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Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 12 June 2018

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 12 June 2018

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. Our first item of business today is time for reflection, for which our leaders are Megan Quinn and Rhys Lambert, pupils from St Columba's high school in Gourock and ambassadors to the Anne Frank Trust UK.

Megan Quinn (St Columba's High School, Gourock): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Anne Frank is a name that I am sure we are all familiar with. Today, on what would have been her 89th birthday, we celebrate Anne Frank day.

Anne Frank was a young German-Jewish refugee who hid from the Nazis during world war two. Anne's life was tragically cut short at the age of 15 in March 1945 when she died of typhus in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Anne documented her time in hiding in the form of a diary, which was published by her father, Otto, to share her story. It has been read by millions across the globe, including by many of us here today. That, in turn, inspired a group of people to found the Anne Frank Trust UK.

We at St Columba's high school applied and were selected to work with the Anne Frank Trust as peer guides, and then as Anne Frank ambassadors. Throughout the process, we have shared not only Anne's story but the importance of challenging hate and prejudice within our school and the wider community.

That has been an invaluable experience. Not only have I learned more about Anne's story, I have become more aware of discrimination in society and now feel more confident in using my voice to challenge prejudice and hate.

Rhys Lambert (St Columba's High School, Gourock): In today's society, young people face many forms of discrimination and cyberbullying. It is important to challenge and shout down hate and strive for a peaceful and more equal society. Children are the future, which is why we need more young voices to speak up so that they can grow up in a more open-minded and tolerant world.

We read Anne's story and are shocked at the level of discrimination that a 13-year-old girl had to

face, yet we forget that it still happens today. I want to live in a world where people do not have to be afraid of speaking up, where people are not judged by race or religion, and where we show compassion instead of hatred.

We invite you to reflect not only on Anne's story but on the dangers and harm that can be caused by prejudice going unchallenged. We leave you with Anne's words:

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-12735, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a revised business programme for today, tomorrow and Thursday.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for:

(a) Tuesday 12 June 2018

delete

followed by Ministerial Statement: National Council of Rural Advisers

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2016

and insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2016

followed by Ministerial Statement: Student Support

(b) Wednesday 13 June 2018

delete

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

and insert

1.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Response to the Scottish Information Commissioner's Intervention Report

followed by Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

(c) Thursday 14 June 2018

after

followed by Ministerial Statement: Human Trafficking - First Annual Progress Report

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Update on the Work of the National Council of Rural Advisers—[Maurice Golden.]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Childcare Provision (2020 Target)

1. **Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to meet its 2020 target for childcare provision, in light of a recent survey that found that only 30 per cent of private nurseries are likely to offer the full 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare. (S5T-01141)

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Maree Todd): We recognise and value the key role that providers in the third and private sectors have to play in the expansion of funded early learning and childcare, particularly in delivering the flexibility that families need. We know that getting funding right is key to securing the participation of providers from all sectors in the expansion. That is why we acted—after the survey was conducted—and reached a landmark deal with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the expansion. That means that funding will reach almost £1 billion per year by the end of the current parliamentary session. That is exactly the action that 81 per cent of the survey respondents were looking for when they said that a better funding rate would enable them to offer 1,140 hours.

Iain Gray: The National Day Nurseries Association will know about the deal with COSLA. In fact, I heard that point put to the chief executive of the NDNA yesterday on the radio, and she was very clear that her concerns are not addressed by the COSLA deal. That is serious, because in some council areas 40 per cent, or even 60 per cent, of funded hours are delivered in partnership nurseries, so the extension simply cannot be delivered without them on board. Surely the minister needs to act urgently to understand and resolve the sector's issues, so what is her urgent plan to meet the NDNA and address those problems?

Maree Todd: I can tell Mr Iain Gray that I met the NDNA this morning, at the ninth early learning and childcare strategic forum—the ninth time that the Government has engaged on the issue. Since I took up my post, just a few months ago, I have met the NDNA on a private occasion and I have spoken at its conference. We absolutely recognise and value the key role that providers in the third and private sectors have to play in the expansion of funded early learning and childcare, and particularly in delivering the flexibilities that families need. In fact, they are essential to delivering that flexibility.

On 1 April this year, we introduced a new 100 per cent rate relief for private properties that are

wholly or mainly used as day nurseries. We estimate that rate relief will remove a burden of rates from up to 500 businesses. We are determined to support the sector, and we are working very hard with COSLA and local authorities to promote positive and effective partnerships with all our childcare providers.

Iain Gray: In truth, if the minister has met the NDNA regularly on so many occasions, it is even more worrying that the NDNA has so little confidence in the Government's capacity to deliver. Perhaps one reason is that the report makes clear that nurseries are already struggling to deliver the existing 600 funded hours. We know that thousands of parents are unable to access their entitlement through inflexibility of provision. The report does not just demand action on the extension; it demands action now, urgently, on the existing provision. What action will the minister take to address that concern about the existing entitlement?

Maree Todd: I assure Mr Iain Gray that we are regularly engaging with the sector. In the national standard consultation, as well as having a standard consultation in which we put out a survey and asked for responses, we held engagement events, the last of which was yesterday. We have held engagement events in Glasgow, Stirling, Edinburgh, Dundee and Kilwinning. We are working hard with the sector. Let us remember that the survey was done before the funding was put in place and the landmark agreement with COSLA was reached and that, at this time, there is positivity about the vision and commitment and passion for high quality in the sector. We are working hard with COSLA to promote positive partnerships in all local authority areas.

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am glad to hear that the minister is listening but, in light of the recent Audit Scotland report in March this year, which was critical of the fact that the Scottish Government had not undertaken sufficient analysis of how successful the delivery of childcare had been after the original increase to 600 hours, I want to ask whether that has now been addressed. Have those concerns been addressed, and has the Government put in place a new baseline set of data, which will be essential for analysing the delivery of the promised 1,140 hours?

Maree Todd: Absolutely. I am confident that we will deliver the 1,140 hours. As I said, we are working closely with our partners in local authorities to do that. We have in place mechanisms to ensure that we deliver and we are working hard. I hope that members in the chamber have an impression of just how hard we are working across the country to engage with the

whole sector and to ensure that we can deliver this. We will monitor the impact that it has.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): The NDNA survey flagged up the issue of the living wage. Can the minister confirm that the Government's plans on early learning and childcare expansion include a commitment to ensure that all childcare staff will be paid at least the living wage?

I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

Maree Todd: Absolutely. Members of the service model working group are working together to develop guidance on what will constitute a sustainable rate for local authorities to pay to partner nurseries. The living wage is part of that. The incredibly ambitious and challenging expansion of early learning and childcare will have an impact throughout the country; it will deliver the living wage in every corner of our nation. Up to 8,000 staff—mostly women—who are currently working in around 960 partner provider settings will benefit if the living wage is paid to all childcare workers in those settings. We are determined to make that happen.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I share the minister's ambition, but I am concerned about the reality. We have heard that the NDNA is not satisfied so far, but it is not alone: the Accounts Commission, the fair funding for our kids campaign and the Scottish Childminding Association all have concerns. Does the minister understand the scale of the anxiety in the community about the matter?

Maree Todd: I assure Willie Rennie that I understand the level of anxiety. Despite the fact that the response rate was only 30 per cent, the survey clearly reflects the preoccupations of many NDNA and Early Years Scotland members. We know from talking to all our contacts and hearing about concerns that many private nurseries and childminders feel huge pressure on their ability to continue to operate as viable businesses in the years ahead. We are determined to address those concerns. Now that we have reached the landmark funding agreement, we move on to the delivery stage. We are determined to work together with all our partners, who are equally committed to deliver this vision.

Homelessness

2. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report by Crisis, which shows that the number of people living in temporary hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation in Scotland has risen. (S5T-01147)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): I welcome the report and the work of Crisis chief executive Jon Sparkes, who chairs our homelessness and rough sleeping action group. We established that group last year to help us to transform temporary accommodation and to end homelessness and rough sleeping.

The group has done a fantastic job. Recently, it made a number of recommendations for transforming temporary accommodation, which we have accepted in principle. There is a focus on preventing the need for temporary accommodation in the first place, and proposed measures include the development of a national system of rapid rehousing, and moving to the housing first model for people with the most complex needs.

Temporary accommodation remains an important part of Scotland's strong homelessness legislation, and we are committed to ensuring that temporary accommodation is of good quality and serves the needs of its residents in helping to ensure positive outcomes, for people who are experiencing homelessness.

Jamie Greene: I add the thanks of Conservative members for the on-going work of Crisis and its interest in what is a complex area. The minister talked about the quality of temporary housing, which is an important factor. The temporary accommodation that many people are in is not adequate and suitable. Crisis says that prevention, particularly through early investment, can ultimately end up saving the Government money. Its figures show that spending now to move people out of temporary accommodation and to create more long-term solutions could save about £29 million per year. Does the Government recognise that figure? Has the minister done similar analysis that shows what up-front savings could be made by acting now for the long term? Is he giving serious consideration to that strategy?

Kevin Stewart: Currently, 81 per cent of folks in temporary accommodation are in mainstream social housing, and I want that number to rise. As Jamie Greene will be aware, we have already made changes. In October, we reduced from 14 days to seven days the period for which pregnant women and families with children can be in unsuitable temporary accommodation, other than in exceptional circumstances. We will continue to look at that situation.

On investment, the Government has committed to the £50 million ending homelessness together fund over the next five years, in order to bring about the required changes and to enact HARSAG's recommendations. We will continue to analyse all the outcomes and see what benefits that fund brings to people across the country.

Jamie Greene: The minister mentioned social housing in his response. Is not it inevitable that the chronic lack of housing is a fundamental long-term issue? It cannot be a coincidence that the hotspots that are identified in Crisis's report, which include Edinburgh, East Lothian, Aberdeen and East Renfrewshire, also have restricted and expensive housing markets. Few people in the sector genuinely consider that the Scottish Government is on track to meet its commitment to build 50,000 new affordable homes in this parliamentary session. Will the minister give us a cast-iron guarantee that, by the end of this Parliament, 50,000 affordable homes will have been built?

Kevin Stewart: That was an interesting question from Mr Greene. I am not sure whether he is aware of the figures that were published this morning, which show that the Government has built 76,500 affordable homes since we came to power in 2007.

The target of 50,000 affordable homes has, as the First Minister laid out at the weekend, become 53,000. Are we on track to deliver that? Jamie Greene need not take my word for it: he need only look at Shelter, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Equality and Human Rights Commission's joint report, which independently assessed strategic housing investment plans. Those organisations say that we are on track to deliver our ambitious target.

Mr Greene also talked about expensive housing markets. He could help us in that regard by doing a number of things, including persuading his Westminster colleagues to change tack. Page 15 of the Crisis report "Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain" says that we require

"Housing Benefit that truly covers the cost of housing and reflects projected rent rises"

in all areas of the country. Page 368 mentions

"no recourse to public funds"

and the hostile environment that is causing major difficulty for people who have come to live here. Furthermore, "Chapter 10: Making welfare work", takes to bits the United Kingdom Government's welfare regime, conditionality, sanctions and the benefit cap.

If Jamie Greene wants to help us, I will welcome that, but he needs to talk to his colleagues south of the border, especially about helping people who live in areas where there are expensive housing markets, which he raised in his question.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I, too, commend Crisis for its report. Having taken into account the research, will the minister explain what he sees as the main barriers to councils in getting people out of unsuitable temporary

accommodation within seven days? What can be done to reduce those barriers?

Kevin Stewart: I welcome that logical question. We need to concentrate on finding out exactly what the barriers are in certain places. As we have heard, supply is difficult in parts of the country, especially in expensive housing markets. Therefore, we have committed to delivering 53,000 affordable homes during this session of Parliament.

Monica Lennon may be aware that the Government has set up housing options hubs, where practitioners from across the country get together to look at the barriers that they face and to consider whether best practice can be exported in order to rid us of some of the barriers.

The recommendations of the homelessness and rough sleeping action group are extremely important. We have accepted all the recommendations in principle, apart from putting a qualification on some of the funding recommendations for which we would require Westminster to co-operate by devolving housing benefit for temporary accommodation.

We will look at all the issues, so that we can provide the right scene and ensure that we get people into homes. I assure Ms Lennon that we will continue to highlight and break down barriers in that regard, because we must do our best for the most vulnerable people in our society.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I apologise to members who could not get in to ask a question. We must move on.

Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2016

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a statement by Roseanna Cunningham on Scottish greenhouse gas emissions 2016. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement.

14:20

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): I am pleased to update the Parliament on the progress that Scotland is making in tackling climate change.

Scotland's transition to a low-carbon economy is well under way. In 1990, Scotland emitted 76 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. Statistics that were published today show that, in 2016, that number had almost halved to 39 million tonnes, which is a reduction of 49 per cent. Scotland continues to outperform the United Kingdom as a whole in delivering long-term emissions reductions. Among western European countries in the European Union 15, only Sweden has done better.

That achievement is a national endeavour that has required effort across the whole of Scotland, in every community, home and organisation. Today's statistics are testament to everyone who has made changes to their personal or business behaviour. Those changes are making a real difference.

On how we are progressing against Scotland's current statutory targets under this Parliament's Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, the statistics that were published this morning show that emissions are down 45 per cent. The targets are set on an adjusted-emissions basis that reflects the operation of the EU emissions trading scheme in Scotland. On that basis, Scotland has not only met the 2016 annual target but is again exceeding the level of the current 2020 interim target of a 42 per cent reduction. Given that we are making sustained progress in meeting our existing statutory targets, and given that those targets lie at the most ambitious end of current international pledges to 2030, I am sure that members will agree with me that that is good news.

However, there is always scope for improvement in reporting against climate targets. For that reason, the newly introduced Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill proposes that all future targets will be set and reported against using actual emissions rather than the emissions adjusted for the EU emissions trading scheme.

A further issue, which members will recall from previous years, is the technical revisions to the data that happen as measurement science evolves. Decisions about those data revisions are made at a UK level, in line with United Nations guidelines. As has become customary, the statistics that were published today contain substantial revisions to the past data, mainly in the forestry sector. The revisions have worked in our favour—in effect, making targets easier to meet than was the case last year. However, in most previous years, revisions have gone the other way and have made the targets harder to meet. Overall, the effect of revisions to date has made the targets harder to meet. That illustrates how important it is that target outcomes reflect on-the-ground actions and are not determined purely by technical changes.

The new bill will implement recommendations from the Committee on Climate Change on that issue. The measurement methods that are used for reporting target outcomes will be frozen from the time when the target levels were last reviewed. That will help to ensure that technical changes alone do not determine whether targets are met or, indeed, missed. Those shifts will improve transparency and enable the Government to be held to account. I know that the Parliament is always keen to hold the Government to account.

The statistics that were published this morning demonstrate that Scotland is halfway through its low-carbon transition. We must build on that momentum and on the global consensus that is enshrined in the UN Paris agreement, and we must commit to doing even more. Through the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill, we are not only providing solutions to our country's needs and interests but putting Scotland in the global vanguard. We are one of the first countries to set new statutory targets that are based on independent expert advice, in line with the global aims of the Paris agreement. The bill will mean that Scotland has the world's most ambitious statutory 2050 target based on domestic actions alone. The interim targets for 2020, 2030 and 2040 will be the most ambitious statutory targets for those years anywhere in the world. Scotland will also remain the only country to have statutory annual targets, allowing the Parliament to hold the Government to account each and every year, which will mean that there can be no delay in increasing action.

There is no doubt that the newly published statistics demonstrate substantive progress. However, they also show where we need to be mindful of consequences. Since 1990, energy supply emissions have come down by 69 per cent, and waste and industry have also seen substantial reductions. In particular, the closure of the Longannet power station, in March 2016, has had

a substantial impact. The move to low-carbon energy is the right one, but we must reflect on those who were employed at Longannet. Its situation shows very clearly that the low-carbon transition involves—and will continue to involve—very real impacts on people, jobs and local economies. There will be many co-benefits, but there will also be genuine challenges. That is why we need to take a balanced approach to meeting our climate, social and economic priorities.

The transition to a low-carbon economy requires transformative change, but such change must be fair and inclusive. It is intended that the just transition commission, which this Government will bring into being, will explore those admittedly difficult issues and advise on continuing the transition in a way that promotes cohesion and equality. The form that the commission will take and its membership are currently being considered and will be announced later this year.

The emissions statistics also show where we need to make more progress in transport and buildings. This Government is already focused on tackling such issues. "Switched on Scotland: A Road Map to the Widespread Adoption of Plug-in Vehicles" outlines plans to increase the take-up of electric vehicles, and Scotland is taking the lead in promoting the use of ultra-low-emission vehicles and phasing out the need for new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2032. "Energy Efficient Scotland: Route Map", which was published last month, sets out our vision that, by 2040, all buildings in Scotland will be warmer, greener and more efficient.

Let me be absolutely clear: this Government wants to achieve net zero emissions as soon as possible. Crucially, I want to get there through responsible, credible legislation, plans and action. We need to maintain Scotland's momentum because, without a doubt, the actions that will be needed to reduce emissions in the future will be much tougher than those of previous decades. I do not want Scotland just to reduce its emissions but to do so in a way that supports sustainable and inclusive growth and a fairer society. The transformation to a low-carbon economy must benefit all; otherwise, it could commit Scotland to approaches that will reduce food production, limit connectivity and jeopardise jobs. That sort of dislocation would be neither responsible nor sustainable in the long term.

I also believe that Scotland's transformation should be built on the strengths of the Parliament's Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Setting a target beyond 90 per cent now would mean reducing the integrity of our approach—for example, by purchasing international credits, removing sectors from our targets or relying on future technology that cannot yet be set out for

scrutiny. For that reason, the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill supports our commitment to achieve net zero emissions as soon as possible but does not set a fixed date for that. The bill will ensure that there is a requirement to have regard to the regular independent, expert advice that will be provided on target levels, including the specific issue of a net zero date. As soon as the evidence indicates that there is a credible pathway to net zero emissions, we will use the mechanisms in the bill to set the earliest achievable date in law.

The moral, scientific and economic case for global action on climate change is clear, and Scotland has risen to the challenge. The statistics that were published this morning clearly demonstrate the strong progress that Scotland continues to make in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The actions that have been taken to date are working, and the commitments that have already been made and those that are in development will help us to make further and faster progress. The proposals in our Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill will help Scotland to remain a world leader in tackling climate change and will enable Scotland to become a fair and just low-carbon society.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. I will allow just under 20 minutes for questions.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing advance notice of her statement, and I refer to my interests in renewable energy and agriculture, as set out in my entry in the register of members' interests.

As a party that is committed to protecting the environment and tackling climate change, the Scottish Conservatives welcome today's announcement and the progress that has been made on climate change emissions. We welcome, in particular, the announcement of the setting up of the just transition commission.

However, the publication of the statistics provides us with an opportunity to discuss broader issues surrounding climate change. It is important to acknowledge that, in many quarters, it is felt that the climate change plan and the recently published bill are not robust or ambitious enough.

Similarly, we note that, although significant progress has been made in bringing down emissions in energy production, there has been little movement in transport and residential emissions—as, to be fair, the cabinet secretary recognised. Conservative members agree with Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, which says that we must use the opportunity

“to discuss what more we can do to tackle climate change”.

What more can be done to reduce emissions in areas such as transport, which is the highest-emitting sector? Will the Government take the opportunity to strengthen the bill so that we can meet our climate change obligations?

Roseanna Cunningham: I outlined in the statement why I believe that what we are proposing in the bill is ambitious. I acknowledged that there are sectors of the economy that have not made the same strong progress as other sectors, but none of that will come as an enormous surprise to anybody.

What more can be done? A great deal more is already being done. I remind members that we are talking about the statistics for 2016. Since 2016, there have been considerable changes in transport policy and huge commitments have been made. For example, a lot of work is currently being done on low-emission zones. That area of interest is not in my portfolio, but the Transport (Scotland) Bill was published yesterday and I expect that, during its passage through Parliament, there will be vigorous debate about some of the things that we are talking about today. The Scottish Government has already made significant commitments on transport that will have an effect on the transport emissions statistics for 2017, 2018 and 2019. There is a tendency to forget that there is a two-year time lag in the statistics.

The same is true in relation to buildings. The Government has made a very big commitment on energy efficiency over a number of years, which will also be reflected in the future statistics. A lot of work is being done to increase the ambition, which is likely to have a significant effect on emissions reductions in the sectors in which we think there is still a lot to do.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing us with prior sight of her statement, and I welcome the fact that we have met this year's targets. Although it is a complex picture, that gives us confidence about what it is possible for Scotland to achieve when climate policy is driven by ambitious long-term and interim targets.

Will the cabinet secretary look again at the claim that the bill's targets are the world's most ambitious as they stand at the moment? Much of the emissions reduction is to come from the deployment of renewables in the electricity sector. What lessons does the cabinet secretary think we can learn from that? How can we apply that approach to sectors in which emissions are not yet falling enough, such as transport, residential buildings and agriculture? The latter was not highlighted in the statement as an area of concern but, in our view, the Scottish Government could consider a more robust policy to support farmers as well as mandatory action. Will the cabinet

secretary commit to having dialogue with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity to address that issue?

Roseanna Cunningham: I will not repeat what I have just said about transport and buildings, as I do not see much purpose in that.

I am glad that the member has raised the issue of agriculture, because one of the difficulties is that most of the emissions in agriculture are not carbon emissions but residual emissions of methane and things like that. Tackling those emissions is a very different matter from the decarbonising that takes place in, for example, the energy sector, which the member used as an example. It is probably fair to say that we will decarbonise energy much sooner than we will be able to reduce emissions from agriculture, because the total reduction of emissions in agriculture would mean, in effect, no food production, and we cannot be in a position where that is what we are talking about.

The member can be assured that I frequently have vigorous conversations with my colleague in the rural economy portfolio. I understand and accept the challenges that exist in the agriculture sector. However, if we set targets in the future that are far too high and cannot be achieved other than by reducing food production in Scotland, that will not assist us either nationally or, indeed, globally.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary outline her view on trade agreements after Brexit and the effect that they might have on our approach to climate change, especially with regard to the relatively recent departure of the United States from the Paris agreement, which suggests that the US Administration has no interest in or understanding of the effects of climate change?

Roseanna Cunningham: I could say that that question has been asked and answered by Stewart Stevenson. However, it is the case that, post-Brexit, the UK might arrive at trade agreements that would not help us to reduce emissions. We do not know what is going to happen and we are not certain what any trade agreements will hold. However, they could end up, for the reason to which Stewart Stevenson alluded, leading to increased emissions from the goods and services that we import. The truth is that membership of the European Union and its single market provides Scotland with access to climate friendly trade with our neighbouring countries, which I think everybody would accept is the most sensible way to proceed.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): Given the closure of Longannet, has the Scottish Government considered what impact the transition to a decarbonised energy supply might have in the event of a black start event?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are talking about the just transition commission because we want to make sure that what we are doing in all sectors, including the energy sector, manages things for our population socially and economically as well as in terms of emissions reductions and targets. What the member alluded to is the kind of thing that is almost impossible to factor into what the future might hold and why we have to be incredibly careful about how we plan. I think that we have done incredibly well in terms of the energy sector, but the closure of Longannet is a sort of microcosm of some of the things that could happen or go wrong in the future. I am not saying that the closure was wrong, but the concern is jobs and the local economy, which is an important aspect of how we plan for the future. In that regard, we all wish that we could have 20:20 foresight, but we do not.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): These figures are the first to show the impact of the closure of Longannet, as has been said. It has been good for our climate but the only just transition support that the Scottish Government offered was at the moment of crisis for those workers and those communities.

Moving to lower emissions requires us to plan and to support workers in the just transition stages, as the cabinet secretary has said. Does that not mean that we need a just transition commission that is long term and has a powerful legal basis in the climate change bill, and that we also need an industrial strategy that takes us to a low-carbon future, in consultation with affected workers and communities across Scotland?

Roseanna Cunningham: When it is set up, the just transition commission will provide the kind of conversation that the member undoubtedly thinks is absolutely necessary, as I do. Longannet could be seen as a case study of what might be required.

The member is asking that we put the just transition commission into statute but I do not think that he is taking on board how long it would take to get the commission up and running if we did that. I hope to be making an announcement later this year, which would be considerably sooner than it would take to set up any statutory just transition commission that he might envisage. I would prefer to get us moving sooner rather than later.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): As we have heard, today's statistics show that Scotland is outperforming many other countries and is providing an example of leadership. How important has international co-operation been and how important will it be in tackling climate change?

Roseanna Cunningham: International co-operation on climate change is absolutely vital and

is happening through the UN Paris agreement. We are proud to be one of the first countries to enshrine in domestic legislation the increased commitment required by the Paris agreement.

Following the introduction of the new climate change bill, members might wish to know that we have received a letter from Laurent Fabius, president of the Paris climate conference, welcoming the bill as a

“very positive step”

and a

“concrete application of the Paris Agreement”.

International co-operation is not just about the actual moves towards climate change mitigation. It is also about climate justice. This Government has put a great deal of money into our climate justice fund, helping to mitigate and tackle the effects of climate change in the poorest, most vulnerable countries in the world.

Every country needs to decarbonise its own economy and society in a way that works for it. Many of the changes to technology and infrastructure that will be necessary to achieve net zero emissions can only be developed with multinational co-operation. The Scottish Government collaborates with other high-ambition states and regions through the under2 coalition, and the First Minister has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Governor of California as a fellow member of the coalition.

All of that international action is incredibly important, but I am particularly pleased to see the new climate change bill being given that kudos and that credibility by somebody as important as Laurent Fabius.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The cabinet secretary has spoken a lot over the past 18 months about the need to keep pace with the European Union. If the EU sets a net zero target, as is being discussed by the European Parliament and the European Commission at the moment, would the Scottish Government use that as a reason to set a net zero target for Scotland?

Roseanna Cunningham: I think that Mark Ruskell is in that category of people who want me to have 20:20 foresight. There is a lot of discussion around net zero and I understand why people want to have these conversations. However, a closer look at what is proposed in various jurisdictions suggests a widely varying approach to how that net zero target might be reached. In many cases, it is not a legislative approach, and in others, the approach is to exclude all sorts of things that we include in our legislation.

I do not know what the EU may or may not come out with in the future. I cannot be certain. I will, however, follow its discussions very carefully indeed, as I would expect all Governments to do, and I would hope that the EU is also looking at the conversations that we are having.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement and I welcome the confirmation that we have achieved the target. I also thank her for her recognition of the significant amount of work that still needs to be done in the areas of building and transport.

In response to Donald Cameron, the cabinet secretary pointed to the lag effect. Since the figures were produced, it is fair to say that the Government has proposed tax cuts for airlines and supported the third runway at Heathrow. Why should aviation get a free pass? What message does that send to those in other sectors who are working hard to make emissions savings and achieve the targets that she has set out?

Roseanna Cunningham: Aviation sits in the transport sector, where I expect and hope that technological changes will make emissions reductions considerably more manageable. It is important to keep aviation emissions in perspective. In the new 2016 statistics, aviation accounts for less than 5 per cent of total Scottish emissions.

There is a challenge in aviation, but what I said about growing the economy and about impacts must be taken on board. If there was an aviation challenge, it would be important for people to consider how many fewer flights we wanted to come into and out of Scotland and to take place internally. Such questions would have to be addressed.

I do not say that to dismiss what Liam McArthur said; I know that he asked a genuine question. However, a genuine conversation is needed about Scotland's wider economy and connectivity, in addition to the emissions reduction aspect.

Technical emissions reductions can be achieved, but that excludes the economic and social consequences of those reductions. We need to think carefully about how that is all managed.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): The cabinet secretary is well aware that some non-governmental organisations and other bodies have called on the Scottish Government to set a net zero target in law now, as Sweden has done. I noted her comments about having a credible pathway to such a target but, if Scotland was minded to adopt the legislative approach that Sweden has taken, what would be the impact on

the Scottish Government's budget and on our economy?

Roseanna Cunningham: The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 set out a distinctive Scottish approach to the low-carbon transition, which included a strong focus on fair and just action to reduce emissions and statutory annual targets to ensure that the Government was held to account every year on the way to 2050. Scotland is the only country in the world to take that approach, which is working—we continue to outperform the UK as a whole in delivering emissions reductions and to rank highly internationally.

Of course we could adopt Sweden's legislative approach and put a date in the bill, but that would mean removing our annual targets, which Sweden does not have; perhaps substantially reducing the ambition and coverage of our interim targets; and allowing for up to 15 per cent of the final target to be met through international credits. The financial impact would be about £15 billion in the period until 2050, and that money would need to be found from other areas of the Scottish Government's budget.

One approach to targets is not better than the other, and I applaud Sweden's ambition. However, the Government's view is that the distinctive features of the 2009 act should be retained and strengthened.

The Presiding Officer: I am conscious that we have four more questioners and not a lot of time, so we might not get them all in.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The cabinet secretary said that

"all future targets will be set and reported using actual emissions"

rather than statistics that are adjusted for the EU emissions trading scheme. Is that change a result of the UK's likely withdrawal from the EU ETS?

Roseanna Cunningham: Not directly. We want to make the change because it is the right thing to do for transparency and accountability; it in no way changes our support for participation in the EU ETS. Under the Climate Change Act 2008, emissions trading is devolved. We hope to be fully involved in decision making about the EU ETS, but I regret that, despite repeated efforts to get responses from the UK Government, we have had no formal discussion about the scheme. The shift to actual emissions accounting under the bill is only about improving transparency in reporting and is not linked to what might happen to the EU ETS.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): What will be the effect on jobs, traditional industries and, therefore, local economies, bearing in mind the fact that some organisations have

portrayed the target of 90 per cent reduction by 2050 as not being ambitious?

Roseanna Cunningham: A 90 per cent reduction target for all greenhouse gases means net zero emissions of carbon dioxide in Scotland by 2050. I think that some people have overlooked that. It is interesting that one of the things on which New Zealand, which has a headline indication that it wants to go to net zero, is consulting on going to net zero on carbon only. There is a bit of a misunderstanding around the discussion and it is important for us to say that.

According to the Committee on Climate Change, achieving a 90 per cent reduction in all greenhouse gases will require the new total decarbonisation by 2050 of energy supply, ground transport and buildings. That is what we anticipate. It means transformational change and challenging actions.

However, by far the largest source of emissions in the CCC's scenario for 2050 will be agriculture, which, as I said, is not the same as other sectors. That needs to be recognised. We cannot produce food without emitting greenhouse gases such as methane, so setting a net zero target for all greenhouse gases before the evidence exists to support it could mean reducing the amount of food produced in Scotland without reducing greenhouse gases at the global level.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Overall, the statement shows a positive trend in reducing emissions. My Conservative colleagues and I welcome that. However, the housing emissions continue to rise. Does that not show that there is more work for us to do on insulating our homes, particularly in rural areas? The route map for an energy-efficient Scotland, which was published last month, did not suggest anything to address the unique rural housing problems. Will the Government heed the Parliament's call for an energy performance certificate target and increased capital investment in home and energy efficiency?

Roseanna Cunningham: This is not my portfolio, but the route map for an energy-efficient Scotland, which was published on 2 May, sets out our vision for all buildings in Scotland. We propose that, by 2040, all Scotland's homes be improved so that they achieve at least an energy performance rating of band C where technically feasible and cost effective

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary may be aware that there are effective solutions and efficient measures for reducing wasteful and harmful emissions from cattle, sheep and slurry. Such solutions are available in the form of yeast and bacteria-based products. What plans does she have to enlist the

expertise of farm industry specialists to support further agricultural emissions reduction and continue our progress towards a low-carbon economy?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are addressing that through the agricultural chapter of the climate change plan and specifically policy outcome 4. There are numerous options on the market and, earlier this year, ClimateXChange published a report commissioned by the Scottish Government and produced by Ricardo Energy & Environment on reduced emissions from the use and storage of manure and slurry, which is on point with what the member is asking about. The report considers the options that are available to Scottish farmers and will help to inform discussions. If she was not already aware of it, I commend it to her.

Stewart Stevenson: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I omitted to draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests in relation to a small shareholding in a wind farm.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Stevenson. You have now corrected that.

That concludes the statement on greenhouse gas emissions.

Student Support

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We move to our next item of business, which is a statement by Shirley-Anne Somerville on student support. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement. I encourage members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible.

14:54

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): This Government has made to people who want to study at college and university in Scotland the firm commitment that access must be based on the ability to learn, and not on the ability to pay.

We have restored free education for first-time undergraduates, which helps more than 120,000 students who study in Scotland every year. The chair of the independent review of student support, Jayne-Anne Gadhia, commented:

"The Scottish Government's focus on funding tuition fees for social and economic prosperity is to be commended".

More full-time higher education students than ever are receiving support—a total of 143,110 in 2016-17, which is up 1.5 per cent from 2015-16. Meanwhile, the 2018-19 further education budget is at the record level of more than £111 million for college bursaries, childcare and discretionary funds, which is a real-terms increase of 34 per cent since 2006-07.

However, I know that there is more to be done to build a fairer future for all. That is why the Scottish Government established the review of student support. I formally state my thanks to the review board's independent chair, Jayne-Anne Gadhia, and the review board members. It was essential for the Government to take some time to consider the recommendations—in particular, those that involve complex interactions, such as with the social security system.

I have already welcomed the report's central premise of creating a student support system that is based on the key values of fairness, parity and clarity. I want Scotland's student support system to be focused on the poorest students, which complements our wider ambitions to reduce child poverty and to widen access to university.

In response to the review, I wrote on 9 June to the convener of the Education and Skills Committee to outline a number of significant announcements to improve student support. They include an additional £21 million per year by the end of this parliamentary session to be invested in improving student support over the session. As

part of that, investment of more than £5 million will be provided in 2018-19 to increase to £8,100 per year bursaries for full-time care-experienced students, as per the review's recommendation that funding should be equivalent to the living wage. The further education care-experienced bursary will increase from £4,185 to £8,100, and the higher education care-experienced bursary will rise from £7,625 to £8,100 per year.

Those steps are of particular significance, because they will take the support that is available to care-experienced HE and FE students to a level that is equivalent to the real living wage. Provision of support that is equivalent to the real living wage was, of course, a key part of the recommendations of the review. We share the review's ambition to achieve that level of support for all students, so we are pleased that we have been able to deliver that in the first instance for care-experienced students.

We will also invest £16 million in 2019-20 to increase further and higher education bursaries for students from the lowest-income families, and to expand access for them. I am pleased to provide more detail on that today. In order to support access to bursaries for students from the poorest families, we will from 2019-20 raise the higher education bursary income threshold from £19,000 to £21,000. We will also increase bursary support for the poorest young students in higher education from £1,875 per year to £2,000 which, combined with raising the HE bursary threshold, will benefit 13,500 students. Further to that, we will increase bursary support for the poorest independent students in higher education from £875 per year to £1,000, which will benefit nearly 18,000 students. Those combined improvements will result in about 31,000 higher education students benefiting from an improved package of support.

For students in further education, we will increase bursary support so that, in 2019-20, students can receive a bursary of up to £4,500 per year, which will benefit more than 7,000 students. In addition, from 2019-20 we will ensure that all eligible further education students aged 18 and over will receive a guaranteed bursary award. That means that students will not face the postcode lottery effect, which the National Union of Students Scotland has long campaigned to end. Taken together, those changes will also increase the total support package that is available to students, and represent the first step towards realising the ambition of delivering the equivalent of the real living wage to students.

Additional funding will also be provided to support another key area. I have asked the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to lead on improvements to information, advice, guidance and financial literacy. The aspiration is to offer a joined-up approach for further and higher

education, and to build on the good work that is already under way in schools and for parents and guardians. The ambition is a combined online portal for student finance information during the 2019-20 academic year. I recognise that some students will be unable to access advice online, so I want to ensure that we provide it via other means, too. We will also seek to improve financial literacy, with increased guidance on student loans, budgeting and repayment terms.

I want to ensure that students are supported not just during their studies, but after they graduate. As part of our programme for government, we committed to raising the repayment threshold for student loans to £22,000 by the end of this session of Parliament. However, we have gone further than that: I am pleased to confirm that the loan repayment threshold will be increased to £25,000 from April 2021, which will reduce monthly loan repayments for thousands of Scottish graduates. A number of system and legislative adjustments are required in order to deliver practically on that commitment, so Scottish Government officials are engaging with key stakeholders to undertake that work. I will also introduce by the end of 2018 legislation to reduce the maximum repayment period for student loans from 35 to 30 years.

I will now outline the Government's response to some of the other specific recommendations. The review reported unfair and inflexible attendance criteria in colleges. Over recent months, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and the National Union of Students Scotland have worked closely to make improvements for the coming academic year.

The Scottish Government wants in place a system in which bursary awards are based on students' engagement in their studies, and which takes clear account of their personal circumstances—for example, caring responsibilities and other important factors including mental and physical health. NUS Scotland has stated:

"This is a huge win for students, and gives students' associations the back-up they need in challenging unfair policies at a local level."

We have made a clear commitment to supporting college and university students' mental health and wellbeing. In March 2018, we confirmed more than £250,000 funding to NUS Scotland for its think positive mental health project across Scotland's campuses.

We are also committed to making university and college campuses places where students can live, study and conduct research free of sexual harassment and gender-based violence. We have provided an additional £396,000 to implement a

new toolkit to address gender-based violence on campus.

We are clear that an essential role is played by college and university staff in providing valuable advice to students on accessing financial support. We want that face-to-face support and advice to continue and grow.

The review made it clear that it was unable to consider a number of areas. As a result, there are some recommendations that I am committed to investigating further.

A new approach for students who are eligible to remain on social security benefits while studying was recommended. Negotiations on that are required with the Department for Work and Pensions. Work has commenced on that, and early exploratory discussions with the DWP are under way. The aspiration is clear: it is to ensure that no prospective student is disadvantaged or discouraged from undertaking studies due to potential loss, while they are studying, of social security benefits to which they are entitled.

Following the review's recommendations, we are committed to reviewing all non-core and discretionary support. We have already provided more than £7 million in discretionary funding for further education students in this academic year, and more than £16 million will be invested for higher education students in 2018-19.

We will also look at support for part-time and disabled students and for carers. That will take account of the significant investment that we already provide to support students with additional needs. Universities receive funding from the Scottish funding council to ensure that institution and course provision is more inclusive for students with additional needs. A total of £2.8 million was allocated to universities in academic year 2016-17, and colleges have access to a £50.5 million access and inclusion fund to help them to achieve parity of outcomes for all students at college. The student voice is essential in that process, so we will launch a consultation to hear the views of learners. I expect that work to commence in the new academic year.

The review called for parity across further and higher education, with the introduction of loans for further education. It gathered valuable evidence, including highlighting cases of students using credit cards or payday loans to supplement their income. That issue cannot and will not be ignored. Independent research that will focus on distinct groups of students will commence soon, and will report by the end of 2018. That research will provide an evidence base on demand and concerns. I will be able to consider that recommendation further once we have a solid evidence base to underpin that consideration.

Finally, we have noted the review's findings that students want more choice over the timings of their payments. Higher education students in particular would like 12 monthly payments rather than their being paid just over term time. That will require engagement with the Student Loans Company, and the Department for Work and Pensions, to ensure that there are no negative consequences for students who receive social security benefits.

In summing up, I say that I am very pleased to have been able to share with the chamber today our commitment to improving student support for our most disadvantaged students, and to provide more detail on care-experience bursaries.

I recognise that a number of areas require further work, and I have outlined how that will be taken forward. Also, as I have made clear throughout the statement, the poorest students are at the forefront of my thinking about any changes that are introduced or considered. I want to ensure that all prospective students, regardless of their background, are equipped with what they need to fulfil their potential.

I absolutely agree with Jayne-Anne Gadhia, who said that

"education has the power to transform lives".

I believe that the changes that we have introduced and are considering will help to do just that.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. That was quite a detailed statement from the minister, and I am conscious that the previous statement overran. That will not affect the opening questioners, but I ask that all subsequent questioners make sure that their questions are succinct. Perhaps the minister will be similarly succinct in her answers.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the minister for early sight of the statement. I welcome many aspects of it, particularly in the context of the lessons to be learned from Professor Sir Ian Diamond's report on similar issues in student support in Wales and from the report from Jayne-Anne Gadhia.

Student support is never an easy area of policy making, especially in the increasingly complex world of further and higher education. We need to be mindful of making hasty comparisons across the board. That said, I want to ask the minister three key questions.

First, the minister stated that bursary support for the poorest students in higher education will rise from £1,875 to £2,000, but in 2013 the figure was £2,640, so the £2,000 will still be £640 below what it was five years ago. Does the minister really believe that that is acceptable?

Secondly, will the minister explain why, when the Scottish Government has the power to make them before then, the full range of changes will not be made until 2020-21?

Thirdly, in relation to part-time students—who have made earnest representations to the Scottish Government that they should receive greater focus, not least because of their importance in expanding the flexibility of the economy—it is disappointing to have heard them receive only scant mention at the end of the statement. Could the minister at least explain the principles that she is examining for part-time support?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will begin with the issue of part-time students, because it is very important. The review that was chaired by Jayne-Anne Gadhia did not look at part-time students. It could have done so, but as Liz Smith said, that is a very complex area. It is an area that the review did not get round to, so the review board has asked the Scottish Government to look at it. We will do that during the consultation process that I said will begin later this year.

On timescales, I am afraid that Liz Smith is incorrect: we simply do not have the powers to enact many of the changes. Some require changes by the Student Loans Company, and some require changes at United Kingdom Government level—in particular, those around the loan that we are looking to build for Scottish students, because that will have to be a distinctly separate offer. We simply do not have the ability within the legislative powers that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament to do that.

When it comes to the higher education bursaries, changes were made in 2013-14 that focused on the level of funding in its totality that was made available to students. That was done with the support of NUS Scotland. I recognise that times have moved on, which is exactly why we are, having listened to concerns that came from NUS Scotland, taking steps today to increase the bursary for the poorest students who are moving into higher education.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank the minister for the early sight of her statement. There are indeed some things in it to welcome: the raising of the care-leavers' bursary and more consistent support, at last, for FE students. The review wanted a shift in balance from loans back to grants for HE students, but the Government told it to abide by financial restraints. However, the core recommendation was that all students should have access to the equivalent of the real living wage, which is £8,100. That was not an ambition, minister—it was a hard recommendation of the review. Why has the Government refused to provide that support for students in general?

Meanwhile, as Liz Smith pointed out, the increase in HE grants does not even restore them to what they were in 2013—in real terms, more than £3,000—when this Government slashed them by 35 per cent, no matter how it is dressed up.

This is the Government that promised to abolish debt, but instead doubled it. Yet again, it will pile even more debt on to students. Why will the minister not just do the right thing and restore grants to the levels at which the Scottish National Party found them when it came to power?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I would have more time for Iain Gray's statements and questions on the issue if the Labour Party had come forward during the budget negotiations with one call to make this happen, rather than them being based on fantasy figures. We could not even have raised the money that the Labour Party wanted. When the Labour Party comes forward with credible options for public finance, I will take more seriously Mr Gray's call for the Scottish Government to spend more money.

We are delivering on the Scottish Government's manifesto commitments that were made at the last election, which were based around the income threshold and the terms of the loan. As I said during the statement and in response to Liz Smith's question, we are looking very seriously at how we can help the poorest families and address their concerns about accessing higher education. That is why we are taking the step of introducing more than £21 million of additional financial support during this parliamentary session that is focused on the poorest students, which will reassure them that we take their concerns very seriously.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): As the minister outlined in her statement, NUS Scotland has long campaigned against the postcode lottery effect in further education bursary support. Will she expand further on how today's announcement will put an end to the postcode lottery and, crucially, how the changes will be communicated to our students to ensure that the most vulnerable do not miss out?

I remind members that I am parliamentary liaison officer to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It will be a welcome development that we are looking to ensure that we have a guaranteed bursary available to further education students. The postcode lottery, as it was described, was part of the concerns that came through from not just NUS Scotland, but other members of the review group. That is why we have taken the decision to ensure that all eligible full-time students in further education who are over

18 will have the guaranteed bursary, which will make a great deal of difference to them.

However, it will make a difference only if we can highlight to them the availability of the funding. That is why we are investing in improving the information, advice and guidance that come through, as, once again, the review heard how complex the system is and how that put people off from going into courses, particularly in further education. The work that SAAS is undertaking on an online portal for student finance will be important as we develop that and will encourage students and their families to get up-to-date information about what is available for them.

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I welcome the commitment that has been made to look at providing more support for disabled students and carers. Will the minister outline the principles that will underpin the commitment and whether it will affect their access to existing support, such as the disabled students allowance and lone parents grant?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I very much look forward to the consultation that will be undertaken later this year, because we will look at all the barriers that have an impact on disabled students and carers. Some of the barriers, but not all, are financial and it is important that we look at that for each demographic of students to find the specific barriers that affect them. The principle behind the consultation is to ensure that we look at the specific needs of individuals and groups of students.

As Alison Harris said, we already support students with disabilities through further and higher education. However, we need to ensure that they get the money in the right and timely way, because one of the other issues that has been raised is that students perhaps receive that support too late after starting. That is why I am very determined to look at all the barriers and not just the level of funding that is in place.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I note the minister's comment that she shares the ambition of the review to achieve student support at the level of the real living wage. Can she outline the timescale and staging posts on the way to her realising that ambition?

Given the financial pressure that exists right now when people are making decisions about whether to go to college or university, can the minister explain why the changes to bursaries will not be implemented until this time next year? Why will the important and straightforward issue of raising the threshold for the repayment of student loans to £25,000 not happen until 2021, which is a full three years away? Why are these changes being implemented—

The Presiding Officer: Ms Lamont, that is too many questions.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Taking this forward is not a straightforward decision for the Government. As I said in my response to Liz Smith, it requires the Student Loans Company to build up an entirely different student loans package. The timescale is not, therefore, our timescale but is the earliest opportunity that the Student Loans Company has said that it would have to do it.

Iain Gray: England did it last year.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As Iain Gray says, England did it last year, but it has a much higher interest rate. It is simply not possible to do this in a different timeframe unless the Labour Party is suggesting that we use that higher interest rate, which has already affected students. I will ensure that we deliver this as quickly as possible.

The year that is required to introduce the bursary changes is also a legislative requirement to ensure that it is done for the academic year following that. The decisions for bursaries and loans for future years will be taken as part of the budget process.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): What discussions did the Scottish Government have with the commissioner for fair access about further work on student finance?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The commissioner did not look at student finance as the commission for fair access requested because a significant review of student finance was on-going under Jayne-Anne Gadhia as chair. However, the commissioner met Jayne-Anne Gadhia a number of times during that review. He will now consider whether further work is required in that area, but as the commissioner is independent from Government, his work plan and timetable will be for him to advise Parliament rather than me.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I welcome the minister's commitment to more support for higher and further education students who have additional support needs. Does she agree that more part-time college courses are a key means of making access more inclusive? Can she confirm that that specific question will be part of the consultation with learners?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Part-time college courses are exceptionally important, particularly for more mature learners, which is why colleges continue to hold the majority of such courses. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that part-time students in further and higher education have the advantages that enable them to take up those courses. We are determined to look at that within the consultation, because I am determined

to ensure that is not just young learners who can access part-time courses, but returners to education, too.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I, too, welcome aspects of the report, including the provisions on mental health and raising the repayment threshold.

We have heard about how the level of debt has increased in recent years. Does the minister think that there is a connection between that and students and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds accessing university? Is that the reason why the levels of those have fallen?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is important that we look into what we can do for the different student demographics. That will ensure that we respond to the needs of students who come from families that might not have a background in higher education or from some of the poorest families.

The Government's work on the response to the report is focused on ensuring that we deliver for students who come from some of the poorer households. That is why the increases that we are making to bursaries and the income threshold are so important.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I warmly welcome the Government's commitment to increase support for our care-experienced students, acknowledging the significant barriers that they face in not just accessing but remaining in education. Does the minister agree that we have a special responsibility to our care-experienced young people, since we will continue to have a parental role in many of their lives after they leave care?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I very much recognise the challenges that have been faced by care-experienced students when they access further and higher education, and I want to put on record my thanks to Who Cares? Scotland for the time that it has spent with me and for the time that care-experienced students have spent with me in talking through the difficulties and challenges that they have faced in accessing further and higher education. I am pleased that they are satisfied with the work that is on-going so far. That builds on the First Minister's commitment to care-experienced young people, and we know that we in the Scottish Government and our agencies must recognise our responsibilities. That is why the Scottish funding council and SAAS are taking on the issue, to ensure that when we develop new services we do so with care-experienced students and applicants taking part in the processes through which we make those changes, so that we can deliver on something that benefits our young people as they go forward into our colleges and universities.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

The minister talked about her party's record in government on student support. When will the 2007 manifesto commitment to wipe out all student debt be delivered, or was that just another empty pre-election promise?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Scottish Government was elected with commitments to decrease the terms of loans and increase the thresholds for loans, and we are delivering on that today.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): What impact is the education maintenance allowance, which was scrapped south of the border, having on those from our most disadvantaged communities, such as in my constituency of Glasgow Provan?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We widened the eligibility for education maintenance allowance in January 2016, to ensure that more students from lower-income households could take advantage of financial support and remain in education. As a result of those changes, widening the criteria has made a real impact on the number of young people who would otherwise not have been supported. There has been a big increase in the number of EMA recipients from the 20 most deprived areas, and 36.8 per cent are now from those areas, which is up from 34.9 per cent previously.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): It is carers week, so I wonder why there was nothing in the statement for students with caring responsibilities. Why the delay, and when will the minister fulfil the promise that she made to students with caring responsibilities?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is another area that the review of student support did not look at in detail. That is why I have committed to ensuring that the Scottish Government will take on a consultation later this year, but that does not mean that we are not looking to see what we can do to improve the situation. Indeed, this morning, I attended a fair access conference, run by the Scottish funding council, at which we heard directly from individuals with caring experience and the impact that that has been having. The course was widely attended by many people from across the university and college sector, so we are looking to see what can be done in the short term, and we will look closely at what comes back from the consultation to see whether other changes to policy require to be made.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Can the minister outline any plans that the Government has to highlight those changes to our students to ensure that they are receiving the support that they are entitled to?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Student Awards Agency for Scotland will do a great deal of work on that with students as they apply for funding in future years. It is important that we make information on the complex area of further and higher education support as simple and accessible as possible. I look forward to the online portal that SAAS will provide in the next couple of years.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement. I thank the minister and members for their succinct questions and replies.

Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-12690, in the name of Angela Constance, on improving the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers.

15:25

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): I welcome members of the Gypsy Traveller community who are joining us in the public gallery. I understand that they have travelled from Aberdeenshire, from North and South Lanarkshire, from East Ayrshire, from my own constituency in West Lothian and from the Cairntow site in Edinburgh. As I did in a recent debate that was secured by Mary Fee MSP, I start by saying to every member of the Gypsy Traveller community who is with us today, and to every member of the Gypsy Traveller community the length and breadth of Scotland—this is your Parliament. Like all citizens of Scotland, you deserve the very best representation from your elected politicians.

Over the years, Parliament has had three inquiries and has returned time and time again to the issues of inequality and racism and their consequences for the Gypsy Traveller community. More recently, the Equalities and Human Rights Committee focused on Gypsy Travellers to mark human rights day, in December last year, and Mary Fee led an excellent members' business debate only a few weeks ago. Some of the Gypsy Travellers who are here today have been directly involved in those meetings and inquiries. I thank them for their input over many years and for not allowing us to forget about the inequalities that they face and the human rights that are they are, as yet, unable to enjoy.

It is fair to say that there has been plenty of talk but insufficient action. We have made some progress, but it has been patchy and inconsistent—to be frank, it has quite simply not been good enough. That has to change. As we mark the centenary of votes for women, I am reminded of the motto of the suffrage movement, which fits well with our aim to improve the lives of Gypsy Travellers: this has to be about “deeds not words”. I put on record the Scottish Government's clear and unwavering commitment to improving the lives of Gypsy Travellers.

As members will recall, the independent race equality adviser Kaliani Lyle, who published her report in December 2017, reported that, on every indicator of what is required to live a happy,

productive and fulfilled life, Gypsy Travellers are worse off than any other community in Scotland. When we published "A Fairer Scotland for All: Race Equality Action Plan 2017-21" in the same month, I acknowledged that we needed to do much more to develop what I called a radical new approach that will bring about change on a much shorter timescale.

That is the context for the creation of the new ministerial working group, which I chair and which brings together ministers with responsibilities for housing, education, employment and health. The job of the ministerial working group is to develop a radical new approach across Government and to bring about real change at a much faster pace. Our approach is firmly rooted in human rights. We will, therefore, take full account of the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which challenges state partners to

"ensure a systematic and coherent approach in addressing the challenges that"

members of Gypsy Traveller communities

"continue to face".

The ministerial working group has met twice this year. The first meeting focused on accommodation. We looked at a range of issues including site provision and site standards. Since then, we have published a review of site standards ahead of the minimum standards coming into effect this month. We have also been working on a set of proposals to ensure that the planning system better meets the needs of the community. The second meeting of the ministerial working group focused on education. We heard directly from Davie Donaldson, a young Gypsy Traveller who is the driving force behind the new young Gypsy Traveller assembly. He gave us a powerful insight into the experiences of young Gypsy Travellers in our schools and education system.

This year, we will have two further meetings, at which we will focus on employment and health. Early next year, we will share a draft set of actions, which we will discuss with the community and those who work with it. By this time next year, we will publish a concrete set of actions to be delivered in the current parliamentary session. It will not just be warm words or more of the same, because that has not worked and the status quo is not an option. We must be bold, innovative and radical if we are to make tangible improvements that will impact positively on our Gypsy Travellers.

Kaliani Lyle's report made it clear that delivering genuine improvements in the life chances of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers over a relatively short period will be dependent on that community's involvement as full partners in planning and

delivery. I could not agree more. Therefore, in the race equality action plan, we have said:

"We will establish a mechanism to ensure continued engagement"

with members of the Gypsy Traveller community.

Over the past few months, working with the community and trusted partners in both the public and third sectors, we have identified a strong desire among women to become more active in their personal lives as well as more engaged with civic matters at a local and national level. I am therefore delighted to announce that we will invest £100,000 in a new Gypsy Traveller women's voices project, which will engage with women to build their confidence and capacity and to encourage participation in daily and public life in Scotland while focusing on the issues that matter most to them.

The Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project will run the Gypsy Traveller women's voices project alongside its existing Gypsy Traveller support project, which we have funded for a number of years. It will offer a range of learning, development and support opportunities to empower women collaboratively in that most marginalised of communities. I am looking forward to working closely with those remarkable women to improve their lived experiences and life chances and those of their families over the months and years ahead.

The Gypsy Traveller women's voices project will complement the new young Gypsy Traveller assembly, which we recently welcomed to this Parliament. Over the next two years, we will continue to provide direct financial and practical support to the young Gypsy Traveller assembly, to strengthen its participation in decisions that affect members' lives. That will include a programme of training and mentoring, which will be tailored to the needs of individual members in the group as a whole.

I hope that our support for those two new pieces of work demonstrates that we are serious in our endeavours to work with the community to develop actions that meet their needs and aspirations, which we will deliver in appropriate and culturally sensitive ways.

This is an ideal time to have this important debate for three reasons. First, the new cross-party group on Gypsy Travellers will have its first meeting tomorrow. I thank Mary Fee for establishing the group and the MECOPP team for providing secretariat support. I will follow the group's progress with great interest and, if I may be so bold, I look forward to an invitation to contribute to the group.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This may be the invitation.

Mary Fee: It is, Presiding Officer. The cabinet secretary is more than welcome to attend every meeting of the cross-party group on Gypsy Travellers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Well done, Ms Fee.

Angela Constance: I thank Ms Fee; she is very kind. In all seriousness, I welcome the additional scrutiny, as well as support, that I hope the cross-party group will bring to the work of the ministerial working group.

Secondly, this is a timely debate because the community wellbeing board of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has recently approved a paper supporting the work of the ministerial working group. Having discussed the issue with Councillor Whitham, who is the convener of the board—she, too, joins us in the public gallery—and Councillor Evison, who is COSLA's president, I am confident that we have their full support.

Last but not least, I am delighted that we are having the debate today because June is Gypsy Roma Traveller history month, which we are marking for the first time in Scotland. The Scottish Government is proud to support two days of events in Edinburgh next week that will showcase and celebrate Gypsy Roma Traveller history and culture and stimulate discussion with a variety of audiences, including schoolchildren and leaders of public bodies. I hope that the events will play a part in challenging stereotypes and reducing discrimination.

Before I finish, I draw attention to the intolerable levels of prejudice and hostility that our Gypsy Traveller communities experience on a daily basis. Such is the fear of a verbal or physical attack that many people choose to hide their identity at school or at work. I have been struck by what I have heard from young people, who have described the difficult decision of whether to come out as a Gypsy Traveller or to hide their identity, to stay safe and feel safe. Hostile attitudes and behaviours have absolutely no place in a modern and inclusive Scotland. We no longer tolerate any other forms of racist abuse and we must all challenge discrimination against Gypsy Travellers whenever we encounter it, whether that is here in this Parliament, in our constituencies or as we go about our daily lives.

I reinforce two key points on which I have already touched. First, I restate my absolute commitment and that of the Scottish Government to do much, much more to address the poor outcomes and discrimination that the communities continue to experience, and to do so quickly, because that is long overdue. Secondly, I explicitly

seek the active support of this Parliament as a whole and of every member who has been elected to it. I sincerely hope that we can work together across political, geographical and organisational boundaries to improve the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Traveller communities and to put an end to what the Scottish Human Rights Commission has rightly described as

"the last bastion of respectable racism".—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 6 December 2012; c 777.]

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the contribution that Gypsy/Travellers have made to Scottish history and continue to make to the country's culture and heritage; notes that June 2018 sees Scotland celebrating Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month for the first time; is united in the view that there is no place for any form of racism in a modern and inclusive Scotland, and condemns all forms of prejudice and discrimination towards Gypsy/Travellers; supports the work of the new Ministerial Working Group on Gypsy/Travellers, which aims to ensure a systematic and coherent approach to improving outcomes for Gypsy/Travellers across the country in line with the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD); recognises the importance of direct engagement with Gypsy/Traveller people; congratulates the Young Gypsy Traveller Assembly in strengthening the voice of young Gypsy/Travellers; commends COSLA's commitment to transforming the life chances of Gypsy/Travellers across the country, and looks forward to working together within a human rights framework to accelerate improvements for this community.

[*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I gently say to people in the public gallery that, although I understand why you wish to applaud, that is not permitted in the Scottish Parliament. I make that rebuke very gently, I hope.

15:37

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Only last month, I spoke in Mary Fee's members' business debate on Gypsy Travellers, in which we heard insightful speeches from members about what needs to be done to improve the lives of people in the community. I was greatly encouraged by the cross-party support that was shown in that debate, and I am pleased that the issue is finally getting the attention that it deserves.

As a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, I have been made well aware of the issues that affect the Gypsy Traveller community, whether we are talking about housing, education, employment or health. The Scottish Parliament has a long history in relation to the topic. In 2001, the Equal Opportunities Committee carried out an inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and public sector policies. In 2012 and 2013, two reports were published, on which the Equalities and Human Rights Committee took evidence last June.

The committee wanted to assess the progress that has been made, and we heard from members of the Gypsy Traveller community. Davie Donaldson told the committee that, since the Scottish Parliament's inception,

"very little has changed ... The situation has remained completely stagnant."—[*Official Report, Equalities and Human Rights Committee*, 7 December 2017; c 3.]

I should say, in all fairness, that, when she spoke in last month's debate, the cabinet secretary was honest about the lack of progress. She said that progress

"has been patchy and inconsistent".—[*Official Report*, 24 May 2018; c 43.]

I recognise the work that is being done through the establishment of a new ministerial group and the young Gypsy Traveller assembly, which I sincerely hope will provide the step change that is needed. I recognise that the group is working with the community, and I hope that a balance is struck between bridging the gaps in public service provision and maintaining people's traditional way of life. As I say in my amendment, I support those moves but I think that it is vital that "measurable indicators" are used to review the progress that is being made.

Central to the lack of progress is a lingering sense that it is okay to be discriminatory towards Gypsy Travellers. Although, in Scotland, public attitudes to diversity and to ethnic minorities have improved greatly over the past 20 years, the worrying exception to the trend seems to be attitudes to the Gypsy Traveller community.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):

While Annie Wells is making that point, can she confirm whether her colleague Douglas Ross has had any disciplinary action taken against him or whether he has undertaken any diversity training following the frankly shameful comment that he made last year?

Annie Wells: I do not set the disciplinary arrangements for my party, but I know that Mr Ross has made an apology. In this Parliament, I speak on my own behalf. I want to make sure that we create the cross-party consensus that we have had so far in previous debates here on the subject. The Government will have my and the Scottish Conservatives' full support for that.

The most recent Scottish social attitudes survey showed that 31 per cent of people in Scotland would be unhappy if a relative married someone from the Gypsy Traveller community and that 34 per cent of people thought that a Gypsy Traveller would be unsuitable to be a primary school teacher. We have seen such attitudes simmer into popular culture. In 2012, we saw how Channel 4's "Big Fat Gypsy Weddings" series came under fire after it was blamed for an increase in bullying and

negative stereotyping of Gypsy Traveller communities. We should shine a light on those communities—not for entertainment but to celebrate the rich cultural contribution that they have made to Scottish society since as far back as the 12th century.

As Mary Fee emphasised in her members' business debate on the subject, the Gypsy Traveller community is extremely diverse and vibrant, and it is characterised by a strong sense of cultural identity. Often absent from history or misrepresented, it is a culture with a rich variety of languages and a strong oral tradition, with stories being passed down from generation to generation. Some groups are highly mobile, moving on when work opportunities have been exhausted, while others live permanently in one area—sometimes in traditional bricks-and-mortar homes—and travel for only a few weeks or months of the year.

When I was reading old committee reports, it was the written evidence of Gypsy Traveller Nadia Foy that made me truly understand the importance of identity and tradition to her community. She said:

"For us, 'travelling' is not just physically moving, it is a state of mind ... we often say it's 'in our blood'."

That is why I, too, welcome the first ever Gypsy Roma Traveller history month in Scotland, which is taking place this month. I look forward to hearing more about it.

When it comes to alienation from public services, the impact of marginalisation is clear, and obvious boundaries remain—a fact that is magnified by a culture of self-reliance and the likelihood that some families will have no permanent address. Accessing service provision can therefore be difficult.

Many Gypsy Travellers often face difficulties in trying to visit a general practitioner. Evidence from the 2012 committee inquiry highlighted the fact that some Gypsy Travellers will travel as far as 300 miles to see a dentist or a doctor whom they trust and know will see them. The impact of that is clear: many Gypsy Travellers experience inexcusable health inequalities and a lower life expectancy. The age profile of Gypsy Travellers is much younger, with only 28 per cent of the population being aged 45 and over, compared with 44 per cent of the population as a whole. In 2012, a number of suggestions were made regarding outreach initiatives and health visits to sites at which patients could be put in direct contact with health professionals. I would be extremely grateful if the cabinet secretary could let us hear more about that and about what work is being done now.

We know that there can be difficulties in accessing education services when travelling. In

addressing those difficulties, we can see what work can be done to expand initial efforts to provide flexible alternatives to school-based learning. I also look forward to hearing from the cabinet secretary about the bridging programmes that will assist younger members of the community to transition into mainstream education. As was shown during the committee's evidence sessions, bullying and discrimination remain huge barriers to learning in schools. Gypsy Traveller children continue to be singled out, with many hiding their ethnicity in order to get through school. Again, I look forward to hearing more about what will be done to assist schools in being better prepared to respond to Gypsy Traveller needs and to counter discrimination.

On housing, minimum standards for council-assigned sites are not being met, with many being built in undesirable and unsafe locations, often on unpopular brownfield sites. Many sites experience issues with dampness, mould and access to water. I am therefore pleased that the Scottish Government has been proactive in addressing the situation by working with local authorities and with COSLA, and I look forward to seeing how partnership working will bring about innovative practice in that area.

I reiterate my support for the Scottish Government's motion. It is welcome that the lives of members of the Gypsy Traveller community are more prominent in discussions across the Parliament, as it is only by highlighting their issues that we will begin to progress their lives among our communities in a fairer way.

The ministerial working group is also a step in the right direction. I urge the Scottish Government to continue to be open and transparent about the work of the group, for the benefit of not only members but, more important, the Gypsy Traveller community. Sadly, the Gypsy Traveller community is still stereotyped in many walks of life. However, by working together, we can preserve the traditions of a traditional community in the modern world.

I move amendment S5M-12690.1, to insert after "Discrimination (CERD)":

"; calls on the Scottish Government to regularly review progress and provide measurable indicators by which to do so".

15:45

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for introducing this important debate, which is appropriately timed as it falls during Gypsy Roma Traveller history month and follows on from Mary Fee's recent members' business debate.

I commend Mary Fee for her passionate campaigning to improve the lives of members of the Gypsy Traveller community, which is not a single community but is comprised of diverse groups, each with its own unique culture and history. Before I met Mary, I was aware of her work in the field of equalities and knew that she was a champion for seldom-heard voices, so I am very proud to be sitting next to Mary today.

We are here not just to thank one another. I thank the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the MECOPP carers centre as well as campaigning organisations such as the Gypsy Council, the Scottish Gypsy Traveller Association, the Scottish Gypsy Traveller law reform coalition and the young Gypsy Traveller assembly. I join the cabinet secretary in welcoming the Gypsy Travellers who are here in the Parliament today or who are watching the debate, wherever they may be. It is great news that the cabinet secretary has cleared her diary to be available for future meetings of the cross-party group on Gypsy Travellers.

Gloria Buckley MBE, who is a Traveller and a tireless campaigner for the Gypsy Traveller community, said:

"We are one community—the Travellers and our settled neighbours. We've all got something in common: we want our children to be healthy and educated."

As many of us begin to organise events in support of the great get together in memory of the late Jo Cox MP, the sentiment that there is more that unites us than divides us is very much on our minds. The huge importance of family to the Gypsy Traveller community is a value that many people in Scotland share. We want our loved ones to be looked after in illness and old age, and we want our children to be healthy, safe and educated.

It is a sad fact that the settled community can take that much more for granted than our Gypsy Traveller neighbours. On average, the life expectancy of a man from the Gypsy Traveller community is 10 years less than the national average. Gypsy Traveller children are more likely than the general population to have no educational qualifications. Heartbreakingly, Gypsy and Traveller mothers are 20 times more likely than the rest of the population to have experienced the death of a child. Therefore, I agree with the cabinet secretary that we need a radical new approach.

That hardship is suffered against a backdrop of prejudice and discrimination that is so prevalent that it has been called the last acceptable form of racism. In the most recent Scottish social attitudes survey, more than a third of Scots said that they would be unhappy about a close relative marrying a Gypsy Traveller, so it is little wonder that up to

15,000 people do not disclose their Gypsy Traveller identity. The most recent census found that there are more than 4,000 Gypsy Travellers in Scotland, but the actual number is estimated to be between 15,000 and 20,000.

Tensions between the settled community and the Gypsy Traveller community can often arise when Gypsy Travellers set up in unauthorised settlements. However, given the insufficiency and inadequacy of authorised sites, members of the Gypsy Traveller community are left with no real options. In my local area of South Lanarkshire, there are two authorised Gypsy Traveller sites—they are council sites—but there is a lack of adequate sites across the patch, in neighbouring authorities and across the country. The on-going work by COSLA and the collaborative approach between the Government and COSLA to improve site provision is very welcome because, even when there is provision, it is not always of an acceptable standard—in fact, it rarely is. It is good that we have a commitment from COSLA, but, as it said in its briefing to MSPs, it will take significant investment to bring sites up to standard. I hope that there is a commitment to make that happen.

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee heard one Gypsy Traveller describe the squalid conditions of some sites. That individual gave an example of an authorised site that was, in his words, “overflowing with rats”. When he went to the warden, seeking help because he was concerned for the safety of his young family, the warden told him to get a cat. That same person described the transformative difference that just one person can make when he spoke about a new warden who cared and who got things done, spoke to officials and made things better for the Gypsy Travellers at the site. Although there is a lot of talk about a lack of progress, it is important to recognise the important contributions of those local authority employees who act as friends and champions of the Gypsy Traveller community. Individuals can make a difference, but we cannot afford to have a postcode lottery for Gypsy Travellers whereby they have better experiences in some local authorities than they do in others.

Action by the Scottish Government and Parliament is crucial. For example, the recent legislation to improve site standards is welcome. I spoke in Mary Fee’s members’ business debate about my experience of representing people from the Gypsy Traveller community in my former work as a town planner. I am grateful that the cabinet secretary has made a commitment to improve the planning system. I, Mary Fee and others will be seeking amendments, but I hope that we can do that in a collaborative fashion.

Legislation is important, but piecemeal change is not enough. There have been multiple inquiries

in the past 17 years, but there has been little progress. A national strategy on Gypsy Travellers was recommended by the Equal Opportunities Committee back in 2013, but that did not materialise. I am glad that the Scottish Government has now acted on the independent race equality adviser’s call for leadership on the issue and has set up the ministerial working group on Gypsy Travellers. The Scottish Government and Parliament must work together on the issue. Mary Fee’s cross-party group is a positive development. I am pretty confident that it will not just be a talking shop, because we have had enough of that. The voices are certainly there, and I commend the Gypsy Traveller community on its work. It should feel immense pride for the way in which it has organised and campaigned for its communities.

I believe that, with compassion and commitment across Scotland, real change is possible. I am proud to move the amendment in my name and I am pleased to say that we will give the Scottish Government’s motion and the other amendments our full support when we vote on them at decision time.

I move amendment S5M-12690.3, to insert at end:

“, and welcomes the establishment of the Parliament’s first Cross Party Group on Gypsy/Travellers.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to use full names. I know that it is a friendly debate—it has been so far and I hope that it remains friendly—but use full names, please.

15:53

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Here we are again talking about Gypsy Travellers. I do not want to tell members that I do not enjoy the subject, but I am weary of aspects of it. I hope that that weariness will not surface too much in my speech, but it is a weariness built of frustration because, as I think that the cabinet secretary said, there has been plenty of talk but insufficient action. I will therefore talk about some actions that we can take.

It is important that this is Gypsy Roma Traveller history month, because Gypsy Traveller movement is a root and branch part of Scotland, these islands and Europe.

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): I agree completely with Mr Finnie. I think that some of us do not pay due attention to the influence of some Gypsy Travellers from Scotland not only in these islands but internationally in Europe and elsewhere. For example, Bob Dylan was influenced by an Aberdeen Gypsy Traveller called Jeannie Robertson. Not many folk know that, but why is

that the case? We would know that if Jeannie Robertson was from some other group.

John Finnie: Indeed, we would. I thank the minister for highlighting that.

In the limited time that I have, I will mention Shamus McPhee, who is an active member of the Gypsy Traveller community. One of his postcards is on my wall. It commemorates the contribution, service and sacrifice of the Gypsy Traveller community during the first world war and is called “Cannon Fodder”. There is a wide contribution there, and the storytelling tradition is also very important.

The motion talks about there being “no place for ... racism in a modern and inclusive Scotland”.

Over the weekend, some people may have seen shocking footage from the Ukraine of a Nazi group—which has adopted the same name as a Nazi group that persecuted Jews in the Ukraine during the second world war—attacking a Roma camp. With the spread of social media, it is at our peril that we are complacent about things such as that and the situation in Hungary, the famous photograph of the Paris suburbs with a daubed sign on the end of the building where the Roma were that was to be demolished and, as has been alluded to, the conduct of the Moray MP.

I wish the ministerial working group well; there have been plenty of talks. My amendment inserts at the end of the motion

“and recognises the need for such support”

—there is undoubtedly support for the Gypsy Traveller community from the Scottish Government—

“to be underpinned by measures that enable Gypsy/Travellers’ traditional way of life, including the mapping of stopping-off places and, save in exceptional circumstances, making these available”.

In the recent debate, I talked about how a lot of the language that we use is still flawed—for example, in Government and COSLA documents. If we talk about housing, we are perpetuating the idea that bricks and mortar are the issue. We should be talking about accommodation, which may be a traditional stopping-off place.

Many of the reports have alluded to the fact that, for a long time, people have been told that their health problems would be sorted if they did one thing: if they got a house. That is deeply offensive. If we are really going to throw our weight behind the traditional way of life, we want to get the language correct, and talking about accommodation may be something that we can do. There has been a review and progress has been made. I will shortly be visiting the site at

Newtonmore where there has been significant progress, and that is welcome.

Language is also an issue when we talk about “stopping-off places”. I have used the traditional term, but I had a look through some of the documents and some of the terms used were: “negotiated stopping model”, “informal stopping places”, “short-term halting sites” and “stopover sites”. We are talking about accommodation. If we are to reinforce our commitment to supporting a way of life, which is about the provision of accommodation sites, we need to change the mindset. This debate has the potential to be a very positive contribution to that.

I move amendment S5M-12690.2, to insert at end:

“, and recognises the need for such support to be underpinned by measures that enable Gypsy/Travellers’ traditional way of life, including the mapping of stopping-off places and, save in exceptional circumstances, making these available to the Gypsy/Traveller community.”

15:57

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I thank the Government for securing today’s time and for the cabinet secretary’s language in what was a very consensual opening speech. We share a strong sense of common purpose on this matter and I thank her for that. I also put on record my thanks to my friend and colleague Mary Fee. I will be a proud member of the CPG alongside her. She has schooled me in things that I did not know about Gypsy Traveller history and rights, and the lack and deprivation of those.

Most important, I thank our friends and colleagues from the Gypsy Traveller community who are in the gallery this afternoon. They are very much part of the fabric of our country and we are very proud to know them and have them here.

When we think about the term “racism”, we often think about the attacks on European Union migrants in the immediate aftermath of Brexit, which were fuelled by the irresponsible rhetoric of papers such as the *Daily Mail*, and the hostile environment policies that led to the Windrush scandal. It comes down to that feeling of othering—that fear of the incomer and of change.

In truth, we are all products of a rich tapestry of immigration and of people moving around these islands, which is very much part of our national identity. We like to think that we are not racist here in Scotland—that we are not like that—but, as Davie Donaldson said in very compelling testimony to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, racism against the Gypsy Traveller community is the last form of acceptable racism in Scotland.

The irony is that Gypsies and Travellers are not incomers. They have a rich cultural identity that spans a millennium in this country. Shamus McPhee, whom John Finnie referred to, has written an excellent history of the Gypsy Traveller relationship with Scotland. It goes back to the 11th century, when they settled in Scotland and were initially referred to as tinklers. Sometimes they were mistaken for Spaniards or Egyptians, but they were treated with reverence to the point that, in 1506, a letter of safe passage was written for the earl of the Egyptians—as he was known—to travel through Denmark.

The position changed dramatically in 1541, when the first anti-Gypsy law was passed in this country and it suddenly became legal to drown or strangle a Gypsy. We talk a lot about hostile environment policies, but that takes the biscuit. We are not quite as severe now, but there are still throwbacks to that time, and such prejudice permeates our culture. Davie Donaldson gave a harrowing example from when he sat on a youth forum in Aberdeen, which involved an interface with the local authority on planning. The officials and elected members did not know that he was a Traveller. When he asked about Travellers' rights and the need for sites around Aberdeen, a senior member of the council said, "Son, nobody cares about the effing tinks." That level of racism is still at large in our society.

Such racism comes from a political imbalance. The nomadic nature of Travellers who still shift means that they are disenfranchised. They are unlikely to register to vote, so politicians are unlikely to try to appeal to them and are more likely to appease constituents who are concerned about where Travellers are moving to. As an answer to that, we have seen social experiments such as Bobbin Mill, which has a fantastic and dynamic community but is where people have lived in the worst housing conditions imaginable and have had to defrost pipes in the winter.

We have heard a lot about health inequalities and about access to education—people are still being left behind and we are not addressing their particular needs. We have heard the statistics about social prejudices. Being a Traveller is a protected characteristic, but we do not often treat it as such, so I am happy to support the Government's motion and all the amendments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask for a tight four minutes from everybody in the open debate.

16:01

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): In Gypsy Roma Traveller history month, it is appropriate that we have set aside time for the debate and for asking what we can do to improve

outcomes for the Gypsy Traveller community. The previous census told us that about 4,200 people in Scotland identify themselves as part of that group, although people in organisations that work with the community believe that the figure is closer to 20,000.

Gypsy Travellers in Scotland are a diverse group with a long and distinct history that dates from at least as early as the 12th century. In the community, written records survive from 1492. However, despite that long history, Gypsy Travellers in Scotland have been legally recognised as a distinct ethnic group only since September 2008. Being appropriately recognised and respected as a distinct ethnic group affords members of the community further protection under the Equality Act 2010, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics, which include ethnic origin.

In December, we on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee heard harrowing and saddening evidence from the Gypsy Traveller community. The discrimination that this marginalised community has to face daily violates their human rights, and we must stamp it out.

As we have heard today, the Scottish Government has set up a ministerial working group, which has met twice and will report its findings early next year. That report will set out the group's achievements and progress to implement the priorities that it has identified.

The group will work to address inequalities in housing, education, health, social services, employment and community cohesion. One action that interests me is the potential work with young people, in this year of young people, to tackle discriminatory portrayals of the community in the media.

The group will consider how to improve engagement with the Gypsy Traveller community, which is essential if we are even to think about tackling all the other issues. We often speak about lived experience, consultation and engagement. Those things are vital for the community.

Shamus McPhee, who has been referred to, gave an example of that when he told the committee about local authority sites. Gypsy Travellers who live on sites that councils own must be provided with secure tenancy agreements. However, Shamus McPhee said:

"Gypsy Travellers who live on local authority sites in Scotland tend to be bound by a Scottish secure tenancy agreement, which limits them to 12 weeks a year in which they can travel off site. That is a violation of their right to freedom of movement. If they can go off site for only 12 weeks of the year before forfeiting their tenancy on a local authority site, that is an impediment to their ability to lead their cultural lifestyle."—[*Official Report, Equalities and Human Rights Committee*, 7 December 2017; c 12.]

Communication is therefore essential.

We know that there is work to do; it would do Gypsy Travellers all over Scotland a disservice if we pretended that everything is fine. It was really good to hear the cabinet secretary speak about the progress that she wants, and we all share that vision.

It is also good to see some local authorities with Gypsy Traveller strategies working with young people's liaison officers, interagency groups and site improvement plans. However, we need a firm commitment from all local authorities not to wait to do as they are told by the Scottish Government but to take immediate action to support an isolated community that has the worst health outcomes, the most horrific living conditions, disproportionate rates of depression and mental illness and the poorest educational outcomes in our society.

I welcome the commitments made by the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government. The amendments from John Finnie, Annie Wells and Monica Lennon are entirely sensible. We need to monitor progress and there should be a mapping of traditional sites. I wish Mary Fee good luck with her cross-party group and I will be there tomorrow.

16:05

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to take part in the debate. I also acknowledge Mary Fee's work. I was not able to participate in her members' business debate, but I was happy to sit and listen. I congratulate her on the passionate and positive campaign that she has run.

Of course everyone is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers, who see themselves as a particularly marginalised group. We have heard that already. Many of them see themselves and their communities as coming from the indigenous Highland Travellers—the showmen or funfair Travellers—whom we see and have become used to. Their history, culture and identity all need to be protected and respected.

I concur with my colleagues that Gypsy Travellers and their families suffer inequalities in health, education and all the areas in which they are not given opportunities. Those are enormous barriers for children to accessing and obtaining education and employment. Therefore, it is essential that we work together to address the issue and try to support Gypsy children to ensure that they feel confident and do not suffer any further from those barriers.

I am encouraged that the Scottish Government has established a ministerial working group on

Gypsy Travellers. The group's aim is to work to get rid of some of the inequalities in housing, education, health and employment. By working together, we can achieve much and get results from that ministerial working group. I look forward to seeing what happens in the not-too-distant future.

A good number of the Travellers are actively involved in business. Many of them are successful business individuals with an entrepreneurial flourish and the ownership of organisations the length and breadth of the country. Another section of the community has become successful in the acting and music worlds because their family and ethnic roots have, with all that culture round about them, taught them from childhood. The entertainment industry has done well by having many of them participate.

There are also individuals such as the famous Billy Welch from Darlington, who talks about the Appleby horse fair, to which tens of thousands of individuals go. Although tourists come and support that, there is still a stigma and many people want to try to hide their roots. We have heard that that also happens in the education system.

The biggest stigma that we have to deal with is in relation to ensuring that Travelling people feel that they are part of the community. Many of them have set up their own businesses and become successful in shipyards and car dealerships or as scrap merchants and caravan suppliers, as well as in many other businesses. Mr Welch himself said:

"We are true business people ... We don't just tarmac, or sell beds and windows. We do big business. We just keep quiet about it."

Many have gone out and shown that they can be entrepreneurs more widely and it is dreadful to think that there is still an unconscious bias against the Traveller community.

I still find it difficult to believe that some communities come into conflict with the Gypsy Travellers and what they are trying to achieve. There are real opportunities, which we should seize, to ensure that there is no clash of lifestyle. I have witnessed the success of purpose-built sites, such as the Double Dykes site in my old area of Perth and Kinross, which provided opportunities. However, more sites require to be made.

I applaud the Scottish Government for what it has done so far to ensure that Gypsy Travellers are respected and have the opportunities that they deserve. They are entitled to life chances, opportunities and respect.

16:09

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure to

speak in this debate on improving the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all Scotland's Gypsy Travellers, which has included the creation of a ministerial working group to develop a programme of work to improve the prospects and outcomes for the community.

There is no place in Scotland for the discrimination that our Gypsy Traveller communities face, which other members have described today as the last acceptable form of racism. We no longer tolerate other forms of racist abuse and we must all challenge discrimination towards the Gypsy Traveller community whenever we encounter it in this chamber, in our surgeries and in our local communities. I am sure that, as elected members, we all have examples of doing that.

I pay tribute to two women: Mary Fee, as others have mentioned, for her passion on this subject, and Christina McKelvie, who I know is gutted at not being able to make today's debate and who has always raised the issue.

I am chair of the cross-party group on racial equality, which held a session last September at which Article 12's Michael Molden and Lynne Tammi made a presentation. We heard how the Gypsy Traveller community is among the most marginalised in Scotland and is frequently unable to enjoy the human rights that others take for granted. Lynne told us about the casual discrimination that is faced by the Gypsy Traveller community; she spoke about the TV programme that Annie Wells also mentioned, "My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding", along with its connotations. Michael told us about the bullying that he experienced at school—which still goes on—and anyone who was at the meeting would have had to have a heart of stone not to be moved by what he told us. Diversity and equality training in schools came up, especially if people are seasonally schooled. The Amnesty International Scotland school programme can be used and school resources could be developed in partnership with Show Racism the Red Card. The cross-party group had a really good discussion, which we will follow up, and I will be a member of Mary Fee's group.

I move from two members who have fought the case for a long time to a former colleague who is now an MP, Douglas Ross, who was mentioned by Ruth Maguire. He was invited to that cross-party group session following his remarks that were widely circulated in the media. He did not attend, but I would like to put on record that Adam Tomkins attended and engaged in the discussion and covered for his colleague; in the spirit of cross-party working, I thank him for that.

As many members have said, there is a lot of diversity among the Gypsy Traveller community in Scotland; different groups speak a variety of languages and hold to distinct customs and traditions. I welcome the fact that the ministerial working group will take that on board and will help with the challenges that members of those communities continue to face.

I am running out of time, but I want to talk about my constituency area of North Lanarkshire. I visited the council's website today and will read out exactly what it said about sites for Gypsy Traveller communities:

"Traditionally there are two kinds of sites provided for the gypsies and travelling community according to length of stay - transient and long stay. North Lanarkshire Council at one time had three sites at Mossend, Annathill and Plains. This gave a combined pitch total of 52. Two sites have since been closed leaving only one official site at Plains, which had capacity for 16 pitches. This particular site was a long term stay site and also had facilities for disabled gypsies and travellers. The site has not been in use for several years following low demand and major vandalism to the site which rendered it uninhabitable. A housing needs assessment is currently being undertaken to determine the extent of demand or need for further provision."

That is absolutely shocking; it basically says that there is no provision. I welcome the fact that the council is reviewing the situation and I have asked it to make sure that there is provision as soon as possible. I hope that the working group will help it to do that.

16:14

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Last December, Parliament approved the race equality action plan, which goes to the heart of what we try to do every day in this place—to ensure that Scotland, as a progressive, inclusive nation, treats all of our citizens equally, no matter what their race or background. As we have heard, as part of that plan the Scottish Government set up a ministerial working group to identify the priorities and enact the changes required to improve the lives of our Gypsy Traveller communities. However, improvement must be practical, tangible and a process that identifies a multifaceted approach to ensure that real equality is delivered.

Unfortunately, society has a negative attitude towards the Gypsy Traveller community. The majority of that negative attitude is based on stereotype, conjecture, misunderstanding and, it has to be said, downright ignorance. As has been alluded to, it does not help when certain members of society say that Gypsies are, in the words of Douglas Ross MP, a blight on our communities that needs to be dealt with. Rather than focus on what can be done to improve equality, Mr Ross said that if he were to become Prime Minister for the day, his top priority would be

“tougher enforcement against Gypsy Travellers”.

Thankfully, there is about as much chance of me running the line at the world cup final as there is of Douglas Ross becoming Prime Minister. However, that kind of attitude towards Gypsy Traveller communities creates more barriers than it helps to bring down. That is an issue that must be addressed in order for the necessary improvements to be made.

What are we doing, and what can be done, to make those improvements? One example comes from the Public Petitions Committee in the previous session of Parliament. In 2015, Jess Smith from the Travelling community petitioned the Scottish Parliament regarding the Tinkers' Heart, which is the title still used for it. The Tinkers' Heart is a pattern of quartz stones laid at a crossroads in the Cairndow area of Argyll, which is thought to be more than 250 years old and has been used by generations of Scottish Travellers as a wedding place and for children to be blessed.

The monument, which was in danger of being lost due to years of cattle grazing and disregard by the wealthy landowner, was given a lifeline by Historic Scotland, primarily as the result of Jess Smith's petition and the work of the Public Petitions Committee, but also because of the intervention of the local MSP Mike Russell, and subsequently the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop. I am delighted to say that the Tinkers' Heart is now designated a monument of national importance and stands as a reminder of the Gypsy Traveller community's contribution to Scotland's rich cultural heritage.

Taking steps to recognise the Travelling communities as part of Scotland's cultural heritage and diversity is an important section of the path to equality. It is important to understand that those people, because they are citizens like the rest of us, have rights and responsibilities, too. Access to health and education is a priority, and it is important that people from the Gypsy Traveller communities are afforded every opportunity to integrate with the communities in which they are living at the time, and have a chance to contribute to the already diverse landscape that we have across Scotland. Falkirk Council, for example, has a Travelling persons site located in my constituency, which I believe the cabinet secretary visited recently. I visited the site a few years ago and this is a timely reminder that I am overdue a return visit.

The site is monitored by closed-circuit television and a Travelling persons officer is based there Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. Each of the 15 pitches has access to a chalet with washing and toilet facilities. As we have heard, as part of the process, the progress report and guidance on

minimum site standards and site tenants' core rights and responsibilities was published last month. That included a survey that was undertaken between August 2017 and March 2018. At the time that the survey was done, Falkirk was one of only two self-assessments that showed compliance with the standards. However, improvements can still be made. Taking on board the points in the executive summary of the report, more can and should be done to ensure that the welfare of tenants on those sites is taken into consideration. Be it safety, or ensuring that people are treated fairly and with respect, this is all part of ensuring that improvements are made to the standard that we would all expect.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr MacDonald, but I am afraid that you must conclude.

16:18

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the debate on improving the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers. Positive steps have been taken to acknowledge the contribution that Gypsy Travellers make to Scotland. However, as many members have said, much more needs to be done at every level of government.

I acknowledge the work of my colleague Mary Fee on this issue. Following her members' business debate a few weeks ago celebrating Scotland's Gypsy Traveller community, she has worked to set up a cross-party group on Scottish Gypsy Travellers, which will have its first meeting tomorrow. That is to be welcomed. The group will provide a forum to discuss issues faced by the community and, hopefully, make the recommendations that are felt necessary for action.

It is estimated that there are between 15,000 and 20,000 Gypsy Travellers in Scotland, and the community has made a rich social and cultural contribution to our society. However, much more work is needed to improve the lives of Gypsy Travellers, as has been said today.

It is clear from some of the statistics that were highlighted in Mary Fee's members' business debate that the community faces inequality. It is shocking that male life expectancy in the Gypsy Traveller community is 55 years—12 years shorter than the average across Scotland. We know that that inequality is rooted in a variety of issues, including the provision of adequate accommodation and access to public health services. Accommodation and health services are human rights and gaining access to them should not be hindered by a person's background. Clearly, work is needed to overcome the barriers

that Gypsy Travellers face in getting the services that they need.

Mr Alan Seath, a planning adviser, highlighted the importance of Gypsy Travellers being in control of their land and their homes. He emphasised the need to aid the Gypsy Traveller community, with a focus on design, layout and greater site provision, instead of enforcement and eviction. He stated that a more positive outlook in the planning system, with robust policies, would assist, along with well-informed housing needs and demand assessment.

We must recognise the simple fact that Gypsy Travellers are discriminated against in Scotland and we should not attempt to sweep that issue under the carpet. Everyone will have heard inaccurate stereotypes about Gypsy Travellers; for some reason, that is almost tolerated whereas other forms of racism are not. We must recognise that for what it is—prejudice, pure and simple.

I was shocked that the survey on social attitudes that Monica Lennon mentioned found that 31 per cent of people in Scotland would be “unhappy or very unhappy” if a close relative married a Gypsy Traveller and that 35 per cent said that a Gypsy Traveller would be “unsuitable” as a primary schoolteacher. It is clear that more work is needed to change those attitudes.

It is encouraging to see the Parliament come together to unite

“in the view that there is no place for any form of racism in a modern and inclusive Scotland”.

The commitment to direct engagement with the Gypsy Traveller communities that we have heard from the Scottish Government is the right step to take, and I hope that we can see a more joined-up Government address the many issues we have heard about here today.

16:22

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government’s debate this afternoon, which has allowed us to discuss the issues that are faced by Scotland’s Gypsy Traveller community. I also welcome the establishment of the ministerial working group on Gypsy Travellers as a positive step in creating a more inclusive Scotland.

Scotland has one of the best human rights records in the world. It remains the best country in Europe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex-plus equality and human rights. Our fairer Scotland action plan sets out unprecedented measures to tackle child poverty. Our equally safe strategy begins to delve deep into the best methods by which to eradicate violence and discrimination against women and girls. The slow

transition of some social security powers from reserved to devolved has allowed the Scottish Government to finally have our say over that matter, and the Scottish Government has been able to work closely with disabled groups to deliver Scotland’s commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. That is all relevant.

Two weeks ago in the chamber, I spoke about a small but deeply important part of Scotland’s population. I worked closely with Scotland’s Gypsy Traveller community during my time on the Public Petitions Committee in the previous parliamentary session and while a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee this session. I am proud of the work that those committees have done for the Gypsy Traveller community and of the individuals who gave evidence to protect and preserve the heart of quartz in Argyll and Bute, known locally as the Tinkers’ Heart—ancient stones that are an integral part of Scotland’s history and culture.

However, that case is just one success in a sea of several challenges. When the Equalities and Human Rights Committee heard evidence from members of the Gypsy Traveller community in December, we were disappointed to hear that, although the Scottish Government and Scottish society in general have made progress in rhetoric, that is not being translated into practice. Reports from previous parliamentary sessions and committee meetings support that trend. In some areas, very little has changed. In other areas, discrimination, marginalisation and hardship have increased.

There appears to be a fundamental gap in Scotland’s human rights and equalities reputation. We currently have enshrined in our laws provisions for every member of Scottish society. We have taken steps to create a more inclusive Scotland, regardless of people’s race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or disability. However, it seems that the Gypsy Traveller community has not been benefiting from our human rights and equalities provisions, despite the fact that, as a society, we are making progress to tackle hate crime and discrimination on a wider scale. In that sense, our country is failing Gypsy Traveller communities.

The issues that Gypsy Traveller communities face are accurately and well documented. Access to appropriate healthcare is a major indicator of the depth of discrimination that the community faces. Those who lead a nomadic life are often denied access to healthcare by GPs, and those who have given up their nomadism and have moved into permanent housing continue to face challenges in registering for GPs due to stigma. Mental health services, in particular, are restricted,

even though suicide rates for Gypsy Traveller men are disproportionately high. That issue is not helped by restricted access to education, employment and housing.

The community faces prejudice regarding access to suitable sites, including permanent, transit and temporary sites. Institutional racism plays a huge role in that, coupled with there being no reference to Gypsy Traveller communities in planning processes. One young person who gave evidence to the committee referred to an incident in which their camp at Kinloch Rannoch—on grounds that are integral to the Gypsy Traveller culture—was shut down. It is now illegal to camp there.

In education, young Gypsy Travellers are forced to hide their ethnicity for fear of discrimination, leading some to call for strong affirmative action to challenge institutional racism, as well as transitional phases for members of the Gypsy Traveller community who are looking to join mainstream educational facilities.

To reiterate what my colleague, and Equalities and Human Rights Committee convener, Christina McKelvie has said, we need to learn from the past to inform our actions in the future. I very much hope that the ministerial working group on Gypsy Travellers will begin to address some of the challenges that the community faces. Amnesty International's report found that strengthened political leadership was required at national and local levels to bridge the gap between local communities, public agencies and local authorities. That is consistent with the evidence that the committee heard from members of the Gypsy Traveller community.

We need to better appreciate Gypsy Traveller history and culture as an asset and resource to Scotland's economy and society, and we need to embrace European and international recommendations so that we can create a truly inclusive Scotland for everyone.

16:27

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am very pleased to take part in the debate. Although I am no longer on the committee that deals with the subject, I was on the Equal Opportunities Committee in 2013 when we produced the report "Where Gypsy/Travellers Live". I just looked at the summary of that report and it does not make any more pleasant reading now than it did then.

At that time, we said that we were frustrated by the lack of progress in ensuring proper education, health and, especially, accommodation for the community, and I fear that progress has continued to be slow. There were some hard-hitting quotes in

the report, not least from the then committee convener, Mary Fee. She spoke for the whole committee when she said:

"We visited ... sites across Scotland ... and were appalled at some of the squalid conditions endured by tenants who pay rent and council tax for sub-standard services."

There was also a quote from the Scottish Human Rights Commission that described discrimination against Gypsy Travellers as

"the last bastion of respectable racism".—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 6 December 2012; c 777.]

Of course, it is not respectable or acceptable, but it is seen as acceptable in some circles, including parts of the media.

There are a number of minority groups in Scotland that are discriminated against or, at least, disadvantaged, and some of those groups are quite large. I remain convinced that the Gypsy Traveller community is unusual in being such a small and disadvantaged group that is still so openly discriminated against.

It is good that the ministerial working group has been set up since the publication of the report, as it was our feeling that we needed strong Government leadership, and that we should not just leave to local government new site provision and other requirements. As well as Mary Fee, I commend John Finnie and others who have pursued the matter over the years and who will not let it go. We felt that the pressure on some local councils was such that it really needed Scottish Government leadership to "support"—the word that we used—local authorities and elected representatives.

On a wider point, I am convinced that we all have a responsibility to speak out when we come up against racist remarks. I accept that terminology can vary and that some people use words that we might not be comfortable with out of habit rather than evil intent. However, when it comes to traditional stopping places that might be unapproved or unauthorised, it is certainly not helpful to say that they are illegal. The word "illegal" can be used very loosely at times and can carry a stigma that is deliberately damaging.

Sometimes we, as individuals, need to intervene and say something about words that are being used. A few weeks ago, I was sitting in a restaurant in Edinburgh when I heard racist remarks at the next table. They were not about Gypsy Travellers but another racial group. I felt that I could not sit there and let it go; I really had to say something. I did not find that particularly easy and I was not sure what reaction I was going to get. As it turned out, we had a reasonably civilised discussion.

We can all do our bit in attempting to change attitudes. Just this afternoon, the young people who led time for reflection reminded us not to let prejudice go unchallenged. It might be easier here in Parliament, where we have broad agreement on the subject, but it can be difficult outside if we find ourselves in a group of people who are being openly racist.

I commend the members who are leading progress on this issue. I am glad that the Government is taking it seriously and it certainly has the support of many of us on the back benches who are not directly involved.

16:30

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Alex Cole-Hamilton referred to the Gypsy Traveller community as being disengaged from the political process. During the 1995 Perth and Kinross by-election, which brought Roseanna Cunningham her parliamentary debut when she won it from the Tories, one of the things that I was given to do as a campaigner was to go and talk to the Travellers who were just outside Milnathort. I found a group of well-engaged people who had some focused and relevant questions to ask of the person who called at their door to ask for their vote. We had an animated discussion, followed by a welcome cup of tea and a biscuit. I am sure that, although I did meet a Conservative voter among them, I can use the singular word.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I was not suggesting that the Gypsy Traveller community is not engaged politically. The political class infers that they are not engaged politically, so politicians do not reach out to them.

Stewart Stevenson: I hope that, between us, we have made the point that we neglect the involvement of anyone in our society at our peril, including the Gypsy and Traveller community.

As my name is Stewart, it would be perilous for me to be disconnected. When my father was a GP and the Travellers used to come for the berries and the tattie howking later in the year, three names came to the door—the McPhees, the McAlindens and, of course, the Stewarts, who are a well-established Scots Traveller family. I have a wheen of people in my family who are called Stewart and I also have McPhees in my family. I do not know whether they were Travellers in either case, but I certainly cannot disregard the possibility.

The key thing that those people exhibited that we should take tent of is that they were self-sufficient. They could teach us a lot about how to make the most of our circumstances and attributes. The rest of us often lie back while those who travel and seek work and success where they

can find it are much stronger people in some ways.

Kevin Stewart referred to Jeannie Robertson, so I will, in turn, refer to Belle Stewart from Blairgowrie, who was a well-known Scots folk singer from a Travelling family. Just to illustrate how prejudice works in rather curious and irrational ways, in the early 1980s Belle Stewart went to the Sidmouth festival to sing at the festival's invitation. Among the people attending were new age travellers, not Travellers in the traditional sense. They did not believe that Belle Stewart could possibly be a Traveller because she was far too clean. Is that not another example of the kind of prejudice that was embedded in the people that she met there?

Belle Stewart's biography was written by her daughter and it captures the Travelling spirit and the spirit of Belle Stewart. It is called "Queen Among the Heather".

16:34

John Finnie: It has been a productive debate and, lest there be any dubiety, I absolutely do not doubt the commitment of the ministerial working group. The Government is displaying welcome leadership, as is my colleague Mary Fee through the cross-party group. I hope that she has booked a big room for tomorrow, because her meeting will be well attended. We have heard members say that there has been plenty of talk and insufficient action, that we need deeds, not words, and that we must take a radical new approach. A radical new approach is what I would like to see.

I am grateful to my colleague John Mason for mentioning the traditional stopping-off places because, if we are embracing the issue of the travelling lifestyle and are genuinely lending it our support, the question of stopping places will need to be addressed. I have talked many times about what might be seen as the tension between local and central Government, with central Government not wishing to tread on the toes of the local authorities, which have responsibility for planning. Permitted development does not seem to be a big issue in agriculture, but perhaps that says a lot about who is putting the plans into practice.

We must listen to people's voices. We have heard the women's voices, and I am delighted to hear that MECOPP is getting money. It does a lot of tremendously good work and was of great assistance to me on a previous occasion when I was on the Equal Opportunities Committee, and I know the work that it does in North Argyll in my region.

I want to say something that might be seen as strange or even controversial. Can we involve men, please? I am delighted that Davie Donaldson

is now involved but, although we know from listening to witnesses that there is no shortage of strong women with well-informed opinions, I find when I go to visit sites that I do not see many men. That may be to do with when I visit, but it is important to get everyone involved.

As regards the amendments, I think that Annie Wells's point about measurable indicators is entirely reasonable, but I am not a great one for statistics—we can manipulate them to say what we want. I am interested in things such as quality of life, which is not so easily measurable. That includes life expectancy, which greatly affects all impoverished communities.

Social attitudes are important, and changing them is about education. I particularly liked hearing about flexible alternatives to school-based learning. I absolutely support that. If someone is out and about with their family in the countryside, as Travellers are, that is a tremendous education. The idea that it is all about academic achievement is deeply flawed.

Monica Lennon talked about a number of groups, and I have touched on MECOPP. I also want to mention Article 12 in Scotland. A lot of powerful young women are involved in Lynne Tammi's work with that group.

Alex Cole-Hamilton used the phrase "hostile environment policies". Although the hostile environment policy was not meant to relate specifically to the Gypsy Traveller community, the term encompasses many of the attitudes that they have faced all these years. I remember once meeting a senior official about accommodation for the Gypsy Traveller community. The business was conducted officially, but on my departure he put a paternal hand on my shoulder and whispered in my ear, "There's no votes in this for you, John." That is not what this should be about. We should be doing things because they are right. I was particularly taken by what Monica Lennon said about things changing when a warden who cared was on the scene.

I do not doubt the care that anyone in the chamber has for the Gypsy Traveller community, but we evidence that care by our actions, so I am happy to support the amendments from other members. I hope that the very nature of our engagement in this debate and in previous debates is indicative of how we go ahead, and that we will go ahead together to try to improve things.

16:39

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful to have the opportunity to close this afternoon's debate on behalf of Scottish Labour, celebrating the contribution of Scotland's Gypsy Traveller community to our nation's shared history. I, too,

welcome the Gypsy Travellers to the public gallery. I hope not only that they have enjoyed the debate but that they have taken heart from the commitment that has been demonstrated by all of us. We have heard a range of speeches from across the chamber, and I will reflect briefly on some of them in my closing remarks. I apologise if I miss anyone out.

John Finnie rightly highlighted stopping places as a crucial issue for Gypsy Travellers and their lifestyles. I share his weariness at the lack of progress. David Torrance and Angus MacDonald spoke about the Tinkers' Heart. David Torrance also spoke about the lack of human rights that the community experiences.

Alex Rowley spoke about health inequalities and the lack of access to support and care. He also spoke about the key role that planning can play. Alex Cole-Hamilton spoke about Shamus McPhee and the work that he has done to bring alive the history of Gypsy Travellers through his stories and his art. Gail Ross spoke about the horrific living conditions that Gypsy Travellers endure. Very few of us fully understand just how horrific those living conditions are unless we have actually seen them.

John Mason highlighted some of the findings of the 2013 report. We were both members of the Equal Opportunities Committee at that time, and I appreciated all the work that John Mason did when I was the convener. He was a powerful advocate on behalf of the Gypsy Traveller community.

It is right that we recognise and celebrate the rich culture of the Gypsy Traveller community. During my recent members' business debate, we heard speeches from across the chamber that celebrated the unique history, culture and lifestyle of Gypsy Travellers. Parliament came together on that day to support the community, and it has done so again today. It is important that we work constructively with one another across Parliament to further improve the lived experiences of Gypsy Travellers throughout Scotland.

There is much work to be done. I know that the cabinet secretary is a dedicated and committed advocate for the Gypsy Traveller community, and I, too, welcome the establishment of the Scottish Government's ministerial working group on Gypsy Travellers. I also welcome the cabinet secretary's opening remarks and her commitment that there will be action, not more warm words.

The Gypsy Traveller women's voices project will be a valuable asset, as will the continuing work of Davie Donaldson and the young Gypsy Traveller assembly. I also welcome the update from the cabinet secretary on the meetings of the ministerial working group, and I look forward to

establishing a close working relationship when the cross-party group is formed, tomorrow.

During the first session of the reconvened Scottish Parliament, back in 2001, the Equal Opportunities Committee held an inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and public sector policies in Scotland. When discussing the 2001 report, young Gypsy Traveller activist Davie Donaldson stated that, over the past 17 years, “nothing has changed”. We would rightly not accept such a lack of action and a lack of progress with regard to any other minority ethnic group in Scotland.

I accept that some progress has been made. Good practice exists in the inclusion of Gypsy Traveller children in education, and some progress has been made with health records. However, without building on and developing that progress, we risk either standing still or losing momentum. That frustrates the community, and it frustrates me.

It is right that we recognise and celebrate the rich and vibrant contribution of the Gypsy Traveller community in Scotland. I am glad that, tomorrow afternoon, I will convene the first meeting of the Parliament’s cross-party group on Scottish Gypsy Travellers. I am also glad that the cabinet secretary has expressed her personal commitment to improving the lives of the Gypsy Traveller community.

However, we must not and cannot be complacent. The community does not need rhetoric; it needs action. It is time for the Scottish Government to show real leadership. It must now take the opportunity to publish its long-overdue national strategy for Gypsy Travellers and begin close engagement with the community in working to improve tangibly the lives of Gypsy Travellers throughout Scotland.

16:44

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Mary Fee has called for action, not rhetoric; I add my voice to those wise words. I commend Mary Fee for establishing the cross-party group. Running a cross-party group is hard work—trust me, I know—but it is rewarding, too, especially when there is consensus.

The cabinet secretary used phrases such as, “There has been a lot of talk and not a lot of action,” and, “It is not good enough,” as well as saying

“this has to be about ‘deeds not words’”

and

“the status quo is not an option.”

How true, Presiding Officer.

There is no denying that the Gypsy Traveller community has faced a plethora of issues for a long time, and it is right that we use our parliamentary time to look at some of the depressing failures. However, we should also take the opportunity to celebrate the Gypsy Traveller community and its culture, traditions and historic place in Scotland, which, as Annie Wells and Alex Cole-Hamilton have said, go back hundreds if not thousands of years. Yes, there are issues, and I will go into some of them, but we should emerge from the debate with a positive view of the future. As Alexander Stewart has said, let us celebrate the great sense of entrepreneurialism and pride in the traditions that exist in a community that is as diverse as any other.

As I have said many times before in other debates in the chamber, we must take the public with us. It would be remiss of us to have a debate about Gypsy Travellers and ignore the root causes of so much of the disagreement and apathy among local councils and settled communities in dealing with the issue of sites. Much of that is down to misinformed views born out of prejudice, bad experiences, poor community relations, inherent prejudice and, on occasion, a mutually negative lack of understanding of the needs and views of those on both sides of many difficult arguments.

Today’s debate has thrown light on a number of the day-to-day issues affecting Gypsy Travellers, and I will touch on a number of them. Health figures reveal that 38 per cent of Gypsy Travellers have long-term illnesses compared with 26 per cent of the rest of the population. It is also frequently reported that Gypsy Traveller men and women live 10 and 12 years less than the general population, which is a disgrace.

I point to the great work of the Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, which is an Irish non-governmental organisation. It has carried out studies into the community and has found that 11 per cent of all Traveller deaths in Ireland are attributed to suicide. The suicide rate among Travellers is six or seven times higher than the rate among the settled community in Ireland. I do not know what the figure is for Scotland, but I suspect that it is not great either. The question is why that is the case and what we will do to address the situation.

Education has been the subject of much discussion, and we know that Gypsy Traveller children’s educational attainment is lower than the national trend. Some estimate that only 20 per cent of Gypsy Traveller children of secondary school age attend school regularly, and it is likely that they suffer from the lowest level of attainment of any minority community.

There are themes connecting the barriers to education with their results. Those include a number of issues that we should discuss, including the controversial issue of enforced mobility and interrupted learning. That must be addressed. Anyone who was brought up in a military home will know the effect that interruption as a result of continuous movement from one place to another has on learning. What are we doing to fix that? What flexibility is there in the education system to cater for that lifestyle?

We do not talk enough about the excessive number of exclusions from school or the inadequate school responses to bullying by students, parents and even, on occasion, teachers who simply turn a blind eye to casual harassment. The list goes on, and it includes the lack of validation of Gypsy Traveller culture in our schools, the limited relevance of the curriculum to many Gypsy Traveller pupils and even teachers' low expectations of them—how sad is that?

On justice, there is a disproportionate use of antisocial behaviour orders against Gypsy Travellers, a high use of remand in custody and cultural dislocation within the prison system. What are we doing to address those issues?

Perhaps we should talk about the elephant in the room. Research by Amnesty International found that the Gypsy Traveller community receives a disproportionate level of media coverage, of which more than half is entirely negative. Much of the discussion is about sites, which we have talked about in the debate, and I welcome the Government's commitment to address the issues of guidance and standards.

In that context, I think that the Green amendment lacks clarity although I am sympathetic to the intention behind it. The Green amendment refers to

"the mapping of stopping-off places and ... making these available".

My problem with that is that it does not sound like a co-ordinated strategy for providing suitable and adequate sites. For that reason, we are unable to support the amendment.

John Finnie: I am grateful to the member for his concluding comment. The amendment is intended to propose a direction of travel rather than be prescriptive. This is not legislation that we are talking about; it is a suggestion to the Government about how we might move forward in a consensual way. That is the basis of the amendment.

Jamie Greene: I appreciate the clarification. The amendment could perhaps have been geared to calling for a co-ordinated approach to the provision of adequate and suitable sites rather

than making available all stopping places. In our view, many stopping sites are inadequate, which is why I brought the issue up.

The debate has been peppered with talk of race and ethnicity rather than lifestyle choices, and I am pleased about that. We are discussing one of Scotland's ethnic communities, and the debate should reflect that key point.

Gypsy Travellers have been treated unfairly in the past and they are still being treated unfairly in many respects. I have said before that prejudice is born out of fear. Fear can be overcome only by understanding and mutual respect, and understanding comes through education, leadership and action. It needs not just warm words and sympathetic debates but top-down Government policy that filters its way through Government directorates, policing, the national health service, social services, our education system and local authorities.

It is time to have a frank, sensible and realistic debate about the issues. History has repeated itself far too often and for far too long when it comes to the Gypsy Traveller community. We need fewer words and more action, please.

16:52

Angela Constance: I thank all members for their thoughtful and insightful contributions to this afternoon's debate. I am glad that the debate has been consensual and positive, because that demonstrates that as a Parliament—and, I hope, as a country—we are committed to working together to improve the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers.

I put on record that I will support the amendments that were lodged by the Labour Party, the Conservatives and Mr Finnie, and that, in response to parliamentary questions, I have already set out how we will take forward the detail of members' suggestions.

Many members spoke passionately about Gypsy Travellers whom they have met or worked with, in their constituencies or in committees, and about the impact that the opportunity to listen directly to the testimonies of people from the community had on them. As for me, the experiences and testimonies that I have heard about the day-to-day challenges that are faced by individuals and the community collectively are jaw dropping and eye opening.

Annie Wells, Alex Cole-Hamilton and many other members talked powerfully about the need to celebrate Gypsy Traveller heritage and culture. John Finnie said that the Gypsy Traveller heritage is a root-and-branch part of our country and Europe. Angus MacDonald rightly paid tribute to

the work that was done to get the Tinker's Heart recognised as a monument of national importance, and Stewart Stevenson talked about his love of the folk singer Belle Stewart.

I have been particularly struck by the work of Damian Le Bas, who has been writing about his journey to reconnect with his Traveller roots. He has written:

"From the Highlands to the Borders, Scotland has a Gypsy history that has yet to be recognised".

That is something that we will work hard to change. Damian Le Bas said of his journey:

"Perhaps I might even solve the bizarre contradiction of Britain's love affair with caravanning, camping and glamping, and its hatred of those who were born to this life, and who largely inspired its adoption as a non-Gypsy pastime. As one Scottish Gypsy Traveller put it: 'There are 80,000 members of the Caravan Club, but I'm not allowed to travel?'"

I want to pick up on other members' contributions this afternoon. Monica Lennon and others spoke about the need to improve both the quality and quantity of sites. Fulton MacGregor and Alexander Stewart spoke very powerfully about the need to establish more sites. Although decisions about the provision of Gypsy Traveller sites are made at local level, and such decisions should be based on information from those with local knowledge and accountability, they must also be based on local need. Therefore the issues around local housing strategies and housing demand needs assessments that Alex Rowley touched upon need to be addressed. We very much look forward to progressing those in our partnership with COSLA as well.

I take on board what John Finnie said about both the use of language and the need to reach out to men in the Gypsy Traveller community. What he said in his personal reflections I have thought about in relation to my own engagement: I have indeed had more engagement with women than men in the community. However, research is imminent—particularly on issues around planning—on which men in the community are very keen to work with the Scottish Government.

On language, I accept Mr Finnie's point that there is perhaps a need to talk more about "accommodation" and not "housing". On such issues, we will work hand in glove with the community. However, I suggest that, in our striving for practical solutions and actions, we should remember that it is important for us to look at specific suggestions—whether they be on informal halting stops or negotiated stops, on which very interesting work is going on south of the border, in Leeds. Negotiated stopping describes an agreement that is reached between a local authority and members of the Gypsy Traveller community. Along with members of the

community, my officials are going to investigate that very practical solution in Leeds this week.

Other members have mentioned issues about site standards. As a Government, we have made our position crystal clear: such standards are consistently not good enough. We have been very proactive in making our views known. The Minister for Local Government and Housing has written to local authorities and registered social landlords and has made it clear that standards are a minimum, and that everyone in Scotland has the right to expect accommodation that is of a good standard—and that includes our Gypsy Traveller community.

Jamie Greene: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: No, thank you—not just now.

We have published our report, and that is now a matter for the Scottish Housing Regulator

In the time that I have left, I want to touch briefly on education. I have seen some excellent examples of flexible learning opportunities. For example, the Gypsy Traveller education group in Larkhall enables young Gypsy Travellers to get the support that they need to reach their full potential. I am a strong advocate of developing Scotland's young workforce, because therein lies the route to flexible learning opportunities that can take young people into apprenticeships, further or higher education or the world of work or self-employment. Flexibility and the ability to have non-school-based education opportunities already exist in our education system: we just have to find better ways in which to make them happen more consistently across the country.

I am conscious that many members have spoken very powerfully about the health inequalities that exist in the community. There has been some progress since 2012. We have seen the publication of leaflets to inform members of the community of their rights to register with GPs, and I know that NHS 24 has done a lot of work to raise awareness of practitioners who will try to work with the community in out-of-hours situations. However, there is absolutely no doubt—and let me be crystal clear—that we need to do much more to address the very stark health inequalities and the differences in life expectancy, among other factors, that exist. Fear of discrimination and actual discrimination prevent the Gypsy Traveller community from accessing essential public services, which contributes to poor outcomes.

I want to take full advantage of the fact that this is a Government debate, which means that, as we approach decision time, the chamber is full and all members are in their seats. Quite deliberately, I want to end the debate in the same way that I

started it, by saying—on behalf, I hope, of the whole Parliament—to the members of the Gypsy Traveller community who are here with us today and those throughout the length and breadth of Scotland: this is your Parliament, you have every right to be here and, like all citizens of Scotland, you have every right to expect the very highest standards of representation. You have every right to expect every parliamentarian and every councillor to work together for you. Most of all, you have every right to expect those of us who occupy public office and perform public service to work with you to ensure that we end the discrimination and disadvantage, and to ensure that your children have every chance, that your elders are cared for and that your voices are heard.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-12690.1, in the name of Annie Wells, which seeks to amend motion S5M-12690, in the name of Angela Constance, on improving the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-12690.3, in the name of Monica Lennon, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Angela Constance, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-12690.2, in the name of John Finnie, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Angela Constance, 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (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)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Macdonald, 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)
 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)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (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)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 76, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-12690, in the name of Angela Constance, on improving the lives of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the contribution that Gypsy/Travellers have made to Scottish history and continue to make to the country's culture and heritage; notes that June 2018 sees Scotland celebrating Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month for the first time; is united in the view that there is no place for any form of racism in a modern and inclusive Scotland, and condemns all forms of prejudice and discrimination towards Gypsy/Travellers; supports the work of the new Ministerial Working Group on Gypsy/Travellers, which aims to ensure a systematic and coherent approach to improving outcomes for Gypsy/Travellers across the country in line with the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD); calls on the Scottish Government to regularly review progress and provide measurable indicators by which to do so; recognises the importance of direct engagement with Gypsy/Traveller people; congratulates the Young Gypsy Traveller Assembly in strengthening the voice of young Gypsy/Travellers; commends COSLA's commitment to transforming the life chances of Gypsy/Travellers across the country; looks forward to working together within a human rights framework to accelerate improvements for this community; welcomes the establishment of the Parliament's first Cross Party Group on Gypsy/Travellers, and recognises the need for such support to be underpinned by measures that enable Gypsy/Travellers' traditional way of life, including the mapping of stopping-off places and, save in exceptional circumstances, making these available to the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Orkambi

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-12545, in the name of Maurice Corry, on Orkambi. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament understands that cystic fibrosis affects over 900 people in Scotland, including in the West Scotland parliamentary region, and that, in 2016, half of all people who died from the genetic condition were aged under 31; believes that Orkambi, which is manufactured by Vertex Pharmaceuticals and treats the homozygous *delf508* mutation, which around 50% of people in the UK with the condition have, is the second drug to be licensed for use in dealing with cystic fibrosis; notes that the main function of this treatment is to keep a healthy balance of salt and water in the organs, particularly the lungs; believes that, according to 2016 UK Cystic Fibrosis Registry Report, there are 336 people in Scotland who could benefit from having access to this, but that it is not currently available via the NHS, despite, it understands, the Scottish Medicines Consortium noting that it was a beneficial treatment and NICE recognising it as an important treatment; believes that clinical data has shown that the drug is able to slow decline in lung function, which is the main cause of death from the condition, by 42%, and notes the work of all the people and organisations, such as the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, which are campaigning to put pressure on the Scottish Government, the NHS and pharmaceutical companies to ensure that such drugs reach those who need them without delay.

17:04

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the members who have supported my members' business motion so enthusiastically over the past week or so.

Cystic fibrosis is a devastating genetic disease that has a terrible effect on patients and their families. From very early in life, children who have cystic fibrosis can exhibit multiple manifestations of the disease, including structural lung damage and abnormal lung clearance, which is a way of measuring airways' health, and they also face nutritional impairments. The damage that they sustain to their lungs is progressive—it worsens over time and leads to increasing impairment of lung function. One consequence of that is that people with cystic fibrosis are more susceptible to life-threatening lung infections.

Due to the geographic origins of cystic fibrosis, the United Kingdom has a very high prevalence of the disease, accounting for some 12 per cent of the global population of patients. NHS Scotland has estimated that one in 24 Scots has a genetic mutation that can, if it is present in both parents, lead to a child being born with cystic fibrosis. According to the United Kingdom cystic fibrosis registry, there are approximately 900 people in

Scotland with cystic fibrosis. They have a median age of just 21 and the median age of death is just 31. Only 5 per cent of cystic fibrosis sufferers will live to see their 50th birthday. I want members to think about that for a second. My 31st birthday is but a distant memory, but those with cystic fibrosis who reach that milestone have just a 5 per cent chance of getting to a 50th birthday.

I want members to think about what they would not have been able to do if they had died before one of those birthdays. I want them to think about the experiences that they would have missed and the memories that they have created with loved ones that would never have happened. That is the reality for so many people who suffer from cystic fibrosis. Surely it is incumbent on us to ensure that people with cystic fibrosis have the best chance of having as many of those experiences for as long as possible in order to create those memories. That is what Orkambi can do.

As I note in my motion, clinical data has shown that Orkambi is able to slow decline in lung function, which is the main cause of death from the condition, by 42 per cent. It has cut the number of infections that require hospitalisation by 61 per cent. According to the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, about 40 per cent of people with cystic fibrosis in Scotland would benefit from treatment with Orkambi.

The drug is different from traditional treatments for cystic fibrosis in that it is a precision medicine. Traditional treatments for cystic fibrosis aim to reduce symptoms and complications, but progressive damage still occurs, which means that symptoms and complications increase with age. However, precision medicine targets the root cause of cystic fibrosis—the dysfunctional protein that causes cystic fibrosis. Precision medicines have the potential to preserve or to restore lung function, and to slow decline and improve the life expectancy and quality of life of patients.

Other precision medicines are being developed. Within five years, about 90 per cent of people with cystic fibrosis could be treated with new medicines that could transform cystic fibrosis from being a condition that kills people to one that they can live with. However, people with cystic fibrosis are worried that they will not get access to those life-changing medicines in Scotland because of the process that the medicines need to go through to become available on the national health service here. Orkambi received its licence two years ago, but is still not available here, although it is available to all eligible patients in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, Greece and the United States. It is still unavailable here because the Scottish Medicines Consortium announced in 2016 that it was unable to recommend the drug

due to its cost, despite acknowledging that the drug is “important and effective”.

Since then, people who suffer from cystic fibrosis and organisations including the Cystic Fibrosis Trust have called for negotiations and a fair sustainable pricing deal for Orkambi. Sadly, there has been no progress, so people with cystic fibrosis are still waiting for help while their health and quality of life decline.

I know that elsewhere there has been success in negotiating prices with Governments. Vertex Pharmaceuticals, the company that makes Orkambi, also makes Kalydeco, which is another cystic fibrosis precision medication. Kalydeco is available in Scotland via the new medicines fund, following the intervention of ministers in 2013, but Orkambi has not had the same intervention. That means that inequality has been created among cystic fibrosis patients, depending on the treatment that they require.

A good example of a different way of opening up access to new medicines is the Republic of Ireland’s approach. By agreeing a portfolio approach, which is a long-term solution, new medicines for cystic fibrosis have become available for patients in that country when they are manufactured and licensed. Deals of that type mean that the overall prices of current and future medicines are capped for a set amount of time, which means that a doctor can move a patient on to new medicines if they would better address that patient’s particular type of cystic fibrosis. That approach has major benefits, and science is now moving so quickly that I worry that the old models for bringing medicines into the system no longer work.

I want to quote Mr and Mrs O’Neill of Lenzie, from my region, who wrote to me and encapsulated what I think the debate is all about. They say:

“My son is 18 months old and he is the future—he should not be denied access to precision medicines that will support him to live the life he so rightly deserves. Although not now, Conan’s health will deteriorate at some point—his life should not be shortened even further by denying Conan and the other 907 people in Scotland who live with cystic fibrosis access to the medicines that they need. It’s not just about Orkambi, it’s about what comes after Orkambi and that is why it is so important that an approach can be agreed that allows access to the pipeline of future life-giving medications and treatments. Scotland led the way with access to Kalydeco and must lead the way again.”

We must have unity throughout the United Kingdom. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has approved the use of Orkambi in England and Wales. We should do the same in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Corry. I remind all members who wish to speak to

press their request-to-speak buttons, please. I see that some folk have woken up.

17:12

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate Maurice Corry on obtaining the debate and for his opening remarks, which were very informative and well balanced.

One thing that Maurice Corry did not mention is that the impact of having cystic fibrosis from birth results in a decline of lung function by about 2 per cent a year, on average. That means that cystic fibrosis sufferers have lost about 20 per cent of their lung function by the time they get to the age of 10. By the time they get to the age of 20, they have lost 40 per cent, and by the time they get to the age of 30, they have lost 60 per cent of their lung function.

I emphasise that because the debate is as much about timing as it is about anything else: time is marching on for cystic fibrosis sufferers. The longer it takes to complete the process to get approval for the new drug—Orkambi—and successor drugs, the more time will be lost for cystic fibrosis sufferers. Therefore, the matter has to be treated as being very urgent.

The good news is, as Maurice Corry said, that we are on the brink of a major transformation in the treatment of cystic fibrosis because of the nature of the advanced new drugs that are coming on the market. However, as a former health secretary, I know the challenges that arise when expensive new drugs that have demonstrable impacts are being made available. When we are looking at the entire picture of the health service, we have to be mindful of the cost—not just the unit cost but the overall cost—of any new drug. That is why the SMC system was set up to take an objective and non-political look at new drugs.

However, sometimes it is necessary for Government to knock heads together. The stage that we are at just now, in particular with Orkambi, is that we need the Government to knock together the heads of the manufacturer—Vertex—the SMC and NHS National Services Scotland, which is responsible for NHS procurement on behalf of the Scottish Government. It is right that politicians are not directly involved. The role of politicians is to set the framework and, if necessary, to intervene where there is undue delay.

For the rest of my speech, I will therefore concentrate on making a suggestion to the Scottish Government and Vertex about the way ahead. The one thing on which we are all united is the need to do everything that is within our power, budget and resources to ensure that cystic fibrosis sufferers get the treatment that they need at the earliest opportunity.

I welcome the decision that became effective about two weeks ago to make Orkambi available under what used to be called the individual patient treatment request system—now, the peer approved clinical system. That is progress, but it is not enough progress, because we know that getting approval under that system is not always fast or guaranteed. That is why the quicker we get general approval for the drug, the better.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: Sure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but Alex Neil has only 30 seconds left, which I am sure he wants to use.

Alex Neil: The time has come for the Scottish Government to knock heads together—those of Vertex and NSS. Two things are necessary. The Government needs to agree to enter into portfolio negotiations, which are outwith due process. It is a novel way of negotiating access to drugs, but we should not let bureaucracy and being outside due process hold us up. The Government should authorise the start of those discussions. The discussions will not be finished quickly, so in the meantime, Vertex should make the drug available at a reduced price so that, when the deal is done, both sides end up where we are trying to get to. Let us do that sooner rather than later.

17:16

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I apologise for being unable to stay for the whole debate because, as I have indicated to the Presiding Officer, I have to leave to chair a meeting of the cross-party group on cancer.

I congratulate my colleague Maurice Corry on securing the debate and I commend his excellent speech, which I whole-heartedly agree with. I very much welcome the broad cross-party support on the issue and I pay tribute to the Cystic Fibrosis Trust for its work and to constituents in my region—Lothian—who are campaigning hard to ensure that Orkambi is available on the NHS to all who need it.

One such constituent is Jenny Landers from Musselburgh, who emailed me just a few days ago about her daughter Freya, who is five years old and has cystic fibrosis. Jenny Landers said:

“Every day Freya takes up to 30 tablets, 4 nebulisers and does 45 minutes of physiotherapy just to keep well. Even with these treatments her health is slowly declining.

She has already been admitted to hospital 3 times for up to 2 weeks at a time. Currently her future is very uncertain as many people with CF are still dying in their twenties.

In one year she will be eligible for Orkambi.

This drug has the potential to slow the pace of the disease, giving her a much better chance of staying well into adulthood and having a career, living independently and having a family. Things most people take for granted. It is not right that we are denying people with CF the chance at a better life.”

None of us will disagree with Jenny Landers’s sentiments, which are shared by many parents, families and friends of people with CF across Scotland. Alex Neil laid out for us the challenge, which is how each of us as elected representatives, the Scottish Government, the manufacturers and the SMC’s processes translate that desire, and the accepted fact that the medicine is a beneficial and effective treatment, into access to the drug on the NHS at an affordable rate that is fair for everyone involved and is sustainable for our NHS.

In quite a few ways, the campaign to access Orkambi mirrors that for Perjeta, which I have been involved in recently, through which women with breast cancer want access to another life-extending drug. I am pleased that Perjeta’s manufacturers have announced that they will make a resubmission to the SMC and I hope that Vertex will do something similar for Orkambi in the shortest possible time.

I commend Vertex’s scientists, who have a large pipeline of potential CF treatments in development that could offer a great deal to many patients. We should celebrate that, and we should all look at how we ensure that the SMC meets the challenge.

I welcome recent reforms that mean that clinicians can make requests to NHS boards for individual patients to access drugs that the SMC has not yet approved, but such requests are not always successful and, understandably, campaigners want Orkambi to be available to everyone who needs it, without delays or extra processes to go through. Maurice Corry referred to the process through which Orkambi was made available in the Republic of Ireland. We need to examine that and consider whether our systems are capable of mirroring it.

I welcome the debate. It is a chance for the Parliament to focus and has brought the campaign for Orkambi here. I hope that the whole Parliament will unite in supporting our constituents whose lives could be improved by access to Orkambi, which is routinely available in many European Union countries and elsewhere.

I hope that the Minister for Public Health and Sport is willing to meet with MSPs from across the parties who are working with the CF Trust and other organisations on the issue. I also hope that, in her closing speech, she will assure us that she will do whatever she can to facilitate Vertex getting to a position where it can make an acceptable application.

Patients with cystic fibrosis in Scotland—many of whom face limited life expectancies—and their families rightly expect the Scottish Government to step up and get things moving. I and other MSPs from across the chamber will keep up the pressure on the Government. Above all, we need action on the matter so that our constituents can realise their potential.

17:21

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Like others, I congratulate Maurice Corry on securing the debate. It is important and timely and the issue has far-reaching consequences: it is literally one of life and death. Orkambi is a life-changing drug that improves the quality of life for cystic fibrosis patients. The genuine cross-party support for and nature of the debate emphasise how important the issue is. I recognise that it is not an easy one for any minister or Government and I hope that, collectively, we can find a solution that is in the best interests of patients.

It is worth noting that Orkambi is available in many countries throughout the world, including our European neighbours, Ireland and Holland. It is more than two years since the drug received its European Medicines Agency licence and almost a decade since the first clinical trial started in Scotland. However, it is still not available to Scottish patients. The reason given—I quote directly from a letter from the cabinet secretary's office—is that

“justification for the treatment's cost in relation to its benefits was not sufficient.”

What price do we put on life? For individual families and patients, that reason will not be much comfort. I recognise the difficulty that the Government has and the difficult decisions that the SMC has to make, but we must do that in the context of a genuinely humane approach on such issues, particularly when we are talking directly about people's lives.

Miles Briggs mentioned that Orkambi is not an isolated case. Perjeta is also a running issue. That demonstrates the challenges that we have with providing access to vital medicines. Perjeta is a vital medicine that is available to breast cancer patients in other parts of the United Kingdom but not in Scotland. That will impact on the life expectancy of those patients. The matter requires a robust response and approach from the Government.

I echo Alex Neil. He took a fair-minded approach and called on the pharmaceutical company, the Scottish Government and the SMC to put their heads together and find a solution that is in the best interests of patients and their families.

I will offer a few other quick reflections. First, I will comment on the letters that we received from the cabinet secretary. I was really disheartened by the letter that came in on 31 March, addressed to Jackie Baillie and Alex Neil, because one of those members is a former health secretary and they were taking a genuinely cross-party approach, but the letter was not a personal response from the cabinet secretary. That was ill judged on her part. I am pleased that she has followed that up today with another letter to Mr Neil and Ms Baillie, but I say gently that it should not take the front page of a national newspaper or a debate in the Parliament for the cabinet secretary to respond directly to fellow parliamentarians.

I will also comment on the individual patient treatment request process and the ease of access to it. It is welcome that our discussions about Perjeta led to a change in approach: requests will be judged not on money but on clinical efficacy. However, alongside that, we have to recognise that that will impact on health boards' budgets, so we need the Government to back up those budgets to make sure that money will be available to make the drugs available if the IPTRs are approved.

Although these debates may be more far reaching than the SMC review, its recommendations could have dealt broadly with the challenges that we face on Orkambi and Perjeta, which are the ability to negotiate and to make a drug available while those negotiations take place in the interim accepted period. I urge the Government to knock heads together on the Orkambi and Perjeta issues and to get on and implement the SMC review recommendations so that we can stop or limit such situations from happening in the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I say gently to members of the public—I am about to tell you off—that we do not permit applause from the public gallery. I know why you are doing it, and it happens regularly, but I am afraid that it is not permitted.

17:26

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I congratulate Maurice Corry on bringing the debate to the chamber. Members will have noticed that my colleague Alison Johnstone waited until the last minute, but she has to chair a meeting tonight. She is our Green health spokesperson, so I will refer to her work along with my personal reflections on the issue.

I have great admiration for the achievements of the pharmaceutical industry—but there is a “however” coming: public health should not be in the hands of profit makers. I am uncomfortable

with what I see as the wheeling and dealing that is openly talked about, as we are talking about individuals. My attention has been drawn to the just treatment campaign and the Crown use licence, which Alison Johnstone has written about. Although I accept that it is not a quick solution to anything, there is a feeling that the scrutiny and public concern that might be directed at companies as a result of that intended approach—which is a legal mechanism that allows patent law to be overridden and another producer to be put in place—might result in reduced prices.

Alison wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to say that she was concerned about a

“lack of clarity about the basis on which the Scottish Government intervenes directly in decisions about drug approval and purchasing.”

On the specific issue under consideration, she wrote:

“Understandably, many cystic fibrosis patients feel that it would be inequitable for the Scottish Government to intervene in order to make cystic fibrosis treatments which act on one genetic stratification available, but not ... so for others.”

I am not a legal or health person, but I understand about the Montgomery review, which the Scottish Government is committed to implementing. It is incredibly important that decisions are medically led. There is a role for parliamentarians and politicians, but people will be concerned about what is being seen as the politicisation of access to medicines.

Alison touched on that point in her letter to the cabinet secretary, when she wrote that we have an

“opportunity to develop a robust, transparent and equitable approval process which is open to scrutiny. One of the review’s recommendations is that a comparative review of arrangements for the introduction of medicines in other countries should be undertaken.”

She went on to commend

“New Zealand’s Pharmac model, and the potential to adapt aspects of that model”

in the Scottish context.

Members have alluded to some of the existing drugs, and I suspect that there will be another one next week and another in future months. We must get the process right—that is most important. I am very uncomfortable when we talk in terms of sums of money when we are talking about people’s lives.

I have a particular interest in the matter because of my constituent Hannah McDiarmid. I was delighted when she and her mother came to the Parliament as my guests in January. Many members signed a motion about her. She was a University of the Highlands and Islands student of

the year who achieved a BA honours degree in Gaelic language and culture at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, for which she studied latterly via distance learning. Hannah was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at 17 weeks, and her health has deteriorated in the time that I have known her. Most recently, she has been coughing up blood due to a condition that I am unable to pronounce, and she has just managed to get her lung function back up to 50 per cent after it declined to 45 per cent recently. She spends two hours a day undergoing physiotherapy to clear mucus from her chest and lungs. Hannah has given me a list of her condition’s symptoms. She is a charming young woman, and she is very grateful for the assistance that she gets from her nurse, Lesley Blaikie. Her mother is also deeply affected by the condition.

There are other drugs, but the situation regarding this drug is very important and we must get the process right. As someone has said, what price a life?

17:30

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Maurice Corry on securing the debate.

A few weeks ago, with Alex Neil—who, of course, is the former health minister who made Kalydeco available for cystic fibrosis sufferers in Scotland—I organised a cross-party meeting of MSPs. The meeting was attended by a substantial number of MSPs from every party in this Parliament, many of whom are here tonight. It was hugely encouraging that, for things that matter, we can put aside our differences and join together to fight in a common cause.

I organised the meeting because of my constituent Kelli Gallacher, who has cystic fibrosis. She is a bright, intelligent and happy young woman. She recently bought a home with her boyfriend, much to the delight of her parents, because it meant that she left the house. She works for the local council and has dedicated her spare time to raising awareness of cystic fibrosis and raising thousands of pounds to improve the day-to-day lives of those who have the illness.

The debate is happening—[*Interruption.*] I promised that I would not cry. The debate is happening because Kelli and hundreds of others cannot get access to Orkambi—a drug that is available to CF sufferers in Ireland, America and the Netherlands and that would enhance Kelli’s life.

It does not stop at Orkambi. The next generation of medicines that will effectively ensure that those with CF live to a ripe old age are just round the corner. We have an historic opportunity literally to save lives. As Alex Neil described, instead of one

drug at a time, the pharmaceutical company is offering a portfolio deal for all the drugs—something that already exists in Ireland. The company is in discussion with the NHS in England and Wales, but it is not discussing the same terms in Scotland. Instead of talking about one drug, which is all that the Scottish NHS seems to want to do, we should be talking about having the opportunity to access them all.

On 25 April, Alex Neil and I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, asking her to meet Kelli Gallacher and a cross-party group of MSPs. I wrote again on 30 May, following our cross-party meeting, with the same request. I received a response on 31 May, which said that the cabinet secretary's diary was too full for her to meet MSPs but that she would meet Kelli. That was welcome.

I received a further email from the cabinet secretary's office yesterday, simply noting the second letter. When I contacted her office immediately to ask whether that was it, I was told that she had nothing to add. I was genuinely disappointed, but I was happy to receive a letter about 2 hours ago—just before the debate—outlining the peer-approved clinical system tier 2 process, which enables individual patients to apply for drugs, and the method for appealing decisions. As Alex Neil said, that process is helpful but it takes time, and time is something that CF sufferers do not have. Orkambi was licensed two years ago and is still not available. The cabinet secretary has now agreed to meet Kelli, which is great, and Alex Neil and I have been included in that meeting, but only at Kelli's request.

I thank the *Daily Record* for its moving and robust campaign in support of Kelli Gallacher and all the cystic fibrosis sufferers in Scotland. Today, the *Daily Record* highlighted Kelli's pleas to the First Minister, and I encourage members to read Kelli's letter to the First Minister. The *Daily Record* has also previously covered comments from Gordon MacGregor, who is Kelli's consultant. I absolutely understand John Finnie's approach, which is that the clinicians need to be on board. Gordon MacGregor briefly spoke out about access to medicines. He has had to stand by helplessly while

“a young man is dying in a hospital bed while the drug which will save his life sits, untouched, along the corridor.”

Presiding Officer, when Alex Neil and I agree, you know that something extraordinary is happening. We need the Scottish Government to get things moving, because a portfolio deal plus interim access now is what is needed. I will finish with Kelli Gallacher's words:

“We shouldn't have to fight for drugs that could save our lives. Some of us don't have time to wait.”

17:35

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, thank Maurice Corry for bringing this important debate to the chamber this evening. I remind the chamber that I am a registered nurse and convener of the cross-party group on lung health. We will meet this evening—I am sure that we will be late starting—and cystic fibrosis and Orkambi are on the agenda for us to discuss. I have sought permission from the Presiding Officer to exit the debate before the final speeches, as I have that long-standing engagement to attend to.

I acknowledge the work of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust. That work needs to be at the forefront, and the trust has done a lot of important work to raise awareness of the issues.

Cystic fibrosis affects 70,000 people across the world, including 30,000 in the United States and 900 here in Scotland, which seems like a wee drop in the ocean. Our ability to give people access to the medications that can support them to have a healthier, more prolonged life out of hospital and our ability to support those people's families need to be considered. There are new disease-modifying drugs such as Orkambi and others that will present soon.

I will not go into detail about cystic fibrosis, but I will say that it is a condition that affects not just the lungs but the pancreas and the ability to digest protein, carbs and fats. The amount of medication that people have to take every day can be high—as Miles Briggs mentioned, it can be up to 30mg. Patients need to demonstrate a real commitment to adhere to therapy—both the meds and the adjunctive care of physiotherapy and exercise—in order to manage their health. It is important to consider that when we look after those patients.

When I spoke to my sister Phyllis, who is a respiratory nurse consultant, and her colleague Stuart Little, they assured me that they were working hard with all their patients and colleagues. Phyllis said that for drugs such as Symdeko, which will be available, and Orkambi, which could become available, the research is progressing and evidence is increasing—the research is looking really good. It is showing that those medications have a direct ability to support the way that protein is activated, or pushed, in order to make salt and water transfer across cell membranes. When we engage with health professionals and clinical consultants, such as Gordon MacGregor, and hear about the work that they are doing, it is clear that we need to make sure that they are part of the process.

When I heard Alex Neil and Jackie Baillie speak about the drugs being managed in Ireland with a portfolio approach, my first thought was, “How can we introduce a portfolio of drugs when some of

them have not even been presented yet?" I was concerned about the safety aspects of introducing a portfolio of meds. However, when I met the Vertex representative, I was assured that each drug would still be presented as an individual drug, even though a portfolio option could be approved. I think that it would be worth considering such an approach as an interim approach while negotiations are taking place.

I would be interested to know how the Scottish Government will support and engage with the drug company, the NSS and the Scottish Medicines Consortium. It is the year of young people and we want to promote the extension of young people's lives—my sister says that some people are living to the age of 51—so it would be great if we could support more folk with cystic fibrosis in Scotland to have healthier, out-of-hospital lives.

17:40

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Maurice Corry for bringing the debate to the chamber today and I recognise the work of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust.

I also thank Robert Barker, who is a constituent of mine, for allowing me to tell his remarkable story of receiving Orkambi at what he thought would be near the end of his life. His father is in the public gallery today, along with many others. They are close family friends, so I have seen the progress of Robert's improvement, as well as the other side of it.

Robert said:

"I started Orkambi in January 2017. Prior to this, my health had been deteriorating over the years due to my cystic fibrosis. I was having more regular hospital stays, more chest infections and I was now experiencing many other problems associated with the condition."

He went on to tell of the progressive challenges that he had faced. He said:

"In 2016, I spent nearly 100 nights in hospital receiving strong IV drugs to treat the symptoms. On the few occasions I was well enough to stay at home, I was hooked up to oxygen 24/7 and I could not even get around my own home without being severely out of breath. I could no longer look after my family, go to work, drive or walk anywhere. On top of this, I had to spend most of my day doing my daily treatments, taking nebulisers, doing physio and taking a long list of other medications. By the end of 2016, my weight had dropped to 50kg and my lung function had dropped to a very serious 17 per cent, despite all the medication and care I was receiving. I knew that I didn't have long left, and that my wife and I would soon have to explain this to my six-year-old daughter. Fortunately, this all changed in January 2017 when I was prescribed Orkambi on compassionate grounds, as a lung transplant was not an option for me. After three to four weeks on Orkambi, my lung function had risen above 30 per cent and I was able to come off oxygen. After three months on the drug, it had climbed to 45 per cent and I was able to return to work full time. By the summer, I felt great and I was able to take my

family on holiday—I had my life back. A year on from first taking Orkambi, my lung function is nearly 60 per cent and my weight is up to 65kg. I am able to do everything I need to do physically. I have had no chest infections, no hospital stays and no sick days from work. On top of this, my doctor has reduced several other drugs that I had to take even before I got really sick. Orkambi is an excellent drug—it may not be effective for everyone, but it should be available to all CF sufferers who may benefit from it, as many of them are running out of time like I was."

I am sure that everyone in the chamber will agree that Robert's story is both heart rending and filled with hope for the future. He can now spend time with his family and lead a normal life, which, before Orkambi, would simply not have been possible.

As Robert and many others in this chamber and beyond have stressed, Orkambi might be expensive and does not work with all patients, but the price of the drug should not prevent it from being available on the NHS. It is important to face the fact that this is about young children, how they develop and how they need a life, as Maurice Corry said. It is about preventing progressive deterioration.

It is disappointing that the strong group of MSPs from across the parties was denied a meeting with the cabinet secretary in the response from her private secretary. In my short six years at the Scottish Parliament, I have never been to an evening meeting with MSPs that was so well attended and passionate.

I, for one, whole-heartedly condone approving Orkambi for all those who might have their lives saved, and I urge members, including those not in the chamber, the cabinet secretary, in particular, and the minister who is here today to listen to calls from across the chamber and beyond. I urge them to ensure that Robert's pleas—and those of many others—for Orkambi to be made available are recognised.

17:45

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): As other members have done, I commend Maurice Corry for securing the debate and for speaking with passion and authority, and I commend all the other members who have contributed.

The debate is timely, because it precedes cystic fibrosis week. I pay tribute to the Cystic Fibrosis Trust for its significant campaigning efforts across Scotland and beyond.

It has been a difficult and emotional debate. Who can fail to have been moved by the stories of the lived experience of people being articulated so powerfully by MSPs across the chamber?

Maurice Corry spoke about Mr and Mrs O'Neill and their 18-month-old boy, and their hopes and concerns for him as he grows up with cystic fibrosis. Similarly, Miles spoke about Freya Landers, and we also heard about the remarkable young women Hannah McDiarmid and Kelli Gallacher, who will be meeting the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport soon.

I am also pleased to see Ralph Barker in the gallery. I also know him and how close Claudia is to Ralph and his boy. I thank Claudia for saying what was quite a distressing thing for her to have to say.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, minister. I did not want to intervene, but we must stop using first names in the chamber. You have been doing it throughout.

Aileen Campbell: I apologise, Presiding Officer. Like everyone else, I probably got caught up in the emotion. I did not intend to disrespect Parliament, but I wanted to make sure that I put on the record my acknowledgement of Claudia Beamish's sincere contribution about somebody she knows and who is dear to her and her family.

The tributes and testimonies that we have heard this evening highlight the debilitating impact that cystic fibrosis can have, the limitations that it puts on life, and the need for us to think clearly about how to help in the best way that we can. Much of the consideration of how best to help people who are living with cystic fibrosis has been based on the availability of the appropriate medicines. The Government absolutely shares members' desire to increase the availability of medicines that patients in Scotland need. That is why we have sought to reform the systems that are in place and to introduce changes that enable us to get medicines to the people who need them. We want to build on those positive changes.

Between 2011 and 2013, the combined acceptance rate for orphan and cancer medicines was 48 per cent. However, from 2014 to the end of 2017, under the new approach that we brought in, the Scottish Medicines Consortium approved 79 per cent of such medicines. The SMC provides a clear and consistent process for consideration of medicines that are being appraised. From that appraisal, the SMC determines whether a medicine should be accepted for routine use in the NHS. That decision is—rightly—-independent of ministers and Parliament.

Although such positive changes are all well and good, I know that the members here tonight and, more important, people who have cystic fibrosis and whom we have heard about in the debate are interested in the fact that Orkambi is not routinely available on the NHS anywhere in the United Kingdom. To clarify the position that I think

Maurice Corry suggested, I note that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has not accepted Orkambi. That is why, last year, the cabinet secretary strongly encouraged Vertex to enter discussions with NHS NSS. We are pleased that that has happened. Those confidential talks are on-going and we hope that, as part of the discussions, Vertex will make its best offer on price and indicate that it will resubmit to the SMC as soon as possible.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): Like many other members, I have been contacted by constituents who take a close interest in the issue. In my case, they are the grandparents of a five-year-old girl who has cystic fibrosis. One of the main features of today's debate has been discussion of how we can reduce the amount of time between the drug being given the green light—if it is given the green light—and being available for use. I ask for the minister's assurance that that will be addressed by reducing the timescale as much as possible.

Aileen Campbell: I will go on to talk more about some of the improvements that we seek to make. Again, that is why it is important that members from across the chamber send a clear message to Vertex to ensure that it resubmits to the SMC as soon as possible.

The cabinet secretary also recently updated the Health and Sport Committee on the further work that we are undertaking to deliver on the recommendations from Dr Brian Montgomery's review of access to new medicines, in order to maximise the benefits to patients. In doing so, we continue to work closely with our partner organisations, stakeholders, patient representatives and the pharmaceutical industry. I acknowledge the call from MSPs for us to do that.

The use of real-world evidence that captures the outcomes of medicines is also becoming an increasingly important element of our work, and was one of a number of data-related recommendations in the review. That is particularly relevant in this debate, as there can often be uncertainty about the robustness of the clinical evidence where the clinical trial data is limited due to small population sizes, so we look to build our use of data to support that.

Anas Sarwar: Can the minister clarify by what date we will have full implementation of the review findings?

Aileen Campbell: I undertake to ensure that we get information to Anas Sarwar about timetables for implementation, if he would find that useful.

We will continue to support access to new medicines through our new medicines fund. Officials are also actively examining an improved negotiating function that seeks to ensure that NHS

Scotland pays the same effective price for medicines as the rest of the UK.

We recognise that the current appraisal pathway is less well suited to medicines for very rare conditions, so we are seeking to include a wider assessment of lived experience, including quality-of-life issues. That is an important element, given the need to have a holistic picture of how a condition impacts upon the life of the individual. I know that, despite the progress that I have outlined and the plans that we have in place to improve that further, that provides limited comfort to patients who need access to medicines that are not yet available. However, it is important to recognise that an SMC “not recommended” decision does not mean the end of the journey for patients. There is, as members have said, a new process in place that enables doctors to request medicines on an individual patient basis for medicines such as Orkambi.

The new peer approved clinical system—PACS—tier 2 process was introduced at the start of this month, and replaces the old individual patient treatment requests. It introduces refreshed national decision-making criteria, standardised processes and a new national review panel to enhance consistency of decision making right across the country. The new system requires doctors to present an evidence-based case to demonstrate their opinion that the patient can achieve a clinical benefit that is comparable to or better than the benefit to the population that was previously considered by the SMC. Importantly, the guidance is explicit that the cost of the medicine must not form any part of the decision-making process, and that arrangements should be only for exceptional cases.

That is why we again urge Vertex to do everything it can in its discussions with NHS NSS to find a solution at a fair price, and to do so as quickly as possible, in order that the SMC can consider a new submission.

Alex Neil: The crucial issue, and the one that seems to be preventing real discussions between Vertex and NSS, is that Vertex is saying that the Scottish Government will not approve portfolio discussions because that is “outside due process”. Can we get clarification? Will the Scottish Government, in preparation for the meeting next week between Vertex and the chief pharmaceutical officer, instruct the pharmaceutical officer to open discussions based on the portfolio discussion? That seems to me to be the sensible thing to do, and it would open up the way for an interim arrangement. It is absolutely crucial that that happens.

Aileen Campbell: I clarify that confidential talks between Vertex and procurement officials are ongoing. I know that Alex Neil remembers from his

stint in office that there are always considerations that the Government has to make in order to seek to do the best we can for the people whom we serve. I know that the portfolio approach sounds appealing, but we must recognise that that approach involves the NHS potentially entering agreements to purchase unlicensed medicines, the safety of which remain unproven. Despite assurances, the risk exists and it is real, so our Government must consider that. That approach also risks stopping the NHS from getting access to future medicines that may be better and offer better value. I will ask officials to look at the issue, but we need to recognise that there is a risk in purchasing unlicensed medicines and in reducing the NHS’s ability to get access to future medicines that might offer better value. We need to be mindful of those things, but we will ensure that—

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Aileen Campbell: I have taken a number of interventions, so I would like to bring my remarks to a conclusion. I will certainly ensure that Jackie Baillie also gets the information that I have promised to Mr Neil on portfolio discussions.

The debate is not easy to respond to. The stories and testimonies that we have heard are powerful and real, and I pay tribute to the individuals who have campaigned to make a difference, because they are inspiring.

However, I hope that the Government’s determination is clear to create a system that is fair and consistent, but which has within in, where needed, the agility to respond to exceptional clinical need, and greater cognisance of lived experience. Those measures illustrate progress.

On behalf of the Government, I look forward to continuing to work with members across the chamber on this important issue, as members have called for. Where I have pledged to get back to members with additional information, I will do so as quickly as I can.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I commend members for their contributions.

Meeting closed at 17:55.

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