



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Wednesday 28 March 2018

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Wednesday 28 March 2018

CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
FINANCE AND THE CONSTITUTION	1
Scottish Fiscal Commission Revenue Forecast	1
Business Rates (2017 Revaluation)	2
Procurement	3
Tax Bands.....	5
Vacant and Derelict Land Levy.....	6
Procurement Process (Business Pledge).....	7
Draft Audit and Accountability Framework	8
Local Government Funding	9
ECONOMY, JOBS AND FAIR WORK	9
Infrastructure Investment (South Scotland)	9
Cunninghame North Economy	11
Glasgow City Region Deal (Impact on Motherwell and Wishaw)	12
Data Capital of Europe	14
Fife Economy.....	15
Scottish National Investment Bank.....	16
BUS SERVICES	19
<i>Motion moved—[John Finnie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Humza Yousaf].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jamie Greene].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Colin Smyth].</i>	
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green).....	19
The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf)	22
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	24
Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)	26
Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)	29
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	30
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP).....	32
Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con).....	34
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)	35
Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP)	37
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)	38
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	40
Humza Yousaf	42
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green).....	44
LOCAL TAXATION	47
<i>Motion moved—[Andy Wightman].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Derek Mackay].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Murdo Fraser].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[James Kelly].</i>	
Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green).....	47
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay).....	50
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	53
James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab)	55
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP).....	57
Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con)	58
Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab).....	60
Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP).....	61
Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con)	63
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	64
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	66
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	67
Derek Mackay.....	68

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	70
BUSINESS MOTION	73
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	75
DECISION TIME	76
EARTH HOUR 2018	89
<i>Motion debated—[Graeme Dey].</i>	
Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP)	89
Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con)	92
David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)	93
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	95
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	96
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	98
Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	99
The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham). 101	

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 28 March 2018

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

Portfolio Question Time

Finance and the Constitution

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions. We have quite a lot to get through, so if we could have quick questions and succinct answers, that would be appreciated.

Scottish Fiscal Commission Revenue Forecast

1. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the Scottish Fiscal Commission's revenue forecast for the increase in the top rate of tax. (S5O-01937)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): The Scottish Fiscal Commission is responsible for producing income tax revenue forecasts. Those forecasts set the amount of money that the Scottish Government can draw down from Her Majesty's Treasury for each tax year. Scottish Government officials regularly engage with the SFC during fiscal events as part of the SFC's regular challenge and question-and-answer process.

Jeremy Balfour: The increase is forecast to raise just £3 million annually, which means that a just slightly larger-than-expected behavioural effect could result in its being a measure that actually loses tax revenue. Given that the cabinet secretary has always professed to being practical when it comes to tax, if, at the end of a financial year, it was found that the increase in the top rate of tax had lost money, would he reverse the decision?

Derek Mackay: That is a very interesting question—which, of course, is why Jeremy Balfour asked it. Of course I will review the actual take from our tax decisions and make future tax decisions in the light of the evidence. However, the point at which we have set the top rate of tax is based on expert advice from the SFC and the Council of Economic Advisers. It is the optimal point at which to raise more money, but all such matters remain subject to review as we look forward to the next budget and tax consideration.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The Government has cited the fact that the complex interaction between Scottish income tax policy and

entitlement to universal credit reduces to just £7 the net benefit of the starter rate of income tax. Has the cabinet secretary requested of the United Kingdom Government a resolution in the form of a disregard of the net benefit of the starter rate of income tax for the calculation of universal credit, or a supplementary payment of universal credit, so that those low-income earners do not miss out?

Derek Mackay: That is a valid question on an issue of which I am well aware. I have been trying to work with the UK Government to ensure that people enjoy the full benefit of the tax position in Scotland being more progressive. I am continuing to pursue the UK Government to address that, because it is in the UK Government's gift to address the matter in respect of universal credit. I hope that I will get a positive result. The fact that it has not responded to date is certainly not a reason not to have a more progressive tax system. Of course, I want people to enjoy all the benefit of the system, in terms of those at the lower end of earnings paying less tax than they otherwise would.

Business Rates (2017 Revaluation)

2. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many appeals there were in relation to the 2017 business rates revaluation, and how many have been resolved. (S5O-01938)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): As at 31 December 2017, 73,577 properties have appealed the 2017 revaluation and 528 appeals have been resolved. That means that 32 per cent of all properties appealed the 2017 revaluation, which is similar to the 31 per cent that had appealed at the same point in time in relation to the 2010 revaluation. All appeals must be disposed of by local committees by 31 December 2020. There is a fast-track process for businesses that wish to have their hearings expedited.

Liam Kerr: I thank the cabinet secretary, but that figure represents a 0.7 per cent clear-up rate, which is too slow. It is shocking that businesses are having to wait so long for their appeals to be resolved, which is causing businesses, especially small businesses across Scotland, including in my area, a lot of concern.

With the new financial year fast approaching, what action is the cabinet secretary taking now to speed up the resolution process, and what reassurances can he give businesses that all will be resolved before it is too late?

Derek Mackay: I am fairly familiar with the fact that Liam Kerr has a legal background. I am sure that he understands that the assessors and the appeals process are independent of Government.

I cannot direct assessors in the appeals to carry out their function in a particular way. I am sure that, with that clarity, their independence will be protected.

I have, of course, made the point, without direction, that we want appeals to be considered as quickly as possible, as a practical matter. Appeals are sometimes grouped so that they can be considered in batches, if it is appropriate to do so. In relation to wider engagement and support for assessors and appeals, I am trying to be as supportive as I can so that they can execute their functions effectively.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): In Glasgow alone, 10,480 appeals were lodged, none of which had been resolved by 31 December 2017. That is totally unacceptable. Will the cabinet secretary therefore use his offices to influence the assessors to ensure that a plan is published with timelines for resolving outstanding appeals—or is he just going to blunder along while businesses suffer higher business-rate costs and uncertainty?

Derek Mackay: That was outrageous language. I said that I am sympathetic to businesses that want to have their appeals heard, while at the same time pointing out that that is an independent process. A judicial element is available as well, if required. How assessors conduct the appeals is largely a matter for them, in keeping with legislation and the guidance. Of course I will provide encouragement as best I can, but without interference. If I was to interfere, I am sure that the Opposition would be the first to criticise me for so doing.

In relation to the Barclay review and quicker revaluations, I have led a lot of work on quicker implementation, more frequent revaluations and improvement of the assessors. It is no wonder that many representative organisations have said that Scotland is ahead of the curve on rates reform—and not always organisations that are easy for Governments to quote. We have made a lot of progress, but there is due process that should be followed, and the law should be respected.

Procurement

3. Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made with other Administrations in the UK in relation to Government procurement post-Brexit. (S5O-01939)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): We are reviewing Scottish legislation in that area to ensure that it functions after the United Kingdom exits the European Union. Members are, of course, well aware of our position on that.

Procurement is one of 24 areas that were identified by the UK Government in its analysis that was published on 9 March as potentially requiring a new legislative framework. As mandated by the joint ministerial committee (European Union negotiations), officials from the four UK Administrations have met to explore the possible need for any such framework. Procurement is a devolved matter, and the Scottish Parliament has used its powers to establish a distinctive and, in many cases, more progressive and sustainable devolved procurement regime. I am clear that Brexit must not be used as cover to introduce any new constraint on our ability to continue to do that.

Gail Ross: My constituency of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross could be adversely affected by the uncertainty that is being caused by Brexit—in particular, in the supply chain for large contracts. Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that new arrangements need to be made, and soon, to ensure that all procurement can be carried out effectively with minimal disruption to the supply chain, and to ensure continuity of service?

Derek Mackay: I know that you wanted brief answers, Presiding Officer.

Yes: in essence, I agree with that position and proposition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was a good answer. There is a supplementary from Murdo Fraser. We will see whether this one goes as smoothly.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I do not know what you mean, Presiding Officer.

Does the finance secretary agree that we should be seizing the opportunity that Brexit gives us to devise a new procurement policy, free of EU constraints, and which allows us to use our extensive public spend better to support home-grown responsible businesses, and thus grow our economy?

Derek Mackay: Presiding Officer, I am now conscious that the briefer my answers, the more members of the Opposition you will call.

Pragmatically, the Scottish Government will try to get the best result in the circumstances. Clearly, that means trying to get the best result in terms of social, environmental and economic benefits from procurement, and in terms of safeguarding what we have put in place, while going as far as we can within the law. We want to safeguard that, whether it is part of negotiations with the UK Government or anyone else. We will try to get the best result to protect the kind of issues that we debated last week, while complying with the law. Murdo Fraser is well aware of the Scottish Government's

position in relation to Brexit and UK-wide frameworks.

Tax Bands

4. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an updated estimate of how much it will cost to implement and administer the new tax bands introduced in its budget. (S5O-01940)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): We anticipate costs of up to £2 million in relation to the introduction of the rates and bands set for tax year 2018-19, and administration costs of £400,000 per year.

Dean Lockhart: The introduction of the new tax bands will cost up to £2 million. Yet, in the response that the finance secretary gave to my written parliamentary question, he—or HM Revenue and Customs—estimated that the cost might go up to £5 million depending on the divergence of Scottish income tax rates from those of the rest of the United Kingdom. We heard earlier that, according to the Scottish Fiscal Commission, the increase in the top rate will bring in only £3 million annually—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you get to your question, please, Mr Lockhart?

Dean Lockhart: —to the Scottish economy. Does Mr Mackay think that the tax increase for the top rate is fiscally justifiable, and does he agree with the Fraser of Allander institute report that was published today, which says that it is time for a new economic policy in Scotland?

Derek Mackay: That was a bit of a mess of a question. In essence, I have answered that question accurately every time that Opposition members have asked it. They keep asking why the number changes, but that is because HMRC has given me different numbers for its projected costs. It is true that HMRC's upper-level cost has come down from £5 million to the cost as it stands now, which is the figure that I just gave in answer to the question. Perhaps the costs will come down further, but it is a matter for HMRC to determine them. I work in partnership with HMRC and those are the figures that we have been given.

On the question whether the divergence is worth it, you bet it is, Presiding Officer. The tax decisions that we have taken have turned a real-terms reduction from the United Kingdom Government's resource budget into real-terms growth for our public services. It amounts to more than £2 million or £5 million. In total, the divergence amounts to hundreds of millions of pounds more going into our public services, and that has been welcomed by the people of Scotland.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Given that the new tax rates and bands incur a cost to implement and administer, does the cabinet secretary recognise that the cost could be better justified if, instead of tinkering around the edges, the Scottish Government used the new taxation powers so that the richest paid their fair share in order to properly tackle poverty and, specifically, the shocking rise in child poverty in our rich country?

Derek Mackay: With regard to, say, just the top rate of tax, our tax policy delivers the optimum amount for the next financial year. The proposition that the Labour Party and some other parties put forward would have resulted in less money in the next financial year for our public services and for tackling some of the issues that Elaine Smith would like us to tackle.

We have made the right, balanced decisions on taxation. It is not accurate to describe our policy as “tinkering around the edges” when, in effect, it has realised hundreds of millions of pounds more for our public services. Thanks to the decisions that this Government has taken, we have turned the Tories' real-terms reduction to our budget into real-terms growth for our public services, lifted the public sector pay cap and delivered real-terms growth for many parts of the public sector, including local government.

Vacant and Derelict Land Levy

5. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider introducing a levy on vacant and derelict land. (S5O-01941)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Vacant and derelict property is already liable for non-domestic rates, subject to statutory exemptions and reliefs.

Additionally, the Scottish Land Commission is looking at the development of a strategic approach to tackling vacant and derelict land, and developing detailed proposals for a compulsory sales mechanism.

Mark Ruskell: Data collected by the Scottish vacant and derelict land survey shows that, in Mid Scotland and Fife, more than 900 hectares of land are vacant or derelict, which is an area greater in size than the entire town of Alloa. If that derelict land was made liable for non-domestic rates, it could be worth more than £7 million to councils in the region. In 2016, the Scottish Government promised to consult on introducing such a levy—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to your question.

Mark Ruskell: —through, I understand, the work of the SLC. When will the consultation take

place? When might the SLC report on its work so that councils can start collecting the money, which they so desperately need to maintain vital public services?

Derek Mackay: The round-table forum has already been convened; I think that I have supplied the minute to the Scottish Green Party before, but I would be happy to do so again. On the other work, I am happy to look at timescales and report back to Mark Ruskell. We should make decisions in an evidence-based fashion, and that is what I propose to do.

Procurement Process (Business Pledge)

6. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government, when considering awarding contracts, what importance its procurement process attaches to whether a company has signed the business pledge. (S5O-01942)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): We expect those who deliver public contracts to adopt ethical business and fair work practices. The Scottish Government highlights the values of signing up to the voluntary Scottish business pledge as part of our procurement processes. Earlier this month, ministers wrote to the Scottish Government's suppliers highlighting the benefits of the business pledge and encouraging them to sign up to it. The Minister for Employability and Training announced in Parliament last week a review of the business pledge, which will focus on attracting greater business buy-in and impact.

Kezia Dugdale: The scheme requires private sector firms to pay the living wage, avoid using exploitative zero-hours contracts and make progress on diversity and gender balance, so it is astonishing that, after two years of the business pledge being in place, the finance secretary is only now asking the companies to which the Government gives public money to sign up to the pledge. Why is there no Scottish Government target for companies to sign up to the business pledge—Keith Brown confirmed that in response to my recent parliamentary question—and why is it not mandatory, when he is giving away hundreds of millions of pounds of public money without banning those practices?

Derek Mackay: The scheme is not mandatory because it is not legal to make it mandatory as part of a contract. We are trying to promote the scheme, and to encourage and support businesses. Incidentally, we are encouraging not just those who supply goods and products to the Scottish Government, but all parts of the business community. While visiting a company today that does not rely on Scottish Government finance, I encouraged it to sign up to the business pledge and I am sure that it will do so. As

parliamentarians, we should encourage as many as possible to sign up.

Of course, we should be trying to ensure that every business in the country is delivering the business pledge. Why should we not be trying to reach out and get as many businesses as possible to deliver that? We must do it in a legally—

Kezia Dugdale: There is no target.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Dugdale, stop shouting from your seat. Please carry on, cabinet secretary.

Derek Mackay: We must do it in a legally compliant way. That is why the earlier question was so important—it shows that our ability even to encourage may be under threat as a consequence of some of the negotiations. We have gone as far as we can, and we will continue to promote the business pledge. In the review of the business pledge, we are happy to take on board any other ideas about what we can do, because we really believe in the benefits that the business pledge can bring to businesses and to wider society.

Draft Audit and Accountability Framework

7. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the Treasury's draft audit and accountability framework and its proposals for effective scrutiny of shared services. (S5O-01943)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): The Scottish Government is working closely with HM Treasury to improve the current draft of the audit and accountability framework. Our aim is to ensure proper accountability to the Scottish Parliament of all devolved service delivery, whether it takes place in a United Kingdom public body or a Scottish public body, and effective assurance provided through independent national auditors. We also want to see a framework that is written as simply and as clearly as possible.

Willie Coffey: The Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee and the Finance and Constitution Committee, as well as Audit Scotland, have expressed concern about the proposed framework. It introduces unnecessary complexity and red tape and makes far worse a process that is working reasonably well at the moment; we already have good arrangements in place with HM Revenue and Customs and Office for Budget Responsibility staff, who regularly attend to give evidence. Will the cabinet secretary give an assurance that the Scottish Government will try to persuade the UK Government to simplify the framework and make it far simpler and more workable?

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government is trying to do that and will continue to do that. I will report back to the member if I have any progress to announce.

Local Government Funding

8. **Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that any additional funding it provides to councils for specific purposes is used in that way. (S5O-01944)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Any funding that the Scottish Government allocates to local authorities for a specific purpose is provided by means of a ring-fenced specific grant. Each specific grant is accompanied by individual terms and conditions and is administered by the relevant policy team. That ensures that the money provided is used exactly for the purpose that it was intended for.

Graeme Dey: I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to the actions of Angus Council, which is to receive an additional £1.56 million for the purposes of meeting additional expenditure associated with social care, and which has passed on just £510,000 of that, made up of £200,000 for Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 implementation and £310,000 for living wage inflationary impact. Does he share my anger that money earmarked for such important purposes is being pocketed by a local authority?

Derek Mackay: Although the extra £66 million in support of social care in 2018-19 is not ring fenced, I made it clear in my letter of 14 December to the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the leaders of all 32 local authorities, including Angus Council, that I look to local authorities to continue to prioritise their financial support for social care. I have not received any replies to say that councils were not prepared to accept the 2018-19 local government finance settlement, so I expect all councils to comply fully with the terms that were set out in my letter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on finance and the constitution.

Economy, Jobs and Fair Work

Infrastructure Investment (South Scotland)

1. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what future infrastructure investment plans it has for South Scotland. (S5O-01947)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): The Scottish

Government's infrastructure investment priorities include: increasing the supply of affordable housing by 50,000 homes by 2021; continuing with the expansion of broadband to deliver access to superfast broadband to all residential and business premises by 2021; and the expansion of early learning and childcare, which will benefit citizens throughout the country, including South Scotland.

NHS Dumfries and Galloway's Royal infirmary, which is worth £275.5 million, has recently been completed. In the Scotland's schools for the future programme, St Joseph's college and the North West community campus in Maxwelltown in Dumfries and Galloway and Jedburgh high school in the Scottish Borders are all currently in construction.

In addition, we are providing Forest Enterprise Scotland with £500,000 of capital funding in 2018-19. That will be used to develop infrastructure and improve the visitor offer in South Scotland.

The Scottish Government has agreed heads of terms for the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city region deal, investing £300 million over 15 years, and has also committed to exploring the potential for a borderlands inclusive growth deal.

Emma Harper: That is interesting news. I am interested to know whether, as well as the housing, schools and health investment that the cabinet secretary mentioned, the programme includes the upgrades to road and rail infrastructure that are urgently needed in the south-west of Scotland, especially in relation to the A75, A76 and A77.

Keith Brown: The Scottish Government understands the important role that the transport network plays in supporting the south-west and wider Scottish economies. It has a good track record of investment in South Scotland. I could mention, of course, the completion of the longest piece of new rail track in the whole United Kingdom for 100 years, which was the Borders railway, elsewhere in South Scotland.

However, further improvements are important to local businesses and communities—the member has made many representations on that issue. That is why we recently commissioned the south-west Scotland transport study. That study will consider the rationale for further improvements on the strategic road and rail corridors throughout the region, with a focus on access to the ports at Cairnryan, and consider the case for change in relation to transport infrastructure investment, which will then form part of the second strategic transport projects review.

Cunninghame North Economy

2. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to grow the economy of Cunninghame North. (S5O-01948)

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government is committed to achieving inclusive economic growth across Scotland, including in Cunninghame North and North Ayrshire. Our enterprise agencies work with local businesses to help them to meet their growth aspirations. Scottish Enterprise currently account manages 150 companies in North Ayrshire, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise is actively engaging with key businesses on Arran and Cumbrae. Last year, Scottish Development International supported 28 companies in North Ayrshire to internationalise and, this year, there has been inward investment worth £1 million to Cunninghame North, which created 10 new jobs and safeguarded 60.

During yesterday's debate on the Local Government and Communities Committee's report on city region deals, the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work and a number of Ayrshire MSPs, including the member, called for the United Kingdom Government to commit to an Ayrshire growth deal. The Scottish Government has already confirmed that it is fully committed to that deal.

Kenneth Gibson: A number of potentially exciting economic developments are being advanced in my constituency. However, some local employers feel that such developments will lead only to some of their skilled workers being enticed away by other businesses. How do we ensure that the skills base is enhanced so that local people benefit from additional employment opportunities and skilled jobs do not just move from one company to another with a marginal impact on unemployment?

Jamie Hepburn: In the area of skills, Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland are active partners in the team North Ayrshire business support model, which provides companies with a co-ordinated approach to their business and skills support. A good investment for any employer is the recruitment of apprentices. Skills Development Scotland has invested £2.3 million in the apprenticeship programme in North Ayrshire in 2016-17, and, at the end of 2017, there were 800 apprentices in training.

We also need to support employers to upskill their existing workforces. We have introduced a pilot flexible workforce development fund and individual training accounts to help people who are in low-paid work or seeking employment to upskill, and we will continue to transform the approach to

bringing young people into the workforce through the developing the young workforce initiative. Employers have a big role to play in shaping and responding to that agenda, and yesterday I was delighted to attend an excellent DYW Ayrshire event, where I saw the energy, creativity and enthusiasm of young people in vocational education and of the employers who are responding to the skills challenges that industry faces in North, South and East Ayrshire.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Despite everything that the minister has just said, over the past 10 years, the number of young people in employment in North Ayrshire has dropped from 60 per cent to just 44 per cent, which is the second lowest rate in Scotland. Why is that the case? What will the Government do about it?

Jamie Hepburn: We know that the challenges are more substantial in some parts of the country than in others. North Ayrshire has an above average level of areas of multiple deprivation, which brings particular challenges. Jamie Greene could have listened to my previous answer for some of the things that the Government is trying to do, but I will rehearse the answer again. We are piloting our flexible workforce development fund, we have introduced individual training accounts, we are taking forward the developing the young workforce initiative—which in Ayrshire is well ahead of the curve, with some fantastic work there—and we are investing significantly in modern apprentices in the area. Next month, the fair start Scotland project will go live and many unemployed people in North Ayrshire will be able to benefit from its introduction.

Glasgow City Region Deal (Impact on Motherwell and Wishaw)

3. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the Glasgow city region deal will bring to Motherwell and Wishaw. (S5O-01949)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government has committed £500 million over 20 years to the Glasgow city region deal to support delivery of a programme of investment to stimulate economic growth and create jobs right across the city region. Three core North Lanarkshire projects have been identified by the Glasgow regional partners for delivery within the first 10 years of the deal, accounting for a total capital investment of around £170 million.

Those projects are progressing and it should be noted that recent efforts to re-scope have resulted in further positive impacts for Clare Adamson's area, which I am sure that she is aware of, given her work in that area. North Lanarkshire Council secured approval from the Glasgow city region

cabinet in December 2017 to widen its existing programme to include the vital infrastructure upgrades that are still required at Ravenscraig.

Clare Adamson: The new infrastructure will potentially make Ravenscraig one of the most attractive emerging areas for development. Although the improvements will be a few years in the making, in the longer term they will offer real opportunities in the area. What can the Government do to encourage people to look at the potential in Ravenscraig?

Keith Brown: The Government remains committed to working with North Lanarkshire Council and other parties on the further development of the Ravenscraig site. On top of the considerable investment that has been made so far to remediate the site and deliver the first phase of improvements, which have totalled about £45 million, Scottish Enterprise has also recently helped to fund a refresh of the master plan for the site—I know that the member is aware of that from the meetings that she has asked for with me and others. The new strategy has taken on board feedback from local residents and it includes thousands of new homes, employment space, which is very important to the member, parkland and two new primary schools. The sheer scale of the Ravenscraig site means that a phased approach will still be necessary, but we expect the revised planning application to be with North Lanarkshire Council in the coming weeks. We will continue to work hard to help to bring those plans to fruition in the years ahead.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): The work on Ravenscraig that has been approved by the city deal cabinet is to be applauded, but it is, of course, a new project for the city deal. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the city deal cabinet should say what projects will have to make way for that project? The cabinet should be clearer about its plans.

Keith Brown: Clarity and transparency are always a good thing but, as the member knows full well, it is not really for either this Government or the United Kingdom Government to dictate to the Glasgow city deal partners how to conduct their business. As long as the deal complies with the conditions that were applied when the UK Government and the Scottish Government made those funds available, it is for those partners to take it forward.

I think that the member has asked me in the past—quite rightly, and I have acceded to the point—to allow some flexibility for the city deal cabinet to look afresh at some of the projects that it previously approved, not least because that deal was the first of the city deals. The deal was developed some time ago, before city deals had

evolved to the extent that they have now—it was much more a list of infrastructure projects.

I know that the member's view is that one or two of the projects are not ones that he would have supported in his time. There is scope within the flexibility that both the Scottish Government and the UK Government have offered to influence the Glasgow city deal cabinet but it is for the cabinet to make these decisions.

Data Capital of Europe

4. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to help Edinburgh to achieve its ambition to become the data capital of Europe. (S5O-01950)

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government is investing £300 million in the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city region, including £60 million towards innovation, as part of a £1.1 billion investment that was announced in July 2017.

Some £300 million of the overall sum is to be invested in world-leading data innovation centres, including the Bayes centre for data, the Edinburgh futures institute and the Usher institute of population health sciences and informatics, to support creation of the data capital of Europe through direct capital investment and the creation of an environment to nurture and attract further innovation and investment.

Knowledge and innovation are key themes and one of our eight Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council funded innovation centres, the Data Lab, is taking great strides forward in supporting Scottish Development International's work in promoting Scotland more generally, and Edinburgh within it, as a natural choice for inward investors in data analytics and informatics.

Gordon MacDonald: Edinburgh's ability to achieve its ambition to become the data capital of Europe will depend on collaboration and co-operation with other countries, and on the ability to attract people with the right skill sets. What impact could Brexit have on Edinburgh's ability to achieve that ambition if we are outside the single market and there is restriction of movement of people?

Paul Wheelhouse: Gordon MacDonald has raised an important point. Although no specific assessment has been made of the potential impact of Brexit on the ambition for Edinburgh to become the data capital of Europe, it is vital to Scotland's economic interests that we are able to attract workers who have the right skills. It is therefore a matter of great concern that leaving the single market and ending free movement of

people to the United Kingdom will have a negative impact on our economy, on businesses, and on the individuals and their families who are affected.

The UK Government's own figures show the negative impact of a stricter immigration policy as being greater than the 0.2 per cent boost to economic growth that, for example, a US trade deal might bring. We continue to believe that Scotland's interests are best served by European Union membership. Short of continuing membership, the best outcome for jobs and living standards will be that we retain membership of the single market and the customs union.

Fife Economy

5. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the Fife economy. (S5O-01951)

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting inclusive economic growth across Scotland, including in Fife. Fife has benefited from substantial additional investment in infrastructure, regeneration activity and business support, which is helping to create and retain jobs in communities across Fife.

For example, targeted support of £6 million helped to deliver the Fife task force action plan, which has seen investment in locations including Glenrothes. In addition, £2.7 million was awarded to Fife for an enterprise hub, industrial workshops and a subregional business park in Kincardine, to help to foster economic resilience and to benefit communities that have been affected by the early closure of Longannet power station.

However, I recognise that on a number of measures, further progress is needed in order to develop a more robust and resilient economy for the area. I want to reassure Claire Baker that I am engaging with Fife Council and the Fife economic partnership to deliver that.

Claire Baker: It has been reported today that Burntisland Fabrications—BiFab—has received a letter of intent from 2-B Energy to develop a two-turbine demonstration that could extend to nine turbines. This is to be warmly welcomed and is testimony to the workforce.

However, concerns remain that a subsidy package that has been offered by the UK Government would require the turbines to be generating electricity by the end of September, which could jeopardise the project. Will the minister join me in calling on the UK Government to extend the deadline? Failing that, what action is the Scottish Government able to take to ensure that the contract can go ahead?

Paul Wheelhouse: I certainly warmly welcome the fact that the contract is being offered to BiFab, which is a very important company in Fife. We have had many engagements in which we have discussed—as has the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, who has been leading on this issue—how to help BiFab at this time. I reassure Claire Baker that the cabinet secretary has written to the UK Government to stress the importance of allowing flexibility in the financial deadline for installation of the equipment for the 2-B Energy contract.

BiFab has obviously gone through a difficult time as a company, which has been partly triggered by this very issue. We have been calling on the UK Government to show sufficient flexibility. However, I assure Claire Baker that we will do everything that we can to support the company and to develop the technology here in Scotland, and I assure her that that we have supported the project until now.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Is the minister aware that Lower Largo is the birthplace of Alexander Selkirk, who provided the inspiration for Robinson Crusoe? Does he agree with me that there is a huge amount of untapped tourism potential in my constituency, and will he agree to meet me to discuss how repairing and restoring Lower Largo's historic pier could lead to the economic regeneration of coastal communities in my constituency and the wider Fife economy?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I expect supplementaries to be questions.

Paul Wheelhouse: I am aware of the issue regarding Lower Largo pier. I had not made the connection with the local hotel, but I now realise why it is called the Crusoe hotel. I make it clear that avenues of funding are potentially available from Historic Environment Scotland; however, the owner of the hotel would have to apply. I will be happy to discuss with Jenny Gilruth any initiatives that we can take to support the wider Fife economy and the tourism sector, for which Fiona Hyslop is, of course, directly responsible as Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs.

Scottish National Investment Bank

6. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether the Scottish national investment bank will have the power to refuse to lend to commercially viable businesses that it considers operate against its public-purpose missions. (S5O-01952)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): In general terms, it is too early to provide detail on the lending activity

of the bank, at this stage. Benny Higgins launched his implementation plan for the Scottish national investment bank on 28 February. The Scottish Cabinet will consider the report and its recommendations over the coming weeks, and will respond in early May. The plan recommends that the Scottish ministers should set the parameters within which the bank should work, by setting a strategic framework that will identify the missions that the bank will need to fulfil. The report also recommends that the bank should be administratively and operationally independent of the Scottish ministers and that it should not just operate to a code of ethics but should go beyond regulatory requirements and adopt a best-practice approach.

Alison Johnstone: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response. Can he give assurances that the bank's investment strategy will, at the very least, be guided by the strongest of public-interest principles—for example, that it will not lend to high-carbon-polluting industries or companies that use poor workers' rights practices?

Keith Brown: As a caveat to my previous response, I should say that it will be for the Scottish Government, through engagement with the wider population—the mechanisms for which are still to be established—to set the missions for the bank. Examples would include the transition to a low-carbon economy, responding to demographic pressures including an ageing population and promoting place-based inclusive growth across the whole of Scotland.

Ministers will consider the strategic framework under which the bank will operate, and will progress the mission-based approach in the Cabinet in the near future. That will be our process but, beyond that, I make the commitment to Alison Johnstone that we will of course, through the relevant committees of the Parliament and in the chamber, present our proposals and have them questioned by Parliament, as usual.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will have two quick supplementaries, please.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can the cabinet secretary confirm what percentage of funding for the Scottish national investment bank will come from financial transactions money?

Keith Brown: Dean Lockhart will know, from the Scottish budget, the amount that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution has made available. However, it is a starting position; we are looking beyond that to see what other funding we can get.

As the member knows, financial transactions funding is part of the discretion that the finance

secretary currently has, but that is not the limit of our ambitions for the bank, so we are in discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury to see what might be possible. We would like to see a substantial portfolio of funds being available, some of which will be from financial transactions as Dean Lockhart suggests. I cannot say what the percentage will be until I know the size of the other quantum. We expect to have that in future weeks, and as soon as we have it, I will be happy to let the member know.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The cabinet secretary has already suggested that the Scottish national investment bank will be capitalised by £2 billion over 10 years. If he is now suggesting that the amount will be higher, I welcome it, because Labour's proposal is, of course, for 10 times that amount. Does the cabinet secretary consider that the Scottish national investment bank is in danger of being undercapitalised, as was suggested by Jim McColl to the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee?

Keith Brown: Without question, even with the £2 billion that has been mentioned, the Scottish national investment bank could transform the Scottish economy.

Of course we would like more funding. Long before the Labour Party got on board, we requested from the United Kingdom Treasury, not least through the Scottish Futures Trust, between £5 billion and £7 billion to enable us to take forward major structural changes.

We have to work with the money that we have. We also have to work with the Treasury to ensure, for example, that we can carry forward balances from one year to the next. That is, unfortunately, the reality of the position that we are in, but we will carry on those discussions. There is no lack of ambition from the Scottish Government about what the bank might achieve.

Bus Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-11289, in the name of John Finnie, on better buses.

14:41

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Here is a bit of background to the debate: in 1984, the United Kingdom Government published a white paper entitled “Buses”—good title. That resulted in the Transport Act 1985, which provided for deregulation of the bus industry. The proposals were designed to remove restrictions on competition from local and long-distance bus services. It is important to understand the background against which the proposals came forward. The following quotation is attributed to the Prime Minister of the day, Margaret Thatcher:

“A man who, beyond the age of 26, finds himself on a bus can count himself as a failure.”

The Scottish Green Party wants a lot more failures, because we want there to be a considerable increase in the number of passengers on buses.

Despite that context, the 1985 act recognised the need for subsidised services to continue on many routes, and a system of competitive tendering for such services was proposed. It is a fact that nearly 20 per cent of routes are subsidised.

It was believed that competition would deliver lower fares, new services and more passengers. Let me deal with those objectives individually. First, on fares, in the decade between 2005 and 2015, fares increased by 13.5 per cent above inflation. On new services, it is widely recognised that the number of services has reduced. As for new passengers, in the same decade, the number of passengers decreased from 460 million to 414 million—a 10 per cent fall. Indeed, the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK told us recently that the number of bus trips in 2015-16 was 409 million—43 million fewer than in 2011, five years previously.

The decline in Scotland is greater than it is elsewhere in the UK and contrasts with the 16 per cent increase in passenger numbers on trains over the five years to 2016. There might be a reason for that. Citizens Advice Scotland told us in a recent report that two thirds of Scots are dissatisfied with the frequency of local bus services, with half of its respondents saying that services are late.

Moreover, successive Governments have spent millions on motorways, and transport ministers, including the current incumbent, are never shy

about hailing growth in our railways, which of course Greens welcome, and growth in our airports and air passenger numbers, which we do not. Meanwhile, Governments have neglected bus users.

There is an opportunity to reverse the decline, which I am sure that the transport minister wants to grasp. In the consultation document “Local bus services in Scotland—Improving the framework for delivery”, the minister acknowledges:

“the sector faces significant challenges with the overall number of passenger journeys decreasing and service cutbacks in some places which can leave communities without a public transport option. We believe that the legislative framework governing bus services requires improvement”.

In 2013, Iain Gray lodged a member’s bill proposal which, unfortunately, did not succeed. In the consultation document on his proposed bus regulation bill, he said:

“Good public transport—effective, reliable, safe, and affordable—is a hallmark of a modern, forward-looking society. It liberates people who cannot drive and provides a practical alternative to those who choose not to.”

On the question of buses versus trains, the transport minister has acknowledged that buses are able to serve a much wider area than rail, which is more restricted by geography and fixed infrastructure. Bus services are flexible and can be developed into use quickly when demand is identified.

In the short time that I have, I will not go into what is required to provide a bus service. However, there are issues to do with the operator’s licence, the notice that is given prior to operation, whether there are any variations and the role of the transport commissioner.

It is important to say that local authorities can subsidise only socially desirable services that are not covered by commercial services that are registered with the traffic commissioners. When a local authority proposes subsidising a socially necessary service, it must hold a competitive tendering before establishing the service. The Transport (Scotland) Act 1989 required local authorities to incorporate their municipal bus operations as arm’s-length companies, but it did not specifically require them to be privatised. Much is made of a very successful model, which is that of Lothian Buses. I know that my colleagues will talk about that company, which runs a successful and profitable operation. Fairly recently, it took over services in East Lothian and there, again, it has been a major success.

However, there has been no legislative action on the regulation of bus services since the enactment of the Transport Act (Scotland) 2001. The programme for government 2016-17 states:

“As part of our preparation for a Transport Bill later in the Parliament, during 2016-17 we will ... work with stakeholders to develop legislative options for improving bus services and securing nationwide multi modal smart ticketing.”

Sadly, the Scottish Government is failing on its targets. It is failing on congestion, modal shift and air quality. We are keen that the national indicators should inform some of the decisions that will be made, because the Government tells us that they

“enable us to track progress towards the achievement of our National Outcomes and ultimately the delivery of the Purpose.”

If we had better bus services, we would improve traffic congestion and improve people’s perception of their neighbourhoods. In the Government’s information, under the heading “Why is this National Indicator important?”, it states:

“Our satisfaction with our neighbourhoods has an important influence on the overall quality of our lives.”

Under the heading “What will influence this National Indicator?”, it states:

“Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with our neighbourhoods is governed by a wide range of factors including: the local physical environment”

and the

“convenience of services such as shops and public transport”.

We know that just under a third of households in Scotland do not have access to a car, and that the bus industry receives nearly £300 million in subsidies from local authorities and the Scottish Government. However, in real terms that funding has dropped—it is 8 per cent lower than it was five years ago. As I said earlier, nearly 20 per cent of bus journeys are subsidised, so it is entirely reasonable to have a target on increasing bus usage. We already have times and targets in relation to climate change.

What could a target look like? The information is already available, as the minister knows, with his transport statistics on bus usage. By “bus usage”, we mean journey numbers. It is certainly open to the minister to use another metric, if that is more desirable, but the important thing is that we turn the decline that we all see, and which is very evident everywhere, into growth.

What is the justification for a high-level target? As I said, it is very clear that buses stand out as the only transport type that is in decline. I accept that the solution that we produce will be complex, with bus companies, local authorities and the Scottish Government needing to work together.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Finnie is in his last half minute.

John Finnie: Making this work will require clear ambition. It is fair to say that the solution will be different in different parts of the country. All of that can be accommodated under a high-level statutory target. It would fit well with other targets on inclusive communities, connectivity, anti-poverty, air pollution, domestic manufacturing and climate change.

Ministers have already said that they want to increase bus usage, so let us make that clear in a target. More important, let us make that happen.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that coordinated action is needed to deliver cheaper fares, more routes and reliable services to make buses a practical option for more people and communities across Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to set a statutory target in its forthcoming transport bill to reverse the decline in bus usage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Humza Yousaf to speak to and move amendment S5M-11289.2.

14:49

The Minister for Transport and the Islands

(Humza Yousaf): I welcome this important debate, which brings a focus to one of the key modes in our sustainable transport mix. Given that 75 to 80 per cent of all public transport journeys are made by bus, which far outweighs the percentage for any other mode of public transport, buses probably do not get the coverage that they should get in comparison with those other modes.

I agree with John Finnie that we must urgently tackle the decline in patronage. Of course, the decline in passenger numbers is not a recent issue. I have just been looking at the numbers, and I see that the downward trend began in the 1960s. There are a range of causes for it, some of which John Finnie touched on. Some of the factors were identified in a recent KPMG study that was commissioned by CPT. It contains a long list of issues including the long-term growth in car ownership, behavioural changes related to use of the internet, and out-of-town shopping. Another major factor that all members will recognise is congestion, which is a real issue, particularly but not only in our conurbations.

My view on how to approach the patronage challenge differs slightly from John Finnie’s, although, when I look at his motion and at what I know is important to him in facing down the challenge, I see that the differences are only minor. I do not agree that a centralised, national approach would necessarily be the right way, nor do I think that a big increase in public ownership is necessarily the answer. The graph of patronage decline between 1960 and 1986, when we had deregulation, shows a decline of 1,000 million bus

passengers in Scotland alone, so it is clear that public ownership in itself is not a panacea.

John Finnie: Will the minister acknowledge that I said that, although there would be a target, it could be applied differently in different areas? In the central belt, there is a successful bus operation in the city of Edinburgh, but there is the reverse in the minister's city.

Humza Yousaf: I recognise the latter point. On the member's first point, I hope that my amendment improves on his motion, because it makes it more explicit and clear that it is perhaps better for services to be determined at the local level. The member referred to Lothian Buses. When I speak to people across the country, some see the Lothian Buses model as attractive, but many others do not feel that it would be the right model to choose.

It is not for central Government to dictate how people should get around or how transport authorities should help them to do so, but we want authorities to have the right tools. The upcoming transport bill will give local authorities the tools that they need to—we hope—increase patronage. Our proposed new partnership model is being developed to give a statutory framework for transport authorities and bus operators to work together on a legally backed agreement without the cumbersome burden that some of the current mechanisms place on them.

At the heart of our proposals is local franchising, which I know a number of local authorities are interested in. We must ensure that the appropriate checks and balances are in place, but I see and hear a lot of excitement about that proposal, and I am keen to hear member's views on it.

Another proposal is to give local authorities the right to run their own municipally owned bus companies. We want to remove the legal dubiety about whether local authorities have that power. Most recently, Aberdeen City Council wrote to me on that issue, because of its clear interest. If people look at the current local factors with regard to Aberdeen's bus service, they will see why that power would be of interest to the council. That will be at the heart of our proposals in the transport bill, as will open data and smart ticketing.

However, legislation will not be a silver bullet. We need local authorities to take up the options that are available to them at present. Low-emission zones will certainly be part of that, and I will talk more about our plans for LEZs when I sum up. I have heard what the Greens have said about Glasgow's proposals not going far enough, and others have said that to me, too. I will proactively pass that feedback to Glasgow City Council, which is not yet at the end of its process.

Other legislative tools are already in local authorities' hands. If I take Glasgow as an example again, the council has the ability to tackle on-street parking with traffic regulation orders. We know that an element of congestion is due to the level of on-street car parking, particularly in our city centres. Local authorities already have tools to tackle that issue. We will provide a legislative solution with the upcoming transport bill, on which I look forward to hearing members' thoughts, but on the other hand, local authorities already have tools in the toolbox that could make a huge difference.

On funding, we provide more than £0.25 billion of support for bus services, as well as free bus travel for older and disabled passengers. We always work in conjunction and collaboratively with the bus industry to see where we can target and improve that funding.

We all agree on the scale of the challenge. We might disagree about how we increase patronage—frankly, how we get more bums on seats—on our cleaner and greener buses. However, we certainly all want to get to the same outcome, and I look forward to hearing what members have to say about how we achieve that.

I move amendment S5M-11289.2, to leave out from “coordinated” to end and insert:

“partnership working at national and local level is needed to deliver cheaper fares, more routes and reliable services to make buses a practical option for more people and communities across Scotland; further believes that the forthcoming transport bill is a key opportunity to set the framework for transport authorities and bus operators to work together to reverse the decline in bus usage; considers that the bill will give local authorities the flexibility to pursue partnership working, local franchising or running their own buses, allowing them to better respond to local needs, and further considers that the proposed new statutory partnership model should allow transport authorities to set their own objectives for the good of their communities.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jamie Greene to speak to and move amendment S5M-11289.3.

14:55

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will attempt to use my tablet but, the last time I did that, the battery ran out halfway through my speech, so bear with me if I end up reading from paper.

I thank John Finnie for bringing the debate to the chamber. It is a very good use of his party's business time, as it is on an important issue that is underdiscussed in the Parliament. For that reason, our amendment does not delete anything from the motion, as that would detract from and dilute the message that John Finnie wants to get across.

I, too, think that it is important that the Government is held to account for its ambitions on the issue. There has been a lot of talk about a modal shift to buses and the benefits of that, and there is nothing in that that anyone disagrees with, but we need more detail on how we measure success on that. It might be helpful if the minister could address that in the forthcoming transport bill.

I have an open mind on whether there should be a statutory target in primary legislation or whether the issue is dealt with in another way. As the additional wording that my amendment would insert in the motion says, if we can produce a measurable target in another way rather than in the transport bill—for example, in a transport strategy—we would be open to looking at that. However, it is still important that the Government is held to account on the issue. As we know, the move to buses and other public transport is part of a much wider discussion about CO₂ emission reduction, reducing congestion on our roads and getting people out of cars. It is also about improving connectivity and the opportunity for towns and cities as well as for rural economies, which rely so much on lifeline services.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the member feel that the issue of how many people use the buses is entirely within Government control, or does he feel that there are other factors?

Jamie Greene: It is not entirely within Government control. Clearly, there are various reasons why people may or may not use a service. Does it take them from where they are to where they want to be? Can they afford it? Is it accessible, safe, reliable and frequent? A consumer or traveller thinks about a number of questions before deciding to take the car or the bus. However, the Government still has a role to play.

That takes me on to quite a philosophical debate. There are many models that we can consider for how to operate services. At one end of the spectrum, there is the model of wholly privately owned franchises, which admittedly could be subject to more rigorous tender processes. At the other end of the spectrum, there is the model of an entirely municipally owned and heavily subsidised service. Somewhere in between, there is a hybrid model that works differently in different local authority areas to meet the needs of those areas. There is a fundamental debate about what works in different parts of Scotland and, again, I am open minded on that. This discussion is a good one, and we should have more such discussions.

There is also a debate about what we consider to be a lifeline service and, if we consider something to be a lifeline service, who should

shoulder the responsibility for it. Recently, Ross Greer had a members' business debate on the removal of routes and services, the cost of tickets and changes to timetabling, and the speech that sticks in my mind is Bob Doris's, in which he listed the huge complexities in his part of the world with the services that are available. Right across the country, we MSPs get many representations from constituents with regard to scheduling decisions.

It is entirely appropriate for companies to operate to the best of their ability and deliver effective, reliable and affordable services, but franchises should not become mere cherry-picking exercises, where only the profitable routes are chosen and routes that I would consider to be lifeline services get taken away. I note that central Government has taken strategic decisions on other modes of transport such as aviation and ferries, and its subsidising of those services seems to be the normal thing to do.

However, having read the Government's amendment, and thinking about what could be the direction of travel in the forthcoming transport bill, I hope that sole responsibility for delivering what we consider to be lifeline services will not be transferred to local authorities, whose budgets are already quite tight. If a local authority wants to operate a service, it should be allowed to do so, but only in the full knowledge of the consequences, the costs and the liabilities, including the pension liabilities with regard to drivers, the cost of continually upgrading the fleet in order to reduce emissions, and so on.

That said, I am very open to local authorities being able to operate services. The Lothian model has been mentioned a lot but, of course, what works for Edinburgh might not work for other parts of Scotland. We need to have this debate and discuss the options, but I hope that the proposed transport bill will not simply pay lip service to the issue, but actually address it. We need to put more pressure on the Government to deliver with regard to patronage.

I move amendment S5M-11289.3, to insert at end:

“, or via another appropriate but measurable method in relevant Scottish Government transport strategies, and calls on the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to ensure that timetabling and bus provision better meet local demands.”

15:01

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the Scottish Greens for bringing this important issue to the chamber.

The need for real change in Scotland's buses is clear for everyone to see. Much of our bus network is slowly being lost, route by route.

Moreover, since the Government came to power, the number of bus journeys has dropped by 17 per cent, while, at the same time, bus fares have increased by a massive 47 per cent.

Make no mistake about it: there are many reasons for that decline, but decisions that have been made by the Government have contributed, too. The bus service operators grant has been reduced by a quarter, there has been an overall 8 per cent fall in support for buses over the past five years and the eye-watering cuts to council budgets have inevitably led to bus routes losing financial support and being axed. There has also been a failure to make the necessary structural changes, with the Government opposing not one but two Labour members' proposals to re-regulate our buses. Given that three quarters of all public transport journeys last year were made by bus, such cuts and inaction are leading to real lifeline services being removed from more and more of our communities.

It is those who can least afford it who are being disproportionately affected—young people, older adults, the unemployed, students and others on low income. They are being hit hardest by the massive fare hikes, and the axing of services often removes their only viable travel option, particularly in rural communities such as the one that I represent. It is therefore little wonder that the recent Citizens Advice Scotland report revealed that two thirds of bus travellers are unhappy with the frequency of their service and that 58 per cent have described services as poor value for money. We need real change on our buses.

I have sympathy with the Green motion, which proposes a statutory target for bus usage, and Labour will be supporting it. However, I would note that many of the legal targets that have been put in place for our national health service are never met, and any targets that are put in place must be backed by actions to deliver them.

We therefore need to have a bold rethink about how we manage bus services in Scotland, and we need to ensure that the real alternative of radical re-regulation and municipal ownership lies at the very heart of the Government's forthcoming transport bill. Scotland has fallen behind much of the rest of the UK with regard to re-regulation, and we must wake up to the fact that the current unregulated market is simply not working. Re-regulation gives us an opportunity to start to protect the lifeline services that are currently being axed and to stop bus companies cherry picking the most profitable routes.

Re-regulation also provides a chance for us to call a halt to the race to the bottom in the treatment of staff wages. The fair work principles should be included in any bus franchise agreement to ensure a minimum level of terms

and conditions for the staff of any bus company that enters into a franchise deal. We need to drive up, not drive down, workers' terms and conditions across the sector. Simply put, if a bus company wants to receive public money for delivering services, it should be paying its workers a decent wage and offering a high standard of terms and conditions.

Re-regulation also provides an opportunity to drive forward multi-ticketing and end the current postcode lottery with regard to concessionary travel, particularly for young people. Those who are able to work their way through the current complex web of concessionary bus travel in Scotland will find that discount fares for children under 16 tend to be 50 per cent of the full fare. However, despite the fact that many young people are still in some form of education beyond the age of 16 and the fact that, if they are working, they are likely to be paid a low wage, the availability of discounts for young people of 16 or above can be non-existent or very limited.

If we are serious about reversing the decline in bus travel, we need to change the social attitude that often exists towards bus travel, and that needs to start in potential passengers as early as possible. We should make it a condition of any franchise deal that bus operators must provide a minimum level of concessionary bus travel for young people. Instead of trying to axe the bus pass for those who turn 60, the Government should be exploring ways to extend free bus travel to more young people.

There are other rigged rules that we need to revisit to stop our public transport being dictated at the whim of private bus companies. We should end the anomaly that prevents local councils from setting up municipal bus companies and ensure that, when any changes to bus routes are proposed, they will be allowed only after proper consultation with passengers and agreement by the traffic commissioner. It is simply not good enough that, often, the first time that passengers find out that their bus route is being axed or changed is after the decision has been made, when they pick up a new timetable.

From Unite the union's hand the bus campaign to the Co-operative Party's people's bus campaign, there is a growing movement that wants to see our bus services change so that they start to put passengers and not profits first. Labour's amendment sets out the real change that we want to see and will seek to deliver when the Government brings forward its transport bill later this year.

I move amendment S5M-11289.4, to insert at end:

"and put municipal ownership and bus reregulation at the

heart of the bill to allow local authorities to set up bus services to serve their communities, protect bus routes, deliver minimum standards in concessionary travel, in particular for young people, and drive up staff terms and conditions, and is concerned that any measures to cut back availability of the current concessionary travel scheme will decrease bus usage further.”

15:06

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I thank John Finnie and the Green Party for raising the issue of better buses. Like the Greens, the Liberal Democrats believe that reversing the decline in bus use across the country is essential. We need to make bus use a practical option for more people in communities across Scotland, particularly in our rural areas, where bus transport is problematic, to say the least.

However, we have a problem with the last part of the motion, which calls for a statutory target to achieve greater bus use. A statutory target without any penalties is just a useless piece of legislation. Our statutory health targets are consistently missed but, of course, no penalties have been attached to the Government because of those failings. Such targets are completely useless.

We think that, in the forthcoming transport bill, the Scottish Government will enable many of the freedoms in Labour’s amendment without calling for bus reregulation. However, we think that Labour has got it right in highlighting the concern about

“any measures to cut back availability of the current concessionary travel scheme”.

The Conservative amendment will, of course, be pre-empted if the Scottish Government’s amendment is agreed to.

Although I have not been in any discussions with the Government about its amendment, we are willing to support it because—I rarely say this—it is quite a sensible amendment and it chimes with what we believe.

Humza Yousaf: That is twice today.

Mike Rumbles: I am coming to that. Do not get a heart attack.

However—there is always a “however”—I want to use this debate to highlight the important issue of ensuring that the concessionary travel scheme is not only protected but enhanced. I am proud that my colleague Tavish Scott introduced that successful scheme when he was transport minister. It is successful in many ways. It aims to get people out of their cars, not to do away with cars altogether, helps to end social isolation and loneliness—let us have joined-up government on that—and is extremely good for our environment. It is effectively a win-win scheme for everyone and is a really effective use of public money. However,

I am concerned that the Minister for Transport and the Islands must not hide behind increasing its use for young people—which is very welcome—by reducing the availability of the bus pass for those aged 60 and over.

I have pointed out to the minister in committee that limiting the money that is available under the scheme effectively prevents the bus operators from driving up usage through advertising it. The minister made it clear that there is no Government prevention on that, but the bus operators feel that they are effectively prevented from advertising it because the scheme is designed so that any use over and above the limit has to be paid for by the bus companies themselves. That acts as a disincentive to promoting bus travel, and I ask the minister to look again at that issue.

Jamie Greene: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike Rumbles: I am in my final minute. I would take an intervention if I had more time, but I cannot do so, unfortunately. I am getting a nod from the Presiding Officer.

The key must be to increase bus usage, as that is a win-win for everyone and our environment. Anyone—not least the minister—who listened to my fulsome praise for the transport minister at this morning’s meeting of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee during stage 2 of the Islands (Scotland) Bill, when he refused to accept for himself the new Henry VIII powers that the Conservatives’ Jamie Greene was offering, might have been surprised by my comments, but I give praise where praise is due. I would like to heap such praise on him when he publishes his plans for the future of the concessionary bus scheme, but we shall have to wait and see.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. We are very pushed for time, so I ask members to stick strictly to four minutes, please.

I am sorry, Mr Ruskell—you have five minutes.

15:10

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We can all agree that bus services make a big contribution to the economic, environmental and social sustainability of our towns, cities and rural communities. Buses keep us moving. Compared with the private motor car, they make efficient use of road space, and they have the lowest carbon footprint of all transport modes except bike and foot. If they are run as affordable, quality public services, buses can help young people to access apprenticeships while helping their parents get to

work and empowering their grandparents to be free from physical and social isolation.

When I think back to my days as a councillor, I remember that the strongest community campaigns were always those to save bus routes and services. The slow erosion of councils' power to subsidise and keep routes open has led to much suffering, especially in rural areas.

However, we can fall into the trap of not questioning the environmental performance of bus services. Although carbon emissions per passenger mile are low, buses make a major negative contribution to air quality through exhaust emissions of particulates and nitrous oxide. Successive Euro engine standards have driven down emissions over time, but pollution levels are still above European Union danger levels, especially on nitrous oxide, in 32 areas of Scotland, from Crieff to Glasgow. That hidden killer is contributing to the deaths of 2,500 people every year in Scotland alone.

Dieselisation of cars has not helped. The growing congestion levels in towns mean that stationary private cars are holding up polluting buses in toxic traffic queues, and the minister mentioned the parking problems that we can have in urban areas. It is clear that we must transform our bus services from being a major part of the public health pollution crisis to being a central part of its solution. The Government's clean air for Scotland strategy—or CAFS, as it is known—recognised that, but the Government has been desperately slow to take action and it still faces the threat of legal action under European air quality laws if it does not speed up.

Even in that context, Scotland's first low-emission zone, in Glasgow, has got off to an extremely shaky start, being branded as a "no ambition zone" by Friends of the Earth and a "free pass" to cars by Transform Scotland. In addition, there were non-governmental organisation resignations from the Scottish Government's air quality group just last Friday. Fifteen per cent of the bus fleet in Glasgow is already Euro 6 compliant. Simply nudging that up to 20 per cent next year represents glacial progress that will ensure that we remain in breach of European air quality laws just as we are leaving the EU, with all the ministerial pledges on regulatory alignment still ringing in our ears.

The major immediate problem that Glasgow City Council faces seems to be relatively easy to solve. The minister could really help today by giving councils and bus companies some clarity on funding. The Scottish budget, which we approved just last month, includes £10.8 million specifically for low-emission zones. It also includes provision for a future transport fund that is worth £60 million, some of which is for a green bus fund. Following

suggestions by the Greens in budget negotiations, a brand-new £10 million of financial transactions has been earmarked to support bus companies to improve emissions through retrofits.

Despite the tens of millions of pounds that are about to be made available in the new financial year in just four days' time, nobody seems to have the certainty that is needed to make ambitious plans. The Glasgow low-emission zone is the most developed, and it needs certainty on how much of the £10.8 million of funding will go there. Bus companies and even some officials in Transport Scotland do not seem to know about the £10 million-worth of loans that could be made available for bus retrofits. Can the minister commit to providing more certainty to companies and councils on the funding that will be available for them to be ambitious on air pollution?

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your final minute, Mr Ruskell; it is your choice.

Mark Ruskell: I am very tight for time—oh, go on then. Why not?

Liam Kerr: I will be brief. The member is making an important point, but nowhere in the Green Party motion is there a reference to anything to do with the environment. Why not?

Mark Ruskell: The environment is integral to what constitutes a quality public service. That is the point that I am trying to make. Environmental quality is hugely important to our communities and to the travelling public who have to breathe in the poor-quality air.

I return to the point about funding. I have another question to ask the minister in the time remaining to me. Will he commit to specifically tasking his officials to make sure that the loan fund, which is detailed in the draft budget, is made available for those bus retrofits and to give councils certainty of funding to help make the LEZ plans ambitious?

It is time that we made buses part of the pollution solution, not the pollution problem.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Mason, to be followed by Peter Chapman. You have a strict four minutes, Mr Mason.

15:15

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I should probably declare that I have had a bus pass since last summer and I have saved somewhere in the region of £150 since then. I generally prefer to use public transport if it is practical. Quite apart from the obvious environmental benefits, using the bus or train lets

me do many important things, such as reading committee papers for coming here or engaging in profound conversations on Twitter.

I find myself very much in agreement with the thrust of the motion. We all want affordable fares, a strong network of routes and reliable services. However, it has to be said that if we are to go beyond that to get cheaper fares, more routes and more reliable services, an additional cost will certainly be involved. Although I am open to either franchising or public ownership, neither comes without its problems and costs.

John Finnie: Politics is about priorities. If our priority is to spend £6 billion on two roads, we will not have money for public transport.

John Mason: I accept that politics is about priorities, but if we put more money into buses and public transport, there will be less money somewhere else.

As I said, although I am open to franchising or public ownership, neither comes without its problems and costs. Our trains system is franchised and costs a lot of money. As I understand it, London buses are also franchised and, last time I looked, they cost something like £700 million per year, which is £100 per member of the population.

We used to have public ownership of buses in Glasgow and there were still complaints. I grew up in Rutherglen and folk there used to complain that the outlying schemes such as Castlemilk got a much better bus service because that was where the Labour councillors got most of their votes and they fixed the buses to serve those areas.

Whoever owns and operates our bus services, someone still has to decide which services are viable and which need to be reduced. There is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation here. Does having fewer people using the buses lead to reduced routes or do reduced routes lead to fewer passengers?

In my constituency, the improvement of the rail service on the Whifflet line has encouraged some people to switch from bus to train. Personally, I prefer it if I can use the train or the bus rather than my car. However, one of my neighbours asked me why on earth I would leave my car at home and use the train or the bus. To him, it was partly a status thing and a sign of being in control that he would use his car virtually all the time. Many people still want their own cars because using the car means that there is no waiting around at bus stops or on station platforms and it gets them from door to door and lets them drop off the kids at school and carry on to work.

As John Finnie and Colin Smyth said, in some circles, there can be a certain amount of stigma

about bus travel, which is not some people's transport method of choice. I remember seeing an exchange in a film called "Crash", which was set in Los Angeles. One of the characters says, "You have no idea why they put those great big windows on the sides of buses, do you?" His mate then asks, "Why?" and he replies, "One reason only: to humiliate the people of colour who are reduced to riding on them." We have a slightly different situation here, but I think the point is made.

Although I have a lot of sympathy with the motion, I wonder whether we can set statutory targets for bus usage, which sounds like trying to force people to use buses. We will have to do something on education to change the culture to get people enthusiastic.

There can be tension between two different good things. Low-emission zones can push up the costs to the bus industry, which maybe pushes up fares. In Glasgow we have pedestrian zones, which are good, but the buses have to do circuitous routes around them, which can have a damaging effect in respect of journey times and emissions.

I support what the Greens are saying, but I have some reservations.

15:19

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, need to declare an interest, as I also have a bus pass, although I have not actually used it yet.

I welcome John Finnie's motion, as it would be amended by my colleague Jamie Greene. I am sure that everyone in this chamber can support increasing the use of buses and making services available to as many people as possible. Not only are there socioeconomic benefits, but there are environmental benefits, too, because increasing the use of public transport and decreasing the use of personal vehicles would greatly reduce our carbon emissions.

It is hard to see why, in a large city such as Edinburgh, people would not want to take the bus. It is relatively cost effective, bus lanes provide journeys that are free from congestion and, with eight bus companies providing services, buses can take people pretty much anywhere they want. However, it is a different story in the North East Scotland region that I represent. One in five bus routes in Scotland have been axed since 2010, many of which were rural services. As the number of people using rural services has decreased, the number of routes offered has decreased in an ever-downward spiral. The last remaining people using those routes are relying on their councils to subsidise the services.

It is well known that Aberdeenshire Council has been underfunded for years, and with constantly squeezed budgets it has to focus on its statutory duties. Nevertheless, it has subsidised 64 out of 123 bus routes in the area, spending some £3.7 million a year and serving more than 900,000 passengers. Last month, however, the council unfortunately had to announce proposals to remove eight routes and reduce two of the routes that it has subsidised; with its budget for 2018-19 decreasing by 4.3 per cent in real terms, it had no other option. Decisions on local bus service provision must be taken as close as possible to those who will benefit from it. In practice, improving local authorities' ability to increase services and passenger numbers is hard, but decreasing their budgets certainly will not help.

Transport accounts for just under a quarter of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions, and road transport makes up 73 per cent of those emissions. Figures show that the average occupancy of a car is one and a half persons. In theory, therefore, if there are 50 people travelling to work each day in their cars and those 50 people switch to a single bus, that will decrease not only our greenhouse gas emissions but congestion on our roads. In that scenario, one bus takes more than 30 cars off the road.

However, driving has begun to be seen as the easy option. Public transport fares are increasing, routes are reducing and figures from Citizens Advice Scotland show that nearly two thirds of people are dissatisfied with the bus. We need to reverse that by providing frequent and reliable services at a reasonable cost. We need to encourage people out of their cars and on to the bus. The problem is how to do that. Unfortunately, I do not have time today to explore that further.

Today's debate is all about vision: a vision to improve the standard of our bus services, increase public use of bus services and improve our environment. I hope that the Government will adopt some of the visionary ideas that it has heard today from across the chamber and do something to reverse the fall in bus usage, which has plummeted 17 per cent over the past 10 years.

15:23

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in the debate, and I thank the Greens and John Finnie for focusing on the issue of buses. I will highlight the issue of integrated public transport with an example from my South Scotland region, and focus on the need for reregulation and the issue of bus emissions.

On integrated transport, I want to describe briefly what someone would have to do if they lived in Lanark and wanted to travel to Edinburgh

on public transport. One cannot get a train from Lanark to Edinburgh, so they would have to travel to the nearest train station, which is a 15-minute bus journey away in Carstairs. Members might think that that is not too bad, but it is not that simple. On the morning commute, after getting off the bus they would have to wait for up to 40 minutes for a train, and at the end of the day they could find themselves at 5.40 on the train from Edinburgh to Carstairs. That service is at a useful time for me and I often take it. However, I have a car, whereas those who do not have a car have to wait another 55 minutes for a bus to get back to Lanark. Where is the integrated transport? Perhaps I am oversimplifying the issue but, in my view, much of what I described happens because private bus companies operate the route and do not have to provide a connecting service to the train station. That is unacceptable, because it means that living in Lanark and commuting to Edinburgh without a car is near impossible and certainly not practical.

As a country, we ask people to leave the car at home, but we do not provide a real alternative. Buses and trains should be our number 1 short and long-distance public transport alternatives to cars, not just for people who cannot drive but for those who can. As my colleague John Finnie said, one third of people are not even car owners.

Integrated public transport is essential. I have been talking about the issue for many years, but has it happened yet? The answer is no. To achieve it for the population, buses must be affordable, must go where people need to go in urban and rural areas, and must go at the times that people need.

The present arrangements for bus contracts drive forward an unacceptable state of affairs in urban and rural Scotland. Profit-driven private companies with little accountability will not change the way in which they operate simply because we ask them to. As we have heard from many members, bus passenger numbers are falling and will continue to fall until the Government takes some action. I agree with John Finnie that a national performance framework indicator should be considered.

Scottish Labour has worked in many ways with the Scottish Co-operative Party, Unite the union and the Socialist Environment Resources Association to take forward bus reregulation. When we come into government, we will reregulate our buses, but let us hope that it happens before that through the transport bill. Iain Gray introduced a bill to reregulate the buses in the previous parliamentary session, but time ran out. It is now the time to do that, as people and the planet cannot wait any longer.

Reregulation will also create the opportunity to set a clear expectation for low emissions at a national level, and Lothian Buses should be recognised for its lead on that, which will help to address air pollution and protect people's health. My colleague Mark Ruskell highlighted the importance of the Scottish Government loan for the changes to buses, and I hope that the minister will comment on that in his closing remarks. It is about low-emission zones and people's health, but it is also about greenhouse gas emissions, which are so important, and it is part of my brief and that of many members in this chamber to tackle that.

I look forward to the transport bill and to the Scottish Government having robust arrangements for the future of our buses with regard to a whole range of issues that have been highlighted this afternoon. I also look forward to the opportunities for Scottish National Party back benchers and members of other parties to lodge amendments as necessary.

15:27

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I think that we all agree that the current approach to bus provision does not deliver what we and, more importantly, the public want. We might disagree about which faultlines are most significant or about the solutions but, as MSPs who deal with constituency issues, I suspect that there is a general point of consensus.

I was recently involved in dialogue with a provider over its decision to remove a local service, which caused considerable difficulty for a relatively small, but not insignificant, number of my constituents. I was struck by the justification that was offered by the operator for scrapping a service that attracted 900 passengers a week on average. It was quite blunt: the operator was not making money on the route, so it was being pulled. There was also reference to a lack of subsidy, yet there remain a considerable number of subsidy-provided buses in Scotland, particularly in rural or semi-rural settings.

If I recall correctively, the bus service operators grant, which is still worth more than £50 million a year, was refocused just a few years ago to link subsidy with kilometres travelled, thereby better supporting distance routes such as those in Angus South.

The concessionary travel scheme is another form of subsidy in so far as it encourages use of bus services. Around £200 million is being directed to support that in 2018-19, with 1.3 million people expected to make around 145 million journeys.

Beyond that, the Government provides bus companies with access to funding streams, which

were recently enhanced, to replace old polluting buses, and the main operator in my constituency has made good use of that. In all, the idea that there is not enough support provided for bus travel in Scotland is absurd. The major problem is that we are in a situation in which bus companies are only interested in profitable routes, and that is the issue that we need to crack.

I welcome the fact that the forthcoming transport bill will be used to give local authorities powers to step in and run local bus services. Anything that offers the opportunity to secure a changed approach is worth pursuing, but I caution against that being seen as a silver bullet, especially in areas such as the one that I represent. For that to work, it will require local authorities to view it as an opportunity to be grasped. I am not sure that that can be taken as a given.

We have a council in Angus that has, at times, shown too little regard for its rural parts. It has insisted on there being no rural focus when putting £2 million in the pot to enhance broadband provision across the county, scrapped road and pavement winter weather clearing across a range of villages, withdrawn food waste collections from areas just outside settlements, and introduced changes to recycling provision that have seen fly tipping incidents across our rural areas increasing.

That is not a political point. Those examples cover periods of different hues of control of the authority, including by the SNP. When the kind of mindset betrayed by such actions exists, can we assume with any confidence that councils will instinctively seek to deliver bus services based on social responsibility and equity of access, rather than on the bottom line? Although I support exploring options, let us do so mindful that it will not necessarily bring about improvement unless we crack collaboration and do not have a one-size-fits-all approach.

I welcome the fact that the Greens have dedicated some of their debating time to this issue. It is a debate that we absolutely should be having, but let us recognise the complex nature of the issue and the need for good will and co-operation to resolve it in a way that meets the aspirations of the public.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We move to the closing speeches. I call Iain Gray.

15:31

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I add my thanks to the Greens for bringing this topic to the chamber today. There has been a great deal of consensus throughout the debate about the importance of buses and the need to act. The minister pointed out in opening that 80 per cent of all public transport journeys in Scotland are taken

by bus, and that is correct. Some 393 million journeys a year are taken by bus, compared to 94 million rail journeys. However, as Colin Smyth told us, those numbers are changing. Bus use has dropped by 17 per cent, while rail passenger numbers have been increasing. That is because, as a number of members have said, we have let bus passengers down over recent years.

The minister cited a figure that he described as £0.25 billion. That £250,000 of subsidy is provided to bus services in Scotland each year but, as John Finnie made clear, that is significantly less than we spend on roads, and it is also less than the subsidy that is provided to rail. Colin Smyth pointed out that the core subsidy—the bus service operators grant—has in fact fallen by 25 per cent in recent years. A number of members have talked about the concessionary travel scheme, and the reimbursement of that has also been squeezed in recent years, so that the bus operators do not get the benefit that they did when the scheme was introduced.

We have also heard a couple of passing references to a good example of how things can be better. John Finnie started that when he talked about buses in my constituency of East Lothian, and he is absolutely right. Until relatively recently, we were one of the worst examples of how bus services in 21st century Scotland can fail communities. Services were provided largely by FirstBus. It was a poor service. It was unreliable and provided by very old buses that were uncomfortable—indeed it was not unusual for them to catch fire en route. As a result, with every week that passed, fewer passengers would use those buses. That is the answer to Mr Mason's question of whether it was a chicken or an egg. It was a downward spiral—poor buses, fewer passengers and less investment by the company, which then began to close down routes that were not making any money and cherry pick the routes where it thought that it could still make money. Eventually, the operator gave up altogether and walked away.

Those services were replaced by Lothian Buses, a municipally owned company, which treated East Lothian not as routes but as a network, and reinvested its profits in new buses and new routes. As a result, I now live in a village of about 100 people and have a bus every half hour from my door, and even have night buses, which I could use if I were young or exciting enough to find myself in the city in the middle of the night.

The question is: if we know that it can be done, how do we encourage it to happen elsewhere? Labour has an answer. In the past two sessions of the Parliament, we have presented bills that were primarily focused on reregulation through local

franchising. That is the key to improving our bus services.

The Government supported that proposal in opposition but has opposed it in government. Indeed, in the previous session of the Parliament, it denounced our proposals in the most strident form. Therefore, when the Minister for Transport and the Islands says that he is excited about local franchising and wants to hear our views, it indicates that he cannot really have been listening for the past nine years, because we want local franchising to be introduced. However, as the previous First Minister used to like to say, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repenteth.

We are delighted that the Government has come round to the idea. We could have had local franchising by now if the Government had supported our bills. We need to hear less talk of the transport bill. It needs to be introduced. Let us get it done.

15:36

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The debate on bus travel has proven to be a much-needed sharing of ambitions that, I hope, will help the Scottish Government's forthcoming transport bill.

Everyone is rightly concerned about what they consider to be their bus services. For too long, timetabling issues and gaps in services have meant that passengers are heavily inconvenienced and wonder whether they should use buses at all. For example, one-minute connection times are just not acceptable.

Many people in rural areas who have to cope with older buses that often have no heaters and high emissions, as Mark Ruskell and Peter Chapman highlighted, do not look forward to bus travel. However, it does not end there. Constituents in the Highlands have found that buses have been removed from routes due to breakdowns and retasking. The result is that people miss appointments, and the level of distrust in bus companies has resulted in lower bus use.

John Finnie: Does Edward Mountain agree that, if there were some co-ordination around school contracts, for instance, some services would be more viable?

Edward Mountain: I absolutely believe that co-ordination between all levels and proper management would make a much better bus service, which must be what we are aiming for.

We must understand that the scrapping of bus services will have long-term consequences in rural areas. We know only too well that, once bus services are removed, communities feel isolated

and opportunities are closed off to them. Those bus services seldom come back.

The Conservatives agree with John Finnie that we need to halt the decline in bus use, which is occurring despite the financial contribution that the Government makes. However, it is not, as he makes out, an argument between buses and trains, as many rural areas do not have access to trains. Therefore, we must, as John Finnie says, support both. We must make buses and trains attractive to use.

We agree with the minister that we must do something urgently to prevent the decline in bus use. We also agree that taking central control will not help. As Jamie Greene pointed out, we cannot dilute the message that John Finnie has given. We want to promote the use of buses. We also believe that, as Jamie Greene made clear, cherry picking profitable routes serves Scotland and the bus users badly, and we agree with Colin Smyth that our bus services are lifelines for students, non-car users and rural users.

Iain Gray: South of the border, the Conservative Government has come to the view that the way of achieving what Mr Mountain is calling for is to allow local franchising, particularly in cities. Will he agree with that?

Edward Mountain: I am looking at what is happening in Scotland and I do not want to take the argument south of the border. There are plenty of people down there who will take the argument up.

We have sympathy with Mike Rumbles's point that setting targets without penalties will not achieve much. Many people in the Highlands would love to use trains and buses but have to use their cars because they do not have the ability to use either form of public transport. We need to give them more choice.

We do not necessarily support Claudia Beamish's call for reregulation of services, but we support concessionary travel, as do all parties in the chamber.

We welcome the debate and would like a complete review of bus provision to ensure that it delivers for those people whom it serves, rather than just meets targets that have been set arbitrarily. We want to see increased use of buses, which will be achieved by well-managed companies that deliver services across all routes, not just those that are profitable. That will need continued Government support, which must be targeted to ensure the high-quality services that we all require.

We remain convinced that the Government's amendment dilutes John Finnie's motion, so we will not support it. We suggest—tactfully—to the

Liberal Democrats that they should think very carefully about supporting the amendment and, by doing so, diluting the message that John Finnie has rightly brought to the chamber.

15:40

Humza Yousaf: This has been a very good debate, and I thank John Finnie and the Greens for bringing it to the Parliament. Bus travel does not get enough airtime. Although other transport modes should be given parliamentary airtime, the fact that 80 per cent of public transport passenger journeys are done by bus is not reflected in the amount of conversation that takes place in the chamber.

There are issues with bus services being withdrawn—members have mentioned the impact of that in their constituencies—but the experience of travelling on the bus is popular among those people who do it. The most recent transport focus survey, a couple of weeks ago, highlighted that nine out of 10 passengers were satisfied with the journey that they had just taken. Transport focus interviews a large sample and, importantly, the survey takes place right after the journey, so it reflects bus passengers' views quite accurately. That is not to say that urgent attention is not needed.

We are introducing the most radical measures in the devolution era to tackle the decline of bus patronage. I accept some of what Iain Gray has said about sinners repenting, but I do not accept it fully because, with the transport bill that we will introduce—he will wait to see the details—we will improve on the measures that he has brought to the chamber in the past.

Iain Gray: Labour members are keen to see the proposals. When does the minister intend to introduce them?

Humza Yousaf: I intend to introduce them in the first half of 2018, before the summer recess. A reason for the delay is that the transport bill is more than just the bus element; we will also focus on responsible parking and the Scottish Road Works Commissioner and we might want to bring in some bits about LEZs. However, the intention is that the bill should be introduced no later than the summer.

I also gently make the point—although I will not labour it—that when Labour was in power, it did not introduce powers for local franchising or municipally owned bus companies. The Scottish Government's proposals for the transport bill will be the most radical bus measures in the devolution era.

I will turn to a couple of points that have been made by members. I have been praised by Mike

Rumbles twice today—I fear that if he does it any more, I will be excommunicated from the SNP. The points that he and other members have made about concessionary travel have been put on the record. The Government is still in listening mode; our consultation had almost 3,000 responses and no decision has been made. It would be presumptuous for anybody to think that any decision on concessionary travel has been made yet, because it has not.

Mark Ruskell, Claudia Beamish and others have asked for clarity on low-emission zones, which I am pleased to give. In Derek Mackay's budget, money is ring fenced for LEZs. We are also working with stakeholders and the bus industry on a loan scheme to give maximum flexibility. There is no doubt that, for some bus fleets, retrofit is the right way to go, but other bus operators do not think that retrofitting would be the right thing for them because of the age of their fleet—Lothian Buses is in that category. Providing assistance with the cost of Euro 6 buses might be the best thing to do as opposed to retrofitting Euro 3 buses, which do not have much life left in them at all.

Mark Ruskell: On a technical point, does the minister acknowledge that the money is potentially there to work on exhausts, if not necessarily on engines? A large number of exhausts in Glasgow could be retrofitted to make sure that the Glasgow LEZ is as ambitious as it can be.

Humza Yousaf: As I said in my opening remarks, I think that Glasgow is listening to what the Greens, Friends of the Earth and others have said about their ambition for the Glasgow LEZ. The money is there. We have to be careful, though, because although a proportion of the money that we are putting forward for LEZs will be for the abatement of emissions, some of it will be for some of the important infrastructure for LEZs, such as number-plate recognition.

We have to continue to work with stakeholders and be as flexible as possible. It sounds as though everyone is excited, to varying degrees, about the transport bill. It will not be a silver bullet—we also need local action at a local level. That is the purpose of my amendment and I hope that members will whole-heartedly support it, because I do not think that it takes anything away from the motion other than in relation to the disagreement that we have over a national target. Other than that, I think that the amendment supports the aims that most people in the chamber have spoken to.

I am delighted that we have had the debate and I look forward to hearing people's views on our forthcoming transport bill.

15:46

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I thank all those who have contributed. It is fair to say that this has been a fairly consensual debate, with a great deal of agreement on many of the issues.

I agree with the minister that congestion is the real issue here—demand reduction is key and sometimes that aim is challenged by local authorities that are increasing free car parking opportunities in our cities, directly contradicting the sea change that we want to see.

Jamie Greene spoke about lifeline services and for many people, buses are just that; I was pleased to hear him speak out against the practice of cherry picking routes. I welcome Colin Smyth's call for fair work principles to be embedded in contracts with companies and I share Mike Rumbles's support for the many benefits of concessionary travel. Mark Ruskell spoke of the action that is needed to ensure that companies and councils can be as ambitious as we want them to be when it comes to air quality. I have some concerns about John Mason's contribution. I hope that he will have as much concern and as many reservations about his Government's commitment to reducing air departure tax as he has about investing in our buses.

In response to what the minister said earlier, I say this: who can have travelled on Lothian Buses and not be convinced that it is the way to go? I am not biased; I am an Edinburgh resident who is so grateful for the service that Lothian Buses provides and that Lothian residents enjoy, but I want everyone to have access to equally good bus travel. The forthcoming transport bill gives us an opportunity to ensure that all regions of Scotland establish a service that is every bit as good as Lothian Buses, which just happens to be owned and managed for the benefit of the local community.

Lothian Buses has been on the go for nearly 100 years, it employs more than 2,000 people and it operates around the clock—as Iain Gray has said—365 days a year. This year alone, it has been shortlisted for public transport operator of the year, for best bus service, and for excellence in travel information and marketing at the Scottish transport awards.

We frequently do this in the chamber for a variety of occupations, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who drive, maintain and clean our buses. Also, I cannot let this debate finish without mentioning Charmaine Laurie's heroic driving, which saved lives in the snow on Edinburgh's streets.

As we know, bus travel was deregulated by the Conservative Government in 1986. Deregulation has entirely failed to meet its objectives. It has not

increased competition in the sector; instead, it has placed vital public services in the hands of a few profit-making companies which, at times, have demonstrated little obligation to the communities that they serve. Today, the vast majority of buses in Scotland are run by just two companies, and it is fair to say that all members are contacted with concerns regarding the service that they offer at times. Issues are raised about regularity, reliability, cost, cleanliness—

Jamie Greene: In many small towns and rural areas, it is not big companies but small local businesses that provide a vital service—and they are not sitting around in wads of profit either. How do we ensure that there is still a model that allows such small businesses in rural areas to be supported?

Alison Johnstone: Recently, I was contacted by people from Pathhead who were very concerned about the potential loss of the 51/52 service that is run by Borders Buses, which would have prevented them from getting to Dalkeith. Therefore we are working in conjunction with local authorities, and it is key that we see buses as a public service with which both local government and national Government have an involvement. While profit-seeking companies are delivering such services, they have a part to play and have to have responsibility for the job that they undertake.

Efficient, low-cost public transport is good for society and for us all. Only recently, the cross-party group on cycling and walking became the cross-party group on cycling, walking and buses. We widened our remit because good bus links are so important to our active travel infrastructure and, indeed, to all of us. Buses are the glue in a thriving low-carbon transport system. When they are resourced properly, they have the potential to increase individual rail, walking and cycling journeys.

I agree with Claudia Beamish, who called for a real alternative to the car. In many situations, people do not have that. She spoke of the journeys that people can face when they try to access our cities from rural parts of Scotland. Buses have relatively low capital costs and they are flexible, which makes them central to an adaptable transport sector, so we should all be concerned that numbers have fallen. The Government's climate change plan has focused on electric cars. Those are fine—they are better than diesel and petrol cars—but they do not reduce congestion. You can sit in an electric car traffic jam, and a bus can still be waiting for a long time. When people complain that their buses have not arrived on time, it is usually because our congested roads are holding them back.

There is also a gender issue here—

The Presiding Officer: That is five minutes, Ms Johnstone.

Alison Johnstone: In closing, I would just like to say—I do have the last word in this debate—that a statutory target in a transport bill to increase bus patronage would help to focus our efforts. If we are serious about social justice in Scotland, we have to be serious about buses.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes our debate on better buses.

Local Taxation

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-11290, in the name of Andy Wightman, on scrapping the council tax. I call on Andy Wightman to speak to and move the motion. You have nine minutes, please.

15:53

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): The last time that Parliament had a debate on the future of local taxation was in September 2016, when, rather typically of such debates, we ended up by not agreeing to anything. However, had Douglas Ross, formerly of this place, not been in Switzerland at a football training camp, Parliament would have agreed by a majority to have further discussions. All members did, in fact, vote for amendments that committed them to doing that.

Today, we have an amendment from the Government that says that it is

“open to further dialogue on options for local tax reform.”

I do not have a problem with sitting down to discuss local tax options except that that is precisely what I did—and, indeed, what Jackie Baillie did—in the commission on local tax reform. Our final report, which was published in December 2015, contained 19 recommendations, the first of which was expressed in unambiguous terms:

“The present Council Tax system must end.”

Our two concluding recommendations noted that, with the good will that had been established between Labour, the Greens, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party, the time for local tax reform had come. The report concluded by saying:

“This is an opportunity that must not be missed.”

However, since September 2016, no substantive discussions have taken place. If discussions are to be meaningful, they must have a clear focus, which needs to be a commitment to scrap the council tax, with all its associated flaws. If we cannot agree on that, we are failing to live up to our responsibilities.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Many of us would keep the council tax in the absence of a better alternative. We cannot resolve to scrap it unless we know what we are proposing to replace it with. What is the Green proposal? Is it a garden tax?

Andy Wightman: This debate has been bedevilled by claims that we must keep an out-of-date, archaic, regressive tax because we cannot agree on what should replace it. If we are to get rid of that logjam, we should agree to get rid of the

council tax and, as our motion suggests, have an implementation group come up with an agreed system for the future.

That is why, at budget time this year, my colleague Patrick Harvie made clear that the Scottish Greens will be unable to enter budget negotiations for 2019-20 unless meaningful progress has been made on local tax reform. He wrote to the First Minister outlining short, medium and long-term options and making clear that negotiation between the parties will be necessary if progress is to be made.

In her response early this month, the First Minister noted a range of initiatives that are under way, including the Government’s tinkering with the council tax, the Planning (Scotland) Bill and the Scottish Land Commission. In other words, she proposed to kick the can further down the road, ignore the commission that she established in February 2015 and wait for more reports, reviews and debates.

Greens are not prepared to wait any longer. We want action that includes as a bare minimum an unequivocal agreement to scrap the council tax. It is a fundamentally bad tax, and I am disappointed that the Government continues to believe that minor tinkering will make the meaningful changes that are needed. In particular, I reject the First Minister’s claim that changes to the council tax have tackled the fundamental regressiveness of the system. I also reject Derek Mackay’s claim in his amendment that the 2016 changes make the council tax “more progressive”. In fact, they make it marginally less regressive, which is a long way short of being in any way progressive.

For the record, I note that taxes can be regressive, proportionate or progressive. Regressive taxes are those where the lower the value of the tax base is, the higher the tax rate—that is the council tax. Proportionate taxes are those where everyone pays the same rate, such as 1 per cent. Progressive taxes are those where the higher the value of the tax base is, the higher the tax rate, as is the case with income tax. The commission’s report showed clearly that the council tax is—and it remains—one of the most regressive taxes in the United Kingdom, in relation to the value of the property and income. The changes that were made in 2016 do not change that.

If members need reminding of that, they can read the report that the Resolution Foundation published last week, “Home Affairs: Options for reforming property taxation”, in which the authors note that someone who lives in a property that is worth £100,000 has

“around five times the effective tax rate ... of someone living in a property worth £1 million.”

The authors articulate the four broad reasons why that is the case. First, the very wide bands mean that properties with widely varying values pay the same tax. Secondly, the fixed multiplier of tax rates between the bands is such that the ratio between bands is far, far less than the ratio of the tax base. Thirdly, property values are more than a quarter of a century out of date. Fourthly, there is huge regional variation. For example, band D properties in Edinburgh are far more valuable than band D properties in Inverclyde.

The Resolution Foundation goes on to argue that, because of its gross regressivity, the council tax looks increasingly like the poll tax, which it replaced, and that its failings are such that the youngest households are hardest hit, because young people increasingly live in properties in the lowest bands.

In her first report, "Shifting the Curve", Naomi Eisenstadt, the First Minister's independent advisor on poverty and inequality, urged ministers:

"Be bold on local tax reform".

She went on to say:

"this is a central moment of political decision, an opportunity to introduce a much more progressive system, one that will have important implications, particularly for working households at or just above the poverty line."

That moment of political decision was ducked, but now—three years out from the next Holyrood elections—can be that moment. We have the time to begin a process of fundamental reform and to transition to a fair, modern, transparent and flexible system. Instead, the finance secretary and his colleagues routinely turn up to the chamber and committees and tell us that progressivity lies at the heart of their tax plans. With respect to the council tax, progressivity clearly does not lie at the heart of ministers' plans.

I understand that some take the view that, as Murdo Fraser observed a few moments ago, in the absence of agreement on a replacement, we should not scrap the council tax yet. However, if not now, when? A succession of reports, analyses and inquiries have all said quite clearly that this iniquitous, regressive and archaic tax has had its day. The Lyons inquiry and the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that we should scrap it. The commission on local tax reform said that we should end it. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is clear that it is regressive and outdated. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Adam Smith Institute have said that we should get rid of it. Why are we not able to agree at the very least that, notwithstanding the various views on its replacement, the council tax must go?

The Scottish Greens bring this debate to Parliament today to make it clear that the status

quo is no longer tenable. We are focused on the council tax as a start, but the system of local government finance as a whole is not fit for purpose. We need not only to have a new system of local tax, but to give councils far greater fiscal autonomy and to adopt and agree a fiscal framework to replace the annual arguments about the local government settlement. Just as the Scottish Parliament is maturing as an institution, with new responsibilities for raising public finances, local government should be accorded the same status and the same fiscal freedom that is the norm in countries right across Europe.

Constituents of mine are living in band E properties that are worth less than nearby properties in band B, and the majority of taxpayers are paying the wrong amount of tax, so what conceivable justification can there be for us to do anything other than commit to scrap the council tax? Our on-going inability to deal with the issue should shame this Parliament.

If we are unsuccessful in persuading members to back our call today, so be it, but members should hear this: the Scottish Greens are a party of radical democracy. We believe in the capacity of the local state to organise its own affairs, to be responsible for its own finances and to be accountable to the electorate that it serves. That is why, in the next few weeks, I will launch a consultation on a draft members' bill to incorporate the European Charter of Local Self-Government into Scots law, which will have implications for what we are debating today.

If we reach no agreement on fundamental reform, my party will not take part in budget negotiations at the end of this year. We reject the idea that we can go on any longer with business as usual.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the present Council Tax system must end; agrees that its replacement must be a progressive alternative, and calls on the Scottish Government to convene a cross-party implementation group by 31 May 2018.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call on Derek Mackay to speak to and move amendment S5M-11290.2.

16:02

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): The package of reforms to the council tax that was set out in our 2016 Scottish Parliament manifesto has been delivered by the Scottish Government, with the structural changes having been in place since April 2017. As a consequence, the council tax is now fairer. As this debate is essentially about local government funding, I restate my view that local

government has received a fair settlement from the Scottish Government.

The commission on local tax reform highlighted that one of the iniquities of the original council tax system was that higher value properties incurred a smaller amount of tax relative to their value than those in the lower value bands. We addressed that by changing the way that council tax is calculated for properties in bands E, F, G and H.

Andy Wightman: I recognise the reforms that were made in 2016, but I do not agree with the cabinet secretary that they address the fundamental iniquity and regressiveness of the council tax. They do not address the criticism that the commission on local tax reform made that the tax rate for those at the top is less than the tax rate for those at the bottom. That is still the case.

Derek Mackay: Andy Wightman referred to “tinkering”. The reforms raise more than £500 million for public services, which is retained locally. I would describe that not as “tinkering” but as a substantial investment in Scotland’s public services, and that is before we even get to the matter of locally determined increases.

The Resolution Foundation was quoted. I am mindful that, in relation to the SNP’s proposition going into the Scottish Parliament elections, it said:

“The SNP’s tax increase would raise revenue in a progressive manner, with the tax rise falling harder on higher income households”.

Andy Wightman: Will the minister take an intervention?

Derek Mackay: I have to make progress as I have only five minutes, I have taken one intervention and I have a lot to say on the Government’s position.

It is a fair judgment to say that political parties will attach different weights to the considerations that were set out in the commission on local tax reform. It highlighted the need for relief to be available for low-income households. The council tax reduction scheme provides exactly that, and our reforms enhanced it, especially for households with children. We have increased the child allowance by 25 per cent, and we continue to refuse to follow the United Kingdom Government’s damaging example of applying a two-child cap.

When local taxation was last debated, I was clear that we were on a journey of reform and that those were just the first steps. I was also clear that I was willing to engage. Members are well aware that we have made reforms through the Barclay review of the non-domestic rates system, and we are interested in engaging further on the council tax, but we have been determined to strike the right balance between protecting household

incomes and ensuring that our public services have the resources that they need in order to deliver. I believe that our decisions on tax and the allocation of resources achieve that balance.

In our 2016 manifesto, we set out that the time was right, after nine years, to lift the council tax freeze, but that increases would be capped at 3 per cent and not at 5.99 per cent, as applies in England. That strikes the right balance. All councils have now set their council tax rates for the forthcoming financial year, and all have increased the council tax by 3 per cent, which will mean a further £77 million for local services. Without some sort of constraint, taxpayers would risk facing increases such as the 12.5 per cent increase that the Labour minority administration in North Ayrshire proposed for 2018-19. Where we have asked households to pay more tax, we have done so in a reasonable and balanced way. We continue to be committed to making local taxation fairer and ensuring that tax overall is progressive, and we continue to be open to discussing how that might be achieved.

The Opposition parties may be able to provide a critique of the Government’s position or the existing council tax regime, but there is no majority view on a replacement. In keeping with our collaborative approach on taxation and proposals for further reform, there needs to be serious engagement, and not cheap political points.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Derek Mackay: I have very little time left.

I believe that the discussion paper on the role of income tax in Scotland, and the consultation throughout, was an exemplar in engagement on tax. Even if the Opposition disagreed with the final policy outcomes, the process was one of consultation and sound methodology, with clear tests established.

There is no clear alternative proposition to the council tax, which commands majority support in this Parliament, so an implementation forum seems somewhat presumptive. For our part, we have tasked the Scottish Land Commission with exploring the possibility of introducing a land value tax to ensure that we can take an informed decision on that. There is much interest in it, but limited examples of it in operation.

Local government’s role in the dialogue is fundamental. It would have to implement any changes that followed from decisions that we made, it would depend on the revenues that were then collected, and it would have to deal with any shortfall should the reforms be ill-considered. Changes to local tax must be progressed in partnership with local government and with a clear evidence base. In that regard, the commission on

local tax reform did valuable work. Our governance review builds on that as we work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to engage the public and look across all our public services in order to understand the changes that can improve lives and bring democracy closer to the people.

For all those reasons, I move amendment S5M-11290.2, to leave out from “believes” to end and insert:

“notes that the present Council Tax system was changed in 2016 to make it more progressive; acknowledges that these changes will result in an estimated additional £500 million over the course of the current parliamentary session; considers that any changes to local government taxation must be done in partnership with local authorities; recognises that the Land Commission is undertaking work on the introduction of a land value tax and that a joint review of local governance is underway, and notes that the Scottish Government is open to further dialogue on options for local tax reform and any plan that would command the clear support of Parliament.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I warn members that there is absolutely no time in hand, so speeches must be kept to time and absorb any interventions. That is bad timing for you, Mr Fraser. You have four minutes, please.

16:09

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the Green Party for bringing this debate to the chamber. At least it is consistent in its messages on local taxation, but already in this short debate we have exposed the black hole at the centre of the Green Party’s argument, because we cannot resolve to scrap the council tax without agreeing what we would replace it with.

I listened carefully to Andy Wightman’s speech, but I am no clearer about what the Greens are proposing as an alternative. I have heard them talk previously about a garden tax. I must say that that surprised me, as I thought that the Greens would be in favour of gardens, where they can cultivate their home-grown vegetables—their turnips and marrows—but now it seems that they want to tax those self-same gardens. However, we are not any clearer about what they are proposing.

Andy Wightman: Will Mr Fraser take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry, but I have only four minutes. Mr Wightman will have a chance to respond in winding up the debate.

Those of us with long memories will recall that, in 2007, the SNP was elected on a clear manifesto commitment to scrap the council tax and replace it with a local income tax. Indeed, the language that SNP politicians used at the time was near hysterical. They talked about the “unfair” council tax or even the “hated” council tax. Of course,

once the SNP was in office, even with an overall majority, it took no steps to scrap the council tax, despite all its promises and despite the fact that it was supposedly hated.

As Andy Wightman said, back in 2015, the report of the Scottish Government’s commission on local tax reform said that council tax must go but, just like the Greens today, it could not come up with an alternative proposal. Fortunately, the Scottish Conservatives were there to help out, not for the first time. We established our independent commission on competitive and fair taxation in Scotland, which reported just a month later, in January 2016, recommending that the council tax structure should remain essentially unchanged, but with an increase in the multiplier for the higher bands of G and H. As it happened, the SNP Government rejected the recommendation of its commission on local taxation and adopted proposals that were very similar to those of our commission, although it went further by increasing the multipliers for bands E and F in addition and increasing those for G and H by more than we would have done.

That is where we are. We have already had reform of the council tax, and we do not support further reform of it. Accordingly, we reject the Green motion. The council tax is by no means perfect—no system of taxation is—but it is better than many of the alternatives. The council tax is long established, easily understood, relatively efficient and relatively easy to collect. It is a property tax, and therefore an approximation of a tax on wealth, which is appropriate at a time when we regularly express concern about the bias in our tax system towards taxes on income as opposed to taxes on wealth. Although property may not always be an accurate proxy for wealth, nevertheless, our view is that some sort of property tax should be a component in the overall taxation mix in Scotland, as it is in most other western countries.

Andy Wightman: Will Mr Fraser take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry, but I just do not have time.

We would support broadening the range of taxes that councils have at their disposal. We would want that to be underpinned by a new fiscal framework between the Scottish Government and local authorities, as Mr Wightman would say. For example, that would involve looking at devolving land and buildings transaction tax to councils and giving them more control over business rates.

There is one more important point to be made, which is covered in my amendment. When we hear parties on the left such as the Greens talking about tax reform, that is often code for higher

taxation. The overall income tax burden in Scotland is already higher than that in the rest of the United Kingdom. We do not want discussions on tax reform to be used as a Trojan horse for yet more taxes on hard-pressed Scottish families at a time when our economy is faltering.

We reject the Green plans to scrap the council tax without any clear idea about what would replace it, we support plans to give councils additional taxation powers and we oppose plans for overall increases in taxation.

I move amendment S5M-11290.2.1, to insert at end:

“, but believes that any reform of local taxation should not be used as an opportunity to increase the tax burden on households.”

16:13

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Andy Wightman and the Greens for bringing forward this important debate, because

“It’s time to scrap the Council Tax.”

Those are not my words; they are the words of Nicola Sturgeon, on 11 April 2007. Eleven years ago, the country was adorned with posters such as the one that I am holding up now, on which the SNP was pledging—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You know how I feel about props.

James Kelly: —to scrap—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Put it down.

James Kelly: —to scrap—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, put it down.

James Kelly: It is a very important piece of evidence, because it shows Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Salmond pledging to

“scrap the unfair council tax.”

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

James Kelly: Not just now. The reality is that 11 years down the road, we have Alex Salmond—

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): Will the member give way?

James Kelly: No, not just now. Eleven years down the road, Alex Salmond is a discredited television host, and the discredited council tax is still in place. How can we trust the SNP on local taxation? The changes that it put forward in 2016 merely tinkered around the edges. In evidence to the Local Government and Communities Committee, Professor David Bell said that they did not

“address the concerns ... raised by the commission on local tax reform”

while Kenneth Gibb of policy Scotland described them as “a political fudge”. They did not address the inherent unfairness that people see in local communities and which local MSPs see for themselves in the cases that are frequently raised with them about the council tax’s unfairness.

At the 2016 Scottish elections, Labour proposed to abolish the council tax and replace it with a fairer property tax system based on modelling that was prepared for the commission on local tax reform and which showed that 2 million households—or 80 per cent of all households—would be better off. Surely such a system is much fairer.

Of course, the issue is not just about replacing the council tax but about shifting the balance of power and responsibility and re-empowering local government. In that respect, we have, in recent times, proposed the kind of tourist tax that is used in countries such as France and cities such as Barcelona. This city of Edinburgh receives hundreds of thousands of overseas visitors, particularly during the festival period, and having such a tourist tax makes good economic sense.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Does James Kelly agree that such a tax would have an impact on domestic travellers, who make up 84 per cent of travellers to Scotland?

James Kelly: As the international examples show, a tourist tax has worked fine in France, in regions such as Catalonia and in cities such as Barcelona. It has had economic benefits in those places, and I would argue that it would have economic benefits in Scotland, too. Such a mechanism, allied with the introduction of a land value tax—which I see is gaining traction, even in SNP circles; Alex Neil recently had an article in the *Airdrie & Coatbridge Advertiser* in support of it—and a social responsibility levy on alcohol sales would raise additional revenue for local councils. Crucially, they would also move more powers to local councils. Things have become too centralised, with local government being penalised by the SNP Government, and this kind of approach would put more revenue-raising powers in the hands of councils.

From that point of view, we very much welcome the Green motion and the suggestion of cross-party talks to tackle this issue and to try to come up with solutions. Time is up for the council tax, and it is time that this inept SNP Government built a proper democratic solution that delivers for local people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I now move to the open debate, and I

ask for speeches of a tight four minutes. I call John Mason, to be followed by Bill Bowman—who will actually have only three minutes.

16:18

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It is good that we are having this wide-ranging debate and the chance to brainstorm and float a few different ideas. As others have said, there is a lot of agreement that council tax is not ideal, and perhaps most of us would agree that, ideally, we would like to get rid of it. I consider it good that it was frozen for a number of years and that it has now been reformed a bit and allowed to rise.

One problem is that the council tax is based on 1991 values, and any revaluation is likely to lead to significant winners and losers. Those properties whose value has not risen as much in relative terms since 1991—which would probably apply to poorer areas, including those in my constituency—would be winners, because their relative value in Glasgow has fallen. That said, I accept that owners in the west end, where property values have risen by more, might take a significant hit.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Does John Mason recall when he and I used to campaign for the abolition of the council tax? He now talks about reform. Perhaps he could let us know at what point he stopped wanting the abolition of the council tax.

John Mason: I am going on to that. To give a quick answer, I would support the abolition of the council tax if we could get something better that is agreed on. We need to have agreement from at least two parties on what any replacement should be. The system is fundamental to how Scotland works, and there would be significant upheaval and costs involved in replacing it, as Derek Mackay rightly said, but I would certainly be keen for any new system to have widespread party support and widespread public support and buy-in so that it will stay in place for a good length of time. We cannot change the local government finance system very often.

I hope that we can agree on certain local taxation principles. Local taxation should be linked to the ability to pay, for example. Local government should raise more of its own money so that, as in the Scottish Parliament, what is raised by it and what is spent by it would be more closely matched, and there will always need to be some transfer of resources between richer and poorer areas. I presume that that would be based on need—for example, island costs are higher, and there is more poverty in Glasgow and Inverclyde.

That leaves open certain other questions that we are not yet agreed on. Should every council

have the same range of taxes, or should councils choose from a palette of possible taxes? For example, some want a tourist tax and some do not. Is it possible to get one system that suits Glasgow and Clackmannanshire, or is some asymmetric system possible?

The SNP has certainly been keen on a local income tax, which still has strong arguments in its favour, not least the link to the ability to pay.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: No. I am sorry, but I have no time.

There are some difficulties with a local income tax. Practically, could we have 32 different rates of income tax? Would Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs be willing or able to manage that? Conceptually, would we abolish the property tax? I have some sympathy with the arguments that Murdo Fraser put forward. That tax is easy to understand and is much harder to avoid than others.

I know that a land valuation tax has been popular with the Greens, although I am not sure whether that is still their first choice. I have had that tax explained to me more than once and have felt that I was beginning to understand it, but I have to admit that I do not think that it is easy to grasp. We need a tax that the public really feel comfortable with. The commission that Marco Biagi set up raised some problems with LVT. Areas in my constituency such as Baillieston are not well off, but people in them have very large gardens as the housing is ex-council housing, and they would perhaps end up paying more.

It has been suggested in the media that the Greens would like a property tax that is based on current valuations. I wonder how that would work in practice and whether they would expect properties to be valued every single year.

Overall, the Government is open to discussion, and I support exploration of the options. However, I would like to see broad agreement in the chamber and among the public on the way forward.

Rachael Hamilton: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I made an intervention in James Kelly's speech in my role as shadow cabinet secretary for culture and tourism. However, in my haste, I failed to declare an interest.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order, but it is now on the record.

16:23

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): No one will argue that the council tax is perfect. It is

based on values that are almost 30 years old and it does a poor job of funding councils. However, the public are familiar with it and they understand it. Any change must not add complexity, and change must not be used to slip in tax rises by the back door. That is the worry whenever we hear the Greens talk tax. Just this week, one of my constituents contacted me to express his fear that local tax reform of the sort that the Greens propose could lead to his losing his home.

That fear is well founded. The Greens' residential property tax would inflict back-breaking tax hikes—almost half a billion pounds-worth—on already hard-pressed households. Nearly 1.4 million homes—more than half of all Scottish properties—would be subject to the new tax burden.

Mr Harvie has drawn a red line over that issue and threatened to withhold his blessing from the next budget unless his hard-left agenda is adopted.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Bill Bowman: I do not have time. The Greens have had their chance.

It is worrying that the SNP offers no assurance that it will not agree to send local tax bills skyrocketing. Mr Mackay has spoken of his commitment to making local taxation more progressive. The motion uses the very same word. Far from suggesting fairness, “progressive” has become a byword for an ideological obsession with raising taxes. If the SNP and the Greens are truly concerned about fairness, they should accept that simple fairness dictates that the Government should not raise taxes on families that are working hard to pay their bills.

Instead of propping up the lamentable left-wing consensus, Mr Mackay should heed the Scottish Conservatives and give councils more control over their budgets. The devolution of business rates income would provide a serious revenue stream and would act as a transformational incentive to grow local tax bases.

Derek Mackay: Would the member accept a point of clarification?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Bowman gave you such a strange look that I was not sure whether he was giving way.

Derek Mackay: I must try that again, Presiding Officer.

Local authorities retain the income from non-domestic rates. Is it Mr Bowman's position that local authorities should also set the poundage in local areas?

Bill Bowman: No.

Devolving land and buildings transaction tax revenues is just good common sense, given the obvious connection between LBTT and council tax and business rates.

A new fiscal framework—one that recognises the needs of communities and places localism at the heart of council funding—should be agreed to underpin such changes. The Scottish Conservatives propose a mature and measured approach that would give councils more control while offering reassurance to the public. I ask Mr Mackay to use the opportunity of this afternoon's debate to give Scottish families such reassurance by ruling out any Green grab on local taxes.

I support the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser.

16:26

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I apologise to the chamber and to Mr Wightman for missing the opening portion of his speech.

I welcome the opportunity to debate local taxation. By design, the Labour proposals differ slightly from those of the Greens, but the ambition to make property taxation more progressive is a shared one. Underlying our scheme is a plan to make 80 per cent of people better off and to put local government finance on a stable footing, but just as crucial as the policy intention of having a more progressive system is the symbolism of departing from a discredited Tory system that was introduced more than a quarter of a century ago, which was born out of the poll tax. That system has left the majority of householders in the wrong council tax band and has barely been tinkered with since it was devolved to this Parliament. The tinkering that has been done, which has involved increasing the multipliers for properties in bands E to H, has raised £100 million, with the increase falling on the backs of those people who live in the most expensive houses, most of whom can afford it.

The Scottish Government's promise of a new exemption scheme for 54,000 low-income households was meant to help to cover the new costs, but last month I discovered that fewer than 2,000 households have claimed. We were told that a third of eligible householders are pensioners, which means that thousands of older people are still paying too much. What can only be described as a sticking plaster is part of the council tax reduction scheme, which, although only five years old, is ripe for wholesale review. As a like-for-like replacement for council tax benefit, by design it must compensate for the high costs of the regressive council tax.

In social security terms, we tackle the misery of poverty by boosting incomes in two ways:

reducing the high cost of annual bills and directly boosting the incomes of low-income families. A new, more progressive property tax would lower the bills for people in what we know as bands A and B, thereby boosting what are generally low incomes. Because three quarters of the reduction is paid in bands A and B, the overall cost of the reduction scheme would fall, too, and those savings could be redirected to those who need it most.

Today's scheme, which costs £360 million, is paid to 500,000 Scots each year, although that number is now 11 per cent lower than it was in 2013. There is a £20 million underspend, but to date the Government has no system to track who is missing out. Only a reformed property tax and a more attractive reduction scheme can adequately identify the households that need the most help. A new system that had impressive take-up rates that was run by the Scottish Government and local authorities would deliver far better poverty-relieving payments, such as free school meals or school clothing grants, than the shambolic universal credit system.

Although the Scottish Government appears to approach council tax reform with absolute trepidation, it is worthy of note that the finance secretary is less concerned about tinkering with the reduction system for people on the lowest incomes every year. Given that a promised discussion on the reduction scheme is due this summer, perhaps the Government would be wise to consider a wholesale redesign of council tax, too.

16:30

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I thank Andy Wightman and the Scottish Greens for bringing this debate to the chamber. I will start on a note of consensus by saying that I have a great deal of respect for Mr Wightman and his erudition on these matters. I was very interested to hear what the Green proposition was, because the motion refers to a "cross-party implementation group", which rather presupposes that there is something to implement.

Andy Wightman: The implementation group is designed to scrap the council tax. The member will be well aware that there are different views across the Parliament about what should replace it. There is in place a potential progressive majority to scrap it, so the implementation group is intended merely to make a start—to commit to scrap the council tax.

Tom Arthur: I thank Andy Wightman for that intervention, but I am keen to hear what the Green proposition is.

Andy Wightman: It is in here.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have had enough of props, even if they are Green. Do not hold things up.

Tom Arthur: In the nine minutes and 11 seconds of his speech, as well as in an intervention, Mr Wightman did not outline to the chamber what his proposition is. The Greens are simply stating that they want to scrap the council tax. Mr Wightman eloquently and convincingly outlined all the flaws, errors and unfairness in the council tax system, which I do not contest, but I do not think that it is correct to simply abandon it without having something to replace it.

Mike Rumbles: Would it not concentrate the mind of the Government if we were able to set a date for the abolition of the council tax?

Tom Arthur: Setting an artificial deadline could just lead to bad reform, rather than correct reform.

I think that there is consensus across the chamber that the council tax is not the ideal form of local taxation. Rather than having a cross-party implementation group, we could have a cross-party discussion group. If someone is in employment and they feel that their job is unfair and they decide to indulge in the moment, hand in their notice and walk out of their job, it might feel good at the time—

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Tom Arthur: No. I apologise, but I have taken two interventions already. I would have taken an intervention, but I am short of time.

If one leaves one's job and does not have another job to go to, one will face the consequences.

There is clearly a desire among the progressive parties in this chamber to discuss how we can make local taxation fairer, but setting artificial deadlines, as Mr Rumbles suggests, or just scrapping the council tax without a single idea of what we would replace it with would be foolhardy.

I suggest that we begin a process of discussions. We should start with basic principles. The cabinet secretary referred to the consultation document on income tax, which outlines some key tests that should be met, which are to maintain and promote levels of public services, ensure that the lowest earners do not see rises and ensure that any change makes the system more progressive and supports the economy.

Indeed, those principles could be buttressed further with the Adam Smith principles outlined in the consultation document: certainty, convenience, efficiency and proportionality. A strong approach should be taken to make sure that there is no tax avoidance. As Murdo Fraser highlighted in a

previous debate, property tax such as council tax is important because it is very difficult to avoid paying it, and there is the potential to avoid other taxes such as a local income tax.

I am sympathetic with the broader thrust of where the Greens are going, because there needs to be taxation that addresses wealth. However, we have a limited suite of powers in this Parliament. We do not have income tax power over savings and dividends and we do not have power over corporation tax. There is a need for a much broader suite of tax powers to implement taxes on wealth and other more progressive reforms that the Greens would like to see.

There is much more that I could say on this, but I realise that time is against me.

16:34

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): I remind colleagues that I am still a councillor in Aberdeen City Council. I have looked forward to participating in this debate to make the case for fairer funding for councils after Government cuts. Despite the increasing block grant, council funding is down in real terms. That is unacceptable and has taken our public debate in the wrong direction. For all the talk of solutions, the debate has not been about the mechanisms that we use to tax people; it has been about how to tax people more.

Benjamin Franklin said in 1789 that there remain two certainties: death and taxes. If we must have taxes, we must choose them wisely. I view tax against three criteria: fairness, effectiveness and fitness for purpose.

On fairness, tax is ideally set at a level at which it is seen as being levied equitably. When taxes are apportioned without equity, the result is discord. They also need to be transparent.

On efficiency, rates that are cheap to collect and provide optimum taxation levels are the only sensible course. It is not fiscally neutral to take from consumers and give to beneficiaries—there is an economic impact. That is why it is important to consider the side effects of those decisions, and to consider economic growth, which is currently stagnating under the SNP.

On fitness for purpose, tax exists to raise money for public services, not to reorder society in a grand alternative universe that the Greens would prefer. In the real world it is not appropriate to levy one increased tax upon another.

Local taxation is a key element of the overall tax burden because, while income tax rises discourage people from working here in Scotland, local tax rises punish them for living here. Mr Mackay will claim that it is nothing to do with him, but his decision to continue underfunding local

government forced every council to increase council tax rates.

Tom Arthur: Will the member take an intervention?

Tom Mason: Very quickly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his final minute. If you allow it, Mr Mason, you will still have to conclude.

Tom Arthur: Today, Tom Mason's colleagues in the UK Government increased local taxation by 5.1 per cent in England. Does he share my hope that many people from England will relocate to Scotland, the lowest-taxed part of the UK?

Tom Mason: That is very unlikely.

We know that every single-occupancy household will face a higher overall tax burden in 2018-19 than they did in 2017-18. A 3 per cent rise in council tax in the cheapest band, band A, more than offsets the maximum income tax reduction of 38p a week. In a written answer, Mr Mackay said that he had capped council tax rises at 3 per cent to "protect household income". We know that Green proposals go well beyond 3 per cent, so when the SNP caves in to pass its next budget, it will, by definition, not be protecting household incomes.

Scotland deserves better. It deserves a Government that prioritises a high-growth, low-tax economy, boosting wages and creating jobs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There you must conclude, Mr Mason—please sit down.

16:37

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I do not know what has happened to Mike Rumbles this afternoon. He agreed with Humza Yousaf on two separate occasions and now he is being cheered on by Patrick Harvie. I think there must be something wrong with Mike Rumbles. [*Interruption.*] He will not be sacked, honestly, Murdo Fraser.

We have heard from Murdo Fraser and James Kelly that the SNP has been on a journey with the council tax. There was a time when it would take every opportunity to condemn it. Alex Salmond called it unfair and insisted that he would scrap it, but he did not. Nicola Sturgeon said—quite strongly—that she "hated" it. She went on to criticise any suggestion that it should be tinkered with, but then she did that.

Now SNP members seem to be the staunchest defenders of the council tax. When they secured the support of the Greens and the Labour Party for their arbitrary increases to the council tax, I argued that those would not be the first steps towards

further reforms but the last steps. We have heard from the minister this afternoon that we will have to get a consensus across the Parliament from the other parties before he will even consider taking our proposals forward. Rather than being with us on developing a consensus, he is going to be a bystander, and his long-grass amendment confirms that.

Derek Mackay: Let me be absolutely clear—I have said that I will work with any party to find a parliamentary majority, so it is not the case that I will be a bystander. I clearly have a role, as finance secretary, but to ask us to vote for a proposition to abolish a form of taxation without any idea of what will replace it is simply irresponsible.

Willie Rennie: That is a positive step forward, because it is not what the Government position was before. If the Government is prepared to take part in constructive engagement about the replacement of the council tax, that is a welcome development from the minister. His previous position was that the Government had delivered its manifesto commitment and had no obligation to do anything else, so that is a welcome change.

I commend the Greens for trying again after they were convinced to back the Government last time. Andy Wightman used to make the case that the Government's previous set of council tax changes violated international law, which was not an argument that I heard him make this afternoon. He cited article 4, article 9 and article 9(3) of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and he made a convincing case that the Government's council tax proposals were illegal, before he voted for those same proposals. I wish the Greens well in changing the Government's mind this time. They seem to be pretty determined not to vote for the budget unless there are changes, and we will be with them on that. We favour the ending of the council tax, as it is unfair.

A land value tax is our alternative, as it would levy a charge based on the real economic value of the land, rather than just on the property on that land. It would be reflective of how well that land was serviced and what value it could deliver for the benefit of wider society. There is a strong set of lobbyists and enthusiasts who believe that a land value tax could be the best way not just of raising the revenue but of shaping the way our society and economy works in a fair and just way.

If we are to deliver change, it must be change that enhances local democracy. I was disappointed with the minister's earlier comments in favour of capping, because that undermines local democracy. The new local government tax must be a truly local tax that is set locally. That means leaving it to local authorities to set the rate that is right for them, and it must be a step towards

allowing councils to raise the majority of the money that we spend. That is our proposal as we enter into this debate in a genuine and optimistic way.

16:41

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Let me take members back to 2007. The SNP manifesto said:

"Local taxes can be fairer. The SNP will scrap the Council Tax and introduce a fairer system based on ability to pay."

Derek Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: No. Derek Mackay did not take an intervention from me, so I am not taking one from him.

That was the first of many broken promises that were to follow. The 2011 SNP manifesto promised to replace the council tax—that went well, didn't it? Roll forward to 2016, and the promise to scrap the council tax had all but disappeared.

Our history is littered with quotes from John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon. Do members remember "discredited council tax" or "unfair regressive council tax"?

Tom Arthur: Will Jackie Baillie take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: No. Tom Arthur refused to give way, as well.

My personal favourite quote was this:

"Labour's hated council tax is totally unfair and—"

Joe FitzPatrick: Will Jackie Baillie give way to me?

Jackie Baillie: No. Perhaps Joe FitzPatrick should sit and listen to this:

"Labour's hated council tax is totally unfair and any tinkering with bands would not make the system any fairer."

That was Nicola Sturgeon in April 2007. What delicious irony: here is the SNP simply "tinkering with the bands" and keeping a "hated" and "unfair" council tax, which is exactly what the SNP said that it was against. Council tax is regressive. Proportionally, the very poorest shoulder the largest burden. A decade on, the SNP has not scrapped it, but we can.

I must have done something wrong in a previous life because I served on the commission for local taxation, together with Andy Wightman. The Tories refused to participate, so Murdo Fraser asking parties what they propose is a tad cheeky, even for him. The commission heard from experts, communities, professionals and elected members, and there was data and modelling. Everything that we need to know about local government finance

and the options available to us was in the commission's report. There were 19 recommendations, the very first of which was:

"The present Council Tax system must end."

At seven words, it was the shortest recommendation, but it was the most powerful, and the SNP cannot bring itself to implement the unanimous view of the commission by scrapping the council tax.

To all the SNP members, including the cabinet secretary, I point out that the commission was chaired by a Scottish Government minister. There were Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green and SNP representatives, and they all agreed. Guess what! That makes a majority in this chamber. Is the cabinet secretary saying that the SNP minister who was the chair got it entirely wrong?

Derek Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: No, I am not taking an intervention. Why do the SNP members not listen?

There is a clear majority to replace the council tax, but let me also quote from the 90-page report, alongside which there were several other volumes of evidence, to remind the cabinet secretary that it said:

"this report serves to inform the design of ... alternatives".

That is what the Green motion is about. Let us have that discussion. Let us move it forward. We welcome the Greens' motion and will be supporting it. We have sympathy with the principle behind the Tory amendment, but the Tories have clearly done a deal with the SNP to remove most of the Green motion and stifle progress, and for that reason we cannot support it.

The SNP has a choice—a choice to reform local government funding and to make it fairer for the people of Scotland—but I regret that it appears to be far too timid to make it.

16:46

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Greens say that today's debate is about fairness. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Greens want to scrap the council tax, but that would mean hiking taxes for hard-working families, which would mean penalising aspiration. As Murdo Fraser said, the Greens have no alternative and no idea. Bill Bowman talked about the tax not being perfect, and many people would support that.

Over the past few months, it has become increasingly clear that the SNP, the Greens, Labour and the Liberal Democrats want to increase taxation. Only the Scottish Conservatives have the confidence to challenge that cosy consensus, but it is a fact that we should not be thinking about hiking any taxes at this time. Last year, UK growth was 1.7 per cent, but the Scottish economy forecast growth was just 0.7 per cent. Even with that, the OECD has forecast that Scotland will have the lowest economic growth rate in the developed world for the next three years. Why would anyone want to put up taxes during that time?

There is no doubt that there is an opportunity to debate local taxation, and it is clear that, although there is a strong public awareness of the council tax, there are undoubtedly flaws in the system, going back to 1991. However, there is little public appetite at present to reform the council tax. Perhaps that is why the SNP has failed to deliver on the promises in its manifesto, having been in government for the past 11 years.

Derek Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

Alexander Stewart: No. Time is very tight.

There are nevertheless many ways in which we could deal with trying to support the taxation from councils. The Scottish Conservatives support widening the range of taxes that local authorities can use. For example, there are strong cases for allowing councils to keep all their business rates income and to ensure that there are incentives throughout the location to inform and support.

The Scottish Conservatives believe in empowering our local communities by devolving new financial powers to our councils to improve accountability and to drive growth locally. However, today's call from the Greens for reform of local taxation is less about that and more about trying to get tax rises through the back door. I am happy, therefore, to support the amendment in Murdo Fraser's name to the Scottish Government's amendment, and I encourage members across the chamber who believe in supporting hard-working families to do likewise. By doing that, we may get a fairer system.

16:48

Derek Mackay: I will need to check the *Official Report*, but Alexander Stewart referred to introducing new local taxes and I am genuinely interested in what the Tories' secret plan for those new local taxes might be. Every party has suggested that there is potential for local discretion in that area, so there is a bit of consensus from every party in the chamber, which is why I am not walking away, contrary to what

Willie Rennie might say. I believe that we can find consensus.

I am sorry, Presiding Officer, but I missed how much time you said I had. I am sure that you will be generous.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have five minutes.

Derek Mackay: Thank you.

As well as the party politics, there is a serious point to be made in this debate. Yes, there was the commission on local tax reform, but subsequent to that there have been parliamentary elections and, arguably more important, local government elections as well. It would be fair at least to engage with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on what it thinks about the future of local taxation, because elections are important.

The Tories have asked what we are doing and whether we are delivering on our promises. I was elected on the 2016 Scottish Parliament manifesto that set out what we would do on council tax and that is exactly what we have done. All my colleagues in the SNP are in the same position in that regard. However, I recognise that we are in a Parliament of minorities and that we need to reach a consensus with others. My door remains open to discuss the matter but it is unreasonable to say that we will scrap the council tax without an alternative. We need to test many of the issues on local taxation.

I suppose that the Scotland Commonwealth games team in Australia will be proud of the policy somersaults that parliamentarians have made. If we want to go back to 2007, we should ask what every other party's position on local taxation was at that point. We committed to consult in 2011 and we have done that. In 2016, we committed to reforms, which we have delivered and which put an extra £500 million into Scotland's public services. It is significant to say for a moment that local government has had a fair settlement from the Scottish Government. Yes, in part, that is because of the constructive approach from the Greens. I acknowledge and accept that.

The Tories' contribution was almost laughable. I understand their pragmatic position but, in Tory-run England, council tax rises are above 5 per cent, so it seems a bit rich for them to criticise the Scottish Government. Of course, that makes England the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom. The Tories have opposed rate capping despite it being in the Tory manifesto and tried to take credit for the changes to the multipliers that they actually voted against when push came to shove.

We will take forward a tax debate because it is really important that local government has

continuity and security of funding to deliver public services throughout Scotland. Local authorities have a degree of discretion, which we have said we will examine further. Members should not dismiss the serious governance review that we are undertaking in partnership with local government and COSLA, or the work on land value tax, further local discretion and further local and community empowerment. Nor should they dismiss the commitment that I have given previously, and which I restate, on ensuring that we can deliver a more progressive system.

In essence, that is the offer that I have made to the Opposition political parties but we must do that in a reasonable, fair, evidence-based and pragmatic way. Considering what further refinement we can make is a reasonable and fair approach that gives certainty to local authorities to plan their resources while acknowledging the difficulties in any alternative to the council tax. We are advancing a serious proposition to engage with the other parties over a period of time in a fashion that can find consensus, recognising that we have to strike a balance. Of course we will respect the Parliament's position in that regard.

On the continuing financial outlook for local government, I will continue to work in partnership with local authorities to give them the best possible settlement that we can and to see how we can empower them to make more decisions more locally. That is all the more reason to engage in the reviews that are under way and not to walk away from them. We should engage in a spirit of consensus and positivity, and with a constructive approach to ensure that, if we refine the system further, we can do so in a fashion that commands confidence, as—I believe—we did with the engagement on income tax.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude, cabinet secretary.

Derek Mackay: We have delivered on our manifesto commitment and we will keep on delivering.

16:54

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the members who have taken part in the debate, but I must express my frustration that, nearly 20 years after devolution began, we are still trying to break the log jam. I say to Mr Arthur that I do that in the knowledge that every aspect of local taxation—taxation for local services of any form we wish—has been in the Parliament's devolved competence from day 1.

Tom Arthur: If a local income tax was to be administered, should it include savings and dividends? The Parliament does not have such a power.

Patrick Harvie: We do not have that power and I do not support a local income tax. I will come on to that later.

I am pleased that nobody has defended the council tax on its merits, which is understandable because the system is fundamentally broken; it is regressive—it is still regressive after the recent tweaks—and 25-plus years out of date, with most households and properties in the wrong band. It is absurd to continue with a system of taxation when we know that most people pay the wrong amount.

I welcome the case that was made by members, including James Kelly, that this long-standing argument needs to be addressed and that there is a need for wider reform of local council services and new fiscal powers that offer flexibility. That wider reform needs to include asset wealth, in the form of property, as part of the tax base—there seems to be consensus on that. Bizarrely, I agree with Murdo Fraser on that argument: property wealth needs to be included.

In the earlier arguments on local income tax, I was never convinced that that was the right option. It is clear that even its advocates must see that, in the context of devolved power over national income taxes, the case for an additional local income tax is messier and less necessary.

I need to draw attention to some unwelcome comments, such as the suggestion that the Greens are pretending that there is no alternative. The Green proposal is not a prop but merely a document to refer to, which we published more than two years ago. Other parties have proposals, too. We know that consensus needs to be built; we are not insisting in this debate that other parties should just adopt our policies wholesale. We recommend only that we endorse recommendation 1 of the commission report—that council tax has to go—and then we can begin to build consensus.

Derek Mackay claims that he has addressed the unfairness of the council tax and he cites the Resolution Foundation. However, it is clear that, although the SNP's tax increase would raise revenue in a progressive manner, it has not said that the resultant tax, as amended, is a progressive tax—it absolutely is not.

Mike Rumbles: Does Patrick Harvie agree that if the Scottish Government were to set a date years in advance for the abolition of the council tax, that would concentrate minds and we would achieve something?

Patrick Harvie: Absolutely. We seek an implementation group—if the Government wants to call it something else, that is fine—that needs to crack on with the job and make progress. That would begin the prospect of legislation in this parliamentary term. We have suggested a five-

year transition period to any new system, so we are talking about a long-term argument. However, progress will not be made on a long-term argument unless the first steps are taken. There is an idea that there is no majority for a specific replacement, but that is for one reason only: it is because we have tolerated an unjust status quo for so long. That is our collective failure across the political spectrum over years as a Parliament.

However, it now seems that a measure of consensus has emerged in the debate, as shown in comments by members from the Greens, Labour, Lib Dems, some in the SNP and even some Tories—for example, those who made the case for a broader range of local tax measures and those who supported a land value tax—who did not echo the nonsensical rhetoric of a garden tax. It is as if Murdo Fraser imagines that gardens are not already counted in the valuation of properties, whereas the problem is that they are counted in a valuation scheme that is out of date and broken and in which most households are in the wrong band.

I would like to say a great deal more. I hope that we will have many more chances to progress the debate further, because it needs to be progressed. The range of options is out there; the argument that we have addressed the fundamental unfairness of the council tax is spurious. We need to crack on and get this job done. People in Scotland have voted for donkey's years for political parties that said that they wanted to scrap the council tax. Let us all now commit. We can reach a measure of consensus; if we agree that we will pass legislation during this parliamentary session, we will have done something that is economically sensible and socially just. I commend the motion in Andy Wightman's name.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-11339, 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 17 April 2018

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee Debate: Air Quality in Scotland Inquiry

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 18 April 2018

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform;
Rural Economy and Connectivity

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Historical Sexual Offences (Pardons and Disregards) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 19 April 2018

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 Debate: Safe Injection Facilities

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 24 April 2018

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 25 April 2018

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Social Security (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

Thursday 26 April 2018

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Civil Litigation (Expenses and Group Proceedings) (Scotland) Bill

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 19 April 2018, 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 Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-11340, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S5M-11341, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2017 Amendment Regulations 2018 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 17.5 of Standing Orders, the Local Government and Communities Committee be appointed as lead committee on the scrutiny of the Scottish Government's revised National Outcomes.—
[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We come to decision time. I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Humza Yousaf is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Jamie Greene and Colin Smyth will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S5M-11289.2, in the name of Humza Yousaf, which seeks to amend motion S5M-11289, in the name of John Finnie, on better buses, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: That means that two amendments are pre-empted, so the next question is, that motion S5M-11289, in the name of John Finnie, on better buses, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed? Is there a no there?

Members: No. [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: There was a no. There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)

Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 109, Against 0, Abstentions 5.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that partnership working at national and local level is needed to deliver cheaper fares, more routes and reliable services to make buses a practical option for more people and communities across Scotland; further believes that the forthcoming transport bill is a key opportunity to set the framework for transport authorities and bus operators to work together to reverse the decline in bus usage; considers that the bill will give local authorities the flexibility to pursue partnership working, local franchising or running their own buses, allowing them to better respond to local needs, and further considers that the proposed new statutory partnership model should allow transport authorities to set their own objectives for the good of their communities.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-11290.2.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend amendment S5M-11290.2, in the name of Derek Mackay, on scrapping the council tax, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 28, Against 86, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-11290.2, in the name of Derek Mackay, which seeks to amend motion S5M-11290, in the name of Andy Wightman, on scrapping the council tax, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)

Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 86, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-11290.1, in the name of James Kelly, which seeks to amend motion S5M-11290, in the name of Andy Wightman, on scrapping the council tax, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 23, Against 91, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-11290, in the name of Andy Wightman, on scrap the council tax, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 86, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that the present Council Tax system was changed in 2016 to make it more progressive; acknowledges that these changes will result in an estimated additional £500 million over the course of the current parliamentary session; considers that any changes to local government taxation must be done in partnership with local authorities; recognises that the Land Commission is undertaking work on the introduction of a land value tax

and that a joint review of local governance is underway, and notes that the Scottish Government is open to further dialogue on options for local tax reform and any plan that would command the clear support of Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-11340, 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 Budget (Scotland) Act 2017 Amendment Regulations 2018 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-11341, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 17.5 of Standing Orders, the Local Government and Communities Committee be appointed as lead committee on the scrutiny of the Scottish Government's revised National Outcomes.

Earth Hour 2018

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S5M-10561, in the name of Graeme Dey, on earth hour 2018. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes WWF Earth Hour 2018, which starts at 8.30pm on 24 March; understands that, while people do a wide range of things to show that they care about the planet's future, millions will choose to mark Earth Hour by going "lights out" for 60 minutes as a symbolic show of solidarity in tackling climate change; celebrates reports that families and communities across Scotland will be taking part, joining the Parliament and some of the world's biggest landmarks, such as the Sydney Opera House, the Eiffel Tower and Edinburgh Castle, in switching off their lights as a visual display of their commitment; believes that Scotland's local authorities have always played a major role in the success of the event, with Scotland being the first country to have its councils give the hour 100% support; considers that this awareness event has become a moment for people around the world to think about the importance of helping bring real change to the lives of people; acknowledges what it sees as the continued cross-party support for the aims of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, and notes the view that this should be built on in the Scottish Government's forthcoming climate change legislation.

17:09

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I thank all members who signed my motion, enabling it to be debated this afternoon, and I place on record my appreciation of the co-operation of the Conservative chief whip, who I understand intends to speak in the debate, in facilitating a debate-slot swap, to afford us this opportunity.

Last Saturday evening, at 8.30, lights around the world went out to mark WWF's earth hour. The annual event is a symbolic act of solidarity with the planet, to mark the threat that climate change poses.

Globally, hundreds of millions of people take part in earth hour events. Members of the public shared on social media great stories of their activities on the night. People held candlelit dinners, went on nature trails and staged upcycling and repairing workshops, and 2050 Climate Group had a candlelit ceilidh.

I am not surprised to learn that research shows that 85 per cent of people who participated in the initiative are likely to have been inspired to do more to protect the planet throughout the year. That is self-evidently good news, because ultimately it is behaviour change that will put us on the path that we need to be on if we are to halt the worst impacts of climate change.

This year, WWF asked members of the public not just to sign up to taking part in earth hour 2018 but to make a promise for the planet. Individuals promised, for example, to use a reusable coffee cup or refuse plastic cutlery when they are out and about, to take steps at home, such as switching to green energy and turning washing machines down to 30°, and to reuse and compost leftover food, wherever they are.

As I said in the debate on plastic last month, we politicians might have thought in the past that we needed to prompt and facilitate behaviour change, but we are now finding that the public are setting the direction of travel and calling on us to make things happen. There are numerous triggers that are making the public realise that they need to act, whether we are talking about television shows such as "Blue Planet", the mess that people find when they undertake beach clean-ups, or the coffee shops that offer the carrot of a discount for reusing a coffee cup, as I am pleased to say that the big chains have started doing.

Some of the steps that people are being encouraged to take sound challenging, but we need only remember how quickly people got on board with the idea of a plastic bag charge to realise that the public will respond.

I am delighted that Arbroath abbey, in my constituency, participated in this year's initiative. Historic Environment Scotland is a great supporter of the earth hour programme.

My motion refers to Scotland being the first country in which all councils have participated in earth hour, so I was disappointed when Angus Council advised me that it would not participate this year. I have previously highlighted the council's involvement and action to turn off lights or raise awareness of climate change among staff and community partners and through school lessons. I have learned from WWF that Angus Council promoted earth hour through its internet and social media channels. Forgive me for being overwhelmed. We should all be upping our efforts, not rowing back.

Despite the lack of significant action from Angus Council, I know that many of my constituents participated in earth hour, including people at Glamis castle. The people who run the castle are implementing positive environmental measures. They are looking into powering the castle from the hydroelectric plant that runs off the river by the sawmill in Glamis village. The plant already powers the estate office, and the provision of power to the castle would remove the need for oil and gas for heating.

Glamis is also taking steps to reduce the use of plastic. The thrust of the programme is to remove all plastic carrier bags from retail outlets and

replace them with good-quality paper bags. The restaurant will also stop using disposable plastic. From this year, its disposable items will be made of card.

Charging points for electric vehicles will be installed at Glamis. The castle has more than 100,000 visitors a year, and it says that although it is making only a small contribution, it is a start. I applaud Glamis castle and others who are journeying down the road that our society—at domestic and global levels—needs to tread.

I acknowledge that many local authorities in Scotland remain at the forefront of leadership on earth hour. Dundee City Council, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Highland Council and Glasgow City Council all played their part last weekend.

Lothian Buses, which is publicly owned, showed a promotional animation on its number 1 route, which is served by fully electric buses. Lothian Buses and Glasgow Subway are the biggest transport providers in Scotland's two big cities, and both companies featured advertisements for earth hour 2018.

What exactly are we doing all that for? WWF, which deserves enormous credit for coming up with the earth hour concept, recently published a report, "Wildlife in a Warming World", which is based on work that was undertaken by the University of East Anglia and James Cook University. The research concludes that:

"Almost half of plant and animal species in the world's most naturally rich areas, such as the Amazon and the Galapagos, could face local extinction by the turn of the century due to climate change if carbon emissions continue to rise unchecked."

Even if the Paris climate agreement's 2°C target is met, those places could lose 25 per cent of their species.

The Amazon, for example, has around 10 per cent of all known species in its ecosystems, and it plays a crucial role in regulating the global climate. The region is highly vulnerable to climate change. Even a rise of 2°C would threaten more than one third of the species in all groups, without them being able to adapt by moving to other areas. A 2°C rise in global temperatures is forecast to make Madagascar climatically unsuitable for more than a quarter of its species. The call for action is crystal clear.

The annual earth hour activities are clearly to be commended. However, although they are important, we must remember that we need to undertake action not only now but all year round, so that we are able to tackle the challenges of climate change head on. Good progress has been made in Scotland through our taking responsibility

for tackling those challenges, but we cannot stand still.

The Scottish Government's upcoming climate change bill provides an opportunity for us, as parliamentarians, to lay down a fresh marker. It is only with behavioural change, which, as I said, I believe that the public is leading, that we will get to where we need to be on this critical issue. I look forward to earth hour and lights out 2019, and to the positive measures that citizens across the globe will undertake between now and then, through many climate change related actions, as a result of earth hour 2018.

17:17

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Graeme Dey for securing this members' business debate. I confess that it was more convenient for me, as a keen advocate of tackling climate change, to indulge the member through the switch that he refers to. I also thank WWF for its continued support for tackling climate change across the world, and for its efforts on earth hour.

In the west of Scotland, East Dunbartonshire Council and West Dunbartonshire Council were awarded the WWF earth hour super local authority badge. I am sorry to learn about Angus Council, but I hope that next year it will be in the running for that award. In East Dunbartonshire, the lights were switched off at William Patrick library in Kirkintilloch. Interestingly, the education department and the national health service worked together to produce a sustainable school meals cookbook—I am sure that the children of East Dunbartonshire will be delighted to taste those recipes. Another one of this year's promotions was the hashtag #PromiseForThePlanet, with individuals making promises to take action to make a difference on climate change.

I want to focus on a couple of materials that we should all look at more closely in terms of tackling climate change. The first material is, of course, plastic, which has been in the media primarily as a result of "Blue Planet" and David Attenborough. An interesting statistic is that, by 2050, there will be more plastic in the oceans than fish, by weight. Over the past 30 years, about 8 billion tonnes of plastic have been produced. However, projections show that, over the next 30 years, 34 billion tonnes of plastic will be produced, which is more than a fourfold increase. That is a real worry.

The first thing that we can do about plastic is to extend producer responsibility. Producers of plastic packaging should bear more of the cost of disposal. By doing that, as well as by encouraging producers to take responsibility for their products, we will begin to influence the design of such

products. By designing those products slightly differently, we can help to tackle litter. For example, with the old aluminium tin cans, the ring pull was often discarded after it was pulled off. The cans have been redesigned so that the ring pull is no longer detachable. It is such developments that we need to see. We also need to increase plastic recycling, and it will be interesting to see what impact the deposit return scheme will have in that regard.

The second area that I want to highlight is gold. I was chatting to Donald Cameron before the debate. He got married 10 years ago. To produce the gold ring on his finger, 3 tonnes of waste were produced. When my sister got married last year, to produce the same gold ring—but not with the same husband, clearly—30 tonnes of waste were created. The amount of waste that is created in the gold mining industry is increasing because the quality of ore is decreasing. There are 600,000 children employed in the gold mining industry worldwide in what are often the poorest conditions.

I do not have enough time to explain the facts around the use of cyanide, mercury and sulphuric acid in the gold mining industry, so I will finish on what action we can take. There is more gold in 1 tonne of discarded electric goods waste in the United Kingdom than there is in the ore found in the rock in Africa, Australia or China. By recycling and recovering gold, plastics and other materials, we can begin to tackle climate change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Golden. I learned lots from your fascinating speech. I think that you should have a debate about the topic all by yourself.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Oh no! [*Laughter.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sorry, cabinet secretary. Maybe the member and I will just have a chat sometime.

17:21

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I, too, thank Graeme Dey for bringing the motion to Parliament today to recognise the importance of earth hour 2018.

I welcome the debate because it fosters greater dialogue about the steps that we can take to tackle climate change at an individual and legislative level. The small changes that we make in our daily lives can collectively have a large impact on the environment and the legislation that is passed in Parliament can nationally influence our carbon footprint.

We recognise earth hour 2018 because it provides individuals, businesses, organisations

and Governments such as ours with a way to show solidarity in tackling one of the 21st century's most pressing issues.

According to the WWF, the past 20 to 30 years have been distressingly damaging to our environment due to climate change, pollution and overconsumption. The list of species affected as a result of those factors is staggering—populations of freshwater species have declined by 80 per cent and populations of land species have declined by 50 per cent.

Today, one in six of the planet's species is at risk of extinction from climate change. We can visualise the impact of climate change on wildlife here in Edinburgh at the national museum of Scotland. If people go to the survival gallery in the natural world section of the museum, they will see walls of animals that are critically endangered and extinct. The exhibit is sombre, but important, as it visualises the fact that the loss of species that we are seeing today is estimated to be at a rate between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than the natural extinction rate.

We commend the WWF earth hour campaign. Such a simple concept has a powerful visual impact and causes us to pause and think about the implications of our daily actions on the environment. I am proud that, as Graeme Dey stated in his motion, Scotland is the first country to have 100 per cent of its councils participate in earth hour.

Fife Council switched off the lights in many prominent buildings, including Fife house, Rothesay house, Bankhead central, the town house in Kirkcaldy, the city chambers in Dunfermline and the county buildings in Cupar, to mark the event. However, important as earth hour is, it cannot be the only step that we take to tackle climate change. Such a symbolic event is designed not only to show solidarity but to spark action—and it is action that we need to encourage and support in Scotland via grass-roots initiatives and legislation by Parliament.

I am pleased that Fife Council has engaged in many diverse projects that tackle climate change. There are 55 energy efficiency projects in the works for council buildings, including the potential installation of photovoltaic panels in schools and nurseries. The new-build homes programme is achieving a fantastic B energy performance certificate rating and the council recently increased its electric vehicle fleet to 26.

This year the council is also launching three long-term strategies that are aimed at reducing climate change: the zero waste resources strategy to reduce waste landfill, the low-carbon Fife supplementary guidance and the sustainable

energy climate action plan for low-carbon and energy efficiency measures.

With councils across the country taking equally promising measures to tackle climate change and our record-breaking renewable electricity generation, Scotland is a world leader on reducing carbon footprint. I am glad that Scotland participated so thoroughly in earth hour 2018 and stood alongside the rest of the world in the knowledge that, by leading by example, we can pave the way for a greener society. However, let us keep in mind that progress is a never-ending process and that we must remain committed to continuing to tackle climate change by small changes in our lives and via forthcoming legislation from the Parliament.

I again thank Graeme Dey and WWF for recognising the importance of displaying global solidarity in tackling climate change. Symbols such as the darkness of earth hour reiterate our commitment to preserving our planet and taking steps to protect its future. A commitment that affects our entire planet should not be taken lightly. I am proud of the steps that Scotland has taken and continues to take for a greener Scotland and a greener earth.

17:25

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I believe that climate change is one of the biggest concerns that we face collectively as a society. Our planet is at a very real and serious risk of environmental disaster unless we make greater change, and do it now. That is why I was pleased to sign Graeme Dey's motion welcoming earth hour 2018. On Saturday, like millions of people across the globe, I switched off my lights, although I have to say that I bought a few candles, which took me back to the 1970s when we had the miners' strike. However, I did not really need the candles, because Mossmorran was flaring all weekend, and the communities around it were pretty lit up. Goodness knows what was going up into the atmosphere from Mossmorran, but we can have that discussion with the cabinet secretary on another day.

I welcome the number of high-profile buildings in the Mid Scotland and Fife region that took part. They included Dunfermline abbey, Castle Campbell, many buildings in Perth, Dunkeld cathedral and Stirling castle. It was a very successful event.

As a dad and granddad, I always think to myself that most parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles would walk to the end of the earth and back to protect their children, yet the greatest threat to future generations is climate change. As Graeme Dey points out in his motion, people are becoming

more aware and demanding more action, but we have a long way to go and we need to do more to engage and involve people. When we consider the climate change bill that is to come forward, we need to think about how to engage the people of Scotland more and ensure that they take ownership of the actions that we need to take to meet the 2050 targets, which are ambitious but achievable.

As WWF Scotland has pointed out, we are making good progress. Emissions are now 41 per cent lower than they were in 1990, which is good and is to be welcomed. However, WWF Scotland has also pointed out that progress on cutting emissions has been slower in a number of areas, such as agriculture, transport and the heating of homes and buildings. We need a better understanding of the issues in those areas. As the convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee knows, we discussed that yesterday in relation to agriculture. In transport, the Government has set a target that, by 2032, there will be no further sales of petrol or diesel vehicles. We need to have a discussion in Scotland now about how we achieve that.

It is a scandal that, in 2018, we still have people living in fuel poverty in Scotland. This winter, people have been cold in their houses because, even though they have tried to heat their homes, the heat goes out the doors and the windows and the heating system is poor in the first place. Those are real things that we can do something about now that will be of massive advantage to some of the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities.

This is a serious issue. Government is doing a lot about it—and all credit to it for that—but a lot more needs to be done, and we need to get on with that job. Finally, I say to the cabinet secretary that we also need to look at how we engage the whole of Scotland in this process.

17:30

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I join members in thanking Graeme Dey for bringing this debate to the chamber, and WWF for continuing to lead on this work not only in Scotland but around the world.

Earth hour, ultimately, is about creating a catalyst, embedding awareness of climate change in our everyday lives and building the momentum for change. This year, WWF has asked people to make a promise to the planet to do more to protect the environment, and we have heard some suggestions, including running a washing machine at 30°C and getting a reusable coffee mug. Of course, such actions are, in themselves, tiny changes, but as daily reminders and signals to

Government and industry, they can spur us on to deliver much deeper and more meaningful change.

Indeed, a lot of action has been catalysed just in the past 12 months. Who would have thought that an hourly television nature programme would have spawned a citizens movement against marine plastics, leading to Governments introducing deposit return schemes and a plan for action against single-use plastic across Europe? Indeed, who would have thought a few years ago that a ban on fracking in Scotland was achievable, given the huge vested interests that were lining up against communities across Scotland? With the fracking ban, a line has been drawn in the sand, and it signals the prospect of an end to the fossil fuel age: something that might have seemed hopelessly idealistic just a decade ago. The actions of these citizens movements have delivered change across Europe, and we are now looking to campaigns on, for example, fossil fuel divestment to deliver action that will have the furthest and most profound reach.

Every one of us plans for our personal future through pension funds, and they must take account of the future of our planet and the economy that it sustains. At this point, I must declare an interest as a member of the Scottish Parliament pension scheme trustee board, because I want to emphasise that, although the health and performance of investments will be the primary concern of anyone who is involved in the governance of any pension fund, whether it is in the private or public sector, those sorts of responsibilities do not preclude considering its members' views and being wise to the fact that investing in fossil fuel reserves, which we have no hope of burning, is inherently risky business. The growth of carbon bubbles should concern us as much as the growth of housing bubbles, and citizens and scheme members should be part of that divestment discussion.

The theme of this year's earth hour is the impact of climate change on the natural world. If the planet temperature rises by 2°, a quarter of priority species will be at risk of extinction. As we head towards debating the next set of climate change targets, it is important that we reflect on the impact on the natural world of our aiming higher or lower in that respect. After all, we have a moral duty to do everything that we can as early as we can.

Of course, we have yet to make the really tough transformative changes. I am sure that when, in the earth hour debates of the Parliament's 10th session, members look back at our debates about, say, making soil testing compulsory, they will find them infinitely trivial—although I hope that Ross Greer or perhaps Kate Forbes will refer to and

reflect back on that statement. Who knows? Perhaps Mr Golden might still be here, too.

Finally, it is critical that we invest in adaptation. For example, coastal wetlands can lock up carbon, buffer sea-level rises and create much needed habitat. Although the Greens' recent budget deal with the Scottish Government has accelerated action on marine protected areas, it is disappointing that in the past year there appears to have been no action from Scottish Natural Heritage and the Government on creating a national ecological network. Given this year's earth hour theme of species protection, it might be good if the cabinet secretary can comment on what we can do to really buffer our environment against the extremes of climate change.

We still have much to do in our homes, communities, fields, forests, seas and Parliaments, but I think we are starting to join up the dots faster than ever and the momentum for change is unstoppable.

17:34

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, congratulate Graeme Dey on securing this debate and thank him for bringing it to the chamber. I also pay tribute to WWF for the earth hour initiative, which has been running for 10 years. I have been a supporter of it from the get-go; I even have a kilted panda to prove that. That came at the cost of also having to wear a dolphin mask.

As other members have said, the campaign has captured the public imagination. As Mark Ruskell rightly pointed out, it has demonstrated that small steps taken together have a cumulative effect. Probably more important, it sensitises the public to the broader messages and the need for wider reform and action, not just at earth hour but year round.

The global impact is unquestionable. The motion refers to the parts that are played by the Sydney opera house, the Eiffel tower and Edinburgh castle. I add to them St Magnus cathedral in my constituency and the architecturally less impressive but no less committed headquarters of Orkney Islands Council and NHS Orkney.

The message that was reinforced through earth hour this year was to make a promise for the planet. I can update members. On-going negotiations in the McArthur household on the purchase of a hybrid vehicle are reaching a delicate stage. Perhaps there will be more about that in due course.

The campaign is going from strength to strength at the local, national and international levels. As I have said, it opens up opportunities to debate

more substantive issues. In the two or three minutes that are available to me, I want to focus on just a couple of those: biodiversity and energy efficiency.

As a species champion—for *Primula scotica*, since you ask, Presiding Officer—I am very conscious of the threat that is posed by the loss of biodiversity. The Scottish Environment LINK briefing points to the “State of Nature 2016” report, which suggested that one in 10 Scottish species is at risk of extinction. That includes plants, butterflies and birds, including puffins and kittiwakes.

Scotland now ranks in the bottom fifth of all the 218 countries that were analysed for the biodiversity intactness index. Leaving aside the justifiable concerns that we all have about the clumsy title of that index, that finding should act as a stark reminder of the work that is needed to restore and protect habitats as a means of safeguarding biodiversity.

Earth hour should act as a reminder that, although we have made considerable progress on energy efficiency, there is still an awful lot to do. On the eve of earth hour last week, I took part in visits in my Orkney constituency that were organised by the existing homes alliance Scotland. I am sure that colleagues will be aware that Orkney has the dubious honour of being the part of the country with the highest level of fuel poverty. The visits on Friday to an elderly couple who have benefited from measures that were taken under the warm homes scheme and to R S Merriman Ltd, which is a local contractor that delivers high-quality work under the scheme, underscored for me the social, economic and environmental imperatives of our approach.

To secure a win-win-win situation, we need a warm homes bill that remains ambitious for the genuine eradication of fuel poverty, properly recognises the rural and island dimension of fuel poverty and how we tackle it, and translates into action the status of energy efficiency as a national planning framework priority, with the budget to back it.

I congratulate Graeme Dey again, not least on his negotiating skills with the Tory chief whip. I also congratulate WWF on keeping the issue of climate change to the fore not just for an hour or a day, but year round.

17:38

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, thank Graeme Dey for bringing this important debate to Parliament. As he said, last Saturday, thousands of people in Scotland added their voices to those of millions across the world by switching off for earth hour in a demonstration

of solidarity to fight climate change. I attempted my own candle-lit supper—although with young children involved, that was not the most peaceful of moments.

Earth hour is not just about raising awareness; it is about stimulating action and enthusing people. WWF research shows that, in previous years, 85 per cent of adults who took part said that

“Earth Hour had inspired them to do more to protect the planet.”

A recent WWF report highlighted the grave problems that are faced by wildlife across the globe, for example, as a result of rising temperatures, which lead to habitat loss and drought among other devastating effects. At this point, I should mention that I am the species champion for the merlin. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has said that one of the main reasons for the decline of the merlin is habitat loss.

Despite the Paris agreement, which, as we know, aimed to limit the average global temperature rise to 1.5°C, current national climate pledges would still result in a 3.2°C rise in temperature. If we just carried on with the status quo—business as usual—that would lead to a 4.5°C rise, and the staggering loss of almost 50 per cent of the species that are found in priority places across the planet, which is simply unacceptable.

Although Scotland is not one of WWF’s priority places, we all acknowledge that we have a crucial role to play in environmental and wildlife restoration, given the fragility of our planet. As we know, Scotland is home to various carbon stores, such as sea lochs, which were recently highlighted in a report by the University of St Andrews as a carbon store that requires greater attention. Peatland restoration is also important. SNH estimates that our peat bogs hold 1.6 billion tonnes of carbon and that degraded peatland emits substantial amounts of carbon dioxide.

Nationally, we must ensure that we take steps to conserve Scotland’s biodiversity and natural areas, because, as SNH stated, healthy ecosystems help to increase the resilience of Scotland’s communities to the impacts of climate change. Through managing our many and varied ecosystems, such as coastal habitats, we can help to address the effects of rising sea levels and increased storm surges.

On a local note, I am extremely proud to say that many communities across the Highlands and Islands made their voices heard on Saturday by taking part and switching off for earth hour. I hope that you will permit me to make a few mentions, Presiding Officer. In the Western Isles, lights at the Lewis war memorial were temporarily switched off.

In the Highlands, Inverness castle, Eilean Donan castle and Urquhart castle, to name but a few, were all drawn into darkness for an hour. Kinlochleven library held a polar bear lantern-making craft event in honour of earth hour. As I think that Graeme Dey said, Highland Council was awarded a 2018 super local authority badge for its substantial contribution to earth hour.

It was not just local authorities in my region that contributed; many constituents also pledged support. Six-year-old schoolboy Felix Hughes from Oban campaigned to find a way to recycle the 1,000 single-use plastic straws that he estimates are thrown away daily at his school.

I applaud WWF Scotland for its efforts in promoting earth hour and encouraging more of us to get involved and make changes in our everyday lives. We must be bold as a nation in our fight to prevent damaging climate change. I am particularly encouraged by the fact that this issue brings together everyone across the Parliament.

17:42

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): I am delighted that we again have the opportunity to debate support for climate action in Parliament today. I am impressed by the level of participation in earth hour around the world and in Scotland, where 177 Scottish landmarks and monuments went dark.

We have had an unusual tour of constituencies in this debate, to which I will add. In this year of young people, it is good to know that many schools also signed up. In my constituency, Morrison's academy in Crieff and Ochil tower school in Auchterarder were among the more than 1,000 Scottish schools that took part.

This is the 10th year of Scottish Government support for earth hour. We joined Saturday's switch-off, with St Andrew's house, Victoria Quay, Atlantic Quay and Saughton house all going dark. Like Liam McArthur, I lent my support to earth hour by going dark and joining in on Twitter with Islay the kilt-wearing panda for #PassThePanda, which I understand was the hashtag being used.

This year, earth hour grew to include the hashtag #PromiseForThePlanet, which referred to promises by members of the public to make a lifestyle change as part of living more sustainably. One of the most popular pledges was to use a reusable coffee cup. Thank goodness that is something that I do—I urge other members to do the same if they are not already doing so. I wonder whether those two hashtags are beginning to flag up an earth hour fringe developing. It will be interesting to see whether that increases again next year.

Maurice Golden talked about plastics, ring pulls and deposit return, which was an interesting choice. I will not enter into the gold debate, because, interesting though it was, it is perhaps a bit beyond the subject of tonight's debate.

On plastics, I reassure Maurice Golden that issues of production, design and manufacture are very much in our minds and will be represented at the June summit in Oban. On ring pulls, I have to advise him that I have an expensive designer belt that is made from ring pulls, which can be bought in a rather flashy shop in London—the shop makes belts and handbags that have become sought-after accessories, so all is not lost for ring pulls.

Maurice Golden also mentioned deposit return, and I am proud that Scotland was the first part of the United Kingdom to commit to introducing a deposit return scheme. I am pleased to learn that the UK Government will now follow our lead. We have ambitious plans and wish to work closely with the UK Government to ensure that communities north and south of the border reap the environmental benefits that a deposit return scheme can deliver.

I am appointing an expert panel to advise on environmental charges and other measures to prevent wasteful behaviours, which will begin its work with consideration of disposable cups and plastic straws. There will perhaps be more about that in other chamber interventions. Graeme Dey rightly flagged up that public pressure is now driving change. Who knows where that will take us, because it means that behaviour change is happening? That is an interesting development and something that perhaps five years ago we would not have foreseen.

Members including David Torrance, Alex Rowley and others spoke about climate change. Of course, 2018 is a big year in Scotland for climate change. As well as the publication of our climate change plan, this month we awarded the 1,000th climate challenge fund project, next month officials will hold a climate conversation with the Scottish Youth Parliament, and the coming months will see the introduction of our new climate change bill, the establishment of a just transition commission to advise ministers on the transition to a low-carbon economy, and the start of the process to develop the second Scottish climate change adaptation programme; that will no doubt be of interest to Mark Ruskell, given his focus on adaptation.

Since 2008, the Scottish Government has, through our successful climate challenge fund, funded projects to the value of more than £101 million, which have directly helped communities to tackle climate change. Earlier this month, members may have noticed that the First Minister

visited Wellshot primary school in Glasgow to celebrate that 1,000th climate challenge fund award. The award was made to bike for good, which is part of the switch to active travel.

Influencing our everyday actions is key to delivering our climate change ambitions. Individuals and households really can make a difference, as is shown by the earth hour pledges, but also by the reaction to “Blue Planet” and the change that is coming about through the political pressure that is being exerted by ordinary people. The Scottish Government is encouraging the public to do more through our greener together campaigns, including our current saving the world campaign, which members may have seen on social media, television and in cinemas.

Alex Rowley might be interested to know that, as part of an on-going engagement with the public, we initiated a series of climate conversations across Scotland, starting in summer 2016, to take the temperature of public views on climate change and actions that might be needed to tackle it. By participating in climate conversations, people who do not usually talk about climate change can engage with the issues in a way that matters to them. Those conversations are continuing across Scotland and the findings are feeding into the development and communication of climate change policies. I am sure that officials will be happy to share details with members if they are interested.

Scotland was at the forefront of the industrial revolution and, therefore, it has a responsibility to deal with climate change. That is why we already have the most stringent climate change legislation in the world, why we include emissions from sources that other countries exclude, and why we hold ourselves to account against annual targets. No other country does that. The new climate change bill will increase the ambition of our long-term targets. In introducing that bill, we will become one of the first countries to put in place legislation to play our part in meeting the goals of the Paris agreement.

In the last few seconds, I want to say something about climate justice. We have been championing climate justice since 2012, when we launched the world-leading climate justice fund, which was a world first. A total of £21 million has been made available up to 2021, to support some of the world’s most vulnerable people in becoming more resilient to climate change. Last year, we launched the climate justice innovation fund as part of the wider climate justice fund, and I am pleased to announce that the second round of the innovation fund opened today. I look forward to funding another round of innovative and exciting climate justice projects.

It is good to see the enthusiasm that earth hour has generated and I look forward to working with members across the chamber as we make the transition to an environmentally and socially sustainable low-carbon economy in Scotland. Our plans are ambitious and everyone’s support will be crucial.

Meeting closed at 17:50.

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

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba