more than 80 other inhabited islands, and each one is an important part of our country.

Increased autonomy for Scotland's island communities is a growing political issue, which has been particularly in the spotlight since the 2014 independence referendum. The fact that we are even looking at an islands bill is a recognition that there are issues that are unique to Scotland's islands, which we must address.

During the debate, Rhoda Grant said that the powers that are devolved need to be real, and Edward Mountain called for more clarity about what powers are to be devolved. I echo those sentiments.

Angus MacDonald spoke about the problem of population decline, especially in the Western Isles. Of course, it is mostly the young who go away, leaving an increasingly ageing population.

I think that members are in broad agreement about the need to ensure that our islands receive as much devolution as possible, to help them to become more successful. Scotland is on the verge of receiving a swathe of new powers, and it is only

right that we pass some of those powers on to the islands, to enable them to prosper. David Mundell has made quite clear that regional devolution in England—to Cornwall, for instance—and the success of the northern powerhouse project provide clear models for us in Scotland.

There have long been concerns about the SNP Government's centralisation programme. There seems to be a growing consensus in the Parliament that a separate solution is needed for the islands, and I hope that the upcoming islands devolution represents the beginning of a realisation on the part of the SNP that centralisation is not the answer to every question.

The health picture for the islands is, unfortunately, not as positive. Despite some important success stories, there are serious concerns that need to be addressed. I believe that, at the heart of problems with island healthcare, is the significantly higher staff turnover. The turnover for Shetland is 11.5 per cent, which is nearly double the Scottish average of 6.4 per cent. There is also a clear difficulty in filling vacancies, with the Western Isles and Orkney having more than three times the percentage of vacancies for consultants—about 28 per cent—than is the case in Scotland overall. It should be obvious to everyone that a tailor-made solution and some strategic thinking will be required. Jamie Greene expanded on that. We also heard about the dangers around the possible merging of island health boards. I believe that that approach is the wrong answer. That view was argued well by Liam McArthur and Tavish Scott.

Of course, it is not all doom and gloom for those living across Scotland's islands. When it comes to raising kids, the islands enjoy quality education, producing excellent exam results on the back of low primary class sizes and low pupil to teacher ratios in secondary schools, all provided by an incredibly high average school spend per pupil—in Orkney, the spend is double the British average, at £9,281.

Further, despite the challenges that affect islanders—many of which we have heard about today—there are good reasons why study after study finds that the islands are the best places to live in Scotland. High employment, low crime rates, much less traffic, a real sense of community and what we can all agree is stunning scenery all contribute to making islanders some of the happiest people in Scotland. Several speakers mentioned that, in particular Douglas Ross.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have made the gentlemen from Orkney and Shetland smile, Mr Chapman.

**Peter Chapman:** I am delighted about that. It is fine to see them smiling.

There are other opportunities for the SNP to step up and give some immediate and much-needed support to island communities. Pressing ahead with an expansion of community broadband Scotland should be a priority for the Government. With only 40 per cent of premises in the Western Isles being able to access fibre broadband, and with Argyll and Bute Council, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council below the 75 per cent mark, it is time for a solution.

**Dr Allan:** The member will not find me disagreeing about the need to increase broadband connectivity—to use a banned word—in the Western Isles, but will he at least acknowledge that, three years ago, the figure that we were dealing with on the islands for fibre broadband was nil?

**Peter Chapman:** I accept that, and I acknowledge and welcome the fact that work is being done. However, there is a need to move on even more quickly. We have heard that, by 2021, we will have 100 per cent broadband coverage at 10 megabits per second. I wonder whether that is achievable.

The issue is now more important than ever, because most folk see broadband as a right rather than a privilege. The expectation of a good internet connection in the home and in the workplace, where it can bring a boost to businesses and jobs, would be a great pull factor in terms of encouraging people back to the islands and helping to reverse the declining population. Of course, the necessity of broadband has been mentioned by almost every speaker.

The cost of living is likely always to be an issue on Scotland's islands. It is unavoidable that the cost of transporting groceries to Stornoway will be higher than the cost of getting them to Aberdeen. Also of concern, and very much related to the issue of logistical difficulties, is the fact that a number of companies will not even deliver to island communities. Even though that number is falling, which is welcome, the surcharges that are applied have risen by 8.3 per cent since 2012. Rhoda Grant mentioned that.

In addition, we have heard today about the higher energy bills facing island residents. Many of those higher costs are the result of infrastructure challenges, with extremely limited access to the national gas grid, for instance. However, there is also a significantly higher proportion of low energy efficiency homes on the islands than there is in the rest of Scotland, which means that there is a double hit on household incomes—not only is energy more costly, people's houses leak heat at a higher rate. That explains why fuel poverty is a bigger problem on the islands than it is on the mainland. Neil Bibby, Emma Harper and Jamie Greene all mentioned that.

We also need a cost-effective and efficient ferry service. There is a difference in the subsidy levels between the Western Isles and Orkney and Shetland that needs to be addressed, and Rhoda Grant and Tavish Scott spoke about that. We also heard a lot in today's debate about HIE, which has an important role to play, and I am disappointed that HIE will be absorbed into a new national board.

The Presiding Officer is looking at me, so I will finish there.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You will, indeed—with one sentence.

**Peter Chapman:** Well, maybe two. [*Laughter.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, with one. Do not take me on.

**Peter Chapman:** It has been good to see members in broad agreement on the matter; we all recognise the scale of the challenge that we face in delivering more for the islands, and I hope that we can all work together to ensure the brightest possible future for our island communities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Either that was two sentences or you do not know how to punctuate.

16:51

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** Mr Chapman is a brave man, indeed, Presiding Officer.

There have been many interesting and diverse contributions from members across the chamber. Tavish Scott was absolutely correct in saying that a debate such as this allows us to air some issues, although there is not 100 per cent agreement on 100 per cent of the issues. There has been much consensus on the direction that we have to take, although there was some disagreement on the pace and on how it should be done. There is certainly a belief here that our island communities contribute greatly to Scotland and that devolution of powers to the island communities is important. There was great support across the chamber for the broad principles of the islands bill, too.

I welcome the Liberal Democrat's support for our commitment to create the islands plan and their appreciation for the islands strategic group. I am sure that Liam McArthur and Tavish Scott are regularly updated on the progress of that group.

Stewart Stevenson was correct in his intervention on the air discount scheme: this Government did increase the discount from 40 to 50 per cent, which is the maximum that is allowed under the terms. [*Interruption.*] There is a difference of interpretation about whether that is expanding or going back to business travel. My

officials tell me that it was never meant for business travel and, when we started to audit it properly, business travel was excluded.

**Tavish Scott:** No, no, no.

**Humza Yousaf:** I know that there is a difference in interpretation, but let me give Tavish Scott the assurance—in order to continue that consensus—that a proposal has been put forward by the local authorities that are involved and I have promised to look at it. He will understand that we are under financial constraints and pressures, but I have promised to look at it with an open mind.

I hope that Tavish Scott and Liam McArthur will be assured by what I have said in relation to the reduction of ferry fares to Orkney and Shetland, and I will continue to keep them updated on progress. I am not suggesting that there will be an exact match with what is happening in the Western Isles, but the expectation for those living in Orkney and Shetland is that there should be a significant reduction—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, could you speak into the microphone, please? I know that you are a gentleman and that you are looking at the two gentlemen whom you are addressing.

**Humza Yousaf:** There should be a significant reduction in those fares and I am exploring and considering that. I have had a number of discussions with stakeholders on the reduction in ferry fares and we had a consultation that the members will know about. Almost 2,000 online responses were received—an incredible response—and those are now being analysed. I will review those and inform elected members of my decision on the reduction and on the timescales for introducing that. I cannot support the Liberal Democrat amendment, because it would tie us in to a specific timescale. The members will understand that I have to carefully consider the 2,000 responses and I will keep them updated on what we will do.

The Liberal Democrats made good points about health boards and I refer them to the letter that they received from Shona Robison. The only driver behind the reorganisation of the health boards is to improve patient care.

The whole point of island proofing is not just about legislation but about our Government's policies; as far as island proofing is concerned, we would not put forward any policies that would damage the islands. I hope that that gives the member some reassurance.

Liam McArthur, in particular, made good points about fuel poverty—

**Liam McArthur:** Will the minister give way?

**Humza Yousaf:** Please let me make some progress.

I can furnish Mr McArthur with many of the details of what we are doing to address that issue, but he is right to say that Orkney has a particular problem. I also thought that his points about housing insulation and regulations were well made.

I have not yet figured the answer to Mr Wightman's riddle, but when I have the chance, I will Google it furiously. However, on the Crown Estate, I refer him to our manifesto, which contains a commitment to ensure that

"island communities receive the full revenues from Crown Estate assets around their shores and have a greater say in how the assets of the Crown Estate are managed".

I am also bearing in mind what was agreed by the Smith commission. With regard to the pilot that has been proposed by the three wholly island councils, I have entered into very constructive discussions with them, and I am also having constructive discussions with my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform.

Turning to Rhoda Grant's contribution and indeed other contributions from Labour members, I have to say that there is much in the Labour amendment that we agree with. I also want to give some reassurance on various matters. First, I accept that more has to be done. I am not saying that we have made progress and that the islands bill will be the end of it; there is always progress to be made. That is absolutely correct, and I want to reassure Rhoda Grant in that respect.

Ms Grant was absolutely right to say that island communities should be more involved in decision making on transport links, and I assure her that we are doing that, as evidenced by our consultation on ferry fares for services to the northern isles and whether they can be reduced, and by what we are doing with regard to the Ardrossan to Brodick ferry service and the proposal in that respect from Troon, which has been mentioned by a number of members this afternoon. The STAG-style appraisal and consultation will allow communities to input directly into the service that they want.

However, I cannot accept Labour's amendment for the same reason that I cannot accept the Conservative amendment: what it says about Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I entirely agree that Highlands and Islands Enterprise has done some great work. We have partnered with it, we have funded it and we have supported it in its work. Let us not forget that without this Government's funding alongside HIE, there would be no fibre broadband anywhere in Scotland. We have committed to retaining Highlands and Islands Enterprise; indeed, that is the very point.

*[Interruption.]* Let me just make this point. My colleague Keith Brown, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, has had discussions about phase 2, which will look at how the board moves forward. Indeed, the chairs of the agencies, including HIE, were at that meeting.

What we want is streamlining and alignment across Scotland. Why should Skills Development Scotland not benefit from Highlands and Islands Enterprise's great expertise? Of course it should. What people want on the ground is local service delivery. That will be maintained. As I have said, there will be alignment with regard to the board.

**Rhoda Grant:** Does the minister not believe that the board has some influence and that a board that is grounded and rooted in its community will bring forward proposals and take actions that benefit that local community? He often says that he comes from Glasgow and is not an expert; I can tell him that people who come from outwith the Highlands and Islands will not be experts either. We need local people with the expertise to make decisions that affect us.

**Humza Yousaf:** Phase 2 of the review will engage with agencies and their existing boards and draw on advice from other experts in developing and consulting on the detailed scope of the functions of the new statutory board. We have listened and we are listening; we are taking forward this review, and we are bringing in the chairs of the various enterprise agencies to inform it. However, what matters to businesses on the ground is local delivery, and that will absolutely be maintained.

I cannot accept the Conservative amendment for that very reason. I am finding it hard to swallow that the Conservatives care about what happens to HIE, when all the work that it supports is threatened by Brexit. All the jobs, the businesses and the projects that HIE supports are absolutely affected by Brexit; indeed, it is the biggest threat that they face.

I and this Government are totally committed to supporting and strengthening Scotland's isles. We have an ambitious programme of action to create a lasting and enduring framework that will support and act as a catalyst to ensure the continued wellbeing of our island communities. We will work with all local interests, particularly the islands strategic group, where we have to, and we will always listen and do our best to act.

Members across the chamber have raised many issues. We will look to incorporate them when it comes to considering our islands bill and phase 2 of the review of the enterprise agencies. Many other issues have been discussed that we will reflect on.

I look forward to working with members across the chamber when we introduce the islands bill, which will be historic. The communities on our islands deserve no better than our working collaboratively where we can to strengthen local democracy for those who live on our islands.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Before we conclude, I ask Mr Wightman whether he will give members the answer to his earlier riddle.

**Andy Wightman:** The answer is in Maree Todd's constituency. In fact, it is on one of the islands in the loch that she is named after: Loch Maree.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you.

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-02686.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02686, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on supporting and strengthening Scotland's island communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 53, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-02686.4, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02686, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on supporting and strengthening Scotland's island communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 53, Against 61, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-02686.1, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02686, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on supporting and strengthening Scotland's island communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 26, Against 62, Abstentions 28.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S5M-02686, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on supporting and strengthening Scotland's island communities, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the significant contribution that island communities make to Scotland's cultural and economic wellbeing; commends the role of the Our Islands, Our Future campaign, led by the councils of Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles in championing islands' interests; acknowledges that there is more to do to address some of the challenges faced by Scotland's islands, including remoteness, declining populations, connectivity and creating sustainable economic development, and notes the establishment of the Islands Strategic Group, the Scottish Government's forthcoming Islands Bill and proposals for a National Islands Plan, which will seek to strengthen and support the unique needs of Scotland's island communities.

*Meeting closed at 17:04.*



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

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