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Wednesday 22 November 2017

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 22 November 2017

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

Portfolio Question Time

Education and Skills

Fife College (Meetings)

1. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Fife College and what issues were discussed. (S5O-01493)

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government regularly meets Fife College on a number of matters in the general course of business. My most recent meeting with the college was on 7 November, to mark the college's status as an accredited living wage employer during living wage week.

Claire Baker: I think that the minister is aware of Fife College's decision to cut its higher national diploma journalism course and no longer offer access to the National Council for the Training of Journalists exams.

I understand from students on the course that they were informed of the decision only recently and that it has been suggested that they transfer to the University of Sunderland. Those students have made an investment in the course and had expectations about their future. For many Fife students, transfer to Sunderland is not a realistic option. As I understand it, the college's decision will leave Glasgow as the only place in Scotland to offer accredited NCTJ courses.

Does the minister think that it is acceptable for a course to be cut halfway through the programme? Will she raise the matter with Fife College?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Claire Baker is correct to point to the withdrawal of the practical journalism HND course at Fife College. The course was withdrawn due to a lack of demand from students and an analysis of the future needs of employers in the local economy in Fife. The higher national certificate course, which is the same as year 1 of the HND, will continue to run.

When there is any change to course options, the Government expects colleges to work with students at the earliest opportunity to provide support and information about alternative opportunities to continue their studies. I understand that the principal of Fife College is

keen to meet the students who are affected, to hear their concerns and explore directly with them the issues that they face. I understand that that meeting will be arranged in due course.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In a recent report, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council showed that the proportion of Fife College students who come from the most deprived areas has declined in recent years, from 27 per cent in 2014-15 to 23 per cent in 2015-16. What action will be taken to reverse that worrying trend and ensure that all students, whatever their background, have the opportunity to enter further education?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Colleges play a very important role in widening access to further and higher education, and Fife College is no exception.

I know from my experience as a Fife member of the Scottish Parliament that Fife College and its new principal are working hard to ensure that they have the right curriculum in place and can support student applications from across Fife. The principal is concerned about the number of students from the kingdom who come from different backgrounds and wants to take the issue forward. I am pleased to see the positive work that he has taken forward since taking up his position, and the Scottish Government and the Scottish funding council will do everything to support him in that.

Scottish Parent Teacher Council Survey

2. **Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Scottish Parent Teacher Council survey of parents, which found that 92 per cent believed that not enough money is being spent on schools. (S5O-01494)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The most recent data show that education budgets in Scotland are increasing by £144 million in 2017-18—a 3 per cent increase on the year before, in cash terms. We have allocated £120 million of pupil equity funding in 2017-18 directly to around 95 per cent of schools, to be spent, at the discretion of teachers and school leaders, on improving attainment. That is a direct investment by the Government to individual schools, to help them to close the attainment gap.

Iain Gray: The SPTC is clear in its submission to the fair funding in schools consultation that there has been a 16 per cent drop in spending on education since 2009. The SPTC says explicitly,

“Additional funds”—

such as pupil equity funding—

“are welcome but do not reverse this decline”,

and it talks about parents having to raise funds for basics such as information technology, textbooks and reading schemes. Will the cabinet secretary listen to parents and promise to reverse the decline in school spending over recent years in the forthcoming budget?

John Swinney: I welcome the fact that increased resources are being spent on education. There were increases in 2016-17 and 2017-18 and the Government has put in place the resources to support pupil equity funding.

Earlier today, I had the privilege of meeting the pupil council and other pupil representatives from Murrayburn primary school in Edinburgh. The children explained to me exactly what choices they had made about the allocation of pupil equity funding to enhance their school's learning environment and to assist them to close the attainment gap. I welcome the creativity and innovation that has been taken forward, which is evidence of the additional resources that the Government is putting into education.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary confirm again that local authorities spent £4.9 billion on education in 2015-16, which is almost 3 per cent more than in the previous year, as he stated, and that spending per pupil is higher in Scotland than in England?

John Swinney: That is, indeed, the case. The Government invests nearly £8 billion in education every year in revenue and capital, including funding to local authorities. Spending on education by councils has risen in each of the past four years in cash terms, and the total revenue spending on schools has risen under this Government since 2006-07 by £350 million, or 7.6 per cent in cash terms.

Special Educational Needs (Support)

3. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to young people with special educational needs. (S5O-01495)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The responsibility for the provision of support to children and young people with additional support needs rests with education authorities. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 requires education authorities to identify, provide for and review the additional support that their pupils require.

As I announced in the debate on mainstreaming earlier this month, changes to that legislation are forthcoming in January next year. To support authorities to prepare, the Scottish Government will publish revised statutory guidance on the requirements of the act, including those changes,

and non-statutory guidance on the new requirements and complaints to ministers, and it will establish a service to support children to exercise their rights on their own behalf. Those are in addition to the consultation on the guidance on the presumption to mainstream education and the research to help us to understand the experiences of children and young people who receive additional support for learning.

Alexander Stewart: Is the cabinet secretary aware that the removal of charitable status from independent schools will have a massive impact on the 20 small private schools that cater specifically for children with complex additional support needs? Already, two of those schools have voiced concerns that removal of their charitable status would mean a rise in fees, placing at risk their futures and those of the children with whom they work. Will the cabinet secretary commit to protecting those schools and ensuring that parents and special needs pupils will not pay the price for that rate increase?

John Swinney: I think that Mr Stewart has muddled up a couple of things in his question. The issue of designating organisations for charitable status is not a decision of mine; it is a decision by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. It is an issue over which I have no control.

I think that Mr Stewart's question muddles up that issue with the possibility of rates having to be paid by certain independent schools—if I have understood his question correctly. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution is considering that issue, as he said he would do in response to the review undertaken by Kenneth Barclay. He will, accordingly, report to Parliament on that.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I declare an interest as an adult with an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnosis. Identification of neurodevelopmental disorders, such as ADHD, is a vital first step towards putting in place the right support for children and their learning. Will the Government commit to including ADHD as a distinct category in the pupil census, as is currently the case for autistic spectrum disorder?

John Swinney: First, I have admired Mr Johnson's courage in expressing those personal issues, and I have appreciated reading about and understanding his experience.

I will give consideration to that question. I confess that I have not looked at those categorisations for the pupil census but, in the light of the issue that Mr Johnson has raised, I will look at them and reply to him in writing.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): There are significant issues of inconsistency in

identifying young people with additional support needs, as has been noted by the Education and Skills Committee. Current Education Scotland inspection regimes do not appear to give much regard to assessing additional support needs identification and provision. Does the Scottish Government believe that ASN identification and provision should be given greater regard during school inspections?

John Swinney: I consider those issues to be absolutely material to inspections. One of the core aspects of the inspection approach is to consider the measures that have been taken regarding the health and wellbeing of children and young people. I consider the issues that Mr Greer raises to be absolutely material to some of those judgments.

I raised this point in my answer to Mr Stewart. Mr Greer will be aware of the research that we will undertake to help us to understand the experiences of children and young people who receive additional support for learning. Part of that experiential research exercise is to understand how effectively needs are being met and to ensure that the points that Mr Greer raises are properly addressed as part of that commitment.

I reassure members that I consider the meeting of the needs of young people who have additional support needs to be utterly material to the inspection approach. Secondly, the research that we are undertaking needs to be a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of young people so that we can reflect that through policy implementation and guidance, to make sure that what we say in policy and statute is what is happening on the ground.

British Sign Language (Higher Education Courses)

4. **Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the provision, availability and student financial support in Scotland for higher education courses in British Sign Language. (S5O-01496)

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Maree Todd): BSL courses are taught across a range of levels at college and university in Scotland. Financial support is available within the current student support package for students undertaking eligible BSL courses of further and higher education. We want to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work and visit. Last month, we published Scotland's first BSL national plan, which sets out 70 actions that we will take over the next three years to make progress towards that ambitious goal. The plan includes a number of actions to increase the opportunities for learning BSL.

Ivan McKee: The minister might be aware that the only part-time postgraduate course for students of BSL in the United Kingdom is at the University of Central Lancashire. The course is available by distance learning to allow students from as far afield as possible to take part. My understanding of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland regulations is that students of part-time postgraduate courses that are delivered in England could, in principle, attract support from SAAS. However, under current policy, SAAS does not provide it. Will the minister consider whether it might be possible for students of courses such as BSL that are not available in Scotland to be eligible for a funding package?

Maree Todd: I fully recognise that many of the improvements that we want to see being delivered through the BSL national plan will depend on the availability of qualified BSL/English interpreters with the right skills and experience. We already support a full-time degree course in BSL/English interpreting at Heriot-Watt University, and a range of vocational opportunities is available at colleges. During the next two years, we will sponsor two new training programmes, one at Heriot-Watt University and one at Queen Margaret University, that are designed to support BSL interpreters to work in the specialist fields of health, mental health and justice.

We are aware that BSL courses are offered at universities in the rest of the UK and there is no equivalent here in Scotland. We recognise the need to ensure that support is available to Scotland-domiciled students to enable them to take up their chosen course. I can therefore announce today that we will address the issue that Mr McKee has raised and that eligible students who wish to study a part-time postgraduate BSL course elsewhere in the UK will now be able to access a tuition fee loan of up to £5,500 from SAAS.

School Inspections

5. **Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what areas will be prioritised for improvement when assessing the school inspection regime. (S5O-01497)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government launched the national improvement framework for Scottish Education on 6 January 2016. The publication sets out four key priorities that everyone in Scottish education should be working towards. The school inspection programme will continue to focus on these areas for improvement in schools: improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy; closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged

children; improvement in children's and young people's health and wellbeing, and improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people.

Ross Greer: In February of this year, George Watson's college—a private school—underwent an annual engagement visit in which the school submitted self-evaluation information relating to child protection and safeguarding. No areas for improvement were identified at that time but, by September, a special inspection was ordered by the Scottish ministers following a complaint from a parent regarding serious bullying. That special inspection led to ministers imposing conditions on the school due to it being at risk of not adequately safeguarding the welfare of a pupil. Given that, does the Scottish Government believe the inspection regime for private schools to be adequate?

John Swinney: Yes, we do, because we have in place a blended model. There is self-evaluation, which applies right across the board in all schools in Scotland, whether they are private sector or state sector schools, and then there is the opportunity for us to undertake inspections, which are the more traditional inspections that we are all familiar with and which I cited in my answer to Ross Greer.

In some circumstances, those inspections will identify particular issues. They crystallise in a different way in relation to the private sector because there is an independent registrar of independent schools. Through that mechanism, issues will be identified that potentially have to be addressed by individual schools. That was the case with George Watson's college. That has been communicated to the college and my expectation is that the requirements of that inspection will be fully honoured by the school.

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): The general secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland has raised concerns that a proposed introduction of a programme of young inspectors would be unacceptable because they would not have the skills to evaluate what was going on in schools. Does the Scottish Government support the proposal? If so, how would it ensure the quality of school inspections would not decline as a result?

John Swinney: We need to have a sense of perspective, because the concept of introducing young inspectors is not to replace old inspectors—if I may use that term. It is to ensure that the perspective of young people is fully integrated into our assessment of the performance of education.

I sometimes despair when I am involved in conversations about education and the interests of the children and the young people do not crop up

other than when I am introducing the issues into the debate, so I am all for young inspectors having a say about schools. As I said in my answer to Mr Gray, I have just met a fabulous group of young people from Murrayburn primary school who have been decision makers about how pupil equity funding is to be taken forward in their school. They were great advocates for the choices that they had made. It is important that we listen to the voices of young people as part of our assessment of the performance of Scottish education because, ultimately, that education must serve their interests.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Teaching (Greenock and Inverclyde)

6. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the teaching of STEM subjects in the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency. (S5O-01498)

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We are providing specific support for the teaching of STEM subjects in Greenock and Inverclyde with our funding for the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre. That has included support for the development of primary science mentor teachers and science training for primary teachers in the Inverclyde and Clydeview academy school clusters in the constituency.

We also provide support to generation science and the Scottish Council for Development and Industry's young engineers and science clubs. In 2016-17, both those initiatives have supported schools in all 32 local authorities. That has included support from the SCDI to young engineers and science clubs in all the primary and secondary schools in Inverclyde and a visit by generation science to all the primary schools in the area, reaching over 1,500 pupils.

Stuart McMillan: With 2019 being the bicentenary of the passing of Greenock-born inventor James Watt, will the minister consider using James Watt commemoration events to highlight the importance of STEM subjects? Will she also consider the introduction of a national James Watt educational prize, which could be won annually by a school that excelled in STEM teaching?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs said in September, events being planned to celebrate the life and achievements of James Watt would be warmly welcomed across Scotland. I understand that West College Scotland, for example, is actively considering its role in such events. That may include provision of

a prize for students. I would be happy to hear further details from the member of such proposals in due course.

Headteachers (Recruitment Administration)

7. Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I remind the chamber that I am the private liaison officer to the education secretary. To ask the Scottish Government whether it expects the duties of headteachers to include recruitment administration. (S5O-01499)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The consultation that I launched earlier this month on the education bill makes it absolutely clear that the headteachers charter will empower headteachers to be leaders of learning and teaching in their schools. Local authorities will continue to be responsible for providing high-quality education support services to schools, supporting headteachers to make the decisions that most affect learning and teaching in their schools. That will include a significant role as the employer of teaching and non-teaching staff in schools and in the provision of human resources and recruitment support.

Jenny Gilruth: Fife Council has recently changed its teaching recruitment policy, putting its headteachers in charge of the administration tasks associated with appointing staff. Concerns have been raised with me about headteachers' workload, with one headteacher having to sift through more than 200 applications before emailing candidates short-listed for interview via the talent link programme. Does the cabinet secretary agree that local councils should not expect headteachers to complete additional administration associated with recruitment, and that local councils such as Fife Council should empower their headteachers to lead learning by freeing them of unnecessary bureaucracy?

John Swinney: I certainly think that there should be an approach to removing unnecessary bureaucracy in our education system, because in a variety of respects all organisations need to be mindful of the bureaucratic burdens in the education system. The whole objective of the headteachers charter is to enable headteachers to exercise greater influence over learning and teaching in their schools, and that should extend to choosing the individuals who should be on their staff, so I want to see headteachers fully involved in the recruitment processes that are undertaken. Throughout our approach to education, we will be serving the system well if all of us in all organisations look to minimise the bureaucratic burden that is placed on our schools, to enable more concentration to be applied to learning and teaching.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary intend that headteachers' recruitment powers should allow them to use untrained and unqualified maths students to teach maths, as *The Scotsman* today reveals is the case at Trinity academy in this city?

John Swinney: On the question of who should be teaching in a classroom, my position is absolutely clear and consistent. Only General Teaching Council for Scotland-registered teachers should be teaching in the classrooms and that, from what I see from the comments that have been made to *The Scotsman* by the convener of the education, children and families committee of the City of Edinburgh Council, is exactly what is happening in relation to the case that Mr Gray has raised. The students from the University of Edinburgh who are assisting in the classroom are not undertaking the teaching. Experienced teachers are taking the classes, with students assisting the pupils with their learning. That is what has been set out to *The Scotsman* by the convener of education for the City of Edinburgh Council.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Will the Deputy First Minister accept that, when I met the Sound primary school pupil council on Monday in Lerwick, it was explained to me that the school is one music teacher short and on its third round of interviews, and that it has an additional support needs post free as well? Is the important thing not to ensure the availability of qualified teaching staff, rather than giving people powers that they simply do not have the time to exercise?

John Swinney: On the point about teacher vacancies, of course I want to ensure that we take every step that we can to ensure that we have an adequate supply of trained and experienced teachers who can be present in the classrooms. Where that is challenging, we must find ways in which we can support the delivery of education to meet the needs of young people. I also believe that it is vital that our schools are able to exercise a greater degree of flexibility, and for headteachers to be able to operate that power of flexibility to ensure that they can best meet the needs of learners in their individual classroom settings. That is what I take from the discussions that I have with people in the education system about the appetite in Scottish schools. It is also the advice of the International Council of Education Advisers, which encouraged public authorities—both Government and local authorities—to give our schools much more freedom to exercise greater discretion over their approach to the delivery of education.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): For some headteachers it would be a delight to administer recruitment, because they cannot get people into

the classroom to actually teach the children. The administration is not the issue; it is getting the people in who are able to deliver lessons. What is the cabinet secretary doing about that?

John Swinney: We are doing a number of things. We have expanded the number of places that are available for initial teacher education—there was a further increase this year to more than 4,000. We have been unsuccessful in filling all those places, so we have devised new routes for teaching, which have generated more than 200 additional recruits to initial teacher education. Those people would not have come in if we had not developed those new routes into teaching, so I am sure that that will be welcomed by Neil Findlay.

We have also been taking forward the teaching makes people campaign, which is a recruitment campaign to encourage more individuals to come into the profession. Further, the GTCS has taken forward the policy of provisional conditional registration to make it easier and more practical for individuals from other jurisdictions to come into Scottish schools and teach, if they have the requisite qualifications to enable them to do so.

The Government is taking a range of measures to try to encourage and motivate more individuals to come into the profession. For example, last Friday, a tender closed for an additional new route into teaching. We are entirely focused on our measures to encourage more teachers to come into the classroom.

“Working to Widen Access”

8. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent report by Universities Scotland, “Working to Widen Access”. (S5O-01500)

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I welcome Universities Scotland’s report, which moves us forward in our shared agenda to widen access. That said, I remain concerned that the report’s recommendations will not allow universities to meet the timescales and policy challenges that are contained in the recommendations of the commission on widening access. For example, the target date of 2020-21 for minimum entry requirements is a year later than the commission recommended, and we need to pick up the pace of change.

Although I note the actions on articulation and bridging programmes, further clarity is needed on how and when they will support more young people from deprived communities into higher education. In particular, I am keen to see how we can ensure that activities and programmes that are already working well in some institutions can be rolled out to others to create the systemic

change that is needed across education to provide equal access.

Angus MacDonald: One of the groups of young people that we need to ensure have equal access to the opportunity of higher education are those with care experience. What progress is the Scottish Government making on delivering its commitment specifically to widen access for care-experienced young people?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As of this academic year, students with care experience who are under the age of 26 receive a full non-repayable bursary of £7,625. To date, around 500 students attending university in Scotland are benefiting from that support. We also want every care-experienced young person who meets the entry requirement to be offered a place at a Scottish university. Although I welcome the commitment in Universities Scotland’s paper to progress that, I will continue to press universities to act more urgently so that, as soon as possible, we are all doing everything that we can to give care-experienced young people the opportunity to study at university.

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the report, but I note that the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science is concerned that the recommendations might not allow universities to meet the timescales and policy challenges that were contained in the final report of the commission on widening access. Does the minister agree that the success of the widening access policy ultimately depends on raising attainment in schools, which is patently lacking at present?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If the member speaks to Universities Scotland, he will be told that it recognises that universities have a role to play in that regard. Last week, in the delivery group, which we sit on, we discussed with individuals from primary schools, secondary schools and colleges and other stakeholders the issues of attainment in schools and the whole-systems approach to tackling widening access. We are all aware that, in order to make change in the short term, universities, as autonomous institutions, need to play their part. Many universities are stepping up to that challenge but some are a bit behind the curve—to put it politely—on that aspect.

We will take a whole-systems approach to widening access. As the Deputy First Minister has already described, we are doing a lot to increase attainment in schools. However, there is no excuse for universities sitting back and waiting for something else to happen to deliver widening access. They have taken up that agenda themselves; it is a shame that the Scottish Conservative Party has not done that, too.

Student Teachers

9. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to increase the number of student teachers. (S5O-01501)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is taking a range of actions to increase the number of student teachers. We have committed £88 million this year to ensure that every school has access to the right number of teachers with the right skills. We have provided £1 million through the Scottish attainment challenge to support universities in developing new and innovative routes into teaching. We recently announced science, technology, engineering and mathematics bursaries of £20,000 to encourage career changers to train to become teachers of priority STEM subjects. We have also launched the second phase of our teaching makes people recruitment campaign, and we have created a new route into teaching that is designed specifically to attract high-quality graduates in priority areas and subjects. The tender exercise for that new route closed on 16 November and the evaluation process will commence shortly. The number of student teachers has risen by 7.5 per cent in 2017, and, with the new measures in place, we expect that the number of people who are training to be teachers will continue to rise in the years to come.

Dean Lockhart: Figures that were published last week show that the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council's target for student teacher recruitment was only 70 per cent met. The target for English teachers was just 63 per cent met, and the target for maths teachers was only 47 per cent met. The failure to meet those targets in full is resulting in teacher shortages across the region of Mid-Scotland and Fife, and in Scotland as a whole.

The steps that have been taken by the Scottish Government so far have failed to recruit the necessary number of teachers. What assurances can the cabinet secretary provide that the additional measures that he has set out will be effective in addressing the issue of the 816 vacant teacher posts in Scotland?

John Swinney: For completeness, I should correct Mr Lockhart by advising him that the intake by schools of education for primary teacher training was higher than the target that the Government set originally, so we recruited more primary teacher trainees than was intended. Mr Lockhart is correct in saying that we recruited fewer secondary teacher trainees into the system, but it is important that he does not convey the incorrect impression that the schools of education

did not succeed in recruiting all the teacher trainees.

If the Government had not created new routes into teaching through the specific actions that it has taken, we would not have recruited an additional 204 candidates to the teacher education system and the rise in the number of initial teacher training applicants would have been only 2 per cent rather than the 7.5 per cent rise that the Government secured as a consequence of its measures. That 7.5 per cent increase in the intake of student teachers builds on the 19 per cent increase that was secured in 2016.

I am the first to acknowledge that we face challenges in identifying and recruiting all the teachers that we require in our school system but, as the evidence demonstrates, there is an adequacy of places for that to be the case. We have to find new routes to enable individuals to switch careers and enter the teaching profession. That is why I have created STEM bursaries and opened up a new route into teaching, and it is why the Government will look at other measures to address the issue.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary give an update on the proposed scheme to allow those who are moving into teacher training from other sectors to access bursaries? Will he give Parliament an indication of any other measures that have been taken to encourage those who might not be recent graduates and are of a more mature age to consider teaching as a new career?

John Swinney: There is an adequacy of places to enable younger people who are leaving school or university to enter teaching as a career if they wish to do so. However, as we have found that not all those places are taken up, we have to find measures to enable people to change careers, and we have to support them in that process.

For that reason, one of the new routes into teaching that is being taken forward by the University of Strathclyde is aimed particularly at individuals who work in STEM subject areas. It enables them to go through a postgraduate diploma of education, complete their training and enter the teaching profession over a shorter timescale. The STEM bursary route that I have put in place is designed to encourage and support individuals who are already in employment and have commitments to consider changing career and entering the teaching profession. The Government will continue to explore other ways in which we can take forward that agenda to ensure that we have an adequate supply of teachers in our classrooms.

Secondary School Staff (Dundee)

10. **Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con):**

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that all secondary schools in Dundee have adequate numbers of staff. (S5O-01502)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): In my answer to Mr Lockhart, I set out in detail the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to recruit teachers. One of our 11 new routes into teaching is the supported induction route at the University of Dundee, which will increase the number of people who are undertaking teacher education in the Dundee locality.

Bill Bowman: Over the past year, Dundee secondary schools reported 34 teacher vacancies, which was up on the previous year, with 22 of them being vacant for longer than three months. What guarantee can the cabinet secretary give parents and pupils in Dundee that that increasing trend will not continue next year?

John Swinney: The Government is taking a range of approaches to encourage the recruitment of more individuals into initial teacher education and to encourage individuals to consider switching careers and entering initial teacher education. We are also taking a range of measures through the General Teaching Council for Scotland to encourage teachers who are not actively involved in teaching to return to the profession. In addition, we are in negotiation with the trade unions on the payment of supply staff, with the aim of increasing supply cover in our schools by enabling more options to be taken up to ensure that we have an adequate number of teaching personnel in our classrooms to meet the needs of young people in Dundee and in every other part of the country.

Skills Development Scotland (Hospitality Sector)

11. **Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Skills Development Scotland regarding reported skills shortages, such as a shortage of chefs, in the hospitality sector. (S5O-01503)

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): The industry-led tourism skills group, which is facilitated by Skills Development Scotland, is working to implement the actions that are identified in the refreshed tourism skills investment plan. A group of food and drink experts met for the first time in May 2017 to review the matter of reported chef shortages and to discuss potential next steps. As a result of that meeting, it was proposed that a new working group should be formed under the auspices of the tourism skills

group, which is due to meet again on 13 December.

In addition to that work, I have undertaken direct engagement with the sector. In September last year, I attended the first-ever youth tourism conference in Dundee. In June this year, I visited the Busby hotel and met a number of younger members of staff there who are going through training. In August, along with the Deputy First Minister, I met the developing the young workforce national advisory group at the Glasgow Hilton hotel, which is an active member of the regional developing the young workforce group. In September, I met Nick Nairn and representatives from the Dunblane Hilton hotel to discuss the training of chefs and skills shortages. This month, I visited the Fairmont hotel near St Andrews to hear about its ambitious plans to support young people, and I spoke at the Scottish chefs conference about skills in the sector. Only yesterday, I visited the Hilcroft hotel in Whitburn to hear at first hand about its work with the developing the young workforce West Lothian regional group.

Richard Lochhead: I thank the minister for that very full answer—clearly, he is taking the issue seriously. He will be aware that the food and drink sector is worth £14 billion to Scotland and that the hospitality sector is worth £11 billion. For both industries, the availability of chefs is crucial. However, many businesses that I speak to in my constituency and around Scotland tell me that the shortage of chefs is now a severe issue. A number of ways to address it have been suggested, many of which the minister has mentioned. In particular, it has been suggested that there could be support for the Scottish culinary team, which involves budding chefs competing on the international stage and which, in turn, can inspire young people to get involved in the industry. Another suggestion is to rename home economics, calling it something more modern and attractive in order to inspire more young people to learn cooking skills. Will the minister continue to make the issue a priority so that we can make the most of Scotland's food and drink potential?

Jamie Hepburn: I am glad that Mr Lochhead recognised the fullness of my answer, which I wanted to be a vivid demonstration of how seriously we take the agenda. I can certainly commit to ensuring that the issue will remain high on our priority list. As I have set out, a range of activities are under way and will continue. The member mentions the Scottish culinary team, which we have funded to help chefs of the future and to ensure that they are better prepared for the culinary Olympics. I think that I would probably be overstepping the mark if I commented on his suggestion that we rename home economics. I may need to discuss the matter with the Deputy

First Minister, and all suggestions would be gratefully received.

Teacher Vacancies (Highlands)

12. **Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council's statistics on teacher vacancies, particularly regarding the Highlands. (S5O-01504)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The number of vacancies across Scotland currently represents 1.6 per cent of the teaching workforce. As I stated in earlier answers, we are taking a number of actions to address the issue and recruit teachers for all local authorities. For example, we are supporting innovative projects with the University of the Highlands and Islands and the University of Aberdeen, which recruit students from the Highland area.

Edward Mountain: The fact that there has been a sequence of questions on the subject probably tells a story. Given the fact that, over the past two years, the number of teacher vacancies in the Highlands that have been unfilled for more than three months has risen from four to 62, it is obvious that what is happening at the moment is not working. Is the Deputy First Minister going to take any specific steps to encourage teachers to move to the Highlands and to stay there?

John Swinney: The most effective thing that we can do is support the University of the Highlands and Islands in ensuring that it is able to provide initial teacher education in an accessible fashion right across the Highlands and Islands. One of the strengths of the UHI model is that it gives individuals the ability to access higher education within the community in which they live and, once they have secured their initial teacher education, to make a contribution to the education of young people in that locality. That is the new route that I have opened up as part of the measures that the Government is taking forward.

I welcome the initiative that the University of the Highlands and Islands has taken in responding positively to the Government's invitation to tender in that respect. I look forward to these routes generating the interest and involvement that will ensure that we have a strong supply of teachers to fill vacancies in the Highlands and Islands and in other parts of Scotland in the period to come.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Am I correct in assuming that, given that the data was collected in September, things have probably changed, which means that the statistics do not necessarily reflect the reality today?

John Swinney: There will be variation in the statistics from period to period as vacancies are filled and new vacancies arise. In the most recent analysis that we undertook to inform our workforce planning, the information indicated a vacancy level of around 1.6 per cent across the whole of Scotland. As I have said to Parliament before, recruitment into the teaching profession is a challenge not just for us, in Scotland, but for literally every jurisdiction. We are working hard to find different ways to encourage more people into the teaching profession to make a contribution to raising the performance of our education system in meeting the needs of young people in every part of our country.

Burntisland Fabrications

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a statement by Keith Brown on Burntisland Fabrications. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions during it.

14:42

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): Following the written update that was provided to members at the end of last week on the circumstances surrounding the future of Burntisland Fabrications—BiFab, as it is known—I wanted to take this opportunity to brief Parliament on the outcome of discussions that continued last week and came to a conclusion at the weekend, and on the commitment that the Government has made to support BiFab in the future.

I will first give a little background on the company. BiFab is a major fabrication supplier to the oil and gas sector, to offshore renewables and to wider infrastructure industries. It operates three sites in Scotland—Burntisland and Methil in Fife, and Arnish on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. It has a permanent workforce of about 250 staff, with another 1,100 being employed via agencies to support specific contracts.

On Thursday 9 November, ministers and officials were informed that BiFab was in some financial difficulty. The company contacted my colleague, the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy, to inform him that it was about to file a notice of intention to appoint administrators the following day in order to protect the company. That notice created a 10-day period during which BiFab could seek a solution to its financial difficulties.

From that initial contact, the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy and I engaged in extensive discussions with the company, the trade unions, commercial stakeholders and their advisers, and the United Kingdom Government over the course of last week. Through those discussions, we were able to provide enough comfort to the BiFab board for it to delay a decision to place the company in administration immediately, and to secure the space for negotiations to continue and a positive solution to be found.

Those discussions with SSE, the partners in Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Ltd, Siemens, Seaway Heavy Lifting, BiFab and the trade unions—predominantly Unite and the GMB—also provided us with a clearer picture of the nature of the financial position that BiFab was in and the dispute that lay behind its financial difficulties.

Throughout that time, the First Minister was kept fully up to date on all aspects of the situation and she raised the matter with the Prime Minister and engaged directly with SSE and Seaway Heavy Lifting while she was in Bonn for a major international climate change event.

That engagement continued on Thursday, and culminated in two long days of discussions on Friday and Saturday last week, led by the First Minister and including all the key companies that I mentioned. Those discussions helped to broker a commercial agreement between the parties that would relieve the financial pressure on BiFab and ensure continuation of the contract for the construction of jacket substructures for Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Ltd.

Throughout that period I met GMB and Unite and ensured that the unions were informed of the progress of discussions, and the First Minister and BiFab met the unions on Saturday, shortly before the agreement was signed. This morning, the First Minister and Paul Wheelhouse visited BiFab's Methil site to meet the workforce and to see some of the work that is being undertaken.

The First Minister continues to be impressed by the commitment of the workforce, and expressed to them her determination to identify ways to secure the long-term future of BiFab. I am pleased to say that I will visit BiFab's Arnish site next week, to meet the management and workforce and to see the great work that is being carried out there.

The agreement that was reached on 18 November lifted the threat of administration and stated that BiFab would receive payments at the beginning of this week to alleviate its immediate cash-flow issues. I am pleased to report that those payments have been made. The agreement also ensures that the contract for the Beatrice project is now fully funded.

As an added security, the Scottish Government has committed to making available to BiFab a loan on a commercial basis, if necessary. That in part reflects our belief that there is a long-term viable future for BiFab, so we will work with the company to support its future prospects. Employees are back at work and are being paid, and money has been made available to BiFab this week to allow it to get on and fulfil the contract.

Work has not stopped at that: additional support to the company is being set up, including from the Scottish manufacturing advisory service, and the Scottish Government will have on-going engagement with the BiFab management. I pledge today that we will continue to work with BiFab, the trade unions and commercial partners to identify ways to secure the long-term future of renewables manufacturing on its sites.

As the First Minister has done, I pay tribute to the workforce on all three sites—Burntisland, Methil and Arnish. Our focus was, and remains, on the workers, their families and the surrounding communities: we recognise that it must have been an anxious time for them all. However, since the news broke that the company could go into administration, the workforce has handled the situation with great poise and tenacity, which was not lost on the commercial partners.

At the beginning of last week, the workers agreed to continue working on the current order, even though they might not be paid. I met worker representatives on Thursday, during the rally outside the Scottish Parliament, and assured them of the laser-like focus that the Scottish Government would have on retaining the jobs. They were determined to see a resolution and to be themselves part of the solution. I pay tribute to their perseverance.

Only two months ago, the First Minister set out our programme for government, which pledged our continued commitment to maintaining Scotland's world-leading position as the place for low-carbon and renewable energy development and deployment. That sector has already positioned itself as a key part of the Scottish economy.

In 2015, the low-carbon and renewable energy economy supported 58,500 jobs in Scotland, accounting for about 14 per cent of the total UK employment in the sector, which is much higher than our population share. It has also generated £10.5 billion in turnover, which is also 14 per cent of the total UK turnover in the sector, and higher than our population share would suggest.

We have counted 20,000 companies in Scotland that are active in the sector, and there has been nearly £1 billion of capital investment in renewable power, which has generated nearly £225 million in exports. We want to continue to build on that and to maximise the benefits for Scotland. There are also some real opportunities for the Scottish supply chain, including BiFab, from a number of consented wind projects—for example, Neart na Gaoithe Offshore Wind Ltd's project and the Moray east project.

We also remain committed to pressing the UK Government, in developing its industrial strategy, to enable the Scottish supply chain to take advantage of growth within the sector. Scotland has the competitive advantage and the building blocks that are critical to more expansion in the renewables sector, via the skills of the Scottish workforce, our existing port infrastructure and location, and our innovative academic community.

We have demonstrated, and will continue to demonstrate, our commitment and support for

projects that show innovative and world-leading approaches to low-carbon energy and local energy solutions, such as those that are supported by the low-carbon infrastructure transition programme. The programme for government announced a further £60 million to be made available for accelerating innovative low-carbon project delivery by 2020, which will be supported by European Union funding. That builds on the low-carbon infrastructure transition programme, which has already allocated about £50 million to 15 low-carbon capital projects. That funding represents one of the most significant direct energy investments in the past 10 years.

It has been a highly stressful and troubling time for BiFab and the workforce. I again pay tribute, on behalf of the Scottish Government, to the workforce, the company and all the commercial partners. If there was any doubt about what the resolution meant to them, the demeanour of those from the company and the trade unions on Saturday night confirmed the emotional turmoil that they had gone through and their evident relief.

At the very least, the solution will see the contract of the Beatrice wind farm project through to completion. We will continue to pursue a longer-term solution that benefits both the firm and the workforce.

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

It is very welcome news that agreement has been reached between BiFab and the other parties involved in the Beatrice project. That will come as a huge relief to BiFab's 1,400 employees and to communities across Fife and Lewis.

As the cabinet secretary has highlighted, that outcome would not have been possible without the hard work, commitment and dedication of the BiFab workers. I also recognise the important role played by the cabinet secretary and the minister in securing that outcome.

In his statement, the cabinet secretary referred to a commercial loan that the Scottish Government has committed to make available to BiFab, if that should be necessary. Will he confirm the amount of the loan? In addition, what commitments has the Scottish Government, or Scottish Enterprise, made to BiFab in the event that it faces administration or other financial difficulties after the completion of the Beatrice contract? What assistance will the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise provide to BiFab to ensure that it can compete effectively for contracts to secure its long-term future?

Keith Brown: The total sum that might be involved in the loan package is about £50 million. As I said in my statement, that would be loaned on commercial terms and drawn down as necessary. It was quite clear during the discussions that it was

necessary to make that offer in order to unlock from the various partners involved the security that the contract could be seen through to its successful conclusion—indeed, that was the purpose of the suggested loan. We will keep Parliament informed about any progress in that regard.

The member asked about additional support. A number of offers were made, not just by the Scottish Government, to provide support to the management, who had been through a fairly traumatic period, and to provide additional capacity through Scottish Enterprise and anybody else who we think may be able to help in that regard.

I have mentioned the Scottish manufacturing advisory service. Offers of support were made to the company that related to further capital investment and additional advantages for the company as it scoured the prospects of new contracts. Therefore, a substantial level of support has been provided to the company not just by ourselves, but by some of the parties to the agreement that we were able to reach in the end.

When I met the full-time trade union officials and the shop stewards, which was before we struck the agreement, I was asked whether BiFab was viable. I said that I believed it to be viable and that it could have a very strong future. I continue to believe that, and that belief is bolstered by the agreement that we were able to reach at the weekend.

On Saturday, Paul Wheelhouse and I gave the direct commitment to BiFab that we are not walking away thinking that this is job done, by any means. We will continue to engage with the company and we will support it right through the completion of the contract into what we hope will be a bright future.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Scottish Labour applauds the dignity and determination of the BiFab workforce and welcomes the intervention of the Scottish Government in securing the immediate future of 1,400 skilled workers across Fife and Lewis.

I turn to the future. I have three questions to put to the cabinet secretary. First, does he agree that last week's uncertainty puts the spotlight on the challenges that Scottish businesses and manufacturers face in securing work from the renewables sector? Secondly, does he agree that it raises questions about the extent of redistribution from renewables manufacturing into the Scottish economy? After all, only 4 per cent of the Beatrice wind farm project, which is a £2.6 billion project, is going to Scottish manufacturing. Thirdly, the cabinet secretary talked about the UK industrial strategy, but does he not agree that now

is the time for the Scottish Government to work with Scottish Labour to develop an industrial strategy for Scotland that grows and sustains decent jobs and decent pay?

Keith Brown: Jackie Baillie mentioned the challenges that companies face in accessing contracts. There is no question but that there are such challenges. It was evident from the discussions that we had that we were talking not just to partners in a consortium to deliver this contract, but to people who were otherwise in competition with one another on a regular basis. I have no hesitation in saying that the competition is very tough. That is the environment in which BiFab and others work.

Over a number of years, we have tried to provide opportunities through not just the Beatrice project, but other forthcoming projects, some of which I mentioned in my statement. However, we cannot put ourselves in the place of private companies. They might face challenges that we cannot help them with. They must tell us about those challenges at an early enough stage to allow us to help to deal with them. In the case of the Beatrice project, we concentrated heavily on the issue of the jobs. The trade union emphasised the importance of that. We were also cognisant of how central the project was to the renewables sector in Scotland and to maintaining the supply chain link.

I have mentioned a number of the things that we have done, and I have acknowledged the fact that there are challenges, but there are also opportunities, particularly on the export side. Some of the export markets are not the obvious ones that people would think of. We are helping companies to overcome the challenges. In my statement, I mentioned the fact that, in generating 14 per cent of total UK turnover in the low-carbon and renewable energy economy, we have vastly exceeded the contribution that would be expected from a country of our size.

Jackie Baillie referred to the industrial strategy. When it came out, I agreed with Scottish Labour that it contained virtually no mention of trade unions or the workforce. I have made that point to the UK Government. We do not control the industrial strategy. As part of the BiFab discussions and in relation to the industrial strategy, I spoke to Greg Clark, who is the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. I put to him the points that are of most importance to us, which have been raised through the Scottish manufacturing advisory service.

We will continue to input to the industrial strategy. If Scottish Labour has suggestions to make over and above the rhetoric that we sometimes hear, I will be more than willing to listen to those. We should get some detail on the

industrial strategy over the next few days, when the UK Government makes an announcement on it, and I am more than happy to engage with Scottish Labour on that to see how we can best progress matters.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I would like to put on record the commitment and dedication that have been shown by the BiFab workforce and the trade unions over this difficult period to help to secure the future of the company. This morning, it was great to see the appreciation that the workforce at the Methil site showed for the role that the First Minister and the Scottish Government played in securing the future of BiFab.

What can the Scottish Government do to help to secure the long-term future of BiFab and its skilled workforce as major players in the renewables sector in Scotland?

Keith Brown: I acknowledge the assistance that we received from David Torrance and other members, including Claire Baker, Jenny Gilruth, Alasdair Allan and Dean Lockhart, all of whom represent areas that are directly impacted by the situation at BiFab.

Along with Scottish Enterprise, we are continuing discussions with the company. I am looking to see how we can help to ensure that BiFab is seen as an attractive option for additional capital investment, which is crucial to the company's future if it is to win more contracts. As part of the package that was announced at the weekend, we will ensure that further support is provided by Scottish Enterprise and through the Scottish manufacturing advisory service.

More is being done on the issue, which I cannot advise the chamber of because of commercial confidentiality, but as we get more hard and fast information, I will be happy to keep members such as David Torrance updated on the progress of the discussions.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I welcome the intervention that the Scottish Government made to save jobs at BiFab and to respond to the dignity and the unity of the workers.

Everyone in the industry knows that a key way to secure and grow jobs in the offshore renewables supply chain is through cost reduction as part of an industrial strategy. The cabinet secretary mentioned the low-carbon infrastructure transition programme in his statement, but that fund is not open to the offshore renewables sector to bid into. What funds and support are specifically available for cost reduction in the supply chain so that the workers at BiFab can be given long-term livelihoods rather than just short-term salvation?

Keith Brown: I thank Mark Ruskell for his remarks and I agree, in particular, with those about the workforce. I have mentioned some of the specific funds that we have available to assist the industry. In addition, we will provide support through Scottish Enterprise, which will include looking at cost reduction, and through other ways in which we can help the company bid for, and win, future contracts. The offshore wind group, which comprises different players in the industry, is currently looking at how best that can be done.

Mark Ruskell will be aware of the reducing cost of providing renewable energy, which has reached an all-time low of late. While the cost of production has reduced, we want the company to be competitive, and that is what the different levels of assistance that I have mentioned are seeking to achieve.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the minister and others for their efforts to save the jobs at BiFab. The workers to whom I have spoken are relieved, but frustrated that it came so close. They reminded me that when Alex Salmond was First Minister, he promised a new industrial revolution based on renewable energy. I am sure that this is not what he had in mind. What are the minister's plans to grow activities such as design, research, marketing and development to anchor those renewable jobs in Scotland in the future?

Keith Brown: Willie Rennie must be absolutely obsessed by Alex Salmond. I noticed that he mentioned him in his question during First Minister's question time last week.

I mentioned some of the assistance that we can provide. Willie Rennie will also know that we announced a substantial increase in research and development funding in the programme for government, and that is available to the renewables sector. I also mentioned some of the other funds that we are seeking to make available to the company.

I, too, have spoken to large numbers of the workforce and I have received extremely positive feedback about the Government's intervention, as have many others.

It is important to recognise that BiFab is a private company involved in a private contract. When the Scottish Government became aware of issues in that regard, we acted as quickly as we could to ensure that the contract would be fulfilled and, more important, to ensure that many of the employees, some of whom are from my and Willie Rennie's constituencies, remained in employment. Last week, they were looking at a Christmas without employment or wages, and we acted quickly to ensure that that did not happen.

With regard to the Scottish Government's approach, I have received nothing but positive

commendations from the company, trade unions and others involved for the commitment that we showed, the time that we gave and the number of people whom we engaged to work on this, including officials as well as ministers. Having put that much effort in, we want to see whether we can maximise the benefits to the industry.

I have mentioned the different things that we intend to do, but it is also worth bearing in mind that this industry is not on its knees. As I mentioned, it accounts for 14 per cent of turnover and 14 per cent of the workforce in the sector. We are doing a good job, but I accept that we have to do more. Many of the measures I announced today are intended to ensure that we have a brighter future in renewables.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Given the importance of offshore renewables to the future of BiFab, is the cabinet secretary in a position to give us an update on when the offshore wind projects in the Firth of Forth and the Firth of Tay, which were held up by the recent legal challenge by the RSPB, which was thrown out by the Supreme Court, are likely to proceed?

Keith Brown: Some of those matters have been protracted, especially in relation to the project in the Firth of Forth, which Murdo Fraser mentioned. Each of those cases is going through a different process. We are unable to foreshorten the processes, so it will be around 2019 before those projects come forward.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I echo the words of my colleague, David Torrance, and record my sincere thanks to all those involved in reaching a resolution. What support is being provided to BiFab to ensure that a similar situation will not arise in the future?

Keith Brown: In addition to what I have said will be provided, the company is much more aware of the assistance that the Scottish Government can provide. However, we do not want to do that in the kind of crisis environment in which we had to operate last week. I think that the company was about to go into administration on three occasions. I phoned it twice to postpone that so that we could get time and space to work. That is not ideal.

The point underlying Jenny Gilruth's question is: what can we do to ensure that that does not happen? That is a very important question. I have mentioned the different measures that we have taken. Scottish Enterprise support, seeking further capital investment and looking for further contracts should also be mentioned. I have mentioned joint activities by the Scottish Government and the company, which I am not able to go into more detail on, but I undertake to ensure that Jenny Gilruth and other interested members are kept updated as they progress.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I recognise the commitment, tenacity and determination of the workforce and the community in recent weeks to ensure that a deal could be reached. I understand that the contract is due to be completed in April. How can the Scottish Government and its agencies help to promote and restore confidence in BiFab so that it can exploit upcoming opportunities, secure future work for the yards and maintain vital jobs in Fife?

Keith Brown: I thank Claire Baker for her comments about the workforce, which I think that we all agree with.

Two things are central to ensuring the company's future success, one of which is delivering on the contract. That is extremely important, and we are putting in support to ensure that it is able to do that. Different parties to the contract are also putting in support to ensure that that happens. Seeing that the company can deliver such contracts will build confidence for others to place contracts.

The second thing is winning contracts, which is very important. We want to provide whatever support we can within the rules within which we have to operate to help the company to win future contracts. It is a virtuous circle. If a company wins contracts, confidence will grow, and if it delivers them, its reputation will grow and there will be more chance of winning further contracts. That is what we are trying to achieve.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): BiFab plays a major part in the development of the Beatrice offshore wind farm. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the agreement is also very welcome for many companies and projects that depend on the continuing existence of BiFab? I can see the Beatrice offshore wind farm at night from my garden, so I am close to it and I know how important it is. Is the approach a key part of ensuring that we continue to promote renewable energy and the businesses that depend on it?

Keith Brown: Stewart Stevenson makes a very important point about other companies. In particular, NRL also employs people who are dependent on the work continuing, and it will also benefit if we are able to grow what the business currently does by winning future contracts. I acknowledge that BiFab is an extremely important part of the Scottish supply chain.

It was interesting to hear different aspects of the discussions last week and about the extent to which the workforce is seen as the company's most valuable asset by far. Claire Baker mentioned that. The workforce is internationally recognised for the skills that it has. There is no question but that BiFab needs to have a tougher

focus on delivery but, if it can do that, we can continue to see it as a vital part of the Scottish supply chain through its having the opportunity to trade on the reputation of that workforce.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to the workforce during this turbulent time for the company and the locations that it works in and for. Today, the UK Government announced further support for the oil and gas industry through transferable tax relief. What medium and long-term support is the Scottish Government offering BiFab?

Keith Brown: I have mentioned on a number of occasions the different forms and the nature of the support that we would offer BiFab. On the UK Government's support, we have asked for a number of years for loan guarantees on the oil and gas side, for example. We were initially told no, we were then told yes, and then nothing happened. That is a vital part of the support for the infrastructure in the oil and gas industry and it leads on through the supply chain.

We are still waiting to find out whether the much-trumpeted ambassador for oil and gas to be appointed by the UK Government is being appointed or sited anywhere near the UK's oil and gas fields.

We have had frustrations with the UK Government, but there is an opportunity, which Jackie Baillie raised, for us to work closely with it on the industrial strategy to provide further support. However, during topical question time last week, it was made evident by members that it is very important to try to ensure that the company is best placed to help the transition from oil and gas and carbon-based fuels towards renewables. I hope that the UK Government is willing to work with us to ensure that we can further bolster the industry in Scotland.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to maintain Scotland's world-leading position as the place for low-carbon and renewable energy development. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the renewables industry is not only important for our long-term environmental goals but has wider community benefits, particularly in my constituency of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross? Might I add that I, too, can see the Beatrice development from my window?

Keith Brown: It is good to know that so many people are keeping an eye on Beatrice.

I agree with Gail Ross about the crucial nature of the renewables industry, especially in an area such as the one that she represents, because high-value jobs in rural areas are extremely beneficial. The renewables sector and supply chain are crucial for the future of the Scottish

economy more generally, as well as for Gail Ross's area.

As I have said, the industry already punches above its weight and employs around 58,500 people—I am not sure that that has been evident from some of the questions that have been asked—which is 14 per cent of the UK total, and it has a turnover of around £10.5 billion, which is 14 per cent of the UK total. The Scottish Government is determined to see further growth in the industry for the benefit of areas such as Gail Ross's and for the Scottish economy more generally.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary said in his statement that there are some real opportunities for the Scottish supply chain to take advantage of growth in the sector. There have been some missed opportunities for renewables manufacturing in the past, not least in onshore wind manufacturing. Will the cabinet secretary agree to commission a scoping exercise for supply chains so that we can plan strategically to develop jobs in urban and rural areas across all regions in Scotland, building on our industrial strategy, which must be developed as a matter of urgency?

Keith Brown: I reassure Claudia Beamish that that work is already being undertaken. There is very important work to be done in terms of collaboration in the supply chain, because the collaboration has not been what it should be up to this point. If the supply chain in Scotland is able to collaborate more effectively, there will be greater chances of winning more business. However, much of the scoping work on that has already been undertaken and I am happy to provide that information to Claudia Beamish. If she remains dissatisfied and wants to come back to me on it, I am more than happy to listen. As I said, much of that work is already under way, which is on top of the success that we already have. However, we want to do more in the future, if possible.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Given my role as parliamentary liaison officer on the economy and my previous career in manufacturing business turnaround, I am well aware of the kind of hard work and imaginative solutions that ministers will have put into the rescue of BiFab. It is one of a long line of successful interventions by the Scottish Government to save manufacturing businesses. How can the lessons learned in those exercises be employed to good effect to support other key businesses in key manufacturing sectors across Scotland to grow and expand?

Keith Brown: It is very important that we learn lessons. There are lessons, as there always must be, for the Government as well in terms of how we can respond and become involved earlier in such situations. As I have said to people, if the activity on the fifth floor of St Andrew's house last

Saturday had been filmed, it could have been speeded up to a Benny Hill soundtrack to show the huge amount of activity of different parties talking to different people at different times.

We will learn lessons from that experience, which involved dealing with a number of partners in the consortium and with the trade unions, and ensuring that they were kept up the minute about how things were going. We should learn lessons, but so should Scottish Enterprise and BiFab, and I am sure that they will. What we can do to help that learning process through the work of the Scottish manufacturing advisory service is also crucial. We should all learn lessons from the process.

Flood Risk

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-09019, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on working in partnership to reduce flood risk across Scotland. I call Roseanna Cunningham to speak to and move the motion.

15:14

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Last week, I attended the 23rd conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or COP23, in Bonn. The conference was a platform for me to showcase Scotland as a global leader in tackling climate change, as is indicated by our commitment eight years ago to reduce our emissions by 42 per cent by 2020.

Climate impacts are already evident in Scotland, and climate change is likely to exacerbate the frequency and severity of flood events in Scotland in future. That risk and actions to address it are set out in the Scottish climate change adaptation programme, and today's debate is an opportunity to review our progress in reducing flood risk and identify continuing challenges.

Climate change increases the likelihood of flooding in future, but of course in many areas flooding is already a reality. Its impacts are devastating beyond description, as I have seen on too many occasions in my constituency. We are approaching the second anniversary of storm Desmond, during which we saw some of the most significant flood events for some time. Reducing flood risk is recognised in the programme for government because of the devastating impacts of flooding.

The Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 is tailored to delivering a risk-based, plan-led approach to flood risk management in Scotland. As I look about the chamber, I realise that there are not many members left who recall the passage of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill—although John Scott is indicating that he remembers it well.

The 2009 act was an important piece of legislation because it provided the basis for an improved, modern framework that moved away from tackling flood risk on an ad hoc, reactive basis. An important point is that the 2009 act allocates clear roles and responsibilities for flood risk management in Scotland, providing clarity for the public and the foundation for successful partnership working.

That partnership working between local authorities, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Water and others led to the preparation of the 14 flood risk management strategies, which were published in 2015 and which provide the first ever national plan for flood risk management in Scotland, setting out the short-term and longer-term ambition for flood risk management in the country. Across the 14 strategies, 42 formal flood protection schemes or engineering works are proposed for the period 2016 to 2021. The total number of properties that could be protected by those schemes or works is projected to be 10,000.

Since 2008, the Scottish Government has made available funding of £42 million a year to enable local authorities to invest in flood protection schemes. Last year, an agreement was reached between the Scottish ministers and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on a new strategic funding plan for flood protection schemes. The agreement guarantees that, for the next 10 years, the level of flooding capital grant in the local government settlement will be set at a minimum of £42 million a year. That agreement between the Government and COSLA is vital to the good working of the 2009 act.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Is the cabinet secretary aware of the dramatic difference that the new flood protection scheme in Elgin has made? Richard Lochhead's constituents and my Moray constituents welcome the support that has been given.

Roseanna Cunningham: I well remember the terrible flooding that Elgin experienced. As it happens, I think that I signed off on the plan in the first place; it is a testament to the length of time that it takes for schemes to be put in place that I was back in the same role to formally open the flood protection works more recently. I know what a difference such works make and how important it is for individuals, businesses and communities in areas such as Elgin to see work taking place.

A key part of increasing resilience has been the development of the Scottish flood forecasting service, which is a partnership between SEPA and the Met Office. The service provides local responders with a five-day outlook on the potential flood risk. Responders have highlighted that it is an invaluable tool that enables them to identify when they need to be ready and gives an indication of the likely duration of the event. That means that responders can consider their resources and decide whether recovery efforts might be required.

SEPA also operates floodline, which has more than 26,000 customers. The receipt of a flood warning through floodline gives householders time

to take action, such as installing floodgates or considering alternative travel plans.

Last night's weather showed the value of that investment. SEPA was actively engaged in supporting responders in the north of Scotland and flood warnings were issued to the communities in Easter Ross and the Great Glen. That effort will continue overnight, as further rain is expected.

Alongside those measures, the Scottish flood forum has helped communities to build flood resilience and assist those who, unfortunately, have been flooded. The Scottish Government provides financial support for the forum, enabling it to offer free advice about property-level protection measures. Any member who has had flooding events in their constituency will know that the Scottish flood forum is there on the ground almost immediately to give that help.

Historically, householders in flood-prone areas have had difficulty getting affordable flood insurance. The launch in 2016 of Flood Re, which ensures that household flood insurance remains widely available and affordable, was a major milestone.

I encourage all members to raise awareness in their areas about the free services that are offered through floodline and the flood forum and about the availability of Flood Re. It is really important that people know that those services are available to help them.

Another part of our success in flood risk management has been Scotland's leading role in piloting and developing approaches to natural flood management. We are supporting the long-term Eddleston water project, which is developing an evidence base to improve our understanding and persuade practitioners, planners and land managers of the case for natural flood management. Needless to say, some of the money that we have used to do that, through Interreg, has come from the European Union, and I am a little concerned about the availability of such funds in the future.

We are making progress and we have a clear, ambitious programme of work to do. However, we must recognise that there are still challenges to face. I do not want to pretend that our programme is a fix for absolutely everything. One big challenge arises along our coasts. Rising sea levels, increased coastal erosion and erosion-enhanced flooding will progressively impact Scotland's soft coastlines, its assets and its communities. Our first step towards getting a better understanding of coastal erosion was provided by the dynamic coast project, which I launched in August. We now know that we can expect faster and more extensive erosion than we have been used to and that erosion will

increasingly affect all asset types: buildings, infrastructure, and cultural and natural heritage. We have a window of opportunity in which to plan, mitigate and adapt in advance of greater impacts, but that will require cross-sector and integrated adaptation and mitigation planning.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): One way to address coastal erosion at Montrose might be a sand engine. Is the Scottish Government investigating that option? If not, why not? If so, will the Scottish Government commit to covering the cost?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am well aware of the difficulties at Montrose and I know that a great deal of work is currently under way to identify the best option for dealing with the problem there. Whether the option that Mr Kerr raises is the best option, I cannot say, because that work has not yet been completed. What is important is for us to establish how to deal with the problem and then to move on from there.

One of the greatest impacts on the health of people who experience flooding happens when they have to leave their homes. Preliminary results from a social impact study that we commissioned after the Aberdeenshire floods in 2015 showed that two thirds of respondents were in temporary accommodation for more than six months. The financial and social impact on people's daily lives was enormous. The challenge is to ensure that if—or when—a property floods, it is made more resilient to floodwater. We must start to think about making changes following a flood. We cannot aim to go back to normal; we must aim to go back to better.

We are working with stakeholders, including the building and insurance industries, to develop an action plan to promote the need for flood-resilient properties. That can mean introducing resilient materials and using different construction methods for our homes and business premises. Often, the outcome is less damage to the building, less cost, and less time spent in temporary accommodation. It is important that that work is done. All the information that we are gathering helps us to better understand the social vulnerabilities associated with flooding, which allows SEPA to take account of those in its flood risk assessments and action prioritisation methodology. The information is also a powerful tool for local authorities.

We also need to spend some time considering surface water management, and, connected to that, sewer flooding—an issue that I know is dear to John Scott's heart. The sewerage network is a combined system, draining both sewage and surface water from properties and roads, so sewer flooding can occur following heavy rainfall events. There are a number of reasons for that, although

the majority of them tend to relate to people putting inappropriate objects into the sewerage system. Around 70 per cent of sewer flooding events are caused by that, so a bit of work needs to be done there.

I see that I am coming to the end of my time.

We are constantly aware that flooding is a traumatic event that causes damage, destruction and distress to communities, individuals and businesses. We cannot always stop flooding, but we can make sure that we are prepared to do what we can to reduce the risk and, when flooding occurs, support those who are affected.

We are making progress. Together, we have delivered the first set of flood risk strategies and are supporting their delivery. I acknowledge that an enormous amount of leadership has gone into that and that there has been a huge amount of collective engagement. The 2009 act introduced a brand-new approach in comparison with what we had before. It has been an innovative and amazing journey from the act to the first national flood risk assessment and on to the strategies and their delivery. I look forward to future engagement with partners over the second flood risk management planning cycle as we look to what the future will bring with regard to the problem of flooding.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that efforts to reduce flood risk are a vital part of the Scottish Government's adaptation to a changing climate and are needed to provide a foundation for sustainable economic growth and thriving communities; agrees that the risk-based, plan-led, multi-agency partnership approach, as introduced by the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009, has led to a better understanding of the causes and impacts of flooding, and consequently enabled significant progress towards delivering sustainable management of flood risk in Scotland, and further recognises the work of local authorities, Scottish Water, SEPA and other partners to deliver new flood protection schemes, Floodline, the Scottish Flood Forecasting Service and advances in property level protection, which are providing protection to Scotland's communities and increasing their resilience.

15:25

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I declare an interest as a partner in a farming partnership; I also have an interest in a wild salmon fishery.

I welcome today's debate on working in partnership to reduce flood risk across Scotland, and I state at the outset that the Scottish Conservatives will be happy to support the Government's motion. However, given the increasing rate of climate change, it is vital that the Scottish Government considers

“all measures of slowing down water transfer from the land to rivers throughout the catchment”,

as is noted in our amendment.

Every member knows how much flooding can devastate the lives of our constituents, with damage to property, destruction of crops, disruption of energy supplies and, in seven cases, the tragic loss of life. Although no Government can stop flooding, Governments can and must find practical methods of managing flood water.

King Canute proved that we cannot stop the tide, and we need actions, not words, when it comes to flooding. Managing floods is a centuries-old battle that humans have often fought and lost because they underestimate the power of water.

As the climate changes, we need to take account of flash floods, which are, by their nature, unpredictable. The combination of flash floods and high tides means that although pouring concrete and armouring river banks are a visible solution, those measures seldom provide the best answer.

We need to look further afield for solutions. Managing flood plains to allow them to do what they are supposed to do, rather than using them for housing, would be a good start.

SEPA estimates that the annual average cost of flood damage in Inverness stands at £5.6 million. I therefore welcome the Inverness flood alleviation scheme, which was made possible by the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. It will protect 800 homes and 200 businesses in the city. However, communities and businesses in Inverness are rightly concerned that the costs have spiralled by £3.1 million over the original budget—an increase of almost 9 per cent on the planned costs. Residents rightly expect and want the best flood protections but at the best price, and a lesson needs to be learned from that scheme. The most expensive scheme is often not the best option.

We need to be realistic, so I am pleased to see that there is now acceptance that flood prevention can be a combination of speeding up the flow of water down watercourses and delaying water getting into those watercourses. That acceptance means that we need to consider whether forestry, for example, can play a part.

Do forests speed up drainage? They probably do. Soil pans under trees, and ditches keep water from trees and are needed in forestry plantations. Planting and harvesting, however, often create vertical tracts that become good natural drains. Good practice should have stopped this, but when I drive around the countryside in the Highlands and Islands I see plenty of examples of water moving too quickly through woodlands and down to watercourses, increasing the risk of flooding, acidification and silt deposits.

EU agricultural policy has always prioritised farming, with pan-European objectives. With the United Kingdom leaving the EU, we now have an opportunity to redesign our agricultural support systems. Perhaps we should be looking at subsidies that compensate farmers if their land is used as an emergency planned flooding catchment area at times of high rainfall.

It seems to be fashionable to point the finger of blame for flooding at the management of upland areas. What is important in the management of those areas is that we have a range of habitats—to be technical, plagio climax and climax vegetation as well as pioneer vegetation are required. That needs management, and experience tells me that muirburn will play a part in it. Furthermore, we need to ensure that the uplands are grazed in such a way as to prevent damage to fragile soils and peat bogs. That means controlling all grazing animals, not just deer. A holistic and balanced approach is what we need.

I would like to mention watercourse management. Experience tells me that allowing rivers to become shallow through gravel deposits or clogged up with weeds means that they can hold less water—it really is that simple. Surely it is time to investigate whether the dredging of rivers should be viewed just as we view the dredging of ditches and drains: as a natural and effective management tool.

I would also like to mention the management of water. Perhaps we need to rethink the management of our lochs and reservoirs. For example, having the ability to raise the water level in Loch Ness at times of high rainfall would prevent flooding downstream. To give members a really simple example, if the water level of Loch Ness was raised by just 2 inches, those 2 inches would be spread over 56.4km². It would make a massive sink that held water before it drained down into the river. I will leave members to do the maths, but I can tell them that that is a huge amount of water, and that taking such action would have reduced flooding in Inverness.

It has also become fashionable—rightly so—to increase the use of green energy. Wind turbines, which cover many of our hills, provide clean, green energy. However, members should be under no illusion: wind turbines add to flooding risks. We should not forget that under each turbine is between 250m³ to 420m³ of concrete to hold them up. That means that each turbine base removes the same amount of peat—or sponge, if you will—and concrete does not absorb water. That is not all: wind farms need good access tracks—miles and miles of them. Roads cause water to be pushed into drainage ditches, which flow into watercourses—and that is a true example of how

we speed up water reaching our rivers. Are we managing that in the best way that we can?

I am sure that the Scottish Government recognises that it is not about how much concrete we pour, how high we build defence walls, or how deep we dredge a river. If there is a tidal surge or hard rainfall, we must make space for the water with more natural management schemes to slow down the speed at which that water reaches the choke points and, more importantly, the speed at which it reaches our conurbations.

I move amendment S5M-09019.1, to insert after “flood risk in Scotland”:

“; considers that, given the increasing rate of climate change, the importance of considering all measures of slowing down water transfer from the land to rivers throughout the catchment is vital”.

15:33

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Scottish Labour will be supporting the Scottish Government motion today, with the emphasis that it places on and the respect that it shows for partnership working. However, our amendment is intended to highlight some issues that need to be addressed on an on-going basis if we are to truly tackle the flooding challenges we will face together over the coming years. We will also be supporting the Tory amendment, with its climate change focus.

Over the past two weeks, climate change has been placed at the centre of global diplomacy. Indeed, the cabinet secretary attended the deliberations in Bonn. The Paris agreement saw us reach international consensus that climate change is our shared threat and responsibility, but now that the international community has spoken on this, it must deliver on those promises, and the nationally determined contributions—which are known to be insufficient—must be re-examined for greater ambition and equity.

This year, the world has faced a deluge of extreme weather caused by climate change, the cost of which is estimated to be \$200 billion. Scotland has hunkered down for the tail end of some hurricanes, but the country’s main threat from a changing climate is heavy rainfall and subsequent flooding. Since 1961, Scotland’s average annual precipitation rate has risen by 27 per cent.

Our amendment stresses that there must be

“adequate research commissioned to assess the implications of climate change on flooding policy”.

Let me give an example. The UK Committee on Climate Change highlighted the fact that barriers to agroforestry must be addressed. Aileen McLeod wrote to me in early 2016 stating:

“Whilst we don’t have specific research on the impact of the lower density woodland associated with agroforestry systems, we would still expect woodlands of this type to be beneficial for water management.”

Further research is needed, and it may well be happening, but I make that point to emphasise that we must identify ways in which flood protection and better flood management can be based on science.

Regularity of reviews of planning, mapping and flood-related strategies is also essential. Planning has a part to play when considering working in partnership to reduce flood risk. I have an example from my region where agricultural permitted development rights were used—inappropriately, in my view—to exploit the planning system in respect of flood risk, as such applications do not need planning permission and SEPA has no remit. SEPA expressed to me its concern about a decision to grant a housing application on appeal, but it recognised that due process had been followed. It stated:

“it was our judgement that the proposal constituted development within the undeveloped/sparsely developed floodplain (as defined by the 200 year flood extent) and therefore was unacceptable as the land raising works undertaken by the applicant resulted in the loss of floodplain storage/conveyance.”

In challenging times for flooding issues, that loophole should be addressed sooner rather than later.

Our amendment also recognises that

“no communities, whether urban or rural, should be left behind in these developments”.

Action must be inclusive and must support those in challenged communities, small as well as large.

Stewart Stevenson: Does Claudia Beamish recognise that there are also concerns about farmers and others putting in drainage that causes natural flood plains to dry out, so that if water has to go on to them at a later date the hard ground is less able to absorb the water? Does she acknowledge that there is a difficult and interlocking set of issues here?

Claudia Beamish: I absolutely agree with Stewart Stevenson, whose point is well made. There is also the issue, on a much smaller scale, of concreting over driveways in gardens.

The 10-year funding for potentially vulnerable areas will be vital to help address national-scale flood issues. However, not all locations at flood risk are eligible for that funding, including small groups of less than 50 properties. That is the case in Carsphairn in Dumfries and Galloway, which is regularly hit by flooding. In 2016, the First Minister made a commitment to my colleague Colin Smyth that the Government would work with SEPA to

review the situation. I very much hope that that is going to be done and I would welcome an update.

It is right that an ecosystems approach to flooding is promoted in the land use strategy, which I believe should be given more weight. Flooding needs to be tackled with natural resources and ecosystems in mind. As the Tory amendment makes clear, man-made flood defences have a part to play, but the Scottish Government must maximise our resilience, and is doing so, through sustainable land and water management.

In my region of South Scotland, the Tweed Forum is a stellar example of partnership working and sustainable flood prevention. With its membership of public bodies, local stakeholders and non-governmental organisations, the forum has enhanced and protected the natural, built and cultural heritage of the River Tweed and its tributaries, using catchment management with its two interlinked strategic aims. That has implications for the co-operation fund under pillar 2 of the common agricultural policy as we move beyond Brexit.

As our amendment states, partnership working, if it is really to work, must have the funding that it needs. This year, SEPA has faced a budget cut of £1.8 million, and I hope that that cut will not affect flooding priorities at all. Similarly, reliable funding is essential for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, whose budget has been reduced again this year, with cuts of £19.4 million. It is challenging to keep up to date with the new equipment that is needed and with organised flood response working groups, such as the one in Lanark, in my region, which cannot function effectively if there is a risk of closure of local fire stations. Further, will the cut to local authorities' budgets affect flooding? I do not want to be negative about these issues, but it is vitally important that there is adequate funding.

Just yesterday, in our Parliament chat room, pupils from Earlston high school recounted to me how, in times of rain, their school car park has been so flooded that cars have been swept along. That brings me full circle to the necessity of research to inform regular reviews of the relevant strategies for all ranges of flood prevention in order to protect our citizens now and in the future.

I move amendment S5M-09019.2, to insert at end:

“; believes that no communities, whether urban or rural, should be left behind in these developments; considers that the Scottish Government must ensure that there is adequate research commissioned to assess the implications of climate change on flooding policy and that the strategies and sustainable management of flood risk are regularly reviewed, and believes that there must be

adequate funding to ensure that the range of flooding interventions and policies can be taken forward.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We move to the open debate. Members should note that we are pushed for time, so they should take no more time than they are given.

15:40

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Over recent years, large-scale incidents have brought home to people the severe impacts that flooding can have on communities across the country—not only in the direct, immediate and residual physical impacts of the flooding but in the subsequent effect on insurance premiums. My constituency has managed to escape relatively lightly. We have largely tended to suffer only relatively small-scale, localised events. However, the extent to which the effects of climate change are being felt is clear from elsewhere in Scotland, including Ellon, in my colleague Gillian Martin's constituency. Of course, good progress is being made as we seek to reduce Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions, but the impacts of climate change are with us now and are not going away.

Significant steps are already being taken across the country to try to reduce the threat of flooding to homes and businesses. However, whatever man-made or natural flood defences we deploy, we will never entirely put a stop to flooding. Many of our citizens live in or have businesses in areas that are prone to being impacted, with all the trauma and upset that that causes. With that, of course, comes the added subsequent difficulty of securing affordable insurance. In accordance with the urgings of the cabinet secretary, I therefore want to highlight the work of Flood Re, the first scheme of its kind in the world. The scheme will be in place for a further 23 years and is designed to enable flood cover to be affordable to those households that are at the highest risk of flooding and to increase the availability and choice of insurers for customers.

Before the introduction of Flood Re, only 9 per cent of householders who had made prior flood claims could get quotes from two or more insurers, and none was able to get quotes from five or more. In the first month of the scheme's operation, that number rose dramatically, with 68 per cent of those households being able to get quotes from five or more insurers. By December 2016, that figure had increased further, with 84 per cent being able to get quotes from five or more insurers and 95 per cent being able to get quotes from two or more. At launch, 16 insurance providers were signed up to the scheme, and that number has now increased to 60, which represents 90 per cent of the home insurance market. That is extremely good news for everyone who lives in areas that

are prone to such events, and we should acknowledge it as such.

When Lord Krebs, of the adaptation sub-committee of the UK's Committee on Climate Change, appeared before the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, he made clear that homes that were restored under Flood Re should be restored in a more resilient way so that the properties will be insurable and the problems will be more manageable if the properties are flooded again.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to working, via the national centre for resilience, with stakeholders including the Association of British Insurers, the Building Standards Agency, the Scottish Flood Forum and ClimateXChange to encourage resilient home repairs after a flood and to provide the most up-to-date information about techniques and materials to householders.

Although we cannot, of course, control the weather, we can mitigate its impact on our communities. Various stakeholders are responsible for minimising the risk of flood damage, including the Government, councils, householders and neighbours, who all have roles to play. Although some councils, such as Perth and Kinross Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council, provide people who are at high risk of flooding with grants for property-level protection measures, such as barriers for doorways, that is not uniform.

Another organisation that I would like to pay tribute to is the Scottish Flood Forum. It is a Scottish Government-funded charity that provides support for and represents those who are, or are at risk of being, affected by flooding. I have found the forum to be a great help in dealing with constituency cases that are admittedly low level but are nonetheless important to those concerned. Rather like Flood Re, the Scottish Flood Forum plays an important role.

I will conclude by focusing on the role that major engineered flood defences can have in improving the lives of those who live or work in areas that are prone to significant and traumatic flooding.

Just over a year ago, the cabinet secretary visited Brechin in my colleague Mairi Gougeon's constituency to open the town's new flood defence scheme. It provides a one-in-200-year current-day standard of defence and includes direct defences, flood embankments, flood walls, upgrades to the existing surface water drainage system, work on the Denburn culvert and the installation of three submerged pump stations. Even before it was completed, it had proved its worth as, during construction, it helped protect the town twice from potential flooding.

The proposed Brothock water flood prevention scheme in my constituency was last year prioritised by SEPA as one of 42 projects for Scottish Government funding and I look forward to the scheme progressing. Once it has been completed, 530 people will no longer be at risk from flooding, and damage that costs approximately £840,000 each year will be prevented.

I welcome the steps that are being taken to mitigate flood damage and to help people to move on from flooding, and I look forward to further effective measures being taken as our understanding of how best to meet flooding challenges improves.

15:45

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest in the debate as a farmer, although I have not yet been affected by flooding.

It feels very much like groundhog day for me and, I suspect, for the cabinet secretary, as we are survivors of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill in 2008 and 2009. Eight years on, the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 has served its purpose well. Many of the matters that were under consideration then are still under discussion, and now require to be taken on to the next stage.

Without hesitation, we welcome the Government's intention to increase the budget that is allocated for natural assets and flooding. We welcome the 22.3 per cent increase in the river basin management budget and note that the level 3 coasts and flood budget has been maintained at £1.2 million. However, we regret that SEPA's budget has been cut from £37 million to £35.9 million and, notwithstanding the cabinet secretary's remarks, that intended budget reduction requires further explanation. As I said, we note the maintenance of the coasts and flood budget, but that is an area in which we might have to shoulder significant increases in the future to prevent coastal erosion and inundation.

In the evidence taking for the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill in 2008 and 2009, the evidence that was then available from the Met Office predicted a sea level rise of up to 75cm by 2080. However, that estimate is now being viewed as a conservative one, given the report in *Business Insider* of the prediction last week by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of an 8-foot to 10-foot sea level rise. Although land and river flooding has the potential to inflict massive damage on cities such as Perth, those threats pale into insignificance when compared to the threat of the rise in sea level to our children

and grandchildren living in coastal towns and cities.

Regrettably, at some point, we in Scotland might have to decide which areas we will allow to be reclaimed by the sea and which we will endeavour to protect. I suggest that such strategic thinking should be taking place now by the Government, SEPA, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, COSLA and us all. A national debate on the threat will not solve the problem, but it will, at least, focus minds.

I turn to land-based flooding and river basin management, which is an area in which, again, there is a finite limit to hard flood mitigation measures. There is only so much concrete that we can use and afford, so we need to look again at the use of natural capital. That point was made in recommendation 13 of the stage 1 report for the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill in 2009 and I reiterate that we now have to do more with, and use more imaginatively, upstream flood plains and landscapes to take the peaks off floods that have inflicted so much damage in the past.

Sophisticated hydrology to achieve that is still at least part of the solution to the growing need, and land managers should continue to be encouraged to help with that as an identifiable public good in a post-Brexit Scotland. Also on that subject, the illegal release of beavers in the Tay catchment area only makes a difficult situation much worse. Managed landscapes and managed hydrology will perhaps provide long-term protection for the citizens in the Tay catchment area. However, the uncontrolled introduction of beavers will only reduce the ability of hydrologists and land managers to use natural capital and landscape assets to provide necessary flood protection.

No debate on flooding could pass without me mentioning internal and external flooding issues in Prestwick. The cabinet secretary mentioned those, and I am grateful to her for meeting me on the subject yesterday afternoon and for senior Scottish Water officials meeting with me on 8 November. I welcome their acknowledgement of the problem and the now established need to work collaboratively with South Ayrshire Council and other partners to create an integrated drainage and surface water management plan in the longer term for my constituents, in response to the rainfall-driven sewer flooding problems, which Scottish Water is also trying to address immediately. Of course, that will require millions of pounds of funding, which is where the Scottish Government can help. I again ask the cabinet secretary to see what she can do in that regard to help my constituents.

The 2009 act has made a start on addressing flooding issues in Scotland, but it will need to be

built on and enhanced to deal with future problems.

15:50

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): In 2016, my constituency was ravaged by flooding that was the culmination of heavy rains over the Christmas and new year period. We had avoided the terrible flooding that took place at new year in Mr Burnett's constituency on the west side of Aberdeenshire but, early on the morning of 8 January, people from Port Elphinstone and Keith Hall, as well as people from 96 homes in Inverurie and 65 homes in Ellon and many families in Methlick, were rescued from their homes—some in boats—and evacuated to local schools that opened their doors. Many more towns and villages also suffered flood damage.

I will talk about the long-term aftermath of a flood. People face a long and difficult road to getting back into their home, but the effects of a flood last a lot longer than it takes to refurnish a house, although that took up to a year for some people in my constituency. People live with the long-term anxiety about flooding happening again, which is why the debate is important. People want to know that we have a strategy to prevent flooding, and I am sure that the words of the cabinet secretary outlining the substantial flood strategy are welcomed.

Port Elphinstone, Inverurie and Ellon, which were badly hit, are included in the on-going flood protection studies around the rivers Don, Urie and Ythan. The results of those studies will inform the decisions on whether flood protection schemes for the areas that I have mentioned are the way forward, as they have been for Elgin and Stonehaven, which escaped the ravages of storm Desmond in 2016.

In the months after the floods, I discovered that on-going communication with residents is absolutely vital, but it is also missing. Just as vital is partnership working between the Government, local authorities, SEPA, river management groups, landowners, farmers and Scottish Water. In Port Elphinstone, the River Don burst through a protective bund. Drains could not cope and a privately owned canal called the lade overflowed, all of which converged to drive people out of their homes. SEPA has a role relating to the river, the local authority has responsibility for the flood protection bunds, Scottish Water is responsible for the drains and there is a stretch of water that is owned by a private company.

In the months and years after the event, I spent a considerable amount of time trying to get everyone responsible for all the pieces of the Port Elphinstone flooding jigsaw in the same room to

talk to residents. One difficulty has been that residents are not informed when repair or flood management work is being carried out. Neither I nor my office staff will forget the day when Port Elphinstone residents woke up to find a channel of the canal filled in with soil. That was an attempt by the private owner to manage the canal. It said that it had taken advice from SEPA, which it had done, but it had neglected to inform the residents who lived next to the canal. When flood management decisions are taken, everyone must work together, but we cannot forget that the residents are suffering trauma and it is vital that they are kept in the loop.

In talking about flood prevention, I recognise the work of the peatland action initiative. The situation in Ellon, Methlick, Inverurie and other areas of my constituency was caused by heavy rainfall saturating fields that could not soak up any more and rivers bursting their banks, along with a temperature change that meant that, further upstream, there was water where there was once ice and snow. In our peatlands, we have a natural resource that is vital in soaking up excess water and, in Scotland, we have 4 per cent of the world's peatlands. Not only do they hold 140 years' worth of carbon emissions—as we know, such emissions are leading to global temperature rises and contributing to flood events—but the sphagnum moss in peatlands can hold up to 25 times the amount of water that a kitchen sponge can hold.

The terrain of our mountains and hills is key to flood prevention. When sphagnum mosses and heather, are allowed to generate, they hold water in the hills for longer and reduce peak flows downstream during high-rainfall events. It is, therefore, not just about how we deal with flood events when they happen but the environmental work that we do now to reduce the amount of water that makes its way downstream to cause a flooding event. Restoration of our nation's peatlands is a good start but we cannot ignore the long-term strategy—the climate change plan, which is a testament to how seriously the Scottish Government is dealing with the environmental causes of flooding.

15:55

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): As we have heard, it is just two years since heavy rainfall and winter storms brought disastrous flooding to parts of Aberdeen and the north-east. As we go into another winter, the question that many people will ask is whether there has been real and fundamental change that can give them confidence that such a disaster will not happen again.

Two years ago, following storm Frank, hundreds of properties were flooded, serious damage was caused and many people suffered trauma and material loss as a result. A lot of the coverage was, rightly, of the effects on the upper reaches of the River Dee and the River Don. Ballater, Inverurie and Kemnay were all affected, but there were also impacts on the city of Aberdeen at the other end of the River Dee, where sheltered housing had to be evacuated at the Bridge of Dee and there were floods elsewhere in the city.

There was, rightly, a lot of focus on the efforts of local communities to help themselves and on fantastic charitable efforts such as hope floats, which involved some of the same people who are involved with the Aberdeen solidarity with refugees campaign—which makes the point that community engagement works at home as well as abroad.

Today's debate highlights the role of public agencies such as SEPA, local authorities, Scottish Water and the Scottish Government, but public agencies cannot deliver flood recovery or flood resilience unless they take communities and local people with them.

Flooding in North East Scotland is nothing new, nor is it confined to major rivers such as the Dee and the Don. As Gillian Martin said, Stonehaven was fortunate two years ago, but it has perhaps had the most frequent damage from rain and floods over the years, with flooding from the Carron Water and the Cowie Water, landslips on the Bervie Braes and coastal flooding from North Sea storms.

The flood protection scheme that Aberdeenshire Council is taking forward at Stonehaven is intended to provide protection for nearly 400 homes against a one-in-200-year flooding event. It will cost £16 million and is due to be completed in 2020. That is a welcome initiative, but the reality is that more and more homes and businesses are at risk of flooding, and councils need resources as well as a partnership approach to meet the needs of the communities in question.

The reason for the increasing risk is climate change, as has been highlighted.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Given that Aberdeen City Council, which I think is the lowest-funded council in Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council, which is the third-lowest-funded council, and Angus Council face a shortfall of £50 million due to Scottish Government cuts, can they really be expected to cover all the flood risk?

Lewis Macdonald: If the member is making the point that local authorities in the north-east and across Scotland need more support from the Scottish Government, of course, I echo that. However, if he is suggesting that flood prevention and flood risk are not recognised as high priorities

for local authorities, I take a different view. Nevertheless, I think that I support the main point that he is making.

Dame Julia Slingso recently told the Royal Society of Edinburgh:

“An extended period of extreme UK winter rainfall is now seven times more likely than in a world without human emissions of greenhouse gases.”

It is seven times more likely because of climate change, and that will only get worse over the next few decades, even if the rate of production of greenhouse gases is significantly reduced. In other words, planning for lower carbon emissions while dealing with the flood risks that we know about now will not be enough; we also need to mitigate the increased risks of more frequent and severe floods for the foreseeable future, which means providing the resources to communities and public agencies to allow them to play their part.

I was fortunate enough to be an environment minister some 12 years ago when the then Scottish Executive was able to take a major step forward in flood hazard mapping technology. Three-dimensional mapping of the whole of Scotland underpinned the development of higher-resolution river and coastal flood hazard maps than had previously been available. Since then, the data and modelling methodologies have been improved further, as the cabinet secretary said, to allow, for example, surface water risk maps to be published three or four years ago.

It was good to be involved at a key stage in the development of what is now a sophisticated flood risk management system, but more needs to be done. High-quality digital terrain models are now available, which can help to bring assessment of coastal and surface water risks up to the levels already achieved for rivers. As the cabinet secretary mentioned, new technologies can also help us to assess the state of sewers and culverted burns in urban areas. That is important for me, as a resident of Aberdeen, but it is also important in other towns and cities.

There are currently more than 100,000 properties at risk of flooding across Scotland, and SEPA estimates that the number will rise by 60,000 by 2080 due to the impact of climate change. That is a lot of extra risk, and a lot of public expenditure will be required.

We know that, whatever flood prevention schemes and early warning schemes are put in place, flooding will happen. That is why we also need to improve household and community resilience. Despite the vulnerability of many properties to flooding, the number of people without flood insurance is higher in Scotland than it is in England—it is more than 22 per cent of

households, or nearly two in every nine. Not only that, but the lack of insurance is unequal. More than half of the lowest-income households are not insured against flooding. Tenants in rented properties often have no contents insurance, while some private landlords see no need to pay for buildings insurance for those buildings. As Roseanna Cunningham mentioned, insurance providers have developed schemes to reduce premiums in high-risk areas, but that does not help those who are not insured.

There is an urgent need for the Government to look at that issue. I hope that we will hear a little from the minister this afternoon on what more can be done to ensure that poorer households have the cover that they need. That must be part of planning for future flood risk management along with the other things that have been mentioned.

16:01

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife (Green)): I welcome the opportunity to debate flooding. It is far better to debate it now than to do so in the political maelstrom of a flooding crisis, of which there have been a few in the chamber over the years.

We have heard the SEPA estimate that 108,000 properties in Scotland are presently at risk, and we have heard from the cabinet secretary that 40 flood protection projects are being funded by the Scottish Government—a welcome investment that is utilising a £42 million capital budget. However, that will support and protect only 10,000 properties by 2026, so more than 90 per cent of the properties that are at risk will receive no protection. By the time we get to 2026, the number of houses that are at risk will be dramatically revised upwards. We have heard from Lewis Macdonald that SEPA has estimated that we could be looking at yet another 60,000 properties being at risk by 2080.

I am starting to see the impact of a lack of available capital funds on the ground. In Stirling Council, multiple competing projects for flood protection work were put forward for Scottish Government funding. Some, such as that in Bridge of Allan, have been successful in squeezing through the funding formula and the local communities are very grateful for that. However, the low number of residential properties in many smaller rural settlements weighs against them. In the case of Aberfoyle, repeated flooding, year after year, was starting to rip the economic heart out of the town and devastate public services such as the school, but the low number of residential properties kicked the possibility of Scottish Government funding out of reach. I am concerned that, although we cannot protect everything everywhere, a constrained funding model is

leaving some communities behind or placing an impossible strain on councils, which have to choose between maintaining roads and building flood walls.

I am under no illusion that hard-engineering measures alone will provide the total solution. Sensible planning decisions like not building on flood plains such as Bridge of Allan's Airthrey Kerse need to be made by planning authorities and backed up by the planning minister. We also need to take natural flood management more seriously. When the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed, there were concerns that natural flood management would not be embedded enough in the solutions and projects that would come from that new holistic approach. Going back to the example of Aberfoyle, Stirling Council recently led a big piece of work to look at how such an approach could be used to reduce significantly the extent and, therefore, the cost of the hard defence measures in the town. The stumbling block was that landowners did not buy into an approach that, ultimately, would have saved taxpayers money and helped to save the town. With the land use strategy now quietly introduced, the Government must ensure that land that does not deliver public goods such as flood prevention does not get public subsidy.

The closure of the environmental co-operation action fund means that there is little support for farmers to co-operate on a catchment scale. The new rural innovation support service could fill that gap over time, but it has funding only for research and development.

Edward Mountain: I agree that the lands that deliver public goods should be the ones to get Government subsidies, but the difficulty is in ensuring that any subsidy meets the cost of losing lands to flood plains. Can the member see a way around that?

Mark Ruskell: That comes back to the definition of what public goods are. We need to have a debate in the Parliament about how we value natural capital. I would like to see farmers rewarded for the public goods that they deliver, and natural capital is a way to achieve that. However, we need to have a debate in the chamber about the purpose of agricultural subsidies post-Brexit. We have not had a full debate on that subject, and I would very much like the cabinet secretary, Fergus Ewing, to come to the chamber and debate that issue with the member and me.

When land managers get it right—we have heard about the Eddleston Water project—they can protect communities, but when they get it wrong, the public sector picks up the bill. In 2012, the dramatic floods in Dunblane and Bridge of Allan were caused, in part, by a farmer ploughing

fields in the wrong direction. That was a simple thing to do but the result was catastrophic.

We have also seen zero successful applications for agroforestry grants, with the budget now having been cut as a result. Why is that? Where is the driver for natural flood management that should be resulting in dozens of applications for riparian planting schemes?

I hope that the cabinet secretary will have three conversations with Cabinet colleagues on the back of the debate. One should be with Derek Mackay about the long-term sustainability of an infrastructure fund that protects only 10 per cent of homes from flooding; another conversation should be with Kevin Stewart about the need for consistent planning decisions that do not make this expensive crisis even more costly; and a third conversation should be with Fergus Ewing about making sure that the land use strategy is being realised on the ground, because, right now, expectations on land managers are low and the delivery is dismal in many areas.

16:07

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):

Once again, we have before us an are-we-not-doing-well sort of motion that we are all supposed to support—and why should we not support a motion that says:

“the risk-based, plan-led, multi-agency partnership approach”

to tackle flooding is the way forward. Of course it is, and the Liberal Democrats will support the motion in tonight's vote, as we will support the Conservative and Labour amendments. Everything seems so sensible this afternoon. [*Interruption.*] Thank you, Mr Crawford—just wait.

However, we would not be doing our job as Opposition MSPs if we did not hold the Government to account for its actions, or lack of them, and that is exactly what I aim to do in my contribution to this debate.

Communities in the north-east have suffered from severe flooding several times over recent years. Major flooding events have occurred in Ballater, Aboyne, Stonehaven, Kemnay, Inverurie and Huntly, to name just a few towns and villages that have been affected across the north-east.

I will concentrate on the issue of Government funding for flood defences, but I would not want the minister to think that it is just me that is criticising the Government's actions on this issue. A lack of time prevents me from referring to more than one report, but on 3 January 2016, *The Scotsman* reported:

“John Swinney said the Scottish Government had provided flood defences to communities the ‘length and

breadth' of Scotland as he defended budget cuts to the country's environment agency.

Mr Swinney faced stinging criticism yesterday for reducing funding for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency ... by 6 per cent, from £39 million"

to £36 million in the 2016-17 budget.

Ten years ago in 2007, when the current Scottish National Party Government came to power—I hope that it will not be there for much longer—it transferred responsibility for flood defences from itself to our local authorities.

In opening the debate, the cabinet secretary said proudly that the Scottish Government has provided £42 million a year for tackling the issue through the local government settlement for local authorities, but nine years ago, back in 2008, the figure was £42 million a year. To be fair to the Scottish Government—I always like to be that—it provides funds to tackle flood protection and relief other than the funds that it provides through the local government allocation.

Let us consider one of those other sources of funding: the Scottish Government's natural assets and flooding budget line. According to information that I received yesterday from the Scottish Parliament information centre, the budget line for flood alleviation and coast protection was £1.2 million in 2013-14, £1.2 million in 2014-15 and £1.2 million in 2015-16. I am sure that members can guess what the 2016-17 figure was—it was £1.2 million. The figure for 2017-18 is the same: £1.2 million. That is not good news for communities such as Montrose, where the town faces a significant flooding threat from coastal erosion.

Liam Kerr: Mr Rumbles mentioned Montrose and coastal erosion in the same breath. As I said to the cabinet secretary earlier, flooding appears to be inevitable unless something is done, and done quickly. Does Mr Rumbles agree that the Scottish Government must proactively step in and do something about the situation now?

Mike Rumbles: I agree 100 per cent with what Liam Kerr has just said. I know that the cabinet secretary is aware of the situation that Montrose faces, as she said so in response to Liam Kerr's earlier intervention. Indeed, earlier this year, she visited Montrose to see it for herself.

MSPs from across the political divide such as Liam Kerr and I have raised the issue directly with the cabinet secretary to find out whether funding can be raised to tackle the situation before any flooding occurs in Montrose as a result of the coastal erosion. I pay tribute to Liam Kerr, who has been very willing to work with me to tackle the issue for the people of Montrose. He has put party politics aside in an effort to get a result.

It would be much better to act now, before anything happens, than it would be to wait for the risk of flooding to become too great. I am convinced that Montrose is under threat. It is a real threat, and we need some action. Liam Kerr and I have both approached Angus Council, but it does not have the funding to tackle the problem. The cabinet secretary said that the Government was going to wait to find out what can be done. Perhaps she could give us an update on the current situation in Montrose in her summing up; I am sure that members across the chamber would appreciate that.

My time is running out, so I will turn to the Government's motion. Who could possibly disagree with it?

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): You.

Mike Rumbles: No, I do not disagree with it all. Therefore, we will support it at decision time. However, members should not—I am sure that they could not—mistake that support for uncritical support. Holding the Government to account for its actions is exactly what we are supposed to do in such debates. That is so much more important than engaging in self-congratulation, which the Scottish Government is far too keen to do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: From now on, speeches should be of five minutes, please.

16:13

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate, given the constituency interest that I have in the subject, not least in the threat of flooding to industry in Grangemouth.

Flood risk management has been an important part of planning in Scotland, particularly over the past few years. The more the years go by, the more extreme the weather we are subjected to and the greater the risk to our communities and businesses from flooding. It is clear that changes in weather patterns are some of the effects of climate change in action, and—in contrast to Mr Rumbles—I pay tribute to the Scottish Government for doing what it can to tackle climate change and put in place a legacy of protection for the future.

However, with sea levels continuing to rise, and given that we will undoubtedly face further challenges in the years to come, it is important to recognise the work that is being done now to protect our communities and businesses from the potentially devastating effects of flooding. Today's debate is an opportunity for me to highlight the excellent collaborative work that is being undertaken in my constituency of Falkirk East, which will benefit communities across Falkirk

district, not to mention the industries in Grangemouth that are vital to Scotland's economy and our gross domestic product.

The recognition of the importance of protecting our communities is not a recent occurrence. Under the previous SNP administration on Falkirk Council, which I was part of, consideration was given to the effects that flooding could have on our communities and it was at that point that our administration started to invest in flood defences and protection for communities.

The initial plans were put in place for the Bo'ness flood alleviation scheme, which was confirmed in 2006 and built by 2013. That was the first step in beginning to plan for extreme weather events. Members will be under no illusion as to the importance of Grangemouth and its industry to Scotland, so it is only right that we put plans in place to protect it from the risks that flooding poses in the future.

One such project is the Grangemouth flood protection scheme, which is under way. As part of national planning framework 3 in 2014, it was highlighted that the Grangemouth investment zone required the

"construction of flood defence structures and/or the undertaking of works for flood defence ... where the area of development is or exceeds 2 hectares."

The Grangemouth flood protection scheme was ranked first out of 42 identified schemes throughout Scotland in the national flood risk management strategy published by SEPA in 2015 and is recognised as vitally important. When in place, it will protect 5,000 residential, commercial and industrial properties, avoiding flood damages estimated in the region of £6 billion, so it will clearly be money well spent.

Grangemouth is surrounded by a number of watercourses, including the Forth estuary, the rivers Carron and Avon, as well as the Grange Burn, so members will realise how important it is for this scheme to be in place. Studies have been undertaken on this project since 2015 and, most recently, ground investigation works along the tidal reaches of the rivers Carron and Avon were completed and reported on. Falkirk Council is appraising and considering options for the next stage of the scheme, while core stakeholders within the council, utilities, industrial partners such as INEOS and elected members have been consulted, with the next phase of public engagement scheduled for 2018.

To date, and with thanks to the Scottish Government, the council has spent £2 million to get the Grangemouth flood protection scheme to this stage, such is the complex nature of the scheme, and the latest estimates put the cost to complete it at £139 million. However, industry will

also contribute to that investment. Given that the scheme will protect against damages of up to £6 billion, its importance to Grangemouth and its communities, and to Scotland as a whole, is clear.

Further work is planned to be carried out along the Forth estuary shoreline near the village of Airth. That is at the study phase and it will be taken forward for consideration in the next cycle of flood risk management plans. However, that does not necessarily mean that it will be progressed as a formal flood protection scheme. It is encouraging that Falkirk Council is working in partnership with SEPA and Scottish Water to deliver functional surface water management plans. In addition, the work carried out by SEPA, Scottish Water and other agencies to protect communities is clearly of vital importance.

The council and its partners should be commended for the work that they are undertaking to ensure that our communities, industry and vital national assets are as protected as they can be from the potential risks of flooding. However, it is also incumbent upon on us all to ensure that communities and individuals have access to the necessary insurance, advice and information to further protect themselves, should defences fail in the face of an ever-changing climate.

16:18

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate and to outline some of my concerns and those of my constituents.

While I recognise that a great deal of positive work and engagement is taking place around Scotland on flooding, my experience in Dumfriesshire is that warm words and interagency working often fall short of action. The design and implementation of solutions moves at an infuriatingly slow pace that has left many living with the constant fear of seeing their homes destroyed.

The scale of the challenge and the dire problems that our communities face can be seen from the sheer number of towns and villages across the Dumfriesshire constituency that continue to battle against rising flood waters. They include Langholm, Eskdalemuir, Eastriggs, Eaglesfield, Moniaive, Thornhill, Annan, Moffat, Wanlockhead and Dumfries. My mailbag is perpetually full of concerns and many people who get in touch feel abandoned. They find that their views are disregarded and that, all too often, the process is dictated by the views of the local authority. If we are talking about genuine partnerships, the views of local residents need to be taken more seriously. Rather than passing the buck, Dumfries and Galloway Council must start to

take more seriously its core responsibilities for road drainage in particular.

I want to highlight the local ill feeling and serious concern about the Whitesands flooding scheme. It will be no secret to members that I have consistently called for the £25 million scheme proposed for the River Nith in Dumfries town to be axed. Like many people who live locally, I believe that it is the council's incompetence that will ultimately destroy our town centre, not the overspilling of water from the River Nith. Rather than having a genuine consultation with local people and business owners, the Labour Party, particularly in the previous administration, has pushed its own pet project forward and tagged an unpopular landscape gardening scheme on to proposals to build a defensive bund. Even the Scottish Government must be confused as to why local people do not want £25 million spent in their area. Flood defences are important, but it is clear that the problem in this case is that people do not want that particular scheme, and they never will.

To be fair, it is no wonder that local residents are sceptical of the council's ability to build a bund that is designed to keep water out, as it has spent years floundering in its efforts to build a swimming pool that is capable of keeping water in it.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Oliver Mundell: I am afraid that I will not take any interventions, as my time is very tight.

Naturally, as an objector, I welcome an inquiry into the scheme, but I have continued concerns that it will take up to two years to complete and we still do not know how much it will cost taxpayers. We cannot be certain of the outcome of the inquiry, but it is alarming that more than 400 local residents and businesses have sent in legal objections to the proposals. Despite legitimate concerns, it seems that the council is absolutely hell-bent on proceeding with the scheme, by hook or by crook. Meanwhile, residents in Nunholm and Kingholm live in continued fear that, if the scheme goes ahead, it will narrow the water channel and lead to water being displaced into their properties. I continue to back local residents throughout the process, and I hope that, at the very least, that will allow their concerns to be aired, tested and taken seriously by the council.

I return to my earlier comments about road drainage. It is important to remember that flooding is caused not just by our natural rivers. I have constituents who live in damp and miserable conditions because of significant drainage issues on local roads. To me, that seems to be an easy fix. Members can only imagine the frustration of local residents of Annan and Eastriggs who experienced a great deal of damage following

flash floods earlier this year. Their anger was compounded when they found out that, despite flooding issues being well known in the area, the street drains had not even been checked—let alone cleared—in eight months.

This is only a question, but it seems a fairly obvious one to me. Instead of prioritising a grand, multimillion-pound flood defence scheme in Dumfries that very few people support, perhaps the council needs to prioritise smaller schemes elsewhere in my constituency.

16:23

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): As we all know, all the evidence suggests that weather events that create flooding are only likely to increase as a result of human-made global warming. I wish that I had more time to address that issue, but speaking time reductions prohibit that. Let me at least pay tribute to our country's significant achievements in reducing our carbon footprint over recent years.

A number of areas in my constituency are severely affected by repeated flooding events. The city of Stirling's relationship with the River Forth presents many challenges. More than 730 residential properties and 80 non-residential properties are judged to be at risk of flooding. Around 80 per cent of those properties are directly at risk due to the swelling of the River Forth under adverse conditions.

In Callander, in rural Stirling, flooding can often disrupt traffic, businesses and homes. Again, it is the town's relationship with its river—for Callander, it is the River Teith—that causes the majority of the disruption and damage. I acknowledge the efforts of Stirling Council in investing in mitigation measures for areas such as Callander, Bridgehaugh and Riverside. I have no doubt that the council could do more and that people would want it to do more, but at least the measures that it has taken have been helpful. The Scottish Government's financial help for flooded communities has also gone some way to alleviating concerns, particularly for businesses that can often lose out on vital trade as a result of flooding.

I will share with members the detail of the challenging situation in the village of Aberfoyle in my constituency. I share some of the concerns that were raised by Mark Ruskell with regard to Aberfoyle, which is situated on the River Forth and is exposed to increased flood risk as a result of sustained heavy rain or snow melt. That has an effect on the community with regard to daily life and the running of shops and other businesses, but it also has an overall impact on the village's morale that is becoming more pronounced. The

situation is prohibiting investment in Aberfoyle and has created a drag on the local economy. In that regard, I was saddened recently by the closure of the Guyana Garden Centre, which was a business that occupied a key footprint in the village centre.

In recent years, Stirling Council has looked at support mechanisms from the Scottish Government to address the risk of flooding in Aberfoyle. A plan based on a one-in-200-year event was understandably rejected by the local community, largely because of the significant visual impact that its large, hard defences would have had. Further to that, a one-in-10-year event plan that would not have provided the village with an adequate level of flood defence was also rejected. Sadly, however, as a result of the lack of an acceptable, firm plan, Stirling Council missed the funding window for Scottish Government support for flood defences. Irrespective of that difficult background to the issue, we must all try to work together to find the best possible outcome for the community. If we do not, I fear that there will be further deterioration in the area's economic offering.

Tackling the problem of flooding in Aberfoyle and seeing some positive forward movement in that regard will help to attract new investment into the village. It will also make it easier for businesses to secure insurance cover and reignite a sense of purpose for many local people.

On the ground, moves are being made by the local flood forum to look at methods of tackling the problem upstream. I applaud the work that the forum does, but it will always only touch the surface. The council is continuing to assess how it can best mitigate the impact of flooding in Aberfoyle with what looks on the face of it to be an acceptable plan for a one-in-100-year event flood scheme. However, the next round of funding for Scottish Government support in the area is not until 2022, which seems a long time into the future for many in the village. It is important that a lasting solution is found, so I ask the minister to open up discussions with Stirling Council officials about how best the Scottish Government can support the application process for flood defence investment in Aberfoyle.

I am deeply impressed by the resilience of the Aberfoyle community in the face of a real challenge. Aberfoyle has always been a remarkable place to visit or set up home in and it will continue to be so no matter what is thrown at it. However, if the threat of flooding can be alleviated, Aberfoyle can continue to establish itself as a must-visit destination, offering an incredible backdrop of scenic beauty that the people of Scotland can continue to access and enjoy for many generations to come.

16:29

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I am glad to be able to speak in this debate, because flooding is a problem that affects families, infrastructure and businesses across Scotland, especially in the north-east and my constituency of Aberdeenshire West.

I know at first hand how devastating flood damage can be, because property that is noted in my entry in the register of members' interests was damaged by storm Frank. Storm Frank floods caused more damage in Ballater than in any other community in the UK, with 300 homes and 60 businesses flooded. Rebuilding efforts went on for months, and businesses are still rebuilding, two years later.

The extent of flood risk simply cannot be overstated. The Scottish Government estimates that more than 100,000 properties across Scotland are at risk of flooding and that one in 13 Scottish businesses remains at risk. As flooding continues to threaten our communities, the current funding framework for flood prevention remains inadequate. Annual flood damage is an estimated £252 million in Scotland and £1.1 billion across the United Kingdom, but despite that staggering figure, funding from the Scottish Government has stagnated and will remain stagnant for the next 10 years.

The Scottish Government has announced further cuts to SEPA in the coming year. As a result, only 42 flood protection projects across Scotland will receive priority funding in the period to 2021.

As the gap grows between the funds that have been allocated and the funds that are needed for flood relief and prevention, the Scottish Government must change its approach. However, the review of potentially vulnerable areas, which happens every six years, will not take place until 2019, although it could take place earlier, at the cabinet secretary's discretion.

The issue becomes especially problematic when an area that is not a designated PVA is flooded. Kemnay, a village in my constituency, was devastated by storm Frank, but Kemnay was not identified as an area of significant flood risk in 2011—although updated flood maps in December 2013 and the flooding of the River Don in January 2016 would have been enough to designate Kemnay a PVA in 2011.

The Kembhill Park Flood Group and many others have worked tirelessly to get Kemnay added to the list of priority areas in Aberdeenshire for the current funding cycle. It is unfortunate that a permanent flood defence system cannot be constructed until Aberdeenshire Council commissions an extensive flood risk assessment

from SEPA, and Aberdeenshire Council says that that will not happen until Kemnay is designated a PVA. The cabinet secretary could clarify whether that is correct, but regardless of her response, the fact remains that the council simply does not have the funds.

Without a Scotland-wide review of PVAs, flooded areas that were not listed as PVAs at the beginning of the current cycle are being neglected. On three separate occasions, I have raised flooding with the cabinet secretary, including asking for a review of PVAs before the end of the six-year cycle. On each occasion she has confirmed that the Scottish ministers have no plans to amend the timetable.

In November 2016, the cabinet secretary said:

“The decision not to include Kemnay as a PVA was taken by SEPA based on the best evidence available at that time, including flood maps, historical flood data held for the area, and public consultation.”—[*Written Answers*, 8 November 2016; S5W-04269.]

Later that month, she said:

“The Regulations require that SEPA must review, update where appropriate, and submit to the Scottish Ministers the document identifying the PVAs by 22 September 2018. There are no plans to change this date.”—[*Written Answers*, 29 November 2016; S5W-04790.]

In May this year, I got the same insufficient response:

“Whilst Scottish Ministers have a power under the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 ... to direct SEPA to review and, where appropriate update the document which identifies PVAs at other times outwith this six year cycle, there are no plans to use this power.”—[*Written Answers*, 11 May 2017; S5W-09116.]

Why not?

As the Scottish Government reallocates money away from flood prevention, at-risk communities will continue to suffer. Current funding is barely able to support PVA schemes alone. The Scottish Government must undertake a review and it must provide more support for flood prevention, so that flooding does not continue to wreak havoc on our communities and residents are not in fear again this winter.

16:33

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Splendid isolation. No—I am not referring to the Tory Brexit Britain that we will have in the very near future. I am referring to Inverclyde Council’s attitude to dealing with flood prevention and the flooding issues that we have had. For Mike Rumbles’s information, I say that the Lib Dems were in power in Inverclyde between 2003 and 2007 and did nothing to solve the flooding problems. Prior to that, Labour was in power for 20 years, doing nothing, and we also had eight years

of a Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive that did nothing to fix problems that we have had in Inverclyde for many, many years.

Flooding is not a new issue in Inverclyde; it goes back decades, to even before the second world war. There has been little focus on trying to fix or deal with any of the issues. From being a boy who grew up in Port Glasgow, I remember the pinchpoints in Inverclyde. Some of them still exist today.

Therefore, since I was elected in 2007, I have raised flooding in Inverclyde as an issue that needs to be addressed. After my first article about flooding on the A8 and in the Weir Street area in the east end of Greenock, I was contacted by a constituent who offered information to assist. At the end of our meeting, he wished me good luck and ended with, “You’ve bitten off more than you can chew on this issue.” I took that as a challenge.

I was contacted by a second constituent, who wanted to raise flooding issues in a different part of Greenock. I raised the issue further, I got more reports in the local media and I hosted a visit by the cabinet secretary, which she may remember, to the home of Greenock Morton FC at Cappielow park. I also organised the flooding summit with her predecessor, Stewart Stevenson MSP, and many local partners. It was a useful event that would have been even better if Inverclyde Council had sent somebody to participate in it. It did not, which did not surprise me, because Inverclyde Council’s attitude was that flooding was not a problem in Inverclyde. That was put to me by a business that was trying to assist locally, but had been told that by a council official.

Stewart Stevenson: Does Stuart McMillan agree that he has perfectly illustrated the need for ministers and others who have any responsibility to visit communities that are affected, which this Government has been particularly assiduous in doing?

Stuart McMillan: I agree 100 per cent with Stewart Stevenson. [*Interruption.*] Some Tories are laughing. Ministers and cabinet secretaries going out to visit communities is important. If the Tories do not agree with that, it is their problem.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I have taken an intervention already and I have only five minutes. I am sorry.

Members will know that Inverclyde has the River Clyde at one side of it. At the top of the hill, we have Loch Thom reservoir, the Gryfe reservoir number 2 and the Compensation reservoir, to name just three—we have 19 reservoirs at the top of the hill. It is blatantly obvious that water management is the business of every single

agency that deals with Inverclyde. I am thankful that that is now happening. This SNP Government's action, by delivering the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009, has forced people and organisations to come together at the table to begin to deal with their responsibilities.

In response to that legislation, Inverclyde Council commissioned the Dutch company Grontmij, now Sweco UK, to assess the need for flood alleviation measures, which I welcomed. Following its report, which identified numerous priority locations in terms of flooding, the council established a flood action working group including representation from the police, Transport Scotland, Scottish Water, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Network Rail, Ardgowan Estates, Historic Scotland, Amey and relevant council services. The group produced a costed flood action plan in 2010, which was in line with the initial allocation of £500,000 for projects that were designed to alleviate some of the area's flooding problems.

Consequently, in 2014 Scottish Water committed £50,000 to the Fox Street area of Greenock to improve its waste-water infrastructure and to tackle flooding at nearby properties. In 2016, four Inverclyde schemes received national funding as part of the Scottish Government's flood projects scheme. They were costed at £1.54 million, of which 80 per cent was contributed by the Scottish Government, with Inverclyde Council funding the remaining 20 per cent. At the same time, Inverclyde Council's central Greenock flood prevention project was under way, with six out of seven works complete and four additional locations that required measures being at the design stage. It must be noted that that work was largely made possible due to—once again—national funding from the SNP Government, with a £1.7 million grant for the project. I lobbied hard for that and I was delighted that another minister—Paul Wheelhouse MSP—was happy to sign it off.

Flood prevention and maintenance are vital to help our constituencies and our communities. The “splendid isolation” approach in Inverclyde ended in 2009, thanks to the SNP Scottish Government. As John Scott MSP said earlier, the act

“has served its purpose well.”

16:39

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

This has been an excellent debate with thoughtful and insightful contributions from across the chamber. With considerable foresight, the business managers have scheduled a debate on flooding for a day when we have flooding. They deserve accolades for that.

As I learned from SEPA's floodline service this morning, there have been two flood alerts in Scotland, no flood warnings and no severe flood warnings. I signed up to the floodline alert service today; I recommend that all members advertise this excellent service to their constituents.

Climate change is inevitable. Even if all emissions stopped tomorrow, the greenhouse gases that are already in the atmosphere would continue to cause damage for years to come. Because of that, future generations face the possibility of severe weather incidents including floods, with their misery and destruction, unless we act now with adaptations and mitigations. Our communities, especially coastal and riverside communities, are already susceptible to flooding, and during the past few years, they have faced its increased frequency and prolonged effects. As we learned from Lewis Macdonald earlier, the poorer people in our society who do not have flood insurance suffer more of the terrible effects of flooding.

The effects are not limited to our rural communities. Urban buildings that were designed to withstand the weather of the past cannot cope with the conditions of the future. It is therefore vital that we protect our homes, buildings and communities from the effects of flooding. What we can do to mitigate and prevent flooding must be at the forefront of our thinking.

For example, the Royal Society of Edinburgh recently looked at research that said that a 10 per cent increase in precipitation could result in halving of the flood-return period at Pacific Quay on the Clyde: the likelihood of flooding once in 100 years would halve to once in 50 years. That means that the standards of flood defences would fall.

A key step must be taken in respect of planning permission, so that when planning applications for new homes are submitted, SEPA is asked for advice and to check for risk to the environment and to the future homes. However, SEPA's advice against building on flood plains has been repeatedly ignored, as we have heard from several members in the debate. If planning permission is granted, building on flood plains takes place, and homes, lives, businesses and schools are turned upside down because of the flood water.

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee took evidence from members of the adaptation sub-committee of the UKCCC, who told us that not all local authorities carry out strategic flood risk assessments when dealing with local development plans. Not to look properly at future flood risk seems to me to be inherently reckless. In Scotland, where there is increasing pressure to build on flood plains, it is important

that all developers carry out flood risk assessments.

On top of the planning issues, which Mark Ruskell referred to, 90 per cent of at-risk properties are not protected by flood defences. There is a responsibility on developers, local authorities, Government and Parliament to ensure that we do the utmost to protect communities from the tragic consequences of flooding.

When she is winding up, perhaps the cabinet secretary could refer to flood warning systems and responses to flood events. In session 3, a report from the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, on which I was an occasional substitute and which was then convened by the cabinet secretary, made strong recommendations about the establishment of 100 per cent high-resolution radar coverage throughout Scotland, and about the lack of pluvial flooding warning systems in Scotland. I would welcome comments from the cabinet secretary on those points.

It is important to summarise some of the points that have been made by members in the debate: I apologise to the members whom I cannot mention. The cabinet secretary made some excellent points about the good example of flood protection schemes in Elgin, which, as the regional member, I endorse.

I also agree with Edward Mountain's good points about the crucial issues of measures to slow down water transfer and the unfortunate combination of flash floods and high tides. They were good points.

Claudia Beamish made relevant points about climate change being a shared international threat, about the crucial importance of increasing research and development and about having reliable and consistent funding for SEPA and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Graeme Dey made the useful point about Flood Re, the insurance scheme that will run for 20 years to provide flood cover for those who are most in need of it. Gillian Martin brought the human element to the debate by talking about the flooding in her constituency and giving vivid examples of the long-term aftermath of flooding, including people being out of their homes for more than a year.

From Lewis Macdonald, we heard other examples of flooding in Aberdeen. He also made the very important point that 100,000 properties are at risk in Scotland. Mark Ruskell made the point that although there are 40 flood prevention projects, 90 per cent of those properties are not covered.

Flooding causes misery, destruction, death and injury. It is crucial that all agencies, including

SEPA and Scottish Water, work together to reduce flood risk, take a strategic approach to climate change, and develop sustainable management of flood risk. As Gilbert White, the leading American geographer of the 20th century, said,

"Floods are an act of God, but flood losses are largely an act of man."

16:45

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entries on farming and crofting in the register of members' interests.

I am delighted to be able to close for the Scottish Conservatives on what is plainly an issue of great importance. Flooding is damaging to properties and the environment, but it has a particular impact on the lives of many of our constituents. The impact includes the cost of rebuilding a home, the damage to possessions and furnishings and, of course, the untold stress on the individuals who suffer. Occasionally, and tragically, human life is lost.

Although Scotland is significantly less affected by flooding than other parts of the UK, flooding remains a serious issue, particularly in areas where there are no existing flood defence schemes. I welcome the consensual tone of the debate. However, although the funding allocated for natural assets and flooding rose in the last budget, we remain concerned by the overall cut to SEPA's budget. It is all well and good to have the funding in place for flood management, but that work will be undone if one of the primary delivery bodies has its budget squeezed. We must also acknowledge a similar difficulty for local authorities, which are the first port of call for the management of flood defences.

I know all too well the impact that flooding has on local communities, given the various potentially vulnerable areas that exist across the west Highlands and the island communities. The idea that the Highlands are not vulnerable to flooding because of the topography of the area is incorrect. Almost all the major settlements are vulnerable due to their location on the coastline, and several islands including Bute and Benbecula are designated as PVA sites. Indeed, most of the Uists are impacted, and many members will remember the flooding that hit Stornoway back in 2014. I should also mention the fact that Caol and Lochside—on the shores of Loch Linnhe, near Fort William—are regularly affected by floods.

Although I acknowledge that the Government has committed to funding new flood protection projects and to supporting local flood risk management plans, I would be eager to ascertain whether any of those new projects will be in the west Highlands. At present, there are limited flood

defence systems in place, and major towns such as Fort William and Oban remain at risk.

Many members will have seen in the news yesterday—I think that the cabinet secretary mentioned this—that the Met Office has issued several flood warnings for areas around Caithness and Sutherland. I look forward to working with the cabinet secretary to ensure that the Highlands and Islands benefit from new investment in flood defences.

Claudia Beamish: I would like to highlight that a number of smaller communities—particularly properties with under 50 houses in them—are excluded from the potentially vulnerable areas that the member has mentioned. I think that two or three members have raised that issue. Does the member agree with me that that is an important issue for the Scottish Government to address?

Donald Cameron: Absolutely. It is a serious issue, and it is important that the Government addresses it, because we must address the issues of all communities—big and small—in this project.

Several members have talked about the wider issue of climate change, which is incredibly important. The effects of climate change will play a major role in determining our future approach to flood defence strategy and management. We must see flood management in that context. With sea levels rising as a result of global warming, we need to do all that we can to reduce our carbon footprint. That means continuing to lead the way in producing renewables technologies and minimising the impact of our carbon emissions. We need a rounded approach that does not just focus on reducing emissions in the energy sector but looks at how we reduce our impact in housing and transport—just two of that areas in which the recent report by the Committee for Climate Change noted we have not made sufficient strides in reducing our carbon footprint.

I will spend the rest of my time remarking on some of the points made across the chamber that I have found particularly compelling. Edward Mountain spoke of the significance of considering all measures to slow down water transfer from land to rivers, and that forms part of my party's amendment.

Having been around longer than many of us—I hope that he does not take that the wrong way—John Scott spoke about earlier legislation that was passed by the Parliament, particularly the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. It is incredibly important to see the long-term trajectory and to build on what we have achieved in the past.

Lewis Macdonald and Mark Ruskell both spoke powerfully about the difficulty that poorer householders have in getting insurance. Mark Ruskell added to that the observation that there is

an interportfolio aspect to flood management and that it is important to deal with and involve the rural economy portfolio as well as the environment portfolio.

Alexander Burnett was one of the many north-east MSPs who referred to storm Frank, and he made the point that businesses are still rebuilding, even now, which reminds us of the long-term effects of flooding.

Graeme Dey spoke about the number of organisations and the web of stakeholders that are involved. There is clearly an issue of co-ordination. That point was made by Gillian Martin, too—I think that she used the word “jigsaw”. She also gave an evocative case study from her constituency, and I was struck by the point that she made about the importance of long-term communication with residents.

It is clear that, although Scotland takes a commanding lead in devising many of the solutions to tackle climate change, there is still more that we can do to support communities and to limit the havoc that flooding can cause. We welcome many of the steps that the Government has taken, but we remain concerned about the cuts to SEPA, which delivers vital services. Although we are unable to prevent every natural incident, that should not make us complacent in our approach to minimising the outcomes and responding to the challenges that flooding presents.

16:51

Roseanna Cunningham: I thank all members for their speeches in the debate. I will accept both amendments. That does not mean that I agree with absolutely everything that I have heard from every member, but the debate has highlighted the interest in flood risk management and the potential impacts on communities across Scotland. Indeed, the Minister for Parliamentary Business was clearly prophetic in choosing to allocate today for the debate, given the flooding events that took place overnight.

The need to reduce the likelihood of such potentially devastating events is why reducing flood risk has to be a priority for the Government. The debate has highlighted the good progress that has been made in reducing the level of flood risk in Scotland, and I reiterate what an enormous difference there is now compared with what existed before the 2009 act was passed. We now have our first set of flood risk plans, which are based on strategic evidence of the causes of flooding and the locations where it is likely to occur. Those did not exist before. The first six-year plans were published last year, and the challenge

and opportunity is to implement them and deliver the benefits.

At times, the debate reached out into other portfolio interests. I sense that my diary will fill up with bilaterals if I take up all the suggestions that came from various parts of the chamber, but I suppose that an early warning ought to go out to both Derek Mackay and Kevin Stewart, the ministers who are responsible for finance and planning, respectively.

I will go through some of the speeches that we have heard. Edward Mountain talked about hard engineering not always being suitable, and I agree with him—how could anybody not? He raised big questions about land use issues, but he knows how amazingly controversial they can be. Land use could be the subject of a whole separate debate, and land use issues were referred to by a number of other members. I will have a little think about whether there is a different way of looking at issues such as flooding, but I will need to speak to my colleagues about that, because land use covers so many different areas that it is difficult to encapsulate it in a single debate.

Claudia Beamish raised a lot of issues that also relate to bigger land use questions. She talked about costs, as well. I would make the point that the agreement between the Scottish Government and COSLA secured consistent funding across the whole of the period from 2016 to 2026. I know that there will never be enough money to do everything that we want to do, but the point of that agreement was that it delivered a previously unavailable consistency and ability to plan over such a period.

I ought to say that, as part of the review of planning, the Scottish Government is considering the issue of permitted development rights, which was a particular concern that Claudia Beamish raised. We have commissioned a sustainability appraisal on the subject that will inform work on detailed proposals for future consultation.

To those members who spoke about SEPA, I say that its chief executive, Terry A'Hearn, is absolutely clear that flood risk management and flood warning work will continue to be an organisational priority and that it will be delivered through the available budget. That specific promise has been made by the chief executive.

A number of members, including Graeme Dey, talked about Flood Re and some of the issues around insurance, which, I accept, continues to be a challenge. It is important to say that, as useful as Flood Re is, it will operate only until 2039. That seems quite a long time away, but it is not perhaps as far off as everybody thinks. That date was chosen to give notice to householders and house builders that they should build in and ensure resilience and protection. It is important to

remember that the scheme will not be there in perpetuity.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the issue of insurance is a particular one for lower-income households—particularly for tenants in private rented properties?

Roseanna Cunningham: Very much so, and I am aware of that issue in my constituency. I know that, for all the good work that Flood Re is doing, it has not yet reached everybody and there is still an issue in respect of insurance that needs to be dealt with.

John Scott and others raised the issue of coastal erosion. I am well aware of the problem, which is why a great deal is being done to assess the likely extent of the damage. It is important to remind members that, although coastal erosion and coastal flooding are interlinked, they are not necessarily the same. Flood funding will be applicable to flooding aspects of coastal erosion.

Mike Rumbles: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Roseanna Cunningham: No. I need to press on if I am to do justice to the rest of the debate.

A number of members, including Gillian Martin, talked about the impact of flooding on individuals and communities, and it is important that we keep that in mind. Communities and individual householders are at the heart of the issue because they are hit the most.

Going back to the issue of land use, Gillian Martin also flagged up the concern that exists around peatlands and wetlands. That issue is important in relation to any kind of development, and not only in relation to flood risk management.

Several members, including Mark Ruskell, Claudia Beamish and Bruce Crawford, talked about small communities. I say to them that the second national flood risk assessment, which is currently under way, follows a revised methodology that seeks to include small communities that face a significant flood risk. We are aware of the issue and are concerned to do something about.

I have probably missed out a number of members who spoke in the debate and a number of issues that I could have raised, but I will mention the concern that Oliver Mundell raised about Whitesands. As he knows, an inquiry into that scheme will now take place. Because of the number of disputed facts that were raised in relation to the scheme, there was really no other way for us to proceed than to conduct that inquiry. I hope that Oliver Mundell will agree that, regardless of how long it takes, it is better to get the issue sorted out than not to do so.

I caution members that, as I said at the outset, we cannot go back to the previous ad hoc way in which flood projects were dealt with, which is what some members would lead us towards if we were to move away from the framework that we have set down.

The change in climate presents us with challenges in the future that will require continued partnership working involving local authorities, SEPA, Scottish Water and others. Flood risk management is a key component of the suite of measures that this Government has in place to prepare Scotland for the changing climate.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-09054, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 28 November 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Refreshing Scotland's Alcohol and Drugs Strategies

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Making Scotland Equally Safe

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 29 November 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Health and Sport

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 November 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Stage 1 Debate: Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 5 December 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

Wednesday 6 December 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Communities, Social Security and
 Equalities

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

Thursday 7 December 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

and (b) that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 30 November, in rule 13.6.2, insert at end "and may provide an opportunity for Party Leaders or their representatives to question the First Minister".—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-09052, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Telecommunications Restriction Orders (Custodial Institutions) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-09019.1, in the name of Edward Mountain, which seeks to amend motion S5M-09019, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on working in partnership to reduce flood risk across Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-09019.2, in the name of Claudia Beamish, which seeks to amend motion S5M-09019, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, as amended, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-09019, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that efforts to reduce flood risk are a vital part of the Scottish Government's adaptation to a changing climate and are needed to provide a foundation for sustainable economic growth and thriving communities; agrees that the risk-based, plan-led, multi-agency partnership approach, as introduced by the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009, has led to a better understanding of the causes and impacts of flooding, and consequently enabled significant progress towards delivering sustainable management of flood risk in Scotland; considers that, given the increasing rate of climate change, the importance of considering all measures of slowing down water transfer from the land to rivers throughout the catchment is vital; further recognises the work of local authorities, Scottish Water, SEPA and other partners to deliver new flood protection schemes, Floodline, the Scottish Flood Forecasting Service and advances in property level protection, which are providing protection to Scotland's communities and increasing their resilience; believes that no communities, whether urban or rural, should be left behind in these developments; considers that the Scottish Government must ensure that there is adequate research commissioned to assess the implications of climate change on flooding policy and that the strategies and sustainable management of flood risk are regularly reviewed, and believes that there must be adequate funding to ensure that the range of flooding interventions and policies can be taken forward.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-09052, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Telecommunications Restriction Orders (Custodial Institutions) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

Thyroid Conditions

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-07373, in the name of Elaine Smith, on thyroid patients deserving fair treatment. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes petition PE 01463, which has been under consideration by the Public Petitions Committee since 2012 and highlights the problems with inadequate diagnosis and treatment of thyroid conditions; understands that at least 2% of the population will suffer from hypothyroidism in their lifetime, with some doctors believing that the rate is much higher; recognises that the chronic condition affects mainly women (95%); accepts that, in the 1980s, the standard treatment of Dessicated Thyroid Hormone (DTH) was replaced by synthetic thyroxine (T4); notes that T4 is a prohormone that must be converted to T3 (liothyronine), which is the biologically active hormone; understands that the Royal College of Physicians officially recognises that 5 to 10% of patients on T4 do not do well, a figure believed to be substantially higher by others in the thyroid field; takes account of the fact that many patients are wholly reliant on T3 or combination therapy for health and wellbeing; expresses concern that some health boards, including NHS Lanarkshire, are, it believes, issuing controversial guidelines that imply that GPs can no longer prescribe T3; considers any such instruction to be a breach of their duty of care to those relying on T3 to live, discriminatory in terms of gender and potentially in breach of Article 2 and Article 14 Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and notes calls for health boards to ensure that patients continue to receive T3.

17:03

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank members who signed my motion, which allowed me to bring this important issue to the chamber.

This is my first members' business debate this parliamentary session and, as far as I am aware, it is the first time that thyroid issues have been exclusively debated in the Parliament. That is surprising, as hypothyroidism affects 2 per cent of the population and, given that 95 per cent of sufferers are women, it is a big issue for women's health. However, perhaps that explains why not enough attention has been paid to the issue by politicians or the medical establishment, as both are male dominated. Clare Pullar, who wrote to me recently, summed it up well when she said that it is

"a male-dominated profession actively silencing a female-dominated patient group".

Perhaps if 95 per cent of thyroid sufferers were male, and thyroid issues caused them to become economically inactive, diagnosis and treatment might be dealt with differently. There are some men with thyroid problems, but it is undoubtedly a medical issue that affects thousands of women

and the scandalous lack of appropriate diagnosis and treatment is a matter of gender discrimination.

Women are now fighting back in ever-increasing numbers, despite being ill. They are becoming experts in the field of endocrinology, and the current threat of withdrawal of liothyronine—or T3, as I will refer to it—has driven them even further. The improve thyroid treatment campaign has motivated people to become involved in the demand for appropriate treatment, and campaigners have also been motivated by the fact that so many women—mothers, sisters, daughters and constituents of MSPs—are suffering unnecessarily, being wrongly diagnosed, living half-lives, dying of heart failure or myxoedema coma, or committing suicide.

There are some patients in the public gallery tonight, and others are watching the live BBC feed, so I hope that the minister will seriously address the issues raised and will not stick to a script that is perhaps prepared by civil servants based on information from the intransigent male-dominated medical establishment.

The thyroid gland controls total health and wellbeing and has been described as the body's engine. In the 1970s, the standard course of treatment for hypothyroidism changed from naturally desiccated thyroid, or DTH, to levothyroxine, or T4, as I will refer to it from now on. It is a synthetic hormone that is inactive and requires the body to convert it to T3, which is the active form that is needed to function. It is difficult to get a thyroid diagnosis in the first place, as many of the symptoms mimic other conditions such as depression, the menopause and even Alzheimer's, and many women are told that they are borderline and are not given treatment, despite displaying hypothyroid symptoms. Untreated, they are likely to cost the national health service in other ways, such as through infertility treatments, antidepressants and obesity, because the problems that are associated with thyroid disorders include depression, insomnia, infertility, anxiety, hair loss, weight gain, breathing problems and extreme fatigue.

I have personal experience of all of those, as I have an underactive thyroid. I was originally on T4, but I would not be standing here today if I had not challenged a misdiagnosis when I became symptomatic again a few years ago. I was finally put on T3, which quite literally brought me back from the dead. My full story is available on the Public Petitions Committee website, if anyone wants to look at it.

When I started helping Lorraine Cleaver with her petition on the issue in 2012, I thought that I was doing it for others because my situation seemed to be resolved. Over five years later, along with many other women, I am faced with the withdrawal of my

life-saving T3 simply because of cost and not because I do not need it. Unbelievably, we are now going backwards on diagnosis and treatment rather than moving forward with the up-to-date research that is readily available. It is officially admitted that 5 to 10 per cent of patients do not do well on the usual treatment of T4 and that many are unable to convert it. As the medical establishment will no longer allow the use of DTH in the United Kingdom, the only alternative course of NHS treatment for those patients is T3, which is an entirely different medicine from T4. The human body has to convert T4 into T3, and we know that some patients just cannot do that. Therefore, to suggest that patients on T3 can be safely moved to T4 is appalling and shows a complete lack of understanding of thyroid function.

The eminent Scottish endocrinologist Dr Anthony Toft recently said that he suspects that, in time, we will go back to using DTH, which some patients currently buy privately from abroad, but in the meantime all that we have is T3. It is a terrifying prospect for many women that that life-saving medicine is no longer being prescribed, on the instruction of health boards, aided and abetted by NHS Scotland. Most patients cannot afford to buy privately, and they should not have to, but the alternative is unthinkable. The British Thyroid Association recognises that the main reason for the withdrawal is not medical but the astronomical cost that is charged by the company that until recently was the only producer of T3 in the UK. In Germany, the cost of 100 tablets is £25, in Norway it is £15 and in Turkey it is £1.25. Concordia charges the NHS an unbelievable £922 for 100 tablets, a point that was helpfully highlighted yesterday by the BBC. That is a near 6000 per cent increase over the past few years. Why can it not be sourced from abroad? The issue must be resolved by tackling the price and not by attacking patients.

I turn to NHS Lanarkshire, which is mentioned in my motion. Its new clinical guidance on hypothyroidism, which was written by two diabetes experts and a general practitioner, is full of wrong information and out-of-date research, including an irrelevant paper on overactive thyroid issues. When I challenged the board, it admitted the errors, but that guidance must now be recalled from all the GPs it was sent to. The board must then ask thyroid experts, preferably those who know about T3 and who know the difference between hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism, to rewrite it. Frankly, it is shocking that that guidance could be produced in the first place.

Last year, I got wind that the board might be issuing instructions to GPs not to prescribe T3 and to remove it from patients who were on it. The board denied that and it was only after lodging freedom of information requests that I discovered

that there had been such correspondence, including an email saying that T3 is “an expensive medicine” and telling a GP practice that it would have to bear the cost if it prescribed it.

There is no doubt that the underlying message to GPs is to stop prescribing T3. That is outrageous, but it is working, because many women are now telling me that they have been taken off it and they will probably be coming to all their MSPs to tell them the same thing.

GPs have a duty to prescribe the drugs that their patients need. They should be guided by the principle of doing no harm.

The BTA's 2015 statement has been misinterpreted by medics, because of which the BTA has recently had to clarify its position by saying:

“the BTA position statement on hypothyroidism should not be interpreted as a recommendation to not use Liothyronine or an endorsement for its discontinuation.”

That is pretty unambiguous. It goes on to say that patients who are on it should continue and that new patients can be treated with T3.

Let us be clear: there are numerous rigorous scientific studies showing that T3 is a safe and effective medication. There are hundreds of Scottish women on T3, including me, who have been saved from a slow, lingering death and there are hundreds more who could be saved. Let us remind ourselves that the medical establishment admits that up to 10 per cent cannot function on T4. That means that it admits that well over 1,000 women in Scotland cannot function on T4. What is the choice for them if their T3 is taken away?

Without thyroid hormones, patients die. Taking away T3 will undoubtedly result in patient death. Will the minister put a stop to the removal of T3 and send a clear message that GPs must prescribe it?

I will finish with the words of Morag Webster, who wrote to me bravely about her situation. She said at the end of her letter:

“They have taken my 20s, my career, my friends, but I'm a better person for it”—

Imagine her saying that. She continued:

“I'm just disappointed they have robbed me of a chance to have a family of my own.”

This is a massive women's health scandal, which must be urgently addressed. Thyroid patients deserve fair treatment.

17:11

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I hope to be here for the whole debate, but I am

hosting an event this evening, so I apologise if I have to leave.

I am pleased to contribute to the debate, not least because petition PE1463, by Sandra Whyte, Marian Dyer and Lorraine Cleaver, on effective thyroid and adrenal testing, diagnosis and treatment, has been live with the Public Petitions Committee for nearly as long as I have served on it, which is just over five years. In that time, we have taken large amounts of evidence on the subject.

Before I go into any detail, I congratulate Elaine Smith on bringing the issue to the chamber for debate and I applaud her for the way in which she has championed it in the Parliament, such as by attending the Public Petitions Committee, and outwith the Parliament, most notably with her own and other health boards.

Elaine Smith: Will the Public Petitions Committee bring the issue to the chamber so that it can be debated more widely?

Angus MacDonald: Indeed, yes. A draft report will come the committee in the next few weeks. We look forward to a further discussion in the chamber on, I hope, a not-too-distant date.

I thank Elaine Smith for outlining in detail in her speech what is a complex issue.

As I said, the Public Petitions Committee has taken extensive evidence on the issue over the years. Recently, it took evidence from Dr John Midgley, who believes that there should be an unbiased review of present protocols for treatment and diagnosis in the light of new evidence that shows that the single use of thyroid stimulating hormone as a test for thyroid deficiency and for treatment is unsuitable and misleading. Dr Midgley stated that the test for thyroid stimulating hormone is now overreaching, resulting in a significant number of patients being wrongly diagnosed and wrongly treated, or not treated at all.

A constituent who is a thyroid patient contacted me. She was diagnosed with auto-immune thyroiditis—Hashimoto's thyroiditis—and hypothyroidism in September 2016. She is taking T4 levothyroxine medication, which is a monotherapy drug that supplies the thyroid with an inactive hormone—T4. As she is a patient who does not convert T4 into the active hormone T3, the levothyroxine drug is, she states, “next to useless” for her. She has had to lobby hard for months with her GP practice and Forth Valley NHS Board in order for them to provide her with even one other thyroid medication option. NDT, or natural desiccated thyroid, is controversial due to its animal content and unlicensed status in the UK—although I understand that a number of patients are sourcing it abroad—while synthetic T3 is not entertained at all, because of the cost.

As a result, my constituent has had to pay for a private endocrinologist to speak on her behalf to her GP and the health board before they would give approval for her even to trial synthetic T3 as an alternative treatment. She is understandably annoyed at the way she has been forced to “jump through hoops”, as she puts it, to have her condition treated more effectively. As a result of her experience, my constituent feels that thyroid patients should not be limited to a single medication option that may not work for them.

It is clear that, as Elaine Smith mentioned, there is a cost issue. I was shocked to see yesterday that the Canadian drugs giant Concordia, one of the producers of liothyronine, has been hauled over the coals by the Competition and Markets Authority for overcharging for the product. It turns out that in 2007, the NHS paid about £4.46 per pack, but that by July this year, the cost had risen to £258.19 per pack—an increase of almost 6,000 per cent.

The CMA's chief executive, Andrea Coscelli, said yesterday:

“Pharmaceutical companies which abuse their position and overcharge for drugs are forcing the NHS—and the UK taxpayer—to pay over the odds for important medical treatments. We allege that Concordia used its market dominance in the supply of liothyronine tablets to do exactly that.”

That is scandalous, in anybody's book.

I believe that, until earlier this year, Concordia was the only supplier of the drug. Clearly, any future competition will be welcomed by the 2 per cent of the population who suffer from hypothyroidism, not to mention the NHS.

Elaine Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Angus MacDonald: Can I take it, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: Yes, briefly.

Elaine Smith: It is just a brief clarification, Presiding Officer. As I understand it, others have set a similar price.

Angus MacDonald: Thank you for that clarification.

I look forward to improved diagnosis, easier and cheaper access to drugs to treat hypothyroidism, and greater availability in this country of natural desiccated thyroid, which is currently being sourced abroad by sufferers who are desperate to find any form of relief from the symptoms.

I also look forward to debating petition PE1463 further at future meetings of the Public Petitions Committee, and I hope to see some positive action in the future.

17:17

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I congratulate Elaine Smith on securing the debate, acknowledge her work on this important issue on behalf of her constituents with thyroid conditions and thank her for sharing her personal experience. I also pay tribute to those behind the petition that was submitted to the Parliament's Public Petitions Committee in 2012 for the work that they have done in highlighting the serious concerns around the quality of care for and treatment of hypothyroidism.

I commend the work of the British Thyroid Foundation, which provides advice and support to people with thyroid conditions throughout the UK. Hypothyroidism affects hundreds of people in every constituency in Scotland. As the motion suggests, the condition affects about 15 to 20 women in every 1,000, but only about one man in every 1,000.

The risks of initial misdiagnosis can be significant, because some of the common symptoms mirror the symptoms of numerous other conditions. Early access to accurate blood tests is therefore vital. Hypothyroidism is a serious condition, but, as Elaine Smith said, if it is treated correctly, in the vast majority of cases those with the condition can lead a normal life as long as their treatment is monitored appropriately.

The original petition urged the Scottish Government to

“take action to ensure GPs ... are able to accurately diagnose thyroid and adrenal disorders and provide the most appropriate treatment.”

All of us share that aim.

While some progress has been made since 2012, much more still needs to be done. The lack of specific and formal Scottish guidelines on the diagnosis and management of hypothyroidism is a key issue that has been raised by many patients ahead of the debate.

The Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network is not required to follow the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's lead in providing full guidelines on the topic, and I understand the concerns that have been expressed and the focus on the specific needs of a significant minority of individuals who do not successfully convert T4 to T3. I hope that SIGN will be prepared to engage positively with campaigners on the issue and that it will look at how we can make changes.

I very much share Elaine Smith's concerns about the guidance from some NHS boards that implies that T3 should not be prescribed, given that that treatment, or its use in combination therapy, is essential to maintaining the health and wellbeing of patients who are not helped by T4.

The decision to prescribe T3 or, indeed, any non-standard treatment, must be an informed, clinical decision made by a GP and based on the individual circumstances and the best interests of the patient.

The work of the Competition and Markets Authority in relation to the costs to the NHS of the only T3 product available in this country is welcome, and I look forward to the CMA's findings.

As I prepared for the debate, a big theme that emerged for me is the need for more research into a range of aspects that are related to the diagnosis and treatment of hypothyroidism. As Elaine C Smith—I apologise; as Elaine Smith said, the biochemical processes involved in thyroid function and the interaction between all the respective hormones are extremely complex and not yet fully understood.

There is also significant concern that not enough research has been carried out into the specific group of people who do not respond to the standard T4 treatment, a subject on which little is known internationally. In addition, some people would like to see more research into the safety of the desiccated thyroid hormone, which was used to treat hypothyroidism in previous decades but is now unlicensed. I would welcome an indication from the minister about the ways in which the Scottish Government is working with academia and pharmaceutical companies to conduct new research in this area, because it is about time that that happened.

Elaine Smith: I would welcome new research, particularly on patient experience. The improve thyroid treatment campaign's standard letter says that a lot of the current research differs from the previous research, that combination therapy works and that T3 is necessary for those who do not do well on T4.

Miles Briggs: As the member passionately outlined, patients across Scotland do not feel that their voice is being heard, or that pathways to treatment are being properly considered. The debate is timely: we should make sure that we look to transform treatment for those many people across the country.

I again welcome the debate and the very welcome focus that Elaine Smith has brought to such an important health issue for many thousands of people across Scotland. I hope that the debate will help to increase awareness of hypothyroidism as we look to make more progress in the diagnosis and treatment of thyroid conditions.

17:23

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): In referring to the member as Elaine C Smith, Mr Briggs is clearly getting ready for the Christmas panto season. I am sure that he will not mind if we refer to him as Rab C.

I, too, thank Elaine Smith for bringing this members' business debate to the chamber and for her passionate speech. The debate is hugely important to and long-awaited by the many people who suffer with thyroid conditions, some of whom, as we have heard, have been following the progress of the petition on this issue through the Public Petitions Committee since 2012.

It is thought that almost 3 million people in the UK suffer from a thyroid problem and, as we have heard from Elaine Smith, about 95 per cent of them are women. Hypothyroidism is a crippling illness and many people are being failed by poor and inappropriate diagnosis and treatment protocols. Indeed, some people are left completely undiagnosed and untreated.

Currently, patients in the United Kingdom are waiting more than three times longer to receive treatment than their peers in the United States. In America, they are treated much earlier. We know that thyroid problems can progress slowly over time, which means that many people are left suffering a debilitating illness for many months, or even years, before they receive NHS treatment.

The problems do not stop once a patient is eventually diagnosed. As has been mentioned, the current guidance suggests that thyroxine—T4—should be used as the standard treatment for the majority of patients. That means that alternative treatments such as T3 and NDT—natural desiccated thyroid—are rarely offered, despite the fact that there are many patients who do extremely well on T3, and many more patients who require combination therapies. One of the concerns for patients is the threat of T3 being removed from the prescribed medicines list because of the extortionate costs that are associated with the drug.

Elaine Smith has already mentioned this, but it bears repeating, because it is so shocking and stark: in the UK, 100 tablets of T3 can cost up to £922, whereas, in Turkey, the same dose costs less than £1.25 and, in Greece, it costs £3.24. The NHS is being ripped off by Concordia, the company that, until earlier this year, was the only supplier of T3 in this country. Just yesterday, the Competition and Markets Authority found that Concordia had abused its dominant position to overcharge the NHS by hiking the price of T3 by nearly 6,000 per cent in the past 10 years. That is truly shocking.

We need to remember that there is a real human cost at the heart of this debate. I want to tell members about one of my constituents who is a hypothyroid sufferer. She is currently prescribed T4 and T3 as treatment for her condition. She has been prescribed the same treatment since 2005, despite the fact that tests show that she has a genetic abnormality that means that her body cannot convert T4 to T3 as well as it should. Her doctor refuses to increase her dose of T3 and has instead twice doubled her dose of T4. There is no clinical reason for that and it is making her worse. I have no doubt that that has been done because of the cost. I know that there are patients not just in greater Glasgow and Clyde but in Lanarkshire and Tayside, from whom the health board has withdrawn T3 completely. What have those women to do? Must they book flights to Turkey? That would probably be cheaper for them than having to access T3 through the NHS in Scotland.

I know that the pricing of medicines is reserved, but that should not prevent the Minister for Public Health and Sport or the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport from engaging in robust discussions with their UK counterparts. Women across the UK need T3 to give them any kind of quality of life. The drug is being withdrawn from patients only because of the cost.

I urge the minister to implement the recommendations of the improve thyroid treatment campaign group and ensure that T3 is not withdrawn from the prescribed medicines list, that doctors can continue to prescribe it in the clinical interests of their patients and that the treatment protocols include T3 as a standard option. Let us deliver better and more effective treatment for thyroid disease. If this was happening to men, there would be a riot, so I urge the minister to make sure that women are not penalised and that they receive the T3 that they need and deserve.

17:28

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank Elaine Smith for securing a debate on this important subject, and for her personal and moving opening speech. It is very brave for any member to come to the chamber to talk about personal experiences, and we could tell from her speech the extent to which Elaine's life has been affected by this terrible condition.

As my fellow member of the Public Petitions Committee Angus MacDonald said, petition PE1463 has been running for five years, and at times we have been at a loss to know how to make headway with it. I do not profess to be a medical expert on the rights and wrongs of the drugs that are being used to treat hypothyroidism, but I know that it is a condition that has blighted

the lives of women—because 95 per cent of those who are affected are women—for decades.

Like so many “women's conditions”, such as menstrual problems and the menopause—which, of course, is not an illness but a normal part of women's lives—thyroid problems have in the past been dismissed by clinicians, who have said things such as, “Och, it's just your age,” or “It's normal for a woman of your age.” I have been on the receiving end of that advice as, I am sure, have most women. Thankfully, in 2017 such attitudes are changing and the medical profession is displaying a very different attitude to problems that affect more than half the population. We are at last starting to talk about them.

The core of the problem when it comes to thyroid diagnosis and treatment is that it is to an extent stuck in the past, with no clear pathway for diagnosis and treatment. It is clear that one size does not fit all when it comes to treatment. As we have heard, the effects of unmedicated or poorly medicated hypothyroidism are horrific and they include fatigue, weight gain, depression, anxiety, stress, lack of concentration, dry cough, insomnia and much more. The bottom line is that the medical profession must listen to patient groups and individual patients. For example, when we are prescribed antibiotics and find that they are not working, we go back to the doctor to be prescribed a different type, usually with satisfactory results. If one drug does not work, then it is feasible to keep trying until one that does is found. If that drug is T3, as Elaine Smith has described, then that should be prescribed, regardless of cost.

We heard today of the latest shocking controversy surrounding drug companies and T3. This is a terribly serious issue. Patients should never be held to ransom by drug companies, and it is our duty, and that of the Scottish and UK Governments, to ensure that they are not. Buying drugs off the internet is surely the last resort and patients should never have to go there. They end up risking their safety and it costs them a fortune. The quality of life of those who can afford to buy the drug is transformed, but what about those who cannot afford it? Are they doomed to suffer? In Scotland, we pride ourselves, correctly, on the fact that prescriptions are free, thanks to the Scottish Government. No one should have to pay for good health.

I would like to thank the women, such as Elaine Smith and those in the gallery, who have spoken out about this to help other women. They have highlighted a serious issue, and I hope that the medical profession will finally sit up and take action before more women are forced to suffer.

17:31

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Elaine Smith for bringing the debate. It gives us an opportunity to gain clarity about treatments for thyroid patients and the challenges that they face, both of which are complicated issues. Many of those problems are highlighted in petition PE1463, which has been under consideration since 2012. I would like to acknowledge the work Sandra Whyte, Marian Dyer and Lorraine Cleaver have put into that petition.

In the UK, the condition affects 15 in every 1,000 women, or 1.5 per cent, and 1 in 1,000 men, or 0.1 per cent. In Scotland alone, the figure is approximately 100,000, so it is vital that we ensure that they receive the proper treatment. Treatment involves daily hormone replacement tablets for those who have an underactive thyroid. That should allow for a normal healthy life: unfortunately, lack of proper treatment can lead to complications.

We have the expertise and the tools to test for and treat thyroid illnesses, including the state-of-the-art research facility at Ninewells hospital in Dundee, and Axis Shield, which is a Dundee business that is a leader in products for early diagnosis of critical illnesses and hormonal imbalances. Those facilities are a major boon for Dundee, but they are an even bigger boon in helping to improve lives here and elsewhere in the world, so we must nurture and support them however possible.

Sadly, a number of patients in Scotland who suffer from thyroid disorders do not receive adequate treatment. The current T4-only treatment that is prescribed by the General Medical Council is inadequate for patients who are unable to convert T4 to T3, which is the active form of the hormone, as was outlined earlier in the debate. According to the Royal College of Physicians, between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of patients do not respond well to T4. The current T4-only approach is at odds with the work of Dr Anthony Toft, who is considered to be a global expert in endocrinology. Dr Toft stresses the importance of allowing GPs the freedom to treat patients according to their individual symptoms.

Elaine Smith: Dr Toft also makes it clear that GPs should examine their patients and not their blood tests, because the test often does not show what the problems are: it certainly does not show that patients are unable to convert T4. The test will say that they are absolutely fine. We also do not know what "absolutely fine" is, because everybody is different. Dr John Midgley suggests that a test other than the heel-prick thyroid test that is done on babies should be done when people are in their

teens, so that we know what is normal for individuals.

Bill Bowman: I thank Elaine Smith for that clarification and enhancement of our knowledge. I feel a little bit like a student teacher who is being observed from the back of the classroom and corrected.

Unfortunately, the Scottish Government's listening exercise, which was undertaken by Thyroid UK, revealed that many patients who do not respond well to T4 have difficulty agreeing alternative options with their GP.

Dr Toft has also made the point that using blood tests alone as a basis for recommending treatment does not always reveal the full extent of a patient's needs. Basic thyroid testing needs to be improved to include options other than tests for thyroid stimulating hormone. Those TSH tests measure how much of the hormone is in a person's blood, but doctors can make incorrect diagnoses when they use TSH levels as an indicator. It is good to say that twice. If we are to resolve that situation, alternative testing and treatment options must be available.

Fundamentally, the motion is about the need for personalised treatment. We must trust in the expertise and experience of GPs to prescribe treatments that are suitable for individual patients. Tying a GP's hands by allowing only T4 treatment is entirely the wrong approach. It is therefore worrying that the motion notes that some health boards are believed to be

"issuing controversial guidelines that imply that GPs can no longer prescribe T3".

When patients are denied access to treatments, they sometimes experiment with unregulated and unlicensed products. Lorraine Cleaver of thyroid petition Scotland has said that patients, including herself, are spending huge sums of money on their health. They pay for private tests, see specialists or buy medication that is not available on the NHS. That should be of great concern to us all.

We know that a simple change in treatment can mean the difference between a patient living with debilitating symptoms or leading a normal life, so our aim must be that every patient receives the treatment that they need. Let us hope that we can trust the Scottish Government and our doctors to treat patients as individuals, and to treat their conditions properly.

17:37

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I did not intend to speak in the debate, so I might not need the whole four minutes. Members will be glad to hear that.

Two things inspired me to contribute to the debate, one of which was the powerful contribution by my colleague Elaine Smith. As a fellow Coatbridger, I felt inclined to contribute, given what she said.

The second thing that inspired me to contribute was that, just before the debate started, I received an email about the debate from a family member, through an in-law connection. She emailed some of her story. Several years ago, she was diagnosed as requiring T3 and T4 treatment. She was on both for a while before the requirement for T3 treatment was removed. Although she felt a dip in her condition after the removal of T3, she was okay and off it. However, in June this year, her T4 medication was reduced from 300mg to 50mg, and she noted a dramatic dip her condition. Instead of getting more medication or going back on to T3, she was recently taken off medication altogether. She is currently off work unwell. She has a range of symptoms that I do not need to go into, because they have been described by other members. I know that because, as I said, I know her personally. She puts her condition down to her treatment.

There is an issue that we need to look at, and I have every confidence in the Minister for Public Health and Sport and the Scottish Government that they will do that. I am talking about an NHS board difficulty with a particular case. When the individual went for treatment, her GP was not even aware that she required treatment because she had had her thyroid removed. The priority that thyroid treatment is given in Scotland and the UK is an issue. Elaine Smith made that point.

I have noted down a couple of points. The 2 per cent figure has been mentioned a lot. I am no expert on thyroid disease, but I suspect that that relates to 2 per cent who are diagnosed. Are we talking about an even bigger issue? I imagine that the problem is a worldwide one.

When I did a quick Google search using my phone, as we can now do in the chamber, I noted that hypothyroidism is connected to the mineral iodine, and saw an article that said that teenage girls in particular are at risk of iodine deficiency, which can lead to the condition. Again, I do not know as much about the condition as other members who have spoken in the debate, but I note that they have said that more research into it is needed.

I agree with other members that the thyroid issue is gender based and that we need to knock it on the head. I do not think that any of us in the chamber can deny that if 95 per cent of men had the condition, there would be different treatment options.

We have shown with minimum unit pricing for alcohol that we can take on the big corporations: we can do that with the drug companies, as well. I hope that we can all work together to find a solution to the problem of hypothyroidism. I decided to speak in the debate at the last minute, but I should have declared at the start that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport.

The Presiding Officer: I call Aileen Campbell, the Minister for Public Health and Sport, to wind up the debate.

17:40

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): Like others, I am happy and privileged to take part in the debate. I, too, commend Elaine Smith for bringing the debate to the chamber. I recognise the passion and commitment that she has shown in raising awareness of the issue and bringing her personal testimony to the Parliament to outline the struggles that she and many other women have undergone through having a thyroid condition. Many members described the debilitating consequences of the condition and the suffering that many women have to endure because of it. It is therefore incumbent on us all to do what we can to support those women and help them as best we can. Like others, I also welcome the women in the public gallery.

I know that what I have said might not be all that Elaine Smith wants to hear from me, but I hope that she recognises that there will always be a commitment from us to work with her as best we can to make the improvements that I think we all seek. I know that the petition on thyroid disorders is being considered by the Public Petitions Committee and I sincerely look forward to the report on the petition, which is imminent. The Scottish Government is supportive of those who continue to do vital work in raising awareness for thyroid patients. I am encouraged to see so many people showing their support for the petition, for the debate and for the work that will happen as a result of the Public Petitions Committee's work.

Many members mentioned guidance for clinicians as a concern. The British Thyroid Association's position statement of 25 June 2015 set out recommendations on the management of primary hypothyroidism, based on a literature review of the published positions of the European Thyroid Association and the American Thyroid Association. The British Thyroid Association is the leading UK body on thyroid disorders and its guidance is endorsed by a number of expert bodies, including the Royal College of Physicians.

In 2016, NICE published a clinical knowledge summary on hypothyroidism, which provides a concise, accessible summary of current evidence for primary care professionals and focuses on the most common and significant presentations in primary care. NICE also intends to develop a guideline on thyroid disease, with an expected publication date of 20 November 2019. There will be wide consultation with stakeholders and, importantly, patients and service users. I encourage anyone with an interest in thyroid conditions to engage in the guideline development process. I am happy to meet Elaine Smith to consider ways in which we can enable women to take part in that process.

Elaine Smith: Lorraine Cleaver is involved in that process. Will the minister commit to having a meeting with us to talk about some of the issues after the debate?

Aileen Campbell: Absolutely. We want to reach out to ensure that as many as possible of the women who are suffering in the way that members have described and who feel that they have been disempowered through their diagnosis get an opportunity to feed into the process of guideline development. If Elaine Smith wants to accompany Lorraine Cleaver to a meeting, we will set that up.

The chief medical officer's report "Realising Realistic Medicine" describes how we ensure that people are firmly at the centre of the decisions about their health and care. The report sets out how we can help people to make decisions about their care, focusing care on what people need and asking them, "What matters to you?" It is about giving people the treatment that is right for them, at the right time, with the right support. Some of the testimony that we heard in tonight's debate is certainly at odds with that approach, which we want to embed across all practice.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister has heard that people have been told that they cannot access the medicine that they require—T3—and that there is a suggestion that that is because of the cost. Is the minister willing to write to health boards to confirm that they ought not to exclude T3 as an option while the process is going on?

Aileen Campbell: I was going to come on to that, in response to points that Jackie Baillie made. She described concern that T3 will be removed from the prescribed medicines list. NHS England might be considering that, but there is no question of such an approach being taken in Scotland.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Aileen Campbell: May I make a bit of progress? I have taken a couple of interventions

and I want to move on to issues to do with T3 and T4, if that is okay. If I have time, I will come back to Jackie Baillie.

The BTA position statement, which I mentioned, takes into account the wide-ranging international evidence base and concludes that T4 provides

"a safe, rational ... approach to the correction of hypothyroidism, and for the vast majority of patients, treatment results in improved physical and psychological well-being."

In August 2017, the effective prescribing programme looked at medication for a wide range of conditions and considered best practice in the management of hypothyroidism. The EPP board concluded that there is currently insufficient clinical evidence of effectiveness to support the use of T3, either alone or in combination, as the first-line option treatment of hypothyroidism.

NHS boards were therefore asked to review the position of T3 in their formularies, to ensure that T3 treatment is initiated only on the advice of an endocrinologist, given the potential for adverse side effects, and to consider switching use of T3 to T4 at medication review. Such a review absolutely must be carried out in a person-centred manner, with full engagement and shared decision making with the individual. Face-to-face consultations are essential before any change is made, and there should be an assurance that the change is for a trial period and that the individual can return to the original treatment if the mutually agreed outcomes are not achieved.

It is recognised that a small proportion of patients do not tolerate T4. T3 use remains available as an option where the appropriate clinician is satisfied that that is the safest and most clinically effective treatment option for the individual.

Elaine Smith: I thank the minister for taking another intervention—she has taken a lot.

People who are on T3 on the NHS are on it for medical reasons, and taking them off it, even for a short time, will have a really detrimental effect on their health. Also, the medical profession does not seem to be aware that patients who are on T4 only are being put at risk—by the medical establishment—of stroke, osteoporosis in later life, heart attack and so on. That is hugely dangerous.

I was pleased that the minister said that there is "no question" of T3 being taken off the prescribed medication list. We need to tell health boards that, and women need to know that if they are on T3 or their endocrinologist is putting them on T3, they are to stay on it and are not to be taken off it.

Aileen Campbell: I recognise the passion with which Elaine Smith makes her points. A clinician's primary duty is to do no harm, which is why we

expect there to be, through the realistic medicine approach, adequate, proper and meaningful engagement, so that the circumstances that Elaine Smith outlined can be avoided and we ensure that there is a clinically effective treatment option for individuals who cannot tolerate T4.

Members mentioned NDT, which was used until the 1980s. There is a lack of robust clinical evidence that NDT is of any clinical benefit to patients beyond that delivered by the recommended medication T4. I recognise the serious concerns that have been raised in the debate. The treatment is currently not licensed for use in the UK, and I urge anyone who is using the treatment or who is unhappy with their prescribed treatment to talk to the healthcare practitioner who is responsible for their care.

Members talked about research. As I said, I recognise that a minority of people cannot tolerate T4. Further research is required in that regard. In Scotland, the Scottish Government's chief scientist office is responsible for funding high-quality research projects. The CSO's research funding committees consider applications from all areas of medicine. The only stipulations are that the research is led by a Scotland-based clinician or scientist and that it has the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland. The CSO does not initiate research but would welcome applications for research projects that are aimed at the management of hyperthyroidism, which may include clinical trials for both T3 monotherapy and T3/T4 combination therapy. We look to academic institutions to seek funding to lead well-designed research that addresses the evidence gaps. The endocrinological community in Scotland would be happy to consider and assist with those proposals.

All decision making about an individual's health and care should focus on the individual and be discussed and agreed with them and their clinician. There are clearly areas that can be improved, especially when we consider the human cost that is involved, which has been articulated so well this evening. There is much that we need to do to ensure that people's voices are heard so that they feel meaningfully engaged.

I again thank Elaine Smith for bringing the debate to the Parliament, the members who have contributed and the people in the public gallery. We will continue to work together, across the Government and health and social care services, to make the differences that we all want to see. I reiterate that I see opportunity in the NICE work and I confirm that we will continue to work with Elaine Smith and others who want to be involved to ensure that we get meaningful representations in that process.

I look forward to the Public Petitions Committee's work, because I think that it will provide a further opportunity to reflect on the wider issue that people have expressed today: that somehow the issue has not been taken forward adequately because it more commonly affects women across the country. I do not want people to feel that, as the issue is being taken incredibly seriously, However, it is clear that there are areas where we could and must do more to ensure that people do not feel that they have been ignored but instead feel engaged and that they can make progress in their health and contribute. There are opportunities to make improvements and I commit to working with Elaine Smith and others on those opportunities.

Meeting closed at 17:52.

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