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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 22 December 2016

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

General Question Time

Hotel Businesses (Support)

1. Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): I draw members' attention to my register of interests, which shows that I own a hospitality business.

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support hotel businesses. (S5O-00509)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): A range of business support is available directly to hotels and to other tourism businesses throughout Scotland. The business gateway service offers a first point of contact for all public sector business support for pre-start, early stage and established businesses.

In the tourism sector, VisitScotland provides a global marketing platform, together with opportunities for engagement through business development missions and attendance at trade fairs. As well as giving free market intelligence and advice, VisitScotland offers support to individual businesses through its quality assurance schemes and, where appropriate, hotels may be assisted through direct enterprise agency support through one-to-one account management. In addition, skills support is available through the recently launched Scottish tourism skills investment plan.

Rachael Hamilton: Draft revaluations released on 6 December by the Scottish Assessors Association indicate that rateable values for hotels will increase by between 10 and 117 per cent, with initial analysis suggesting an average increase of 48 per cent. That will have a devastating effect on hotel businesses across Scotland, which have to pay eye-watering rates. They are labour-intensive businesses with high fixed overheads that operate on low margins and have highly price-sensitive customers. Hotels are already competing with Airbnb on unequal terms and they have seen cost pressure from wage increases and auto-enrolment. Is it the intention of the Scottish Government to make Scottish hotel businesses unsustainable and uncompetitive?

Fiona Hyslop: The member will be aware that the rates assessment is conducted through independent assessment, and it is very important that it is independent assessment. The member will also be aware that we announced as part of

the budget that the current poundage of 48.4p will be reduced to 46.6p. In those areas where the Scottish Government has control, we are therefore making efforts to ensure that we reduce the poundage burden. Of course, if the Conservative Party and its members vote against the budget, they will be voting against that reduction from 48.4p to 46.6p.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Rachael Hamilton, a hotel owner, has just asked a question about Scottish Government support for the hotel industry. That is the 24th time since May that the Tories have asked explicitly self-serving parliamentary questions to advance their own business interests. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is a completely inappropriate use of parliamentary time and resources?

Members: Hear, hear.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I am sorry, but that is not a question for the cabinet secretary.

Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

2. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to argue the case that Scotland's concerns are taken into account in relation to the comprehensive economic and trade agreement. (S5O-00510)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government has made clear to the United Kingdom Government and the European Commission that trade agreements must not adversely affect the delivery of public services, lower standards or limit the Government's right to regulate in the public interest. I wrote to the Secretary of State for International Trade last month re-emphasising that our ability to regulate and to determine how the national health service in Scotland should operate should in no way be compromised by trade agreements. I have not yet received a response.

As the member will know, regulation of international trade is a reserved matter under the Scotland Act 1998 and trade negotiations are led by the European Commission on behalf of the European Union's 28 member states. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament do not therefore have a direct say in, or direct influence on, negotiations or the ratification of any agreement.

Mark Ruskell: The cabinet secretary will be aware that I have asked over 14 questions now on this topic in recent months. Following the statement to members in the chamber on

Tuesday, perhaps we can get some clarity about CETA and the implications for Scotland. If Scotland remained a member of both the UK and the European Economic Area, would it be subject to the conditions of CETA in any future trading with Canada?

Keith Brown: The proposal that was made by the First Minister on Scotland's place in Europe includes a number of questions—for which we have to seek answers—that relate to the interests of other parties. Very senior people who are involved with that process have said to me that, if Scotland were to be represented by the UK in international trade agreements—rather than by the EU as at present—the UK would not have the expertise to properly defend and promote its interests. That is compared with a country such as Canada, which has huge experience and huge numbers of people who have been involved in negotiating trade agreements for many years. That possibility represents a clear and present danger to the interests of Scotland, so we will keep our eye on it.

We want to promote the best possible outcome for Scotland. The optimum outcome would be for us to represent our own interests internationally and to ensure that our interests are served in those discussions.

Budget (Edinburgh)

3. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its budget will affect the people of Edinburgh. (S5O-00511)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): We have invested in the Royal hospital for sick children and in the NHS Lothian partnership centre facilities—estimated to be operational in June 2017—and we have made a huge investment in the Queensferry crossing. The national health service in Lothian will receive funding of £1.34 billion in the next financial year alone and eight new or rebuilt schools in the east of the country will be operational or in construction in 2017-18, benefiting from £97 million of Scottish Government funding. Schools in the area will benefit directly from their share of almost £7.4 million from the attainment Scotland fund and the City of Edinburgh Council will receive more than £0.75 billion through the local government settlement. In addition, more than 12,000 businesses in the east of Scotland will save almost £26 million a year through the small business bonus. Those are just some of the positive policies from the budget.

Ben Macpherson: I strongly welcome the Scottish Government's strong commitment to invest in our capital city. With population levels rising in Edinburgh, I also welcome the Scottish

Government's commitment in the draft budget to invest £470 million of direct capital investment in affordable housing. How will Edinburgh, specifically, benefit from increased investment in social housing?

Derek Mackay: All members will welcome our excellent investment in housing. We have a target of 50,000 affordable homes—70 per cent of those homes will be for social rent—that is backed by an investment package of some £3 billion and that will benefit every part of Scotland. Having achieved a target of 30,000 homes in the previous parliamentary session, I look forward to this Government delivering a target of 50,000 homes in this parliamentary session. Our investment will include new innovative financial packages to stimulate growth across the sector and Edinburgh will be a main beneficiary of our excellent housing policies.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I want to give the cabinet secretary the opportunity to apologise to Edinburgh residents for the budget shambles last week. The Government had to contact the City of Edinburgh Council within days of the publication of the cabinet secretary's budget to tell the council that he had got the numbers wrong. In fact, the allocation to the City of Edinburgh Council was £9 million less than the published figures. Does the cabinet secretary think that that is a competent way of running Government finance?

Derek Mackay: I know that Miles Briggs is new to the chamber, but local government finance is incredibly complex. Miles Briggs might want to study very closely the evidence that I gave to his colleagues—[*Interruption.*] Labour Party members are heckling me and trying to divert me from my answer, but I know that Miles Briggs, as a very diligent member of the Parliament, will want to know the answer.

I encourage Miles Briggs to look at the evidence that I gave to the Local Government and Communities Committee on local government finance—I covered every question that was asked. He will be aware that the point of the exercise with the circular is to put out draft figures and to engage with local authorities individually and collectively. We have done that consultation exercise and we have delivered those technical arrangements.

Miles Briggs's commentary on the City of Edinburgh Council is not quite accurate regarding reductions. I am looking at the figures—[*Interruption.*] I will come to the figures, Mr Kelly. The figures show that the increase for the City of Edinburgh Council is more than £10 million. The citizens of the capital city will look forward to the increased spending power that the council and that all local government services will have. Looking at the totality of the figure, it is not just an

increase of £10 million—in fact, it is an increase of more than £18 million.

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

The leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, Andrew Burns, describes the settlement for Edinburgh as

“The worst revenue settlement since devolution”.

He goes on to say:

“Rarely in my near 18-years as a Local Councillor have I seen so much spin and manipulation of figures”,

and he points out that Edinburgh will receive £37 million less than it did in last year’s budget. Local government leaders and finance directors across Scotland are warning that we will see deep cuts in public services. Are they all wrong?

Derek Mackay: If local authorities are not happy with the settlement that I have given them, why has the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities not rejected it? It is still under discussion.

It does not surprise me that Alex Rowley is quoting a Labour council leader to undermine the Scottish Government’s position. I have ensured that the city council will have extra resources, looking at the total package and including the integration authorities, which is the point of integration. The extra resource to the Edinburgh area is more than £18 million, which is a 2.3 per cent increase.

Included in the Main Campaign

4. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to implement the recommendations of the Enable Scotland report, “#IncludED in the Main?!”. (S5O-00512)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government will consider the recommendations of the Enable Scotland report “#IncludED in the Main?!” in conjunction with the advisory group for additional support for learning and other key stakeholders.

Jeremy Balfour: The cabinet secretary will be aware that more than 80 per cent of the education workforce who participated in the Enable Scotland national conversation felt that we are not getting it right for every child with the presumption that all children should be taught in a mainstream setting. Does he agree that, in some cases, mainstreaming can intensify the feelings of isolation and exclusion that are experienced by some children with a learning or physical disability, and that a child’s educational requirement should be based on their individual needs and background? Does he agree that the time has come for the Scottish Government to review the

current guidelines, not just looking at what happens in the classroom but taking a holistic approach to the whole school day?

John Swinney: I agree with a lot of Mr Balfour’s analysis. We have to make individual judgments about the educational needs of every child; that approach is at the heart of the getting it right for every child agenda, and it should be applied in all circumstances. I am still a firm believer in the presumption of mainstreaming, but I would not want that to be perceived as ruling out provision in a special educational setting that meets the needs of individual young people. In principle, I pretty much agree with the analysis that Mr Balfour described.

With regard to the wider exercise of our responsibilities in respect of additional support for learning, ministers have reviewed performance in that area on a five-year basis. I intend to continue to look very closely at those issues, recognising the interest that the Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee has taken in the matter and the wider issues that the Enable Scotland report raises, and I will continue that dialogue in the period ahead.

Higher-rate Taxpayers

5. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to attract more higher-rate taxpayers to Scotland. (S5O-00513)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Our income tax proposals for 2017-18 and beyond will ensure that Scotland continues to be an attractive place in which to live, work and do business. Tax is only one side of the balance sheet. As we are not passing on the Tory tax cut, those on higher incomes will benefit from the social contract, which includes free higher education, free personal care, free prescriptions and other vital public services in Scotland, and which maintains Scotland as an overall attractive place in which to live and invest.

Alison Harris: Can the cabinet secretary explain why Scotland has seen a decrease of 10,000 higher-rate taxpayers over the past year?

Derek Mackay: I do not know why the Conservatives are trying to pretend that our tax position going forward has affected the past. I am happy to look at the issue in further detail and share that information with Alison Harris, who I know is a former chartered accountant—perhaps she is currently practising; I do not know her position—and therefore takes the matter very seriously. I point out that all the predictions that she made in a previous debate on taxation have turned out not to be accurate.

Glasgow City Council (Meetings)

6. **Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Glasgow City Council and what issues were discussed. (S5O-00514)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Ministers and officials regularly meet representatives of all Scottish local authorities, including Glasgow City Council, to discuss a wide range of issues as part of our commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland. I most recently met the leader of Glasgow City Council, Frank McAveety, on 1 December, to discuss housing issues.

Ivan McKee: The minister will be aware that Glasgow City Council plans to contract out its information and communications technology services. He will also be aware of concerns that have been raised by the workforce and by Unison about the process that has led to that decision, including the fact that it appears to have been taken behind closed doors without a detailed options appraisal or business case being published, and the fact that the figures for claimed savings exist in isolation with no reasonable means of comparison, scrutiny or verification. Does he agree that that is a matter that the Accounts Commission could usefully investigate?

Kevin Stewart: I am aware of the concerns that have been expressed about Glasgow City Council's plan for delivery of information technology services. Councils are under a legal duty to demonstrate that they are delivering best value for their communities and that they are securing a balance between social, economic and environmental wellbeing in the way they operate. The member is right to say that the auditing of all councils' delivery of best value is the responsibility of the Accounts Commission. However, the commission is independent, so it would be for it to decide whether to look at the particular issue. As Mr McKee will also know, all local authorities are subject to freedom of information legislation and must therefore respond to requests for information about their decisions. They are also legally required to provide public access to their meetings and to their minutes and background papers, unless that would be a breach of confidentiality.

Disability Delivery Plan

7. **Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its disability delivery plan will assist people with learning disabilities and autism into employment. (S5O-00515)

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People" sets out a range of actions to support

disabled people into work. We will also introduce a one-year transitional service through a newly devolved employability programme for disabled people from April 2017, to provide continuity of service for those who need it most. It will be called work first Scotland and will deliver employment support for up to 3,300 disabled people. People with learning disabilities and autism will be eligible for the service. In addition, there is a package of specialist employer support tailored to the needs of individuals, which is being delivered nationally by the open doors consortium, which is a partnership made up of Scotland's leading special employment providers. Enable Scotland is part of the consortium and we look forward to meeting in the new year.

Linda Fabiani: Is the minister aware of the Furnishing Service, which is based in East Kilbride? It is an accredited living-wage employer that offers work experience schemes with Sanderson high school, which is a special needs senior school. The work experience programmes have turned out to be beneficial and are bringing out the great abilities that many people who attend Sanderson high school have. Would he consider visiting the Furnishing Service and Sanderson high school to see examples of the support that can be given, as a way of encouraging other employers to do likewise in their communities?

Jamie Hepburn: We have in place our developing the young workforce strategy, which is designed to encourage far better interaction between the school environment and employers right across the country. We are seeing that happen increasingly and I believe that it is important for all Scotland's pupils to be able to have better access to the labour market, but particularly for those who are furthest removed from that labour market. In that regard, I congratulate Sanderson high school and the Furnishing Service. As Linda Fabiani has said, they have set a positive example, and I encourage others in East Kilbride and South Lanarkshire and across Scotland to follow that example. I would be very happy to visit Sanderson high school and the Furnishing Service at some point in the new year.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

8. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport last met NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and what issues were discussed. (S5O-00516)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly meet representatives of all boards to discuss matters of local importance.

Neil Bibby: At the start of this year, the First Minister promised the people of Inverclyde that services at Inverclyde royal hospital were safe. This week, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde agreed to hold a formal consultation on the closure of the birthing units at Inverclyde royal hospital and Vale of Leven hospital. If the cabinet secretary will not make good on her Government's pre-election promise and commit to stopping the closure of the birthing unit today, will she at the very least take the opportunity to tell people in Inverclyde when she will make that very important decision?

Shona Robison: As Neil Bibby has just said, the NHS board agreed at its meeting this week that the proposals for Inverclyde royal hospital and Vale of Leven hospital were to be major service changes. Of course, that means that those major service changes will come to me. That is exactly what the member has been arguing for all along, I think. I hope that he will be satisfied that that is the case.

Paul Gray, the director general for health and social care, has written to the chair of Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board today to ensure that the terms of the consultation are consistent with the recommendations of the review of maternity and neonatal services which, as the member knows, will be published in the new year. Mr Gray is reiterating to the board chair that it is important that the recommendations of the review are understood before the consultation issues on Inverclyde royal hospital and Vale of Leven hospital.

As I have said before, I am happy to keep Neil Bibby and other members updated as the proposals proceed, but I am sure he will be satisfied that ultimately the decision will be mine.

First Minister's Question Time

12:01

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): At this, the last First Minister's question time before Christmas, I wish all members and people across Scotland all the compliments of the season. I will ask my question in a spirit of good will.

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00670)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I too wish you, Presiding Officer, members and everybody across the country a very happy Christmas and a good new year.

Reciprocating that spirit of good will, I can advise the Parliament that, later today, I will have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland—plus, probably, a spot of Christmas shopping.

Ruth Davidson: In the last 90 minutes, the Auditor General for Scotland has reported back on the Scottish Police Authority. For the third year running, she has cited

"weak financial leadership and management".

She describes that as "unacceptable". How does the First Minister put it?

The First Minister: I agree with the conclusion that the Auditor General reached in the report published this morning. She says that the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland have taken

"steps to improve ... financial leadership ... and governance arrangements but these have not yet had a chance to have an impact."

Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority are working to improve their financial management, which the Parliament should support.

The Scottish Government is working with the Police Authority and Police Scotland to ensure the financial sustainability of policing in the years ahead. That is why we have included in the draft budget a real-terms increase in protection for the resource budget of the Scottish Police Authority and an increase in the capital budget—and we are also continuing the reform budget. That is all intended to put the police on a good financial footing so that they can continue the excellent work that they do.

Ruth Davidson: I note the First Minister's reply, and I will get to the budget in a second, but let us just spell out the report itself. Last year, the

Auditor General said that there was a potential funding gap of £84 million by 2018-19. This year, we learn that the cumulative funding gap that our police service may face over the course of this parliamentary session is now running at £190 million.

Poor leadership is responsible, says Audit Scotland. It says that there are inaccurate financial records, and that the Scottish Police Authority is failing to provide information about what money is being spent on.

The report from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland, which is also out this morning, says that

"urgent work is still needed"

to improve the way that public funds are being spent. Does the First Minister really have confidence that the system is working or indeed improving?

The First Minister: In the section 22 report that was published this morning, which I quoted in response to Ruth Davidson's earlier question, the Auditor General said that the SPA and Police Scotland are taking

"steps to improve ... financial leadership ... and governance arrangements but these have not yet had a chance to have an impact."

That is the conclusion of the Auditor General, which I support.

On the wider budget issues, as I said, we are protecting the Scottish Police Authority's resource budget in real terms. That is important, given the challenges that our police service faces. We are also ensuring a real-terms increase in the capital budget, and the reform budget, which should have ended completely by now, is being continued to assist the police with the on-going work of reform.

As members will be aware, the police are also working on their long-term strategic plan and associated financial strategy as part of the policing 2026 programme. I met the chief constable and the chair of the Scottish Police Authority earlier this month to discuss their progress on that work. We will continue to work with and support the police as they face up to the challenges ahead.

I will say one final thing. Right now, there would be an additional £25 million a year available to the police if—[*Interruption.*] The Conservatives do not like to hear this. There would be £25 million a year extra available to invest in our police if the United Kingdom Government did not insist on making Police Scotland the only police authority in the entirety of the UK that has to pay VAT. Will Ruth Davidson get behind our calls to stop that?

Ruth Davidson: The charges from the Auditor General are "weak financial leadership",

"inaccurate records" and "poor financial management". Running to "Westminster bad" is not exactly going to cut it, First Minister.

There is something terribly familiar about all the responses that we have heard so far today. We have heard that it is terribly regrettable, that it is all in the past and that we are going to do better. Let me read out the reaction from the Scottish Government to last year's report from the Auditor General, which says exactly the same thing:

"The commitments given in this week's Scottish government draft budget ... will put the police budget on a sustainable footing for future years."

A year on, Police Scotland is now staring down the barrel of a £190 million budget deficit. We have heard it all before.

There is an issue in the two reports that were published today that I want to address specifically: transparency. The Auditor General says that there is

"very limited publicly available detail"

provided to the Scottish Police Authority board on how Police Scotland spends its money. Let me read verbatim from the report. It states that

"the SPA allocated £972.9 million to Police Scotland for 2016/17. There was very limited publicly available detail provided to the SPA Board in its papers about what this allocation was to deliver."

In other words, nearly £1 billion of funds was handed to Police Scotland without our knowing what it was for. Does the First Minister find that as extraordinary as I do?

The First Minister: The £1 billion that we invest in our police provides the police officers the length and breadth of this country who keep this country safe. If Ruth Davidson does not know what the police budget is for, I suggest that she does a bit more homework in the future before she comes to the chamber. There are also 1,000 more police officers across this country as a result of the investment and commitment of this Government.

Let me return to the Audit Scotland report. When I quoted it, I was doing exactly that—quoting the Auditor General. I will do it again. The conclusion of the report that was published this morning states:

"The SPA and Police Scotland have begun to take steps to improve both financial leadership and management and governance arrangements but these have not yet had a chance to have an impact."

That is not my view; that is the view of the Auditor General. I would expect the SPA and Police Scotland to act on all the recommendations that have been made by Audit Scotland and by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

The one point that Ruth Davidson did not address in her question is the VAT position, which is material. The UK Government tells us that, because the police service in Scotland is funded by central Government, it has to pay tax. Do we know what the UK Government did when it decided to set up academy schools in England and fund them from central Government? It amended the Value Added Tax Act 1994 in order to exempt academy schools from VAT. There is £25 million pounds a year, right now, that should be going to our police service but is going to the Treasury. Ruth Davidson will not have any credibility when she stands here talking about the police until she backs us in telling her Tory colleagues at Westminster to do the right thing and stop taking money out of the pockets of our police service.

Ruth Davidson: The Scottish Government was warned about VAT—it knew what would happen and it did not listen to Parliament. You know that the First Minister is in trouble when she cannot answer for herself but runs to “Westminster bad”.

Twice today, the First Minister has stood up and talked about the increasing police budget. Let us have a look at that, because I want to challenge the First Minister on it. The Scottish Government claims that the policing budget is going up by £7 million in real terms, but, like everything else in last week’s budget, that is not quite what it seems. The reform budget, which was £55 million last year, was reduced to £36 million for this year. We asked the Scottish Police Federation about that, and it says that, despite its name—and what the First Minister tries to claim—the reform budget is crucial in terms of service delivery. In fact, far from increasing the amount of money that the single force has by £7 million, it appears that the SNP is actually cutting it by almost £12 million.

On top of cuts to councils and double counting, is this not just another stealth cut that is emerging from Derek Mackay’s slightly unravelling budget?

The First Minister: The resource budget of the Scottish Police Authority is not increasing by £7 million, as Ruth Davidson says, but is increasing by £19 million—that is real-terms protection for the resource budget. The capital budget is going up by just under £4 million, which is also a real-terms increase. That is the reality.

Ruth Davidson talks about the reform budget. That budget should have been completely ended two financial years ago. Instead of that, we have continued support through the reform budget to assist the police in making the reforms that they need.

Let us come back to the nub of the issue. Ruth Davidson is standing up here again, as she does week after week, asking for more money for the

police, the health service and education, but where is that money coming from? The only criticism of our budget that Ruth Davidson wanted to make last week was that we were not giving big enough tax cuts to the richest earners in Scotland. Here is the incoherence and inconsistency at the heart of the Tory proposition: tax cuts for the rich, but standing up in Parliament asking for more money for every single public service.

As we know, there is a potential source of additional money for our police service. Ruth Davidson has just conceded that the UK Government’s refusal to exempt our police service from VAT is nothing more than political spite. The UK Government can do it for academy schools in England but it will not do it for police services across Scotland. That is absolutely despicable and the Tories should be ashamed of themselves.

Engagements

2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): On behalf of the Labour Party, I wish everybody a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. I ask my question in that spirit.

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-00688)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Engagements to take forward the Government’s programme for Scotland.

Kezia Dugdale: This morning, Audit Scotland published a damning report on Scotland’s police bodies; the report was laid before Parliament. The decision to publish it little more than two hours before we break for the Christmas holidays was made by the Scottish Government. What was the First Minister trying to hide?

The First Minister: The report requires to be laid before Parliament by 31 December each year, and the accounts were only approved by the Scottish Police Authority board last Thursday afternoon. We have published the report to give Parliament due chance to consider it. The evidence that Parliament is able to properly consider and scrutinise it is right before us today, given that the Opposition leaders are asking questions about it.

Kezia Dugdale: This is a First Minister who, time and time again in the chamber, promises us openness and transparency. She tells us that she respects Parliament, yet that is how she treats it in relation to a serious report about the state of our police.

The Auditor General for Scotland estimates that the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland could face a funding gap of almost £190 million by the end of this parliamentary session. That will cause considerable alarm in communities

throughout Scotland. Rather than having a force that is committed to keeping our communities safe, we have one that is desperately trying to balance the books. When will the First Minister realise that our public services are in crisis?

The First Minister: On the timing of the report, as I said, we have until 31 December to publish the report and lay it before the Parliament. It is a nine-page report. I think that even the Opposition can manage to read a nine-page report in an hour and a half before First Minister's questions. The fact that it has been published this morning gives—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Order.

The First Minister: That gives every Opposition leader the chance to ask questions at First Minister's questions, as they are doing.

On the police's financial position, as I have already said, the resource budget is being protected in real terms and the capital budget is increasing by, I think, more than real terms. We are continuing support through the reform budget and continuing to make the case for the police no longer having to pay VAT, which no other police authority in the country has to do. Will the Labour Party support us in asking the Tories to stop taking money out of the pockets of our police?

Kezia Dugdale: We can read the report in 90 minutes; it is a shame that it took the First Minister a week. If she had any confidence in the report, she would not have published it two hours before the Christmas recess.

As the year draws to a close, this is a good time to look back at the Scottish National Party's record: the national health service and the police are in crisis; school standards are slipping; and the budget is unravelling in slow motion.

SNP MSPs should be embarrassed by the budget, not queueing up to get copies of it signed. There is a shortfall of £200 million in the police service budget and the First Minister says that she is protecting that service—God help our schools and hospitals. The truth is that the SNP is cutting £327 million from local services. When will the First Minister use the Parliament's powers and do the right thing? Stop the cuts.

The First Minister: In the unlikely event that Labour had won the election, the NHS budget would be going up by inflation; under this Government, it will go up by £500 million more than inflation. Funding for local services in the draft budget will increase by £240 million. That includes £120 million more for our schools and an extra £107 million for social care, to provide the services that we need to alleviate the pressure on

our national health service. Therefore, it is a budget about protecting public services.

If we look back to the relative records of different parties over the past year, we see that Kezia Dugdale's crowning glory has been to lead her party to 15 per cent in the opinion polls. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: I know that we are nearing the end of the term, but will members please listen to one another?

We have a couple of supplementaries.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I recently met a group of single parents from Maryhill who raised serious concerns with me about the planned closure of the local jobcentre by the United Kingdom Department for Work and Pensions. The plans are currently out to consultation. The concerns include, to name but a few: the distance, cost and time involved in travelling to the alternative jobcentre in Springburn; a poorer employability service; potential additional sanctions; and the impact on schooling and childcare.

I ask the First Minister to make representations to the UK Government on any concerns that the Government may share about how the proposed closures might impact on vulnerable groups. Does she agree that it would be best if Jobcentre Plus were to abandon the current DWP proposals to close eight jobcentres in Glasgow and if there were a fundamental review and rethink of how best to support vulnerable groups in the city?

The First Minister: Bob Doris raises very real concerns. They are concerns that I share, not least because the changes, if they were to go ahead, would affect my constituents on the south side of Glasgow as well. I know that Jamie Hepburn, the Minister for Employability and Training, has already raised concerns about the impact of the changes on vulnerable groups in Glasgow and, in particular, about how they could reduce access to services and result in additional costs for those who would have to travel further to access them. He is also seeking urgent clarification on the future of Jobcentre Plus facilities across the rest of the country.

I understand that the DWP has extended its consultation until 31 January, and I have asked Jamie Hepburn to ensure that the views of the Scottish Government are expressed clearly and directly to DWP ministers by that date.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The epicentre of storm Barbara will be in the Highlands and Islands, where winds of up to 90mph will destroy property, cut power lines and dislocate road, rail, ferry and air services. Is the First Minister confident that the transport system is

prepared for and resilient enough to cope with the forthcoming severe weather?

The First Minister: The member raises important issues of concern. The Scottish Government resilience arrangements have been activated already to ensure that Scotland is as prepared as possible for the severe weather that is expected across the rest of this week. The relevant authorities have activated their plans to deal with any potential impacts, and extra staffing and on-call arrangements are in place over the festive period.

Yesterday, the Minister for Transport and the Islands chaired a meeting with key partners to discuss the Scottish Government resilience arrangements, and he will continue to chair the daily adverse weather meetings going forward. Of course, public safety remains our absolute top priority. I urge people to listen to the latest advice on local radio and digital channels, and to check before they travel.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): Still on storms, as we approach the anniversary of storm Frank, an estimated 70 families have still not returned to their homes, and Aberdeenshire Council has spent more than £11 million on the clean-up bill.

The residents of Ballater and Kemnay are feeling forgotten, flood repairs are inadequate or non-existent, and people are rightly concerned that they are still at risk this winter. Can the First Minister reassure them that the Scottish Government is doing all that it can to protect them and their families from future floods?

The First Minister: Yes, I can. It is an important issue. This time last year, I saw with my own eyes the damage that flooding did to many individuals' homes, and, indeed, many businesses, across the northern and the southern parts of the country. I can assure the member that those who were affected and those who are still out of their homes as a result of the damage that was done last year have not been forgotten.

With our partners in local authorities, the Scottish Government has been doing and will continue to do everything that we can to ensure that the damage is dealt with, that those affected can get back into their homes as quickly as possible and that, through our flood risk management planning, we reduce—we can never eliminate it—the risk of it happening in the future.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-00681)

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

Willie Rennie: Apex Scotland has 30 years' experience of working in prisons. Its chief executive says that a majority of young offenders have a mental health condition, yet he also says that access to mental health services is "poor or non-existent."

The latest figures show that there was a sixfold increase in the number of attempted suicides at Polmont young offenders institution in just one year. Apex Scotland says that mental health services for young offenders are being left far behind, just like those in the rest of the country. Will the First Minister give me a guarantee that mental health services for young offenders will change?

The First Minister: That is certainly the Scottish Government's intention. I agree with Willie Rennie. This is not a new thing; it is a generations-old issue. If mental health services generally have tended to be the Cinderella service, that is particularly true when we talk about dealing with young offenders in our prisons.

It is absolutely the case that many people—particularly young people—who find themselves in prison suffer from mental health issues. It is therefore incumbent on all of us to make sure that they have access to good-quality mental health services to deal with what are often the underlying causes of their offending.

I have said many times in the chamber and I say again that we are seeing a substantial increase in demand for mental health services. We should recognise that as a positive, as it points to a reduction in the stigma that is associated with mental health issues, but we have an absolute obligation to make sure that we can meet that rising demand. That is why our mental health strategy is so important and why we are taking so much time and care to make sure that we get it right. It is also why the additional investment that we have planned in mental health services is important.

Willie Rennie: The problem for the First Minister is that the mental health strategy does not even mention mental health services for young offenders—there is not one mention of that. I have told her before that many organisations think that the strategy is just not good enough. Marie Curie says that there is nothing for the terminally ill, and the strategy has been criticised by the Royal College of Nursing Scotland, the psychiatrists and a whole lot of charities.

The £10 million that was announced at the weekend is a drop in the ocean. All the while, people are struggling. Hundreds of teenagers are still waiting for more than a year to get the help

that they need, 11 out of 14 health boards cannot even meet the basic target and Police Scotland has lost 200,000 working days as a result of mental ill health.

Does the First Minister accept that the draft mental health strategy, which is already a year late, needs a major rewrite?

The First Minister: The problem for Willie Rennie is that he alleges that the mental health strategy does not cover the issue, but the strategy has not been published yet and will not be published until the new year. We are taking time and care to make sure that the consultation responses, some of which he cited, are properly taken into account. The Health and Sport Committee asked us not to publish the strategy until it had had the opportunity to feed into the process properly.

Publishing a draft document for consultation is a normal part of the process of developing such strategies. What we hear and the input that we get from organisations such as those that Willie Rennie spoke about are a crucial part of making sure that, when we publish the final strategy, it takes account of those important points. I encourage Willie Rennie and any other member to continue to play a constructive role in helping us to ensure that on this very important issue we get it right in all the different aspects.

On the general point about child and adolescent mental health services, I have recognised before and continue to recognise the big challenge that confronts us because of rising demand. We have a lot of work still to do, but we are seeing rising numbers of workers in the area and we are starting to see waiting times improve, although they have an awful long way to go.

We have a lot to do, but we are heading in the right direction and our mental health strategy will help us to accelerate the pace of that. When it is published in the new year, I hope that all members will get behind it. As I have said, this is one of the most important issues to get to grips with in the years to come, not just for the Government but for all our partners working in the area.

The Presiding Officer: We will have some supplementaries.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): What will the focus of the Government's new international development strategy be?

The First Minister: Our new international development strategy was published yesterday. It has at its core the aim of tackling global poverty, injustice and inequality and working in partnership with others to achieve the United Nations global goals. Since 2005, we have supported hundreds

of projects to deliver healthcare, to give children access to education, to give families access to energy and to support people to gain employment to lift themselves out of poverty. The strategy will build on that work and will focus on four partner countries—Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda and Pakistan—to allow our funding to have a bigger impact on the lives of the people whom we work with.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Last Thursday—[*Interruption.*] Thank you very much. Last Thursday, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice provided me with a written answer about Scottish Police Authority committee meetings being held behind closed doors, which he said was a matter for the SPA. Later that day, a member of the SPA raised concerns about openness and transparency. The report from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland was published about 90 minutes ago, and it has 17 pages. If the First Minister has got to page 5, she will have read that it questions the decision to hold committee meetings in private. What will the First Minister do to ensure that the SPA carries out its functions in ways that are proportionate, accountable and transparent, as required by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, which her Government passed?

The First Minister: I expect the SPA to take account of, and make sure that it implements, the views and recommendations of both the Auditor General and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. That includes the views that have been expressed in the report this morning about openness and transparency.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Given the unacceptable decision by Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board to close the in-patient facility at the centre for integrative care and given that, under the original agreement, that decision can be taken only by the Secretary of State for Scotland—it is now devolved to the Scottish Government—will the First Minister respect the decision of this Parliament in a vote and instruct the health secretary to stop hiding behind the board and call in the decision?

The First Minister: As the member is aware, we take all such decisions seriously. We ask the Scottish health council to inform decisions about which proposed service changes are to be treated as major service changes and which do not require that. We will continue to follow that advice and we will continue to make sure that we support local services and the reforms that are required in our health service to make sure that patients across the country get the services that they are entitled to expect.

British Values Oath

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

To ask the First Minister what discussions the Scottish Government has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the proposal by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government that holders of public office should swear an oath to uphold “British values”. (S5F-00706)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government has had no communication from the UK Government in relation to the secretary of state’s response—which was premature, in my view—to “The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration” on social cohesion. We respect the work that has been published by Dame Louise Casey on integration and opportunity. The Scottish Government will certainly consider her suggestions carefully in terms of their relevance to Scotland.

John Mason: I thank the First Minister for that answer. Is the First Minister any clearer than I am as to what British values actually are and whether everyone in Scotland should be expected to have them? I, for one, certainly do not feel particularly British.

The First Minister: It is an important issue and—as I said—we respect the work that has been carried out by Dame Louise Casey, which deserves to be given proper consideration. I suggest that the UK Government do the same, and commit to giving it proper consideration rather than taking the premature step of announcing that all public servants should be compelled to swear an oath. Such an oath potentially risks exclusion of people who do not define their values as being uniquely British.

As a nation—I hope that this is something that all members across the chamber agree with—Scotland has a long history of welcoming people of all nationalities and all faiths. We are committed to supporting their integration into our communities. That is not, in my view, done through swearing of oaths but by creating a country where everyone has an opportunity to flourish, where diversity is truly welcomed and celebrated, where we judge people on the contribution that they make to our country while they are here, and where we do not expect them to give up their own identities and backgrounds in the process.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I declare an interest as a member of the district of Stirling licensing board. A decade ago, none of us would have predicted the growth of online sales—

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry—I thought that you were going to ask a supplementary on

John Mason’s question. This is a general supplementary, which I did not take you for previously, so I apologise—I am afraid that you cannot ask your question.

Mark Ruskell: I cannot?

Members: It’s Christmas!

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ruskell will be happy with that very sympathetic response from the chamber. We move to question 5.

Headteachers (Powers)

5. **Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to the call by the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland for the extension of powers to headteachers. (S5F-00680)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We believe that, wherever possible, decisions about children’s learning should be decided at school level. We therefore welcome the response to the governance review from the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland, which proposes increasing the powers of our headteachers in order to have the biggest positive impact on learning, teaching and outcomes for our children. The Scottish Government will, of course, consider all responses and contributions to our review of governance of education in Scotland, which closes on 6 January.

Liz Smith: I thank the First Minister for that. It is good to hear.

The First Minister will, I am sure, acknowledge the long-standing success of Jordanhill school in Glasgow, but she will also know that a number of schools that want to adopt different governance arrangements within the state sector face constraints because Parliament repealed the Self-Governing Schools etc (Scotland) Act 1989.

Will the First Minister say whether it is the Scottish Government’s intention to amend existing legislation to make it much easier to meet the growing demand for greater diversity in the state sector and the growing demand from headteachers for greater autonomy, and to give more power to parents?

The First Minister: We have made very clear our desire for more power to lie with headteachers and individual schools. That presumption lies at the heart of the governance review. That said, John Swinney also made it clear when he launched the review that we believe that local councils should continue to have democratic oversight of, and accountability for, education.

I absolutely want to ensure that the steps that we take are guided by the need to raise standards

and to close the attainment gap, and not by ideology on one side or the other. That is why we set up the governance review and will listen to all contributions to it. The consultation closes on 6 January, as I said, and we will take time to consider the contributions. John Swinney will set out our plans, including whether there is a requirement for legislative change, after that.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I welcome the First Minister's acknowledgement of the pivotal role that headteachers play in providing leadership in schools across my constituency and the whole of Scotland. What is the Scottish Government doing to strengthen school leadership and to invest in headteachers' skills and professional development?

The First Minister: Strengthening leadership was a key recommendation in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's review of Scottish education. The changes that we are proposing in the consultation on the standard for headship and the draft Head Teachers Education and Training Standards (Scotland) Regulations are intended to do that by enabling future headteachers to acquire the leadership skills and support that they need. The draft regulations will give education authorities flexibility to deal with individual local circumstances—in particular, in relation to temporary appointments.

We absolutely acknowledge the importance of education leadership and we are committed to supporting teachers who want to take the step into headship. That is why we are funding the new "into headship" qualification at a cost of up to £1.5 million to 2018.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Eighteen out of 29 headteachers in Shetland teach in classrooms. They struggle to find enough time in the day, as it is. If the Government plans to give headteachers more responsibilities, what part of the workload will go?

The First Minister: I think that there is a strong desire among headteachers for the greater responsibility that we are talking about, but I accept—I do not think that John Swinney could have been any clearer about this since he took up the post of Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills—the need to ensure that we address excessive workloads of teachers. That is why steps have been taken to reduce unnecessary workload and bureaucracy.

I very much acknowledge that in rural and island areas that might be a particular challenge, which we must address. I am sure that John Swinney will be happy to discuss the matter directly with Tavish Scott.

We will take all such issues into account. Our absolute determination, as I have said many times

over the course of this year and will continue to say as we go into next year, is to raise standards in our schools and close the attainment gap. One way—not the only way—of doing that is to support leadership in our schools and give the leaders in our schools the ability, the powers and the freedom to get on with the jobs that they do best.

Destitute People

6. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the number of destitute people sleeping on Scotland's streets this Christmas. (S5F-00693)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In my view, as long as there is one person sleeping rough on our streets, not just at Christmas but at any time of the year, that is one person too many.

The number of homeless people reporting that they have slept rough before applying for housing support in Scotland has decreased every year for the past five years. However, we know that only those who approach local authorities are recorded. That is why we are working with stakeholders to gather more robust data on the figures for people who are rough sleeping and to assess people's often very complex needs, so that we can continue to take action that will support people to move off the streets and into a home of their own.

Pauline McNeill: It is a sad fact that many people will be sleeping rough this Christmas on our streets—rough sleeping is a visible scourge in our society. The figures that I have show that there was a dramatic increase in rough sleeping last year. That trend is likely to continue. We know from press reports that Glasgow City Mission and the Bethany Christian Trust in Edinburgh are turning people away from their night shelters. There also seems to be a severe shortage of emergency accommodation for women, for some reason.

Will the First Minister look at two areas of Government policy in this regard? First, will she consider initiating national co-ordination to ensure that there is provision for women in emergency night shelters, at least until we can eradicate rough sleeping and homelessness? Secondly, will the First Minister also look at a model that has been adopted in Nordic countries and used in Glasgow? Housing first is simply a model that quickly provides accommodation and permanent homes but, importantly, it wraps the services around the person's particular problems, which might be the ones that have led them into homelessness in the first place. That policy is certainly worth looking at.

The First Minister: I thank Pauline McNeill for raising the issue and the constructive suggestions

that she has made. I will absolutely consider both of those points. Her point about access to night shelters for women is particularly important.

Pauline McNeill's second point, about the housing first model, is something that we are open to looking into, although some of our local authorities already use a model that is not dissimilar in some respects through their housing options work. After the new Moderator of the Church of Scotland took office, he specifically asked us to look at that model and I gave him a commitment that we would do so.

Pauline McNeill's question goes to the heart of the fact that people who find themselves rough sleeping are often people whose needs are not just for accommodation. They have accommodation needs, but they also have complex and multifaceted needs. We have to look at tackling the problem in a holistic way.

I made this point in my first answer—it is important to say that, although the official statistics say that rough sleeping has been reducing, we know that the official statistics do not necessarily tell the whole story. That is why we are working with partners to get more robust data.

I am happy to give a commitment to look into the points that Pauline McNeill raised—as I said, we have already been doing so with the latter one—and to report back to her in the new year.

Christmas Tree Industry

7. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to support the Christmas tree industry. (S5F-00691)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am delighted to say that there are two home-grown trees in Bute house this Christmas. If people have not already bought their Christmas tree for this Christmas, I urge them to consider buying a Scottish-grown tree; if they have already bought their tree, I urge them to consider it for next Christmas.

There is an important point behind the question. The Christmas tree industry is a privately funded sector but the Government is absolutely committed to continued investment in Scotland's wider forestry sector, which is an important part of our economy. The draft budget protects funding for forestry and increases the money that is available for forestry grants in the next financial year to £40 million.

Edward Mountain: I am delighted that the First Minister has bought two Christmas trees and I hope that they are, indeed, Scottish trees. More than 55 per cent of the UK's Christmas trees are produced in Scotland, many on the Black Isle,

which I represent. However, the UK still imports 2 million Christmas trees every year, so there is more to do.

As the First Minister pointed out, it is not just Christmas trees that are important to Scotland. Commercial forestry is also important, especially if we are to meet Scotland's timber needs and the Government's environmental targets. The Scottish National Party has missed its planting targets for the past three years. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: We should hear Mr Mountain's question.

Edward Mountain: I will repeat that, just in case the members opposite did not hear me the first time. The SNP has missed its planting target for the past three years. Does the First Minister really believe that the additional £4 million announced in the budget will be enough to make up the shortfall and to hit a target of 100,000 hectares of planting by 2020? No one else believes that it will.

The First Minister: The Tories' spending commitments are really piling up today. Unfortunately, they are relying on Santa to deliver them the resources that they need to fund those commitments.

There are important issues in the question. I can confirm—I think that I did so in my previous answer—that the Christmas trees in Bute house are Scottish grown. I cannot insist that people across the country buy home-grown Christmas trees, but I encourage them to do so because it is good for that sector of our economy.

On our planting targets, we are absolutely prioritising the action to increase the scale and pace of new woodland creation, and that is absolutely the right thing to do.

I hope that, as we go into the Christmas holidays, everybody enjoys their Christmas tree, wherever in the UK or elsewhere it happens to have been grown.

The Presiding Officer: We will have a final contribution from Graeme Dey.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): In the spirit of Christmas, which Edward Mountain was so uncharacteristically lacking, and on the subject of trees, will the First Minister join me in welcoming this week's community buyout of the historic Loch Arkaig pine forest as another step along the road towards Scotland's land being owned for the benefit of the many and not the few—something that we know the Tories are so supportive of?

The First Minister: We know that the Tories really do not like the principle of for the many

rather than the few; nevertheless, I think that it is one that we should support.

I very much welcome the community buyout, which has been achieved by the local community trust working with Woodland Trust Scotland. The 2,500 acres of Loch Arkaig forest form one of only 38 Caledonian pinewood inventory sites in Scotland. These are vital ancient native pinewoods, so it is really good to see the local community coming together to work with other agencies on a long-term plan to conserve and restore them. *[Interruption.]* I think that the Tories are demonstrating that they do not like the idea of land being owned by the many and not the few, but this Government is determined to continue down that road.

As that was the final contribution, Presiding Officer, in the absence of Christmas spirit from elsewhere in the chamber, I end by wishing you a very happy Christmas. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. That ends First Minister's questions. Parliament will resume in the new year. I take this opportunity to wish you all a peaceful and merry Christmas.

Meeting closed at 12:46.

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