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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Communities and Local Government

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The first item of business is portfolio questions. In order to get in as many questions as possible, I prefer short, succinct questions and answers to match.

Asylum Seekers (Local Authority Support)

1. **Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives from the Home Office to discuss the resources that Scotland's local authorities require to support asylum seekers. (S5O-02479)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government believes that the Home Office must fund all local authorities properly and equitably for the crucial role that they play in supporting people seeking asylum. Local authorities in Scotland should not be treated differently from those in England.

I have made my deep concerns about the issue clear to the immigration minister in meetings and correspondence, most recently at a four nations meeting on asylum on 15 October.

Sandra White: Although the Scottish Government stepped in recently to assist with asylum seekers facing destitution in Glasgow, that has not been a permanent solution. Can the cabinet secretary provide any further information on negotiations with the Home Office regarding equity of funding for Glasgow City Council as a designated Home Office dispersal area?

Aileen Campbell: I believe that we need a long-term, sustainable solution to ensure that local authorities that are participating in asylum dispersal are properly funded and that people who are at the end of their asylum process are not left facing destitution and homelessness. We will continue to raise the issue with the Home Office, and we note that the Welsh Government and English local authorities have made similar concerns known. I am deeply disappointed that the Home Office has so far chosen not to act on those concerns, leaving the Scottish Government, local authorities and the third sector to pick up the pieces. I look forward to tomorrow's debate when

members of the Parliament will also get a chance to raise their voices on this issue.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I very much welcome the minister's approach and her sincerity on the matter.

Does the Scottish Government agree with the Glasgow City Council task force that there is no legal barrier to the use of public funds to provide emergency accommodation for people who are themselves designated as having no recourse to public funds?

Aileen Campbell: What we have done, within the competencies that we have, is to provide third sector partners with the ability to help people who are facing destitution. Recently, I visited Positive Action in Housing and provided additional funding to help the charity to cope with the influx of people that it is having to deal with, in light of decisions that have been taken on asylum seekers in the city.

As I said, it is about ensuring that our local authorities are treated equitably. The Home Office needs to listen to that call if it wants local authorities to continue to provide homes for people who seek refuge and asylum in our country.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I agree with the cabinet secretary and Sandra White that all local authorities should be treated equally.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that forced destitution of asylum seekers, who are already vulnerable, is an inhumane policy that should be reversed? Will she indicate to the Parliament that accommodation and advocacy, in particular, should be given to asylum seekers who have been refused asylum by the Home Office?

Aileen Campbell: I absolutely agree with Pauline McNeill's sentiment as she articulated it.

I underline that we provide funding to services for asylum seekers who live in Scotland, to help people to avoid destitution, where we can. We are also providing an additional £130,000 to strengthen advocacy and advice services that support people who are seeking asylum and people who are at risk of eviction.

As I said, tomorrow's debate will give us an opportunity to flush out more of those issues.

Housing (Dumfries Town Centre)

2. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the development of better housing in Dumfries town centre. (S5O-02480)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): The Scottish Government has allocated almost £88 million over

this parliamentary session to support the delivery of Dumfries and Galloway Council's affordable housing priorities. The funding may contribute to the council's aim to improve town centre living, through its town centre living fund, in relation to which a priority is increasing the supply of affordable housing.

We also support the Scottish empty homes partnership and specialist empty homes officers to provide assistance in returning empty homes to use across Scotland, including in Dumfries and Galloway.

Colin Smyth: I am aware that the minister has met the Midsteeples Quarter project in Dumfries. Its aim is to take ownership of and refurbish disused buildings to create enterprise space and housing above shops. Does the minister agree that such a project is entirely the type of community-led fightback against the decline of our town centres that the Government should support? Will he consider making the project a pilot scheme that is backed by Government investment, so that the Midsteeples Quarter has the funds to buy back the properties?

Kevin Stewart: I pay tribute to those who are active in the Midsteeples Quarter group and to folks who have been involved with the Stove Network as a whole. Their community activism is leading to change in Dumfries. I was pleased that Dumfries and Galloway Council held an empty homes conference the other week, which Colin Smyth and I attended. I am pleased that the council is using money that it has raised from council tax on second and long-term empty homes to provide a fund to ensure that new homes in Dumfries town centre become a reality. I will keep a close eye on that.

I ask other local authorities to look at what Dumfries and Galloway Council is doing, because that sort of work needs to be replicated elsewhere and others could follow that council's example.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Finlay Carson—I will let the question stretch to include Galloway.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am sure that the minister will agree that it takes a combination of factors to create a vibrant and sustainable town centre for residents and businesses. The United Kingdom Government's budget announced a package of rates relief for English streets that is worth £900 million. We would love such a package in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would like to hear your question.

Finlay Carson: Does the minister agree that such a policy would invigorate business and housing in town centres?

Kevin Stewart: In Scotland, we have had the small business bonus for some time.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): For 10 years.

Kevin Stewart: Yes—for 10 years, in fact. Businesses the length and breadth of Scotland have benefited from zero or reduced rates. We have put in place a fair package of measures to ensure that small businesses continue to thrive.

Beyond that, we will work closely, as we always have done, with Scotland's Towns Partnership in promoting the town centre first principle. I will, of course, continue to meet people throughout the country to see where we can export best practice in order to reinvigorate Scotland's town centres.

Planning Appeals (Consideration of Local Views)

3. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government how the views of local communities are taken into account by ministers during consideration of a planning appeal. (S5O-02481)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): Our planning system is inclusive, and the views of the local community are fully taken into account, along with all relevant material considerations, in reaching decisions on all planning appeals, including those of national importance on which Scottish ministers normally make the final decision.

Liam McArthur: Last month, Orkney Islands Council rejected applications by Hoolan Energy for two proposed wind farm projects at Hesta in South Ronaldsay and Costa in the west mainland. Both proposals have given rise to considerable public concern locally, regarding the potential impact on landscape, habitats, wildlife and amenity. Given that Hoolan Energy has confirmed that it is appealing the council's decision, can the minister explain what opportunities there will be for objectors to make their case to those in Government who are responsible for considering the appeals? What assurances can he give that the views of the local community will not simply be overridden in the process?

Kevin Stewart: Obviously, I cannot comment on live applications, as Liam McArthur and other members know. A reporter, who is aware of the time-critical nature of the appeals, has been appointed to make a decision on both appeals. All representations that are made by the local community on the planning applications are forwarded to the reporter by the planning authority, so that they can be fully taken into account in the determination of the planning appeals.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Is the minister aware that many of my constituents in Stepps have no confidence in the current appeals system, particularly following the Scottish Government reporter's decision to allow a planning application that had been refused to go ahead on green-belt land at Hornhill and Gateside farms in Stepps? Does he agree that we must value our green-belt areas, listen to the concerns of communities and respect local decisions?

Kevin Stewart: As Elaine Smith knows, I cannot comment on any live, on-going application. However, reporters are appointed to take the views of all, including, as I have just explained to Mr McArthur, the views of communities. Reporters work independently and they take account of the local development plan and material considerations in reaching their decision. They are independent and they listen to communities. I think that our system is fair in that regard, and that it takes account of all views.

Participatory Budgeting

5. Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how successful it considers participatory budgeting has been since the implementation of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. (S5O-02483)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): Supported by the Scottish Government's £6.5 million community choices fund over the past four years, participatory budgeting has gone from strength to strength, and has established itself firmly in Scotland. Last year, more than 70,000 people voted for the things that matter to them in their communities, with almost 1,000 local organisations securing funding.

Participatory budgeting has been very successful in supporting the aspirations of the 2015 act by putting decisions about how we invest in communities into the hands of the people who live and work in them.

Michelle Ballantyne: Is the Government aware that delivery of participatory budgeting is taking up significant local government officer time, and therefore has a significant cost attached to it? What support will the Scottish Government supply to assist with on-going delivery of participatory budgeting?

Aileen Campbell: I have just outlined that we have supported the policy with significant resources. The decisions that people are making are better decisions not only for their communities but for the local authorities. We are ensuring that we support local authorities through the process.

Participatory budgeting has grown across the country, and is enabling and empowering communities to take decisions. Most people would agree that that is a good thing; I hope that local authorities also agree that it is a good thing.

Furthermore, we are providing support for communities of interest. Glasgow Disability Alliance published the "Budgeting for Equality" action research report and is helping to ensure that people with disabilities can take part in making important decisions.

The key thing is that we want to ensure that everybody gets a chance to have their say in how decisions are made where they live, because that often results in better decisions for the community.

North Ayrshire Council (Meetings)

6. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it will next meet North Ayrshire Council. (S5O-02484)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): Ministers and officials will continue to regularly meet representatives of all Scottish local authorities, including North Ayrshire Council, to discuss a wide range of issues, as part of our commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland.

On 24 August, I met representatives of North Ayrshire Council at Ardrossan academy to announce the roll-out of free sanitary products across all schools, colleges and universities in Scotland. One of the representatives was the council's chief executive Elma Murray, who is set to retire soon. I record my thanks to her for her unstinting commitment to the people of North Ayrshire and to public life.

Jamie Greene: I also place on the record my thanks to Elma Murray, and I wish her successor the very best of luck.

The reality is that, like many local authorities, North Ayrshire Council has been on the receiving end of Scottish Government cuts in recent years. In the most recent Scottish budget, it got a £5 million reduction in its funding. [Laughter.] I am glad that Kenneth Gibson, it appears, thinks that that is funny. Given that we now know that the Scottish Government's block grant is going up, does the cabinet secretary agree that there is really no justification for further cuts to North Ayrshire Council's budget?

Aileen Campbell: It is Halloween, and Jamie Greene certainly had a nightmare with that supplementary question, because despite the rhetoric from the Conservatives, austerity is far from over. In fact, we continue to experience cuts from the United Kingdom Government. Our

resource block grant has been cut and for 2019-20 is almost £2 billion lower, in real terms, than it was in 2010-11. That is the reality.

Jamie Greene should realise that this Government continues to treat local government fairly, and he should look a bit closer to home for where the cuts start.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): When the cabinet secretary next meets North Ayrshire Council, will rates be discussed? Last week, Jamie Greene claimed that North Ayrshire businesses pay 65 per cent more than businesses in the rest of Scotland, with payments of £225 million, and said that non-domestic rates should increase in line with the consumer price index rather than with the retail price index.

Can the cabinet secretary confirm that North Ayrshire Council's non-domestic rates income was £41.665 million in 2016-17, that businesses pay the same non-domestic rates as the rest of Scotland and that—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A shorter question, please.

Kenneth Gibson: Can she confirm that in the current financial year, the CPI is being used and that Jamie Greene needs to do his homework on such matters before attacking the Scottish Government?

Aileen Campbell: It seems that Jamie Greene has a continuing run of nightmares in articulating his views. I confirm to Mr Gibson that businesses in North Ayrshire pay the same level of non-domestic rates as those in other local authorities across Scotland. It is simply nonsense to suggest that they pay 65 per cent more.

Businesses are also benefiting from the most generous package of rates relief that is currently available in the UK. Statistics that were published only this morning confirm that it is estimated that more than 3,000 businesses in North Ayrshire will benefit from our small business bonus scheme in 2018-19. That benefit will be worth £5.8 million to the local economy. I am sure that Mr Gibson will make good use of those positive facts and figures.

Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board Strategic Plan (Implementation)

7. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what role local government will have in implementing the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board's strategic plan. (S5O-02485)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): The Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board is independent and will develop its own plans for how to engage with local government in implementing its strategic plan.

The board's membership includes local government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities representation, and ministers expect the board to ensure that local government continues to be fully involved and engaged. The Scottish Government supports the board's stated commitment to on-going engagement, including with local government. Ministers believe that local government is an essential element of the good governance of Scotland, and remain committed to working closely with COSLA and other local government interests.

John Scott: Local government is mentioned twice in the 47-page document, which presents a complex structure for shaping skills development. There is a real risk of confusion about the role of local authorities. Therefore, I ask what specific actions the Government will take to make local influence in skills development stronger, not weaker, and what role local authorities will play in that.

Aileen Campbell: I reiterate the fact that the board's membership includes local government and COSLA representation: the very heart of the board's decision making includes local government. I expect the board to continue to ensure that local government contributes fully and is fully involved and engaged.

We, along with our partners in local government, have a joint governance role across Scotland, so when economics, enterprise and skills are on the agenda it is important that local government continues to be involved and to have an active role. That is exactly what we expect from the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board's plan.

Planning (Minority Groups)

8. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, as I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that planning policies and decisions do not discriminate against minority groups. (S5O-02486)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): Under existing legislation, ministers and planning authorities are required to perform their statutory functions in a manner that encourages equal opportunities. The Planning (Scotland) Bill also includes provisions to ensure that all members of the public have a greater say in planning the future of their places.

Monica Lennon: Travelling showpeople often live in caravans or mobile homes, so when development is proposed on neighbouring sites it is important that impacts such as noise and vibration take account of the different types of

accommodation that could be affected. Does the minister agree that planning policies and decisions should help to protect and facilitate the traditional way of life of showpeople, and is he satisfied that current planning guidance and practice are adequately protecting them?

Kevin Stewart: I spoke at some length about Gypsy Travellers and showpeople at stage 2 of the Planning (Scotland) Bill this morning. The quality of our places matters to all of us, and planning has a responsibility to ensure that the needs of all our communities are understood and met. Planning can play a vital role in ensuring that Gypsy Travellers have safe and secure places to stop or settle. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that Gypsies and Travellers are properly involved in planning for the future of their places. As I said to Ms Lennon and the other members of the Local Government and Communities Committee—the offer is open to all members—if they want to know what the Scottish Government is doing in terms of research to get that right, I am more than happy to provide that information.

Affordable and Social Housing (Contribution to a Low-carbon Future)

9. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is ensuring that the housing that is built as part of its affordable and social house-building programme contributes to a low-carbon future. (S5O-02487)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): All projects that are funded through the Scottish Government's affordable housing supply programme are required to meet current building standards. Over and above that requirement, a higher level of grant is available for homes that are built to a higher and greener standard. New homes in Scotland are now producing about 75 per cent less carbon dioxide emissions than homes that were built to the 1990 standards. Of the energy performance certificates issued for new homes, 95 per cent achieve an A or B rating for environmental impact.

Gillian Martin: Will the minister update Parliament on the Government's thinking on three issues that will drive down carbon emissions: the potential to set a net zero carbon standard for new buildings, through use of carbon offsetting measures; enabling, in new buildings, infrastructure for electric-vehicle charging; and ensuring that all new builds are as energy efficient as technology allows, thereby reducing the need for future retrofitting?

Kevin Stewart: We are investigating the idea of a net zero carbon standard for new development as part of our current review of building regulations.

On 19 October we launched the plugged-in households initiative, which aims to widen access to electric vehicles, including through housing associations and car clubs, so that communities across Scotland can share the benefit.

A review of the energy standards that are set by building regulations started earlier this year and includes a focus on reducing energy demand. It will also consider the extent to which it is practical to future proof new buildings to support further change, such as decarbonisation of heat that we use in our buildings.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have to move on to the next set of portfolio questions. I apologise to Gil Paterson, who is the only member whom we did not manage to reach.

Social Security and Older People

Social Isolation (Older People)

1. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce levels of social isolation among older people. (S5O-02489)

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): By the end of the year, we will publish our social isolation and loneliness strategy. Our draft strategy was published in January 2018 and it identified that older people should feature as a prominent group within the strategy, as we recognise that they are more at risk of being affected by social isolation and loneliness.

I have recently been meeting a wide range of stakeholders and partners on the details of the final strategy and last week we published the analysis of the consultation responses. In addition, we have included a new national indicator for loneliness in the national performance framework.

Rachael Hamilton: Social isolation is likely to cost the national health service as much as £12,000 per affected person and it can be as significant a risk factor for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Due to lower levels of connectivity, it is very likely that those who live in rural areas may experience isolation and loneliness. Given the high burden on the NHS, what steps is the Scottish Government taking to combat social isolation, particularly in rural areas?

Christina McKelvie: We are working on all those aspects of the impact of social isolation, especially in relation to rural strategies. One of the aspects and a key theme that is emerging now is rural connectivity and rural transport projects. I had a lovely visit with Christine Grahame to the Gallowheels project a few weeks ago, which is a

great example of such projects. A key element in the work that we are doing on social isolation and loneliness is about connecting people and especially about looking at rural areas and at how we can work together collaboratively to answer those questions.

Social Security Spending

2. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the estimates for social security spending in the Scottish Fiscal Commission's May 2018 economic and fiscal forecasts. (S5O-02490)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): As set out in the Scottish Fiscal Commission Act 2016, the Scottish Fiscal Commission's independent forecasts of devolved social security expenditure are used to inform the Scottish Government's budget. The Scottish Fiscal Commission will publish its next "Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts" report, which will include updated forecasts for social security expenditure, on 12 December to accompany the Scottish budget for 2019-20.

Alison Harris: In the past, ministers have sometimes hinted that they do not agree with the Scottish Fiscal Commission's forecast. Last year, for example, the finance secretary argued that the Scottish Fiscal Commission was more cautious than the Scottish Government on income tax forecasts. Will the cabinet secretary therefore confirm whether the Scottish Government has plans to do any of its own modelling or projections of welfare spending or will she confirm that it will always use the Scottish Fiscal Commission figures?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We have a team of officials who work on forecasting and they also work closely and share their information with the Scottish Fiscal Commission. Our modelling and forecasting as a Government has been there right from the beginning of the social security process.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission's forecasting is what has to be used for the budget. I accept that it is challenging to forecast what the expenditure will be on some of the social security aspects, because they are the result of what is a new power for Scotland. We are delivering, for example, best start grants, which are new, and we are encouraging take-up more than the current Westminster system does. However, the member can be assured that Scottish Government officials work closely with the Scottish Fiscal Commission and share all their forecasting and modelling information.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary has said in recent written answers that the Scottish Government could be paying over £2.5 million to the Department for Work and Pensions to deliver Scottish choices and that the full year of delivery of carers allowance by the DWP will cost the Government £5.9 million. Can the cabinet secretary set out how much she expects to pay the DWP in the remainder of the current session of Parliament to deliver Scotland's devolved benefits?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Mr Griffin is quite right to point out that we have to pay the DWP for the choices, such as Scottish choices, that we make. Split payments in universal credit will be another aspect that we will need to look at.

I do not have the information for the current session of Parliament because we are still negotiating with the DWP, and on split payments, for example, we need to establish what we as the Scottish Parliament would like to see before we get into detailed negotiations with the DWP. However, I will be sure to keep the Parliament and particularly the member up to date with our work on that process.

Loneliness and Isolation (Older People)

3. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it can give to older people who find themselves lonely and isolated. (S5O-02491)

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): We are supporting a range of initiatives to tackle social isolation and loneliness among older people, including funding for the Age Scotland helpline, support for the development of men's sheds and support for a range of local community-based projects that bring older people together to spend time with each other. I look forward to building on that further with an older people's framework, which we will launch in 2019 to help to focus on promoting a positive image of older people, tackling prejudice and ensuring that older people's voices are recognised in decisions on their services.

John Mason: The minister may be aware of the Bellgrove hotel in my constituency, which is in effect a private hostel with a lot of older, lonely and isolated residents. It is believed that the hostel management intercepts the residents' mail, which makes them even more lonely and isolated. Is there anything that the Government can do for the residents?

Christina McKelvie: Mr Mason is right: I am well aware of the Bellgrove hotel. Any interception of another person's mail without their consent is a criminal activity, and as such the concerns should be reported to the police.

As the member is aware, the Bellgrove hotel is a privately owned hostel and is not typical of the homelessness accommodation in Glasgow. If he can give me more details of his constituents' concerns, I will be happy to pass them on to the housing ministers.

Homelessness is a clear example of how people can become socially isolated and lonely, and we are recognising and taking a real interest in such people's needs during the process of the social isolation and loneliness strategy.

Older People (Definition)

4. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it defines "older people". (S5O-02492)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Be careful, minister. *[Laughter.]*

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): The Scottish Government focuses mainly but not exclusively on the over 50s, while recognising the importance of removing barriers to positive ageing for everyone. That age is chosen because, for many, it is a point at which life circumstances start to change in ways that have implications for the future—for example, in relation to working patterns, caring responsibilities and long-term health conditions.

As I mentioned earlier, we will publish next year an older people's framework, which is being developed with older people's organisations. It will cover combating negative stereotypes and celebrating the contributions that all citizens can make, whatever their age.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not know whether Ms Fabiani is happy with that definition.

Linda Fabiani: I had not realised until now that our minister is actually elderly—*[Laughter]*—and some of us are positively ancient. I suggest that the age be looked at as part of the strategy, because I am sure that few 50-year-olds feel that they are elderly.

People are living longer lives these days, and I have quite often seen in East Kilbride serious problems where carers who are themselves elderly are looking after daughters and sons who have disabilities or learning difficulties. That is a particular kind of caring and it needs a different approach and special consideration. There is a group in my constituency of East Kilbride, which many members are aware of, that has done a lot of work on the issue over the years. I ask the minister to come and hear at first hand what some of the issues are.

Christina McKelvie: If only I could rescind the offer of the cake that Ms Fabiani ate at my significant birthday party recently—I would take it

back off her. Anyway, she makes a very important point about carers. We all know that, under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, all carers now have rights to have their individual needs and personal outcomes identified. For the first time, they also have the right to support for any identified needs that meet the local eligibility criteria. A major focus of those new rights is that support, information and advice for carers should be tailored to their individual circumstances and characteristics, including any needs that are due to their age. I would be absolutely delighted to visit Ms Fabiani and her constituents in East Kilbride.

Rent Arrears (Universal Credit Recipients in Mid Scotland and Fife)

5. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what support it can provide in response to the reported increase in rent arrears among universal credit recipients in the Mid Scotland and Fife region. (S5O-02493)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We expect to spend over £125 million in 2018-19 on welfare mitigation and measures to help protect those on low incomes. That includes more than £60 million in funding for discretionary housing payments, of which over £50 million is to fully mitigate the bedroom tax. As a result of cuts by the United Kingdom Government, welfare spending will be reduced in Scotland by £3.7 billion in 2020-21. The Scottish Government cannot mitigate cuts of that scale. Mounting evidence shows that universal credit claimants are more likely to be in rent arrears. The very limited measures that were announced in the UK Government's latest budget do not address the fundamental flaws in this discredited system.

Mark Ruskell: I thank the minister for that robust answer. In Stirling, even though universal credit was introduced for just a few months last year, it led to an increase in rent arrears of 15 per cent while, in Fife, there was an 82 per cent increase in crisis grant expenditure as a result of universal credit. It is clear that the policy is putting huge strain on families and is a vindictive attack on our welfare state. Is the cabinet secretary confident that the funds that are available within the constraints of the Scottish Government's budget will be enough to cope with universal credit roll-out and in particular the managed migration that will take place in the next year?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I pointed out in my original answer, the scale of the welfare cuts that are coming to Scotland make it impossible for the Scottish Government to mitigate them. The £3.7 billion-worth of cuts are simply too enormous to mitigate. The member is absolutely right to point

out that universal credit is an entirely flawed system. The budget this week was an opportunity to stop the roll-out of universal credit, end the benefit freeze, scrap the absolutely inhumane and indefensible two-child policy and fully reverse cuts to work allowances, but that opportunity was not taken. I spent this morning speaking to constituents in Edinburgh, where universal credit will be rolled out soon, and they are frightened of the consequences that are coming. It is a shame that the UK Government did not respond to that this week.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): What is the cabinet secretary's reaction to reports that CFINE—Community Food Initiatives North East—which is one of Aberdeen's biggest food banks, has warned that, to ensure that it can cope with the full roll-out of universal credit in Aberdeen, it may no longer be able to supply other organisations in the north-east of Scotland, and that it has called this a "scary time"?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is an extremely concerning time. The fact that we are seeing increased rent arrears, which Mark Ruskell pointed out, and increased numbers of people going to food banks in the areas that have been served by universal credit is testament to how bankrupt the system is. I am concerned to hear Gillian Martin's reports about what is going on in her constituency and with that food bank. I fear that it may not be the only food bank in Scotland that is suffering such demands.

General Practice (Community Link Worker Recruitment)

6. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what progress it is making with its commitment to recruit up to 250 community link workers to work in GP surgeries by the end of the parliamentary session. (S5O-02494)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Responsibility for community link workers sits in the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport. Community link workers continue to form a core component of primary care reform. Our commitment to delivering 250 link workers by 2021-22 is on track. As part of our support for the new GP contract, the Scottish Government is funding integration authorities to deliver that commitment. Integration authorities have set out how they will do that in their primary care improvement plans.

Annie Wells: Despite a pledge by the Scottish Government to recruit 250 community link workers by the end of the parliamentary session, it was revealed last month that, as of September, just three workers had been recruited in nine months,

taking us to a grand total of 56. Not only are we making little headway in terms of numbers, but 38 out of the 56 workers in post are on fixed-term contracts, some as short as 18 months. These are vital health workers who can connect people to non-medical sources of support in the community.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please get to your question.

Annie Wells: What action will the minister take to drastically improve this extremely slow progress?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I pointed out in my original answer, we are on track to meet our commitment of 250 workers. I know that Annie Wells is fully aware of that, because of written answers that she has received from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport on progress in that area. We are determined to fulfil our commitment of 250 workers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Maureen Watt, briefly, please.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary join me in congratulating Aberdeen health and social care partnership, which has concluded a contract with the Scottish Association for Mental Health to provide 20 link workers across all 30 city GP practices for a two-year contract, with a one-plus-one option, to the value of £0.7 million? Is that not an example of the money being there and of the fact that it requires will, commitment and drive at a local level to make the policy happen?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I absolutely welcome the work that has been going on. Maureen Watt is quite right to point to that improvement, which shows that the Government remains on track to fulfil its commitment of 250 workers. I am pleased to hear about the development in the member's constituency.

Social Security Scotland (Information Technology Budget)

7. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what budget it expects Social Security Scotland to have for IT for the rest of the parliamentary session. (S5O-02495)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): On 1 September 2018, Social Security Scotland became an executive agency of the Scottish Government. The agency's 2018-19 budget for information technology is expected to be £3.4 million. That budget will grow in future years, as systems and processes to support further devolution go live.

The outline business case for the agency for social security in Scotland was published in April

2017. It estimated the costs of the agency at a steady state of between £144 million and £156 million per year. Social security devolution is a complex and multiyear programme of activity. The process is not yet complete, and systems and processes are being developed. The social security agency will not reach a steady state until welfare devolution is complete.

Liam Kerr: It is a huge undertaking and, after the Scottish National Party's failures on common agricultural policy funding, the Police Scotland IT system and NHS 24—I could go on—people will be very nervous. What specific lessons were learned from those examples to ensure that the new system will work?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Audit Scotland report that looked at a number of public sector IT projects, what is going on in social security and the new powers that are coming to the Scottish Parliament said that we are making “good progress” with Social Security Scotland and our social security programme.

We recognise that it is a complex area. It is the biggest change to devolution since this Parliament was set up. That is why we are pleased with our progress with the programme, which remains on time. The progress that we are making with Social Security Scotland can only go well if we have good co-operation from the Department for Work and Pensions. I hope that Liam Kerr will encourage the DWP to hold to its commitments on IT, as that will ensure that we deliver to our timetable.

Vulnerable Older People (Protection from Bogus Callers and Rogue Traders)

8. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what measures are in place to protect vulnerable older people from bogus callers and rogue traders. (S5O-02496)

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): The Scottish Government is committed to protecting and supporting vulnerable older people.

We continue to work with Police Scotland, trading standards and partners including Neighbourhood Watch Scotland and Crimestoppers to raise awareness, provide practical advice and encourage the reporting of any suspicious activity.

Following a report by the nuisance calls commission on empowering and protecting individuals, we have implemented an action plan to protect people from scam callers, which includes the funding of call-blocking units for vulnerable consumers. We have also implemented preventative measures through the nominated

neighbour scheme to build resilience and encourage communities to look after each other.

Jeremy Balfour: Sadly, doorstep scammers commonly target older people. Only last week, an 86-year-old lady from Livingston lost hundreds of pounds when bogus traders called at her home. Will the minister commit to further discussions with her justice colleagues on the issue and consider additional awareness-raising campaigns, particularly on darker nights?

Christina McKelvie: Absolutely. That is a great point to bring up. As Jeremy Balfour will know, Crimestoppers leads the if in doubt, keep them out national doorstep crime campaign. There are many other aspects of the work that we do with Police Scotland and other organisations. I would be happy to brief my justice colleagues and see how we can make progress on that issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions. I apologise to Joan McAlpine and Alexander Stewart, whose questions we did not reach. We have to move on to the next item of business, as time is very tight in the following two short debates. I will not have a pause; I will fill in time by singing or talking while members get to their seats.

Ferry Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-14520, in the name of Jamie Greene, on concern over the state of Scotland's ferry services.

14:41

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank those on the ground who care passionately about delivering Scotland's ferry services, those who work on board our vessels in our ports and harbours, and those who weld the sheets of our future fleet. However, I do so in the knowledge that they are working in a difficult climate under contracts that are largely outside their control, on vessels that they often did not choose or design, and in a climate in which their repeated calls for adequate investment go unnoticed and ignored.

Our criticisms will reflect the strength of feeling across Scotland and are focused squarely at the door of the Government, which, after a decade in office, has yet to deliver a sustainable, fit-for-purpose fleet and network of ferries in Scotland. The Government is presiding over an ageing fleet of vessels, no real standardisation between vessel and port, and little to no resilience within that fleet, and it is dogmatic in its pursuit of directly awarding contracts.

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): If Jamie Greene is making assertions about the role of the Scottish Government, does he recognise that, over the past decade—certainly since 2010—we have faced increasing austerity? Jamie Greene might ignore this, but there is a £1.9 billion real-terms cut in the Scottish Government's budget in 2019-20 as result of his Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Greene, do not fret: I will give you your time back. However, you must not get up and stand while another member is speaking, anxious though you are.

Jamie Greene: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

My goodness, the minister has an absolute cheek to stand up and tell members that it is somebody else's fault that the ferry services in Scotland are not up to scratch. It is always somebody else's fault. I advise the minister to listen not just to what we have to say, but to what members across the chamber from every part of Scotland have to say. Listen to us and to the people out there who have to rely on those services.

We have initiated this debate because of those voices across Scotland—not experts in the marine industry, but people to whom the ferry services

matter the most, such as the farmer from Arran who contacted me, who cannot get his livestock to the market on the mainland because of a lack of commercial space on the vessel, and the tourist whom I met sitting in a queue outside my office in Largs. He had come down from Glasgow for the day to take his family to Millport for a day trip, but had spent three hours queuing to get a seat on a vessel that takes eight minutes to cross to Cumbrae. Even worse, Monty Phillips, who is a carer, was forced to sleep in a grit bin overnight because the last ferry to Dunoon was cancelled and the terminal staff would not even let her sleep in the waiting room. There are outrageous and shocking stories of people being let down.

It is a fact that, since the Scottish National Party came to power, there have been more than 70,000 ferry delays or cancellations across Scotland. That is 177 sailings a week in Scotland being disrupted.

It is timely that this debate comes when the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee has just released a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity—I notice that he is absent from the debate—that summarises the committee's findings on ferry funding as part of its budget scrutiny. The committee's report makes for difficult reading, and I advise the minister to read it very carefully. Perhaps if he had read it, he might have lodged a more realistic and self-aware amendment than the one that he lodged for today's debate.

The REC Committee was told that ferry services and ferry infrastructure have suffered from a lengthy period of underinvestment. In evidence to the committee, the managing director of CalMac Ferries Ltd described this summer's disruption as

"the worst ... in eight years".—[*Official Report, Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee*, 30 May 2018; c 3.]

On back-up vessels, Mr Drummond told the committee that CalMac has no spare assets and no spare fleet and that its staff are working at their absolute capacity just to maintain the status quo. If a single vessel is out of service, the entire network is disrupted for weeks at a time, as was the case when the MV Clansman was out of service. To be fair to Mr Drummond, it is not CalMac's fault. It is working with the contracts and the fleet that it has available to it.

The committee held a number of evidence-taking sessions with a wide range of stakeholders. Their concerns included the lack of vessel capacity for vehicles; investment not matching increased growth from tourism; insufficient integration with mainland transport; and a focus on procuring larger, more expensive vessels, which limits the ability to move vessels between one port and another or between one service and another.

I know that there are a wide range of views in Parliament on who should or should not operate our ferries, but when the Government ran a tender for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service contract, the process was complex, inflexible and expensive, and it discouraged innovative bids.

The committee noted that investment in port infrastructure and vessels is not meeting demand. The chief executive of Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd told the REC Committee that the annual investment needed was £30 million on vessels and £20 million on harbours. It has been receiving just half that amount, so it is no surprise to anyone that there is so much disruption to our fleets.

There is a wider problem. Last year's Audit Scotland report, "Transport Scotland's ferry services", warned that the lack of long-term investment and vision, along with skyrocketing subsidies and limited public finances, could be detrimental to the long-term viability of Scotland's ferries. Audit Scotland said:

"There is no Scotland-wide, long-term strategy ... Transport Scotland will find it challenging to continue to provide ferry services that meet the needs of users within its allocated budget."

That is not the future; I argue that it is already the case. In that context, I am pleased to agree with Labour's amendment.

The Conservatives share Labour's aspiration for a Government that produces a 30-year plan for shipbuilding and ferry replacement. That is a sensible addition to the debate, and I ask that other members support that call, too.

The industry has been saying that for years. The Scottish Government even acknowledged that itself as far back as 2011 in its ferries plan, when it said:

"We are faced with significant and growing increases in both resource and capital costs to maintain existing ferry services ... it is clear that we are not able to deliver all of our ... improvements to ferry services".

Since the introduction of the road equivalent tariff, the reality is that demand has simply outstripped supply. Who is suffering the most? Our island communities.

The Government's amendment does one thing: it deletes my motion. It notes that people are concerned and frustrated. Today's award for the biggest understatement goes to Paul Wheelhouse.

We called this debate today because enough is enough. For too long, the Scottish Government has ignored repeated warnings from the industry. The public are sick and tired of the disruption, the delays and the cancellations. They were promised new vessels; they have not arrived. They asked for one type of vessel; another was delivered. They were promised that their needs would be put

first; instead, they are queuing for hours on end to get on a ferry home.

I urge all members to listen to the many anecdotes that they have heard that come from the length and breadth of Scotland, and rather than pretend that the status quo is acceptable, as the Government wants us to do, to stand up and stick up for their island communities, because that is what we will do.

I move,

That the Parliament raises its concern over the provision of Scotland's ferry services, which have seen significant delays, disruptions and cancellations over the last 12 months to the detriment of Scotland's island and rural communities; notes that CalMac Ferries' managing director described this summer's disruptions as the worst in eight years and admitted that there is currently no resilience in the network based on the lack of additional available vessels in case of breakdowns; recognises the comments made by Audit Scotland in its 2017 report, *Transport Scotland's ferry services*, in which it called for a new long-term ferry strategy; recognises the necessity of ferries in boosting tourism and providing vital public services to island communities, and calls on the Scottish Government to remedy these failings and restore public confidence in Scotland's ferry network.

14:49

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government recognises that our ferry services must strive to match the aspirations of the communities that they serve by providing lifeline services and opportunities for economic growth. Indeed, our amendment makes reference to lifeline services; such a reference is missing from Mr Greene's motion.

In the round, our ferry services perform well. To date, the Scottish Government has invested more than £1.4 billion in ferry services around Scotland, and in the year to date, performance under our three public sector contracts sits at above 95 per cent. I commend the work of ferry operators' crew and staff in maintaining high levels of performance in circumstances that we all recognise are often quite challenging. We should not lose sight of that success, but we cannot be complacent. I acknowledge that Mr Greene welcomed the contribution of CalMac staff, but that does not feature in his motion. The Government's amendment makes clear our recognition of the efforts of crew and staff. Members who are considering whether to vote for our amendment can register their support for the staff of CalMac, who provide a key lifeline service, by voting for it.

Given the financial pressures that we continue to face, it is important that we have an honest conversation about how we prioritise investment in our ferry services, so that we target resources as effectively as possible. Those pressures persist,

and this week's United Kingdom Government budget will result in a real-terms cut of £1.9 billion compared with the 2010-11 budget. Conservative members might shake their heads, but it is a fact—

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

The minister has twice said to the chamber something that is manifestly untrue. He has stated twice that the Scottish Government's budget has been reduced by £1.9 billion since 2010. I suggest that he reads the Fraser of Allander institute analysis that shows that the Scottish Government's total budget—resource departmental expenditure limit, capital, financial transactions and annually managed expenditure—is higher than it was, in real terms, in 2010. Does he accept that he has misled the chamber?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was a long intervention, so I will give you the time back, minister.

Paul Wheelhouse: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I absolutely do not accept Mr Fraser's assessment. I say with respect to Mr Fraser that to refer to financial transactions funding as if those funds can be deployed to support resource budgets for ferry services is to mislead the chamber. He ought to consider his own remarks.

The resource budget has been reduced by £1.9 billion relative to the 2010-11 budget. We should not forget, either, that Mr Greene's party's tax proposals for the current year would have reduced Scotland's resource budget by a further £500 million relative to our tax proposals. I presume that Mr Fraser disputes that, too. Mr Greene accused me of cheek; in return—I will be diplomatic and polite—I accuse him of extensive brass neck in his approach to the resourcing of our ferry services.

Since assuming responsibility for the ferries brief this summer, I have been committed to engaging with all our stakeholders to ensure that their views are understood as we have those discussions. Mr Greene might like to let me know on how many occasions the Conservative Party has asked for additional funding in Scottish Government budget rounds since we took office in 2007.

I would like to reflect briefly on our activity to date. We published our ferries plan in 2012. That was an ambitious long-term strategy for investment in ferries. Despite the Tories' age of austerity, we have invested more than £1.4 billion in supporting lifeline ferry services across the network.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul Wheelhouse: I am short of time, but I will try to let Mr Scott in later.

That support has delivered the introduction of new routes, service enhancements and strengthened timetables, and it has enabled additional sailings to be provided in response to increasing demand. We are delivering, but it will take time to deliver in full. Eight new ferries have been added to the CalMac fleet since 2007, and a further two new vessels have been commissioned. That represents a total investment of £215 million in new vessels. In addition, we have recently committed to provide a further vessel to serve the Islay route.

Not insignificantly, five of the last six orders for new vessels have been awarded to Scottish yards. We see the contribution that ferries make to our supply chain and to securing growth in our maritime economy. All five of those Scottish-built vessels deploy hybrid and dual-fuel technologies to reduce the damaging effect of greenhouse gas emissions. We recognise the important contribution that ferries can make to our overarching strategy to reduce emissions.

Our programme of harbour investment includes £62 million of investment in the Clyde and Hebrides network over the past five years. Such investment ensures that ports remain safe and are fit for purpose. When funding allows, we invest in enhancements that enable a wider range of vessels to access the harbour, which adds resilience and flexibility and provides modern and accessible facilities for passengers. More recently, in response to the impact of disruption on customers, which we recognise, we introduced a £3.5 million resilience fund to support CalMac in its obligation to maintain vessels on the Clyde and Hebrides network.

We have achieved much, but we must continue to look forward and build on our investment to date. Transport Scotland is revisiting the ferries plan as part of the strategic transport projects review. We will also revisit the vessel replacement and deployment plan to ensure that it continues to reflect current circumstances and demands, and anticipates future demands. In particular, it will have to reflect the huge success of RET and the impact on passenger demand on some routes. We will work in close consultation with key business partners and community stakeholders.

We will engage with the trade unions on the work ahead to reflect on the operational impact of any proposals on staff and crew.

Tavish Scott: Will the minister give way?

Paul Wheelhouse: May I bring in Mr Scott, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. You are closing, so if do you, you are—

Paul Wheelhouse: I thought that I had additional time, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have, but you had only six minutes and you are getting just slightly over that.

Paul Wheelhouse: Okay. I apologise to Mr Scott.

Those are quite properly long-term measures. Given the scale of investment, it is important that we take an informed, strategic and balanced approach.

I have been listening carefully to island communities since assuming responsibility for ferry services and I put on record that I understand the very real challenges that are faced as a consequence of service disruption, particularly at the level that was experienced during the summer.

I am determined that we must get this right. In addition to closely monitoring operational performance, we are developing an action plan with our ferry operators that will ensure that appropriate measures are in place to improve the customer experience when things go wrong.

We will continue to challenge operators to communicate proactively with customers when there are delays. They must also, with our support, ensure that appropriate measures are in place to ensure that lifeline services are not compromised.

I look for support from across the chamber for developing that action plan. In supporting my amendment, members can ensure that the commitment is recorded and that I will be held to account for any delays in its implementation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please conclude and move your amendment, minister.

Paul Wheelhouse: I thank you for your forbearance, Presiding Officer. I ask members to support my amendment.

I move amendment S5M-14520.4, to leave out from “raises” to end and insert:

“notes the concerns regarding the provision of Scotland’s lifeline ferry services to island and rural communities and acknowledges the frustration to customers in the event of service failures; further acknowledges the significant actions that have been taken to address those concerns to support the continued socioeconomic development of Scotland’s remote and island communities; recognises the commendable work of ferry operators’ crew and staff in maintaining high levels of performance; notes the ongoing review of investment plans and priorities, including the development of an action plan to further address resilience issues on the Clyde and Hebrides network; recognises the continued significant levels of investment in upgraded infrastructure; acknowledges the commitment to an inclusive approach to vessel design and procurement,

which includes communities, public sector partners and trade unions, and acknowledges the positive contribution that ferries procurement is making to Scotland’s ambitious strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions generated by its ferry operations.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Colin Smyth to speak to and move amendment S5M-14520.3. You have five minutes, Mr Smyth.

14:56

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): It is no exaggeration to say that Scotland’s ferry network provides a lifeline for communities. In evidence to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, Western Isles Council described it as

“central to the sustainability and wellbeing of the island communities”

and Argyll and Bute Council said that the network is

“the very means to survive and prosper.”

The summer of discontent on Scotland’s ferries, which was caused by a lack of capacity and resilience, has wreaked havoc in our island communities. Poor planning and Scottish Government investment that is not meeting growing demand mean that our ferry network is not fit for purpose—despite the at times heroic efforts of staff to keep the ferries going.

More than half of CMAL’s fleet is more than 20 years old, and more than one quarter is more than 30 years old. The ageing fleet has meant that there are more breakdowns and higher maintenance costs.

CalMac’s submission to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee states that, on the Clyde and Hebrides route,

“Between 2012 and 2017 the number of cars carried has grown by 37% to 1.43m per year and passenger numbers have risen by 17% to 5.2 million per year.”

The introduction of road equivalent tariff fares on some routes has resulted in drastic increases in use and has created serious capacity issues—most notably on the Stornoway to Ullapool route, with residents of Lewis and Harris often being simply unable to book ferries to the mainland.

We all welcome the introduction of RET fares, and I hope that the Scottish Government will make good on its overdue pledge to introduce them on northern isles routes, but that must be accompanied by the necessary investment in capacity in order to meet growing demand.

Transport Scotland might have calculated and funded the cost of lost ticket revenue that has been caused by RET, but it has not properly assessed the impact on capacity of increased use, and the current ferries plan falls short as a result.

When the plan is revisited, a commitment to increase capacity to meet growing demand will be needed in the forthcoming budget.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does Colin Smyth think that there is scope for varying fares, so that there could be a slightly higher fare at peak times, to try to even out demand?

Colin Smyth: I do not think that that would go down particularly well with the people who would be looking at the prospect of higher fares. The issue is that the RET, which is welcome, has increased demand, so we need to increase capacity to meet demand in order to follow the policy through.

Beyond revisiting the ferries plan, there are shortcomings in how the Government procures investment in ferry services. The poor track record is clear in the decision to replace the MV Isle of Lewis with one large ship rather than with two ropax vessels, as was recommended by the assessment that was done under Scottish transport appraisal guidance and supported by the local community. That not only required significant adjustments to the ports; it also weakened resilience on the route through reliance on a single ship.

The approach to ferry services has to be better thought through and needs greater forward planning. As the motion notes, Audit Scotland recently highlighted the need for a new long-term strategy for ferries to take into account the many proposed developments to services and assets. In fact, a decade ago, the then Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee called on the Scottish Government to produce a national ferries strategy that would detail long-term plans for routes, for ferry replacement and refurbishment, and for ports infrastructure, accompanied by an implementation and delivery plan with a clear programme of funding. Ten years later, the Government has not delivered that, which is causing uncertainty for those who provide services and the communities who rely on them.

We need a long-term ferries strategy more than ever, but it must be accompanied by a national shipbuilding strategy. Shipbuilding and the jobs that it delivers remain important to the Scottish economy. A national strategy setting out a 30-year programme of work would help to create jobs, to develop and retain skills and expertise in Scotland's shipyards, to encourage investment and to improve the efficiency with which yards can produce ferries, which would create the steady drumbeat of consistent work that they need.

We also need to look again at the tendering process for shipbuilding contracts, with failings having been exposed by the current delays in

delivery of the two new hybrid ferries. It seems that the flawed procurement process produced a design that the insurers were simply unwilling to underwrite, which has resulted in significant changes to the design. Despite that, and the impact that such delays have had on communities, the Government has been slow to intervene by bringing all sides together to find a way forward.

Paul Wheelhouse: Will Colin Smyth take an intervention?

Colin Smyth: I will, if I have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have not, really.

Colin Smyth: Overall, the Government does not seem to recognise that ferries—as all public transport does—provide a vital public service. That lack of recognition is summed up by its ambivalence towards public ownership, as seen in its failure to take the northern isles contract in-house permanently.

To add insult to injury, the Government's decision to charter the MV Arrow from Seatruck Ferries Ltd in order to meet growing freight demand on the route means that staff are being paid less than the national minimum wage. That needs to be tackled in future contracts, which will mean setting out unequivocal requirements on pay and conditions for all staff and, ideally, tendering for more than two chartered freight vessels, in order to avoid such situations arising in the first place. That would also facilitate capacity increases and allow for seasonal changes in demand.

A contract must also include a claw-back provision to ensure that surplus profits are returned to the public purse, and must protect the jobs and conditions of all existing staff.

In conclusion, I say that it is clear that, across our ferry network, we are seeing problems that could have been avoided with better planning and more strategic investment. The Scottish Government must take action to improve not only how ferries are run, by bringing lifeline services into public hands, but how investment projects are planned, procured and managed, by creating a long-term strategy for ferries, and a national shipbuilding plan to support it.

I move amendment S5M-14520.3, to insert at end:

“; recognises that ferry capacity must be able to meet demand and that the funding and purchasing of new ferries needs to be transparent, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward a long-term ferry strategy, accompanied by a comprehensive implementation and delivery plan, and a national shipbuilding strategy detailing its long-term ambitions for the sector and setting out a 30-year programme of work.”

15:02

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):

The Scottish Green Party will support the Conservative motion tonight. It is very difficult to take issue with it, although I always try to take issue with everything that members of the Conservative Party say. However, the motion narrates a number of facts—significant delays, disruptions, cancellations, there being no resilience in the network and the lack of additional vessels—and calls for a long-term ferries strategy. That said, there is, in the motion, also a lack of self-awareness. Certainly, there is some denial about the impact of the budget settlement.

At various points, we have heard complaints about RET which, overall, is a success, although some aspects must be addressed. However, we heard where the Conservatives are really coming from when they stepped into the area of—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Excuse me, Mr Finnie. Could you pull your microphone towards you a wee bit?

John Finnie: We heard where the Conservatives are really coming from when we heard their references to tendering. I certainly align myself with Colin Smyth's comments about the Scottish Government's lost opportunity regarding the northern isles route. How such opportunities are treated sends a very clear message about its direction of travel and its philosophy. I have to say that that was a missed opportunity.

The Scottish Greens will also support the Scottish Labour Party's amendment, because it narrates very important proposals, including on an implementation and delivery plan and a 30-year programme of shipbuilding work. That is important when considered in the context of the duration for which a ferry can survive.

I also want to thank the staff for their hard work. There is no doubt that the drip feed of negative comment that comes out has an impact, and we need to understand that increased funding is important. The Green amendment, which was not selected for debate, mentioned increased funding being essential. I am very happy to explain where we would get that funding from, because it is important that people understand that. We would not have spent £6 billion on two roads, or £0.75 billion on the M8, or money on the Aberdeen western peripheral route.

The replacement vessel on the Ullapool to Stornoway route might not have served Lewis and Leodhasachs well, but it has certainly served Lloyds Bank, which has benefited very much from it. The deal will cost taxpayers £67 million by 2022, at which point the bankers will still own the vessel and there will be a requirement to negotiate

a new lease. When we read about funding models elsewhere, that is certainly not a model that we would want to see replicated.

The Government has a number of questions to answer regarding the situation, but Jamie Greene alluded to the report from the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee that came out this morning. It is significant that the Highlands and Islands transport partnership noted that no new major vessels entered the service between 2001 and 2011. That has a significant impact when we are looking at the lifespan of vessels, and there is a collective responsibility to resolve the situation. If difficulties had occurred on our road network such as have occurred on our ferry network, the issue would have been given a much higher profile.

I welcome the fact that we are debating the issue. What I do not welcome is the fact that I read about CMAL describing things as being "commercially confidential" and so on: it is public money. I hope that Conservative members will keep on nodding when I say that I want a ferry service that is run exclusively in the public interest—or not for profit, as we would say elsewhere. I see that their nodding has stopped.

The reality is that we need to ensure that we have a coherent plan and a coherent method.

15:06

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I thank Jamie Greene for using limited Opposition time to debate this important issue. It is a very current issue, as the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity just two hours ago, as part of our pre-budget scrutiny. As a fellow member of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, Jamie Greene will be aware of the troubling evidence that has been presented to members by operators and island communities, highlighting that there are potential long-term problems for our ferry services just over the horizon.

I will quote from the letter, which is on the committee's website, so members can see it for themselves. The first recommendation in the letter to the transport secretary—the minister may not have seen it—

Paul Wheelhouse: I have.

Mike Rumbles: The minister has seen it. That is good. At the first bullet point, the committee

"Calls on the Scottish Government to respond to criticisms of the lack of resilience in the fleet and to the evidence that CMAL has received less than half the amount of funding required over the last 10 years."

That is the result of the committee's investigation.

The effects of transport delays can be damaging for local economies and alarming for travellers. Significant delays to lifeline ferry services can severely impact on island communities, and the damaging effects of delays are often multiplied as repairs take place over weeks or months. In the worst cases, livestock and fresh produce are turned away at ferry terminals, essential supplies and service vehicles are held up, and vital income from tourism is lost.

Of course, delays are far less likely to be a problem if ferry operators have the resilience, flexibility and capacity to move passengers on to other available services and vessels. This year, the Scottish Government welcomed the principles of fair funding for local ferry services for the northern isles, as set out by my Scottish Liberal Democrat colleagues from Orkney and Shetland. By definition, the Scottish Government has accepted the responsibility to support vital ferry links for our island communities and to help operators to fund the snowballing cost of planned and unplanned maintenance.

Repairs at sea can get us only so far, and there is certainly no quick fix for our ageing ferry fleet. This summer, CalMac has reported that for many of its vessels, with nearly half its ferries already being beyond their 25-year life expectancy,

“and having been used intensively during those years of service—the risk of mechanical failures and breakdown is significant. It also takes longer to get older boats back into service when things do go wrong”.

I strongly agree with the motion and with Colin Smyth’s amendment. In fact, I believe that they do not go far enough. We urgently need a long-term plan for our ferry services, and a programme of investment that will provide transport security for island communities for decades to come.

The Scottish Government must set out clear targets for improvement and—this is important—work towards those targets must begin immediately. The northern isles lifeline ferry services are in a tendering process now and the Government must ensure that the islands’ future freight export needs are built into the contract specification. Industry has given the information that is needed by the Government, so the minister must do that. Will the minister say in his summing up that he will ensure that that will happen?

The level of Government engagement—past and present—in our lifeline ferry services has not been good enough. We are in danger of letting a bad situation get worse. We will vote in favour of the Conservative motion and the Labour amendment, but we cannot accept the words of the Government amendment, which seem to us to be somewhat complacent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. We are very tight for time, so there is absolutely no more than four minutes for speeches. Jamie Halcro Johnston will be followed by Keith Brown.

15:10

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As an Orcadian with farming interests in Orkney, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important subject.

Around Scotland, a range of problems face people who rely on our ferry services. The ferry routes are often essential links to our island communities, with few, if any, alternatives for travel or freight. They are a lifeline for people who seek access to public services to operate their businesses, or simply to travel for work or leisure.

It is unfortunate that there is such strong evidence of a lack of strategic direction in the Scottish Government’s provision of support to ferries across the country. Since Audit Scotland drew attention to that issue in 2017, there has been little change. We are left with a disjointed and fundamentally unfair patchwork of provision, funding and investment, in which island communities receive very different levels of service.

My experiences are obviously of the northern isles service, which is currently operated by Serco NorthLink. It is welcome that the Scottish Government is proceeding with retendering the northern isles ferry contract, following the announcement that the contract notice was published at the end of September. The contract will run for eight years and set the shape of the northern isles’ future services into the late 2020s. It is only right that the Scottish Government be ambitious about the future of the service. Although Labour and Green colleagues will disagree, I hope that the tendering process will bring an end to the SNP’s preoccupation with having a public sector operator for the northern isles routes.

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 was intended to support a new approach to Scotland’s island communities by recognising local needs and local opinion. However, it is striking to me that the Scottish Government did not recognise earlier that there is no groundswell of support in the northern isles for getting rid of tendering. We should see the new tendering process as an opportunity to set in motion the changes that are vital to keep the service operating successfully. That includes taking a view on the long-standing complaints about the accommodation and facilities that are available to passengers on the service. It means recognising the needs of business in moving freight, and it means ensuring that the service is

able to adapt to the changing needs of the islands in years to come.

When our ferries are in for refitting, their replacements must meet the needs of local people and local businesses, which has not been the case recently. The stand-in for MV Hamnavoe was a freight boat with limited passenger facilities, and which was entirely unsuitable for disabled passengers.

John Mason suggested that fares could go up at peak times for some routes. One issue that looms over the discussions is the SNP's manifesto commitment to introducing lower ferry fares for the northern isles, which has been fought for by island representatives and promised by the SNP at election after election. However, this summer the Scottish Government's deadline came and went; in Shetland, the promise has been only partially delivered and in Orkney, fare reductions have been kicked into the long grass.

Paul Wheelhouse: Will the member give way?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I am afraid that I do not have time.

The Scottish Government has tried to shift the blame on to private operators, but the need for those discussions was well known in advance. The Government had ample time to discuss proposals with all stakeholders, but a mess was left when discussions were commenced only at a late stage in the process. The commitments were not simply a gift from ministers, but were the result of lengthy campaigning for equality with the support that has been offered to other islands, and they reflect the needs that the islands' geography has created.

Unfortunately, that situation followed the ugly stramash around fair funding for internal ferries, when ministers could not bring themselves to repeat in Parliament their party's pledges. It was only after the voices from the community, the island councillors and MSPs across the parties could no longer be ignored that a one-year deal was worked out.

Paul Wheelhouse: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Halcro Johnston has no time.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: However, the islands still have no certainty about future funding of their internal ferries. They need the Scottish Government to meet its commitment to provide a settlement, with a clear indication that it will be regular and not simply a one-off win with a new fight every new year.

In Orkney and Shetland, the security of our ferry services has been hard won by local action against what often appears to be an indifferent

Scottish Government in Edinburgh. Our island communities, like so many that are dependent on ferry services, deserve better.

15:14

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): There is no question but that disruption and delays for local communities are causing frustration, especially where these are lifeline services. I am sure that both Kenneth Gibson and Alasdair Allan, speaking for their communities, will also highlight that fact.

There is also no question but that vessel procurement is a long-standing and continuing issue for the Scottish Government. I would urge the Scottish Government to cast its net wide and to think as imaginatively as possible to help CalMac procure the additional vessels that are required, not least to support the resilience that has been mentioned. As anybody who has been involved in it will know, it is an extremely difficult market. That means that we need to redouble our efforts to secure that additional capacity.

However, there is nothing in the Conservative motion that helps that. There is nothing about investment. There are no figures. There is no commitment to anything at all, which is standard fare from the Conservative Party. There is also a complete lack of self-awareness. I am somewhat surprised that the Labour Party and the Green Party are willing to ally themselves with the Conservatives, when they explicitly acknowledge that their party's real agenda is to further privatise the ferry network.

Of course, back in 2014, better together told us that we were going to have a huge national ship-building boom when it won the referendum. What has happened to that? There is also no indication in the Tories' motion about where they would find the money for that. We can only assume that they would rather spend money on tax cuts than provide direct ferry services for our communities up and down the country.

The simple fact, which was not acknowledged by the Conservative Party, is that the Scottish Government has a very proud record of supporting the communities that are dependent on ferries. As members have heard, that includes the building of new ferries—the MV Loch Seaforth, the MV Finlaggan and the other eight vessels that the minister mentioned.

Many areas of Scotland have benefited from investment in our harbours and ports. There seems to be no awareness among Conservatives that many of the ports are not owned by CalMac or the Scottish Government, and investment in that regard has to come from local authorities and other organisations. We should also be extremely

proud of the huge investment by the Government in the ferries themselves.

No doubt, the Government's record of investment and support is something to which the Tories object. They would like to see such support cut back and privatised. They do not like the idea of direct awards; they would rather consider where we might make savings from the ferry network than provide new investment.

I recognise that the on-going commitment to lifeline ferry services is reflected in the £1.2 billion that the Scottish Government has invested. I cannot recollect, over the past 10 years, the Conservatives proposing a single budget amendment on investing more in ferries—not one such proposal.

I cannot even recollect the Conservatives raising the issue regularly. The Liberal Democrats have raised it—perhaps not Mike Rumbles, the wannabe member for Tory central, but certainly Tavish Scott and Liam McArthur have been regular advocates for ferry services in their areas. That is fair enough: their communities rely on ferry services. As someone has said, work done by those two members helped to get a further advance for people in the northern isles in last year's budget.

There has been investment in the road equivalent tariff for all ferry routes in the Clyde and Hebrides network, and there has been investment in new vessels. There was £41.8 million for the MV Loch Seaforth, there are the two new dual-fuel vessels, at a cost of £106 million, and there is the MV Catriona, which cost £12.3 million. There has also been substantial investment in harbour infrastructure in Ullapool, Stornoway, Brodick and Kerrera.

None of that investment has been mentioned by Conservatives when they had the chance to do so in this debate. Of course, Conservative Party members have questions, but they forget that one of their colleagues, Patrick McLoughlin MP, came to Scotland a few years back and said that the problem with our transport infrastructure here is that there has not been investment for decades, forgetting that he himself was a transport minister in 1989.

This Government has had to pick up the mantle on transport infrastructure, whether we are talking about roads, ferries or ferry infrastructure, that previous Governments failed to pick up. The Government has done a good job. There is no question but that there is more to do, because we all want to see improved services. I support the amendment in Paul Wheelhouse's name.

15:19

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate our ferry services, but given that I have only four short minutes, Presiding Officer, you will forgive me if I cut to the chase.

There is a need for a Scotland-wide, long-term ferry strategy for not just the Clyde and Hebrides network but all routes—one that covers investment in harbours and new ferries and considers how we get the best return from the money that we spend. Audit Scotland identified that need in 2017, but the Scottish Government has yet to act on all its recommendations.

At a time of public funding constraints, spending on ferries has grown by 115 per cent in real terms, but the funding has not been for infrastructure. That is a huge amount of money, given that passenger numbers are growing by only 0.3 per cent. That probably makes ferries the most subsidised form of public transport, so the Scottish Government needs to demonstrate value for money. However, I absolutely accept that ferry services are essential for our island communities.

The procurement of new ferries and the maintenance of existing ones are also issues that need attention. I am disappointed that the repairs and maintenance of our existing ferry fleet is carried out in Liverpool, and not at the former Cammell Laird yard at Inchgreen. The Scottish Government should aim to return the maintenance and repair of the fleet to benefit local employment and our local economies.

I turn to the two ferries that are being built at Ferguson's. It is, of course, disappointing that there are delays, but I am clear that the design that was set out by CMAL was deficient in the first place. I have no problem with the Scottish Government providing Ferguson's with loans. I have no problem with support for shipbuilding; that is what we should be providing. What frustrates me is that the Scottish Government recognises that CMAL is the problem but, instead of fixing the problem, it gives Ferguson's loans. Unless the Government sorts out the problem at source, the money will prove to be a mere sticking plaster, and we will be back here yet again. The Scottish Government needs to sit down with CMAL and Ferguson's and get the problem sorted out.

There is also the Kilcreggan ferry—the only ferry that is run by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport. Clydelink provided the service between Kilcreggan and Gourock until May this year. It is fair to say that it made Para Handy look good and, for periods of time, the ferry was off more often than it was on. Although Clyde Marine Services Ltd has subsequently taken over, and the improvement in the ferry service has been immense, it is still the community's aspiration that

the service should be run by the Scottish Government. I am pleased that Paul Wheelhouse has affirmed the Government's commitment to do exactly that.

I cannot talk about poor service in one aspect of public transport—ferries—without mentioning travel by rail. It is fair to say that rail travel is shockingly bad in my area. Poor service also affects commuters in East Kilbride, so I know the issue is of interest to the Presiding Officer. The problem has been evident for weeks, but, for the past nine consecutive days, my constituents have endured cancelled and delayed trains. People have been late for work so many times that they are now in trouble with their employers, students at universities and colleges have missed lectures, patients have missed hospital appointments and children have been left stranded in childcare facilities because their parents cannot get back to collect them. Such issues apply to delayed ferries, too. All that is happening at a time when prices have gone up.

I used to complain about skip-stopping; now the new normal is for trains in my area to skip every stop by being cancelled. At a time when we needed the Scottish Government to stand up for commuters and to hold ScotRail to account, it has weakened the targets and let ScotRail off the hook. The Government must take urgent action to force ScotRail to improve its service.

Whether it is ferries or trains, the Scottish Government needs to provide a better service and better value for money. We talk about the fourth industrial revolution—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Jackie Baillie: We talk, too, about lunar tourism but, for goodness' sake, the train to Dumbarton is still nowhere to be seen.

15:23

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Living on an island as I do, I know what ferries mean to every aspect of any island's life and economy. In recognising that fact, the Scottish Government has more than doubled what it spends annually on ferry services over the past decade.

Let me put to one side, just for a moment, any doubts that I might have about the Tories' motives today. The Conservative Party has seemed enthusiastic about privatising ferry services and has suggested that the recent tender for ferry services unfairly favoured the public sector—we have heard echoes of that sentiment today. More recently, the Conservatives seem to almost oppose the Scottish Government intervening to

save the Scottish shipyards that are building new vessels.

Instead of dwelling on any of that, I will make some brief points about some of the things about ferry services that have caused my constituents genuine concern in 2018. I hope that the minister will be able to reflect on a few of the issues in his summing up.

The first is the situation this Easter, when, for several days, North Uist and Harris went without anything like a recognisable ferry service. That had real human and economic costs. I understand that there might have been people who did not get to funerals, that there were cancellations for local hotels and that shops were beginning to struggle to get many supplies in. I think that CalMac has realised that that was not its finest hour. The episode demonstrated what happens when a larger vessel—or two of them, in that case—is out of action at a busy time.

The problem is, of course, born partly out of a big success story. In 2007, the SNP Government began rolling out RET fares, making travel dramatically more affordable for islanders and tourists. That has been a huge benefit to our economy and to the community in which I live, with 10 per cent of Hebridean jobs now thought to depend directly on tourism. However, ferries in the Western Isles alone have now had to cope with an astonishing 184,000 additional passengers every year, compared with the figures a decade ago, and most routes now operate at capacity for six months of the year. I would be doing a disservice to my constituents if I did not record what many of them feel about that. I can only ask members to imagine how the good people of Paisley or Motherwell might react if they were told that they regularly had to make arrangements three weeks in advance when they wished to drive into Glasgow.

There is no doubt that, in summer, a second vessel is now needed on the Stornoway to Ullapool route, and an extra sailing a day over the Sound of Harris, to give but two examples. Crews do their utmost and, as I have mentioned, the funding is certainly there, but I cannot say with any certainty that, without such improvements, those and other routes will be able to cope next summer.

I know that the Government is giving thought to those difficult questions and is thinking ahead. In time, there might be an argument for some of CalMac's shorter routes to be replaced by tunnels, but that is an argument for another day and it is certainly not a cheap option. However, no option is cheap when looked at over the long term.

The Scottish Government has shown its commitment in funding ferry services far beyond any funding that has been provided by previous

Governments—and certainly far beyond any named sum that has been committed to by the Conservative Party today. However, there are problems with services—that is obvious to all of us—and it is now time for all agencies to work together to reassure island committees about what shape these most vital of services will take in the future. We do not have for ever to answer that question.

15:27

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Before I start talking about ferries, I want to remind the Government about the expectations that have been raised by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, which the Parliament supported. The Government should be especially concerned, particularly because it has committed itself to island proofing all its decisions.

In my mind, the Scottish Government is falling short of those expectations by presiding over a ferry network in the west of Scotland in relation to which, as we have heard, there are long construction delays for flagship ferries, 10 years of underinvestment, no spare vessels in the fleet to cope with breakdowns, and a ferries plan that I believe is gathering dust on a shelf and which no one has looked at.

The Government is disempowering the island communities that it sought to support just months ago with its islands legislation. We are possibly seeing the worst of all outcomes, as Jamie Greene made clear, with islanders being unable to travel on to and off islands when they need to. I have been contacted by people who are unable to travel because they are disabled and the ferry is not suitable or they cannot get to it, or because the ferry that they want is overcrowded, meaning that they have not been able to get to funerals.

The Government has seen more than 70,000 cancelled or delayed sailings since 2007, and, as we have heard, the managing director of CalMac has said that last April's widespread disruptions were the worst for eight years. That is a damning indictment and shows just how far our ferry service has declined under this Government, which has been in power for more than 11 years. It is clear that the Government must think again on its ferries plan in order to remedy the 10 years of mistakes that it has made.

I can give the Government some help in that regard. First, the SNP Government must learn that bigger ships do not always lead to better services. Having smaller vessels that are built to serve multiple routes will build much-needed resilience into the ferry network.

Paul Wheelhouse: I am grateful to the convener of the Rural Economy and Connectivity

Committee for taking an intervention. I want to make a point that I think he will recognise from a committee evidence session. It was made by CMAL and relates to the design of larger vessels, which are much more fuel efficient. I take on board the point that Edward Mountain makes about the flexibility of smaller vessels, but does he recognise that there are positive arguments for larger vessels, including in relation to resilience in bad weather and fuel efficiency?

Edward Mountain: I would like to see those figures. It was evidence that we heard—*[Interruption.]* I gave the minister the chance to intervene, so he must let me answer. We must see that those vessels work. Just saying on paper that they are better does not mean that they are better on the ground. Volkswagen might give some clues to that.

Secondly, there needs to be a move towards standardisation. We need to have more standardised ferries, more standardised docking stations and standardised training to allow crews and boats to serve multiple routes. That will create the much-needed flexibility that our ferries network currently lacks.

Dr Allan: Will the member take an intervention?

Edward Mountain: I am sorry—I have taken one and I am pushed for time. I would like to take the intervention, but I cannot take more.

It is time to learn the lessons of the past. The island-class ferries that served routes to Raasay, Mull and Arran, for example, were versatile and readily interchangeable and could provide extra runs for commercial purposes. Those are the design principles that the future CalMac fleet desperately needs.

Thirdly, the SNP Government must support different models for operating ferries.

I am mindful of the time, so my final point is that that the Scottish Government should also consider moving freight on the busiest routes outside the hours of regular travel for islanders and island visitors.

Six years ago, the Government promised in its ferries plan to review its approach to providing ferry services and to continue to reassess the needs of our island communities. Having heard the evidence, I believe that that plan has sat on the shelf gathering dust and that nothing has happened to it. It needs to be dusted off and looked at, especially because the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service is up for renewal in six years. Now is the time to take some action

15:32

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I represent Arran and Cumbrae, and when ferry services let people down it is right that we heed their concerns and push for realistic solutions. Since 2007, this Government has dramatically increased investment on port infrastructure, vessels, and services, from £97.3 million in 2007-08 to £240.5 million this year—a 150 per cent increase. That is a remarkable achievement, after the neglect that our fleet suffered under Labour and the 27.5 per cent cut in the capital available to the Scottish Government in the first year of the Tory and Lib Dem UK coalition government.

Scottish Government investment was absolutely essential and its impact was enormously positive. For example, passengers now enjoy more summer sailings, following an extension of the two-vessel service to Brodick from seven weeks each summer to nearly seven months of the year. That has dramatically increased capacity and visitor numbers, and boosted Arran's economy by 10 per cent in the year before last alone. Cumbrae has 40 sailings a day in each direction in the summer and 20 in the winter. Last April the new £31.2 million Brodick ferry terminal opened, completely transforming the harbour and providing 21st century facilities that will boost Arran's economy. The terminal has a new 110m, two-berth pier that is designed to accommodate the new dual-fuel vessel, MV Glen Sannox, with a dedicated berth to serve other vessels, including cruise ships.

A huge benefit for ferry users was the introduction of the road equivalent tariff for passengers, cars, and coaches. Its roll-out to Arran services in 2014—after I pressed to have the Clyde islands included in the SNP's 2011 Holyrood manifesto—saw fares drop by 46 per cent for passengers and 64 per cent for cars travelling from Ardrossan to Brodick. RET has had a greater impact on Arran than on any other island. Transport Scotland found that 11 per cent of visitors questioned on the Ardrossan to Brodick route, and 17 per cent on the Claonaig to Lochranza route, said that their journey had been wholly prompted by RET. Arran businesses are very positive about the impact, citing increases in both footfall and turnover. That boom has increased demand and I was, therefore, delighted to welcome the MV Catriona to Arran in 2016, having lobbied for the deployment of that £12.6 million hybrid vessel on the Claonaig to Lochranza sailing.

MV Catriona is almost twice the size of the Loch Tarbert that it replaced. It is also cleaner, more fuel efficient and more comfortable for passengers. Arran will also benefit from the £48.5

million new vessel, MV Glen Sannox, which was due to enter service this past summer. They say that a camel is a horse designed by a committee, and so it seems with the Glen Sannox. Despite the fact that it was agreed that it would ply our busiest ferry route, Ardrossan to Brodick, it was apparently designed to fit all harbours except, shockingly, Ardrossan. As yet, no one has been held accountable for that lamentable decision. The Glen Sannox is now expected to arrive a year behind schedule and islanders are understandably frustrated by that delay. The delivery of that vessel is essential to meet ever-growing demand.

I am delighted that Ardrossan harbour will shortly be upgraded to become a quality destination that supports growth through stronger links to Ardrossan town centre. However, the question of the Arran ferry service potentially relocating to Troon while those upgrades are carried out, which CalMac is arguing for behind the scenes, undermines the hard-fought save our ferry campaign to retain Ardrossan as Arran's principal mainland Ayrshire port. I trust that the minister will confirm today that Ardrossan will continue to serve the Ardrossan crossing during the refurbishment of Ardrossan harbour, to alleviate those concerns.

Investment and improvement mean little if our ferry fleet is not resilient and islanders cannot rely on ferries to get them where they need to be. On 27 September, together with Mike Russell MSP and representatives of Arran and Islay community councils, I met the minister to discuss this summer's service disruption to the network. The Scottish Government must take ownership of restoring reliability. If the ferry fleet is not maintained to an adequate standard and if CalMac is unable to find parts for repair and maintenance in a reasonable timeframe, a more effective response must be delivered for our island communities.

I am pleased that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity launched a £3.5 million ferries resilience fund during a visit to Arran on 27 August. That should help to eliminate future disruption, but we can and must do more for our island communities.

I am delighted that the minister has confirmed his participation in the next Isle of Arran ferry committee meeting on Monday 12 November and I look forward to welcoming him, with a view to agreeing a plan of action to restore reliability in the short term, as well as guaranteeing a much more resilient ferry fleet in the near future.

15:36

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, pay tribute to the staff who provide lifeline

ferry services, both onshore and at sea. Those who work onshore often take the brunt of the Scottish Government's failures when ferries are delayed and cancelled, so they need our special thanks for dealing with that and for helping customers who do not get to sail.

Our ferries are not an end in themselves; their purpose is to provide lifeline services. Our island communities and some of our peninsulas are totally dependent on ferry services. Without them, people could no longer live on those islands. We do not have to go very far back in time to see what happened on St Kilda, where people were evacuated from their homes and their communities because they could not access lifeline services. That is not a desirable situation. It is essential that the Scottish Government acts to make sure that other communities do not face the same situation—or, indeed, the chaos that the islands faced this summer. To highlight those issues, we would need a much longer debate, so I will emphasise just one or two issues.

There needs to be a much more transparent approach to financing ferries. We have seen the controversy around the funding of the Loch Seaforth and its ownership after a seven-year lease ends. What is the cost of the vessel? Surely it would have been much more cost effective to have gone with the community's preferred solution of having two ships. That point was highlighted by Colin Smyth.

Jackie Baillie talked about the dispute with Ferguson's over the Glen Sannox and the unnamed hull 802 that will serve the Uig triangle. What is the dispute about? Is it really a deficient design? If so, who is responsible for it? The money put aside for those two ships is £97 million and Ferguson's is now telling us that the cost could well be double that.

We need new ships to deal with demand, which has increased hugely due to tourism; Jamie Greene talked about that in his opening speech. That increase due to tourism is very much welcome but we need the capacity to deal with it because locals cannot access ferries—they cannot get to hospital; they miss funerals, as Edward Mountain said; and they are not able to see their families. I have suggested before that, to deal with such emergencies, some ferry places be reserved for locals at peak times and then released closer to the sailing time.

I have also heard of stories where people have tried to book on a ferry that is apparently full, only to discover from friends who were on that sailing that there was space on the boat. Although locals go on to the standby list, many of them cannot take that risk in emergency situations and choose to fly instead, at a greater cost. We need to look at how we manage ferry bookings.

Reliability has come up again and again in the debate. This summer started with the issues with the Clansman. There was disruption on many routes for many months, including before the summer kicked in. We had 2,326 cancellations between January and July, which is far too many. I think that it was Jamie Greene who said that there have been 70,000 cancellations since the SNP took office. That is not good enough for our island communities. The problems have continued into the autumn: Alasdair Allan talked about the recent issues for Uist and Harris.

There is no capacity in the fleet to deal with those issues. There is no additional ferry that can be brought in. We have been asking the Scottish Government for a number of years to look at introducing an additional vessel, especially for the Ullapool to Lewis route over the summer, but it told us that it could not find one.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you come to a close, please?

Rhoda Grant: My office googled and found one within five minutes, but the Scottish Government could not negotiate the terms of a lease.

I emphasise that our islands deserve better. These are lifeline routes and people depend on them for their way of life.

15:41

Paul Wheelhouse: I will try to respond to as many of the points that have been made as possible.

I do not want to spend too much time responding to Jamie Greene, because I think that I have made clear my views about the nature of his speech and the attack on the Government. I echo a point that was made by John Finnie and others: a bit of self-awareness on the part of the Tories would be welcome, given the age of austerity that we are living through, which has been directed, whether Jamie Greene likes it or not, by the UK Government. I stand by the point that we believe that there have been real-terms cuts to the Scottish Government budget, which has implications for resources. Notwithstanding that, as Kenny Gibson ably pointed out, we have increased spending on ferries in the face of that austerity, but a bit of self-awareness on the part of the Tories would be welcome.

I wanted to intervene on Colin Smyth in order to try to be constructive. I can agree with a lot of what he and indeed Jackie Baillie and Rhoda Grant said in the debate, although we have some issues with a 30-year shipbuilding strategy. I have sympathy with the idea but, in the context of year-to-year budgets, we have to be realistic about how we could plan for that. However, looking at

demand and the longer term, I absolutely have sympathy with those points and I hope that we can find some common ground on the issues in the future.

Although there was much in Mr Smyth's speech that I agreed with, he could perhaps have done more to recognise the positive impact of this Government's investment in RET, rather than being entirely negative. However, notwithstanding that, there is perhaps room for agreement with Labour on some aspects of what it proposes.

I am disappointed that it looks likely that Mr Finnie and his Green Party colleagues will not support our amendment, principally as it contains specific references to working with the trade unions and communities in relation to the vessel replacement programme. By agreeing to our amendment, the Parliament would commit us to an action plan. Clearly, however, I will want to take forward an action plan, in which regard I should give credit to Mr Russell and Mr Gibson. I and Mr Gibson recently met representatives of the Islay and Arran communities, and out of that meeting and previous discussions we have agreed to take forward an action plan, so Mr Gibson takes some credit for those immediate actions.

John Finnie: Will the minister acknowledge that I raised the issue some months ago with Mr Yousaf and the first reference back to me appeared in paper form today? I of course welcome the involvement of the trade unions in procurement, but that was the first reference back. It is very welcome.

Paul Wheelhouse: I thank Mr Finnie for his support in that respect. I recognise his long-standing interest in ferry issues and I do not mean to diminish that in any way, shape or form. I am keen to work with him and other colleagues across the Parliament as we try to address the concerns about both the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services and the northern services, if issues arise there.

Mr Finnie was correct in identifying—and he was right to do so—that there was a period when no major vessels entered service. I think that Randal Robertson of the Highlands and Islands transport partnership referenced in his evidence to the committee that no major vessels entered service between 2001 and 2011. Of course, some minor vessels were commissioned during that period, but major vessels are, obviously, very significant to the resilience of the network.

I suspect that the Green Party and the Conservative Party do not agree on the overall strategy for ferries. I hope that Mr Finnie, if he does not support us today, will find it in his heart to support us as we go forward.

On the northern isles services, I apologise that I did not get a chance to take an intervention from

Mr Scott, but I will be happy to engage with him hereafter. In response to Mr Rumbles, I say that we have recently started the procurement of the northern isles ferry services contract. As part of that, Transport Scotland officials are actively engaging with local stakeholders, including trade unions and community representatives, on the future service specification. That will try to build in sufficient flexibility to vary the contract in response to current and future demand. I hope that that offers some hope to Mr Rumbles that we are heading in the right direction.

Jamie Halcro Johnston started well, and I agreed with much of what he said in the first part of his speech, but I am afraid that he lost me about halfway through, when he started to change tack. I will make the point about the road equivalent tariff that I tried to make in an intervention. At the moment, we are prevented from implementing the road equivalent tariff in the northern isles because a challenge has gone to the European Commission on a state aid case by the private operator of Pentland services. Mr Halcro Johnston probably knows that, so it is perhaps unfair of him to accuse us of withholding RET from the northern isles. He knows that we cannot do that while a state-aid complaint has been made by another operator. We have to respect that process and wait for its outcome.

I am short of time, so I will end there. I have been listening carefully to all the points that members have made. I maintain the point that I make in my amendment, which is that I want to work with members from across the chamber, and I look forward to doing so.

15:46

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On behalf of the Conservatives, I belatedly welcome Mr Wheelhouse to his role as ferries minister in his first debate on ferries, although I am not sure how he is feeling about that after the debate. Many of the problems may not have occurred on his watch, but that does not absolve his Government and his party.

I welcome the opportunity to close the debate, not least because, alongside digital connectivity, which we debated yesterday, if there is one issue that most exercises any MSP for the Highlands and Islands, it is transport, and ferries in particular. Since my election to the Parliament, ferry services have dominated my mailbox. There is a sorry saga of delays, cancellations and insufficient capacity, and sometimes of one island community being pitted against another on account of the best boats being shunted around the network.

Let us pause and remind ourselves, as others have done, what that means for our constituents in

their everyday lives. People are sometimes simply unable to get to work or important hospital appointments or to run their businesses effectively. That is the harsh reality. Given the immense importance of ferries in connecting people from the islands to the mainland and in enabling tourism, it is axiomatic that a reliable and robust ferry network is critical to delivering economic prosperity to some of our most fragile areas.

However, as we have heard from members across the chamber, the Government's stewardship of Scotland's ferry network has been shambolic. Jamie Greene noted that, since the SNP came to power in 2007, more than 70,000 ferry services have been either cancelled or delayed. To put that in context, in the near 12 years that the SNP has been in power, that equates to 123 delayed or cancelled sailings a week. That is unacceptable. ScotRail does not have its problems to seek, but we would not accept that kind of performance on our rail network, and of course there are next to no alternatives to a ferry when it is cancelled.

Ministers have long been aware of the problems. Back in 2010, CalMac, in its submission to that year's ferry review, stated to the Government that a new ferry would have to be built every year just to stand still. Audit Scotland has noted that, too, but the SNP does not consider the issue to be a priority. A few months ago, I asked when the Scottish Government's expert ferry group, which is supposed to meet up to three times a year, last met. When the answer came, it turned out that the group has not met at all since last December, which was almost a year ago. Nothing could better typify the Government's approach to ferries. It always sees ferries as a problem for another day.

Paul Wheelhouse: I ask Mr Cameron to reflect on the fact that, in the response that we sent, we suggested that we are establishing another meeting of the ferry group, and that we have 20 other groups that we meet with to discuss ferry operations.

Donald Cameron: I am glad to hear that but, as I said, the issue still reflects the fact that ferries are seen as a problem for another day and are not a priority.

The vast majority of the 70,000 delayed or cancelled journeys that I mentioned affected the Highlands and Islands. More than 10,000 of the cancellations or delays were to services that operate from Oban, 3,400 were to services from Stornoway to Ullapool and more than 7,000 were to services from Rothesay to Wemyss Bay. That last route provides a good example of how costly disruption can be. When the Rest and Be Thankful pass was closed a few weeks ago, the only

practical way that farmers on Bute could transport livestock on heavy goods vehicles was to Wemyss Bay, but the terminal there was closed. The solution could have been a diversion to Gourock, but Gourock cannot land HGVs. As a result, Bute's farmers were prevented from transporting livestock.

The residents of Dunoon are exasperated about the future of the Dunoon to Gourock ferry route, and they will have their annual general meeting next week. The Government has been invited to attend that meeting and I hope that it does, because the residents want a fair tender process resulting in a robust and reliable ferry service on that route.

I readily acknowledge that we cannot entirely eliminate ferry cancellations and delays. We face some of the harshest weather, and ultimately, passenger safety must come first. However, not all those delays and cancellations have been due to weather and many could have been prevented. On numerous occasions, including today in the chamber, we have heard about vessels breaking down and then consequent delays and cancellations—for example, the breakdown of the MV Hebrides in September. We all know that CalMac does not have enough back-up vessels to deal with breakdowns. The ageing fleet adds further problems into the mix and, as Audit Scotland noted, vessel maintenance costs increased by 136 per cent due to a larger and increasingly older fleet. Other members have spoken about the fact that there is inflexibility in our ferry fleet, whereby some boats cannot land in certain ports.

I will respond briefly to some of the other points that have been made across the chamber. Jamie Halcro Johnston referred to issues facing the northern isles. Edward Mountain and Rhoda Grant spoke of many personal stories of individuals who have trouble with travelling on ferries. John Finnie spoke about the cost to the taxpayer of the Stornoway to Ullapool boat. Most importantly, Kenny Gibson—I rarely quote Kenny Gibson with approval in the chamber—said that the Scottish Government must take ownership of the problem. Hear, hear to that. Yes, it must take ownership.

We want to stand up for the many local communities that rely on ferry services. The ferries are not just a mode of transport; they are a lifeline. The word "lifeline" has been overused but it remains important—the ferries are a life line. That should not need to be mentioned in a motion, as it is a fact. The ferry services are intrinsic to the people of our islands, their lives, their wellbeing and their existence.

The SNP Government has presided over a decade of failure and there is little evidence that it is willing to either acknowledge that or work to

improve it. If the Government fails to act, it will be letting down communities across the west and north of Scotland, and we will not let that stand. We will fight for those communities and we will fight for the future of our ferry network.

Early Years

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-14521, in the name of Alison Harris, on early years. I ask those who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:53

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives are pleased to bring this debate to the Parliament today. The motion in my name addresses a few serious points that, thus far, have been ignored by the Scottish Government. I hope that we can reach cross-party agreement today and send a signal to all the hardworking childcare partnerships in Scotland that their concerns will be addressed.

Four years ago, the Scottish National Party pledged to almost double childcare provision from 600 hours a year to 1,140 hours a year by August 2020 for all three and four-year-olds, and some eligible two-year-olds. It was quite the headline, but one question lingered: how would that be achieved?

It is clear that there has been a distinct lack of planning in following through on that promise, and if it is left to continue at its current pace, the 2020 target will not be met—in fact, the level of provision is likely to decrease. Almost half of the nurseries say that they are unlikely to meet the target of 1,140 hours, with many pointing to underfunding as a significant barrier to doing so. That has been echoed by Audit Scotland, which, in its recent report on the expansion of childcare provision, highlighted a staggering black hole of £160 million a year in the policy's funding.

The motion focuses on one of the main reasons why the policy is failing: the lack of inclusion of the private sector, despite the minister's constant assurances that it is a valued partner. There are more than 6,000 private childcare providers in Scotland. They play a huge part in developing Scotland's children, but they are being swept aside. I have met several partnerships and local authorities, and one theme has been prevalent. There is a total lack of consistency and understanding in the roll-out of the 1,140 hours policy across local authorities.

The issues that private providers face can be boiled down to three major problem areas: the revenue funding rates across local authorities, the catastrophic staffing drain, and the lack of access to capital funding for private providers.

As things stand, there is no standard hourly rate of funding across Scotland. That means that private providers in some local authority areas

receive significantly less than those in other local authority areas. Private providers receive varying rates across council areas, from £3.75 to £4.50 to £5.31. There is material variation and a total lack of consistency.

There is one thing that I want to make clear. The private sector nurseries are not big, multinational corporations; they are usually small, independent organisations with very tight profit margins. In operating at such a level, the slightest change in external factors can lead to difficult business decisions needing to be made. The lack of top-line funding prevents private nurseries from being able to pay many of their staff even the living wage, and the impact of that is that local authorities are able to attract staff who work in private nurseries to work for more money and fewer hours. That has a devastating impact on private providers and is causing a mass exodus of their childcare staff, which will ultimately affect the delivery of high-quality childcare in the long run.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives will support Mary Fee's amendment. The staffing problem is a huge thorn in the side of the feasibility of the policy in delivering good-quality childcare for children across Scotland.

I turn to the third and possibly the most avoidable problem that private providers face: the lack of access to capital funding. Capital funding is supposed to be available to all childcare providers, but many private providers that I have met have noted with frustration that local authorities are denying them access to funding and instead almost exclusively awarding it to their own council-run nurseries, without even considering private partnerships. Worse than that, there is confusion in several local authorities about whether private providers are entitled to receive capital funding. Yesterday, I spoke to representatives from one local authority who were quite indignant at the idea of private providers expecting to receive capital funding. Another local authority basically said, "Oh no. They're not entitled to that."

That can be cleared up today. Will the minister write to each and every local authority to make clear the correct position regarding access to capital funding? I would be happy to give way to her now if she will confirm that she will do that.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Maree Todd): I would be more than happy to write to clarify the position. There is an issue around state aid in respect of local authorities providing capital funding directly to private businesses. However, some—Angus Council in particular—have found a way round that. Angus Council provides capital grants funding. We are sharing that learning throughout the country through the early learning and childcare partnership forum. If Alison Harris would like me to

write to all the local authorities to explain the situation, I would be more than happy to do so.

Alison Harris: I would like the minister to do that straight away, please, because there is confusion. The fact that the minister mentioned one local authority although there are numerous local authorities out there is indicative of the Government's and the SNP's indifference to the scale of the problem and the apparent inability to take on board what everyone is saying.

There has been plenty talk of partnership and engagement, but those warm words are worryingly hollow. I worry that the lack of understanding of the true partnership that is required between local authorities and private providers is preventing any meaningful progress from ever being made. If the expansion is to succeed, that needs to change—and it needs to change now.

Although there is cross-party support for the 1,140 hours target, we have to take a sensible, practical approach to expanding childcare. In this day and age, flexibility is the number 1 childcare concern for many parents, but 90 per cent of council nurseries do not provide full-working-day childcare places and almost none of them offers places that start before 8 in the morning or which last until after quarter past five in the evening. That is just not adequate, because many parents and carers work outside the available time windows. As it stands, many parents are unable to access their full entitlement due to full-time work commitments.

Often, it is private providers that can offer more flexible hours, but if the partnership continues to break down, they will go out of business and that flexibility will disappear.

I hope that all parties will support the Conservative motion and Labour's amendment. We all want Scotland to have a successful childcare system; we are all behind the 1,140 hours. Unfortunately, however, since the big headline announcement four years ago, the Scottish Government's implementation has been poorly planned, staggeringly unclear and damaging to children, parents and nurseries throughout Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament is committed to improving the availability of, and flexibility in, the provision of high-quality childcare; recognises that, in order to deliver the Scottish Government's ambitions, there has to be much more effective partnership working between state and private sector providers; is very concerned therefore at the recent findings that have been issued by the National Day Nurseries Association, which show that fewer than one-third of private sector providers are currently in a position to expand place numbers because they feel that there has been a lack of engagement from both the Scottish Government and some local authorities when addressing their concerns about access to capital funding and the

lower payments being made to many private sector providers; believes that these concerns are in line with those set out by Audit Scotland earlier in 2018, when it reported that there were “significant risks” within the current Scottish Government policy on childcare, and demands urgent action from the Scottish Ministers to ensure that private sector providers, as well as state sector providers, are able to meet their full potential when it comes to delivering expanded childcare.

16:01

The Minister for Children and Young People (Maree Todd): From August 2020, all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds will be entitled to 1,140 hours of high-quality early learning and childcare. Thousands of children in our most challenged communities are already benefiting from early phasing. This truly transformative programme has the potential to improve children’s outcomes and to make a significant contribution to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Quality sits front and centre of our vision. Throughout this debate, we must remember that children are at the heart of this expansion. That should be a powerful motivation for us all to work collaboratively to overcome the challenges that are inherent in such an ambitious reform programme.

We know that high-quality provision exists across the public, private and third sectors; we know that that provision can take many forms, including nurseries, forest kindergartens, playgroups, children and family centres, specialist voluntary settings, outdoor settings and childminding services. The funding follows the child approach empowers parents to choose the provider that best meets the needs of their child, so long as that provider meets a new national standard and has a place available.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I totally accept the Scottish Government’s aims and ambitions, but does the minister recognise that one sector feels very disadvantaged in promoting the Government’s policy, for exactly the reasons that Alison Harris set out in her speech? We need to address that problem, because unless we have a fully engaged private sector that feels very ambitious, we will not succeed.

Maree Todd: Indeed, and I reiterate that this Government’s view is that the private sector will be crucial to our delivery of this ambition.

I will update Parliament later this year on the final standard, which will be informed by the views of the hundreds and hundreds of providers with whom we engaged during our joint consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The standard levels the playing field between local authority, private and third sector providers. All

providers have to meet the same quality-driven criteria. There will be an end to locally set requirements to enter partnership and an end to the capping of funded places in private nurseries.

The national standard delivers one of the most important elements of the expansion programme: ensuring that all childcare staff delivering children’s funded entitlement are paid the real living wage. The initiative, which will raise the incomes of thousands of low-paid workers—the vast majority of whom are women—will ensure that we properly value the contribution that our early years professionals make to shaping the lives of our youngest children.

All members in the chamber should welcome this investment.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The minister rightly talks about the importance of standards and the necessity of paying people the real living wage. How does that square with the fact that the National Day Nurseries Association says that its providers are in deficit to the tune of £2 per child per hour? Is the NDNA wrong in its calculations, or is there a funding gap?

Maree Todd: The funding deal that we reached with COSLA in April secures the money that is required to ensure the delivery of the living wage commitment. That landmark £1 billion package, which is protected for investment in early learning and childcare, will deliver sustainable rates for all providers from 2020. The hourly rate that is paid to providers across the country will increase significantly.

It is worth putting on the record that COSLA is fully behind a provider-neutral approach that puts quality first. However, I and my counterpart in COSLA, Councillor Stephen McCabe, recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that local cultures and systems fully realise our shared vision for a provider-neutral, quality-first approach.

I commend to Parliament the partnership working principles that were adopted in September by COSLA’s children and young people board. Those principles, which were developed in consultation with the NDNA, will be embedded in every part of Scotland, and I have already heard that they are driving improved relationships around the country.

We have established the early learning and childcare partnership forum, which enables providers from all sectors and their representative bodies, together with local authorities, COSLA and the Scottish Government, to work together to identify solutions to common challenges. It is early days—the forum met for the first time last week—but it is clear from the update that Councillor McCabe and I received at the ELC joint delivery board meeting this morning that a spirit of joint

endeavour is already radiating from the forum. Councillor McCabe and I have committed to attend the forum, if necessary, to help to resolve any significant issues that might arise.

We will ensure transparency in the reporting of local authority progress data, which was reviewed by the joint delivery board this morning, so that local authorities are truly accountable for the local implementation of funding follows the child.

Liz Smith: The concern is that far too many local authorities are not engaging in such partnership working. Will the minister clarify—particularly in light of what some of her high-profile SNP colleagues have said—whether she agrees?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will need to be quick, minister.

Maree Todd: I do not agree that that is the case throughout the country. I agree that there are pockets of troublesome, difficult and challenging partnership relationships but, across the country, there is a positive position to report.

We know that there is good practice out there. Last week, the partnership forum heard about actions that are being taken in Angus, Edinburgh and Moray that result in meaningful partnership and providers feeling genuinely valued. I assure providers that are currently experiencing strained relationships with their local authorities that meaningful partnership can and does exist, and Councillor McCabe and I will work tirelessly to ensure that it exists in every part of Scotland.

The Government is absolutely determined that we will support providers in the transition to 2020. Indeed, we have already acted. We introduced the 100 per cent non-domestic rates relief for private properties that are used as day nurseries, and we estimate that that relief will remove the burden of rates for up to 500 businesses. This year's programme for government also commits us to developing a delivery support package.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to a close, please.

Maree Todd: We have heard providers' concerns about sustainability, relationship difficulties, workforce challenges and the need to communicate clearly with parents and families. Those issues will all be addressed in our support package, which we will launch before Christmas.

I call on the Parliament to recognise the commitment of the Scottish Government and COSLA to work tirelessly to support providers from all sectors.

I move amendment S5M-14521.2, to leave out from "recognises that" to end and insert:

"reconfirms its support for expanding the provision to 1,140 hours of funded, high-quality early learning and

childcare for all three- and four-year-olds and for eligible two-year-olds through a provider-neutral approach; believes that all frontline staff delivering the 1,140 hours provision must be paid the real living wage; welcomes that funding for the real living wage formed part of the £1 billion multi-year funding package agreed with local government; recognises the concerns expressed by some private providers on local engagement and investment; further recognises recent progress, including the adoption of partnership working principles by COSLA and the creation of an Early Learning and Childcare Partnership Forum; believes that there is a need to ensure best practice on partnership working and investment, such as the approaches adopted in Angus, the City of Edinburgh and Moray that were commended recently by members of the partnership forum, and agrees that the Scottish Government must work with COSLA, individual local authorities and providers themselves to ensure that best practice is replicated in all parts of Scotland."

16:09

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Alison Harris for lodging her motion for debate.

Childcare is an important issue that impacts on the lives of thousands of families up and down the country every day. Scottish Labour believes that childcare should be flexible, affordable and of high quality, and we support the extension of childcare provision to 1,140 free hours per year for all three and four-year-olds and vulnerable two-year-olds. The debate provides us with an opportunity to assess how the expansion is being delivered and the working relationship between central Government, local government and private nursery providers.

The current childcare system is disjointed and inflexible. No one today would design a system from scratch that looked like that. It is in urgent need of reform. However, the mix of childcare providers that we have today is essential to deliver the extension to 1,140 hours.

Private nursery providers fill a massive gap that council-run providers cannot meet. That is why it is crucial that there are better working relations between Government and private providers. The Tory motion recognises that and justifiably highlights the concerns of private nursery providers. We in Scottish Labour will support the motion in Alison Harris's name and also urge support for our amendment, which would add to the motion concerns about staffing to meet the expansion.

So far this year, I have twice asked the Minister for Children and Young People how many staff are in place to deliver the expansion. On both occasions, the minister could not answer. I would be happy to give way to her today if she would care to update the chamber on the exact number of staff in the system today.

Maree Todd: There are 34,500 staff working in ELC across Scotland, 25,500 of whom are providing funded placements.

Mary Fee: I thank the minister for that clarification. We know that 11,000 more childcare workers are needed by 2020. I appreciate that the minister has updated us on how close the Scottish Government is to the target and I would also appreciate it if she could keep us informed of how that progresses.

Nursery providers, both private and public, need assurance that the right staffing resources will be available to deliver the policy. Private nurseries are telling us that staffing remains a significant problem for them, particularly around the wage competition between private and public nurseries. One nursery owner wrote to me to say:

"We appreciate the importance of paying the living wage; however the current funding between council-run and private nurseries is not on a level playing field."

We also hear that, after staff complete training provided by a private nursery, they often leave to work in a council-run nursery. The Scottish Government needs to ensure a level playing field.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Does Mary Fee accept that the funding arrangements that the Scottish Government has agreed with local authorities entirely address the issue about the rates that have to be paid to enable private providers to pay the living wage? That is part of the funding deal for the expansion of early learning and childcare; it is an implicit part of the agreement that we have reached.

Mary Fee: I thank the cabinet secretary for that very helpful contribution and clarification.

Confidence in the private sector about delivering the policy is plummeting. That is evidenced in the responses to freedom of information requests from the Conservatives. The chief executive of the National Day Nurseries Association has warned:

"Our members are very concerned that the current situation with funded childcare in Scotland means that they won't even survive to the expansion in 2020."

In writing to the minister, an area manager of the Kirktonholme Childcare chain warned:

"The partner providers are literally on their knees and I believe this ambitious policy is about to implode".

The NDNA also reports that only 30 per cent of private nurseries are able to deliver the 1,140 hours of free childcare. We support the extension of childcare to deliver for children and families, but the Scottish Government must own up to the problems that the policy faces and it must get serious about delivering this policy on time.

To repeat what I have already stated, the current childcare system is in urgent need of reform to benefit the mix of private and public providers and, most important of all, families and children.

I move amendment S5M-14521.1, to insert at end:

", and that this action should include publishing data on the size of the current workforce, as well as information on how the Scottish Government expects to meet staffing targets, given that it estimated that up to 11,000 additional early learning and childcare workers will be required by 2020 to deliver the planned expansion."

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I call Tavish Scott to open the debate for the Liberal Democrats.

16:14

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Thank you, Presiding Officer. You caught me slightly unawares there, as I was looking towards the Green Party benches for the next speaker, but there we are.

I start with the example of Archie, who went through his pre-school years depending totally on private sector childcare because both his parents work. One of them has the temerity to live on Shetland quite a lot of the time—although I am told that he redeemed himself this summer by taking Archie to Anfield for a pre-season game. My point is that the dependence that we, as parents, placed on the private sector was complete. I want to reflect that in recognising the Government's ambitions for the delivery and expansion of childcare by saying that those are things that parents absolutely want. However, as members on both the Labour and Tory front benches have rightly said this afternoon, its approach needs to adapt to and recognise the scale of the challenges that exist not just in some but in all parts of Scotland.

One childcare provider who is in the private sector, which is essential to delivery in this area, wrote to me to say:

"There is no doubt that private nurseries are the poor relation when it comes to an equitable distribution of the significant Government funding to support the expansion of Early Years funded hours. Private nurseries are going to be squeezed as cash for capital works to improve"

local authority

"settings and to upskill their existing workforce takes place."

That reflects remarks that have been made by members of other parties. The childcare provider went on to say:

"The private sector will struggle thereafter to retain our best staff, due to the lure of a better paid council job. The private nurseries in turn face a double whammy of"

local authorities

"insisting that any support they get is dependent on demonstrating they are a Living Wage employer ... whilst the hourly rate they pay to partner providers is below the operating cost threshold of the business."

Those are serious and significant concerns that need to be ironed out by the Government as it progresses the matter. If they are not, the concern is about the hours that will be offered for nursery places. What we are talking about here is the 9 am to 3 pm slot, which suits some people. However, most working mums and dads might start before 9 o'clock in the morning and will certainly finish after 3 o'clock in the afternoon. That is why the other parts of the service will have to pick up those times, both before the start of what is broadly considered to be the normal working day and very much later into the evening. In my part of the world, there is a range of jobs in which people work way outside those hours—I know more people who start work at 7 in the morning and finish at lunch time, or who work later at the other end of the day, than I do people who work traditional office hours. Seeing that is essential to understanding and therefore to designing a system that takes into account the challenges of the modern working world that we are in—whether someone is a teacher, a fish processor, a worker in the hospitality industry or whatever.

I recognise that this is a huge challenge, and by no means am I diminishing or decrying the Government's effort to get it right. However, accepting the points that have already been made about tackling the challenge of the landscape that is the modern working world will be essential in its redesign—or, if that is too strong a term, reconsideration—of what is currently not working. I also take Mary Fee's point in her question about additional staff. Many of the Government's own figures illustrate the depth of the problems there.

If I might finish with one other point, it is to say that it is for the Government to recognise what it is asking of local government and the entire range of organisations that provide childcare. Just last month, Highland Council said:

"to satisfy the government that we are delivering this programme of changes requires that any planning, monitoring, tracking, data gathering and financial reporting ... is becoming more complex and more detailed."

I ask the Government, in responding to the debate, to recognise that there must be a happy balance somewhere when it comes to the necessity of auditing the use of public money and dealing with—

John Swinney: Will Mr Scott give way?

Tavish Scott: I will happily give way, but I would like to finish my point.

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, cabinet secretary, but Mr Scott will not be able to take an intervention. Perhaps the point could be covered in your closing remarks.

Tavish Scott: There must be a happy balance somewhere when it comes to the necessity of auditing the use of public money and dealing with the range of reporting that is now being required, often of businesses that have very few people indeed.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Scott. I apologise for not giving you notice that you were about to be called. There was no speaker for the Scottish Green Party this afternoon.

We move to the open debate.

16:19

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's debate on what I believe is potentially one of the most important and far-reaching pieces of legislation currently on the Scottish Government's books. Thirty hours a week of free childcare should be a major tool in the drive to tackle health inequalities and promote the preventative health agenda. It is also an opportunity to help tackle that stubborn attainment gap before it even starts to open. The goal must be to get all of our children to school age on as level a playing field as possible, irrespective of background or personal circumstances. Furthermore, it is also a huge boost for those who want to get back into work following the birth of their child.

We on the Conservative benches support the objectives of the Scottish Government's legislation. To achieve those laudable objectives and create the prerequisite number of quality childcare places will require partnership working between local authorities and private nursery providers. I know that the minister has examples of where the attitude and approach from local councils is collaborative and reflects the way in which the Scottish Government has set out its delivery plan. However, the picture across the country of councils' relationships with and treatment of partnership nursery care is in many cases far from that ideal.

Last week, I met a number of partnership nursery owners from across Scotland who have serious concerns about their treatment and the sustainability of the scheme. I do not have time to raise all their concerns, but here are some of the things that they told me. They reported one council balloting for 20 per cent of the places that should be available for partnership nursery places. Those

successful in the ballot get 1,140 hours of free childcare at a rate of £5.31 per hour, and those who are unsuccessful—80 per cent of those who should be eligible—get 600 hours of free childcare at a rate of £3.43 an hour. I am pretty sure that that is not what the policy intended.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Does the member recognise that we are in the pilot stage of the delivery and that, although some of the mechanisms used might not have been ideal, we want to deliver across all areas by 2020? There was never going to be a situation where all nurseries would be able to offer 1,140 hours at this stage in the pilot, so does he recognise that lessons have been learned?

Brian Whittle: The people Clare Adamson needs to speak to are those in the gallery who brought the issue to my attention. I think that 2020 will be too late and that balloting for places is not the way forward.

We have councils that are supplying childcare for 38 weeks of the year but have the audacity to ask the private providers to deliver holiday cover. Not only is that grossly insulting, it most definitely does not have the child's wellbeing at the centre of the policy. One council is allocating all Scottish index of multiple deprivation 1 to 4 places to the local authority, with SIMD 5 and 6 going to private nurseries. Where is the parental choice in that? Why are they forcing those SIMD 1 to 4 children out of the partnership nurseries that they are already settled in? That council is taking choice away and is labelling children.

I have listened to stories of local authorities that have openly stated that they do not believe in partnership nursery childcare and have no intention of working with private providers at all. They are going to take all their childcare in-house, rather than use nurseries that have delivered decades of top-quality care and have become an integral part of the community. Every nursery represented at the meeting highlighted the issue of local authorities recruiting directly from the partnership nurseries into local authority nurseries. They are losing so many of their highly trained, qualified staff that the Care Inspectorate is now downgrading them because of an increase in staff turnover.

There are huge discrepancies between what the SNP Government and the minister have asked local authorities to deliver, and what they are delivering. There are local authorities that are consulting and using partnership nurseries as a crucial part of scaling up childcare in Scotland. However, as I have tried to highlight today, a significant number are treating them as anything but partners.

I ask the minister to meet the representatives of partnership nurseries who are in the gallery today and to listen to their concerns directly. The minister and the Government must get this right. Aspiration is not enough without a proper plan and a continued audit of its implementation.

16:24

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): There is no doubt that there is cross-party support for the transformation of free childcare to 1,140 hours. No one can argue that giving children the best-quality early years education is a bad thing. The Scottish Government is delivering on its promise with a £1 billion, multiyear funding package. That is an amazing commitment to children and families in Scotland and it heralds a new future for family life.

Of course a project of this size and complexity will not be plain sailing during the planning stages; I do not think that anyone would reasonably expect it to be. As the Government amendment recognises and as I have witnessed in my constituency, there is a disconnect at present between some private care providers and local authorities, so it is good that we are having this debate.

However, I do not believe that there has been “a lack of engagement” from the Scottish Government, as the Conservative motion says. The problem lies in how some local authorities have chosen to implement the roll-out. I have visited as many private and local authority nurseries in my constituency as I can this year, and I have been approached by private providers and childminders about the 1,140 hours roll-out. I have met East Dunbartonshire Council to relay concerns and to gain clarification on how its plans are progressing.

The passion and care of early years workers in all sectors, which I have witnessed during my visits, have been amazing, and I cannot praise them highly enough. On Monday in Rutherglen, the Education and Skills Committee hosted an early years forum that included private early years providers, local authority nursery workers and officers from a cross section of authorities. We heard that local authorities have individual approaches to the roll-out depending on the needs of the area, because one size does not fit all. However, by its nature, that muddies the waters for planning and implementation. We heard from private providers that communication and partnership working are far from perfect. North Lanarkshire Council is one of the worst offenders, but it is not alone. It has not consulted the private sector as an equal partner and has used the capital expenditure money to build new nurseries, contrary to Scottish Government guidelines that

state clearly that councils need to maximise provision through their nurseries and expansion by partners to meet the demand of 1,140 hours, and only after they have done that build new nurseries. I was pleased to hear the minister say that she will clarify that point.

I also heard about the incident that Brian Whittle spoke about, involving the Scottish index of multiple deprivation and families being dictated to. If that is correct, it goes against all the principles of parental choice and flexibility that are a great strength of the Government's commitment to this transformational policy. What I heard was shocking, and I will welcome the minister's comments when closing about Government scrutiny of local authorities' implementation of the roll-out and how the money is being spent. Private providers said that, although they are happy to pay the living wage, their funding allocation concerns are leading to an exodus of trained staff to local authorities and that childminders have been sidelined in some areas, despite being a major part of the blended model of childcare that should be offered to parents.

It is impossible to address all the issues in a four-minute speech, but I believe that the Government will work with local authorities to address the problems and will make this hugely important initiative work. We will learn from good practice, such as that in Angus, Moray and Edinburgh. Failure is not an option. We need to show that we are listening and that we are acting without delay on concerns that are raised. The bottom line is that this transformational policy will bring phenomenal benefits and huge opportunities for children and families throughout Scotland. By working together, I am confident that we can and will make it happen.

16:28

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I am not sure whether to declare an interest, as people can take it as read from the food stains on my suit that I picked up a three-year-old this morning to take her to her funded place. I am only too aware of how important quality childcare is. I truly believe that it should be made available to everyone, regardless of where they live or whether they can afford it.

That is why this commitment and this debate are important. We are merely months away from when the Scottish Government's target is supposed to be met. As Alison Harris pointed out, it is important not just because it is a Government target or commitment but because doing the commitment in the wrong way has the very real possibility of making things worse by removing provision.

Brian Whittle: Does Daniel Johnson agree that one of the downsides of getting this wrong is that we will take childcare away from nought to three-year-olds?

Daniel Johnson: That is exactly right. We need only look at the reality of the 600-hours policy and what nurseries have to do to make it work to realise why there is a problem. When we talk to nurseries about the 600-hours approach, the first thing that they say is, "Don't call them free hours; they are funded hours." That is because nurseries are having to top up that provision and find ways of cross-subsidising it. That is the reality of the £2 deficit per child per hour that the NDNA identified.

As Brian Whittle pointed out, as we increase provision to 1,140 hours, if places are insufficiently funded, wriggle room will be removed and the ability of nurseries to operate at all will be undermined, because we are talking about a much greater proportion of the total hours and the ability to cross-subsidise will be reduced. That is a fundamental point.

We need to be realistic about what parents need. Parents need up to 2,000 hours a year. They need provision from 8 am to 6 pm and they need flexibility, so that they can work. That is why partnership providers are needed. The flexibility is just not there in local authority provision.

In the local authority sector, 68 per cent of provision is for only half days. Fewer than half of our local authorities can provide lunch, and less than 3 per cent of local authorities can provide full-time, year-round—that is, not just in school terms—childcare.

That is not the fault of those providers; it is because provision is based on a model that is about supplementing school hours. What we need is holistic and flexible childcare, which is why we need partnership providers.

The NDNA has found that 46 per cent of nurseries will not be able to provide 1,140 hours, only 7 per cent can do so on current funding rates, and 53 per cent of nurseries that are looking to provide 1,140 hours will need top-ups to supplement the rates. That should sound alarm bells about the insufficient funding. Although the current funding levels might be increased, there is simply not enough funding to cover the deficit of £2 per hour per child.

The Scottish Government has only months to get this right. It has a mere matter of months in which to build the buildings that need to be built, train the people who need to be trained and, fundamentally, get a funding package right, so that the 1,140-hours policy can be achieved and does not end up removing childcare provision and capacity rather than increasing it.

16:32

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): The policy of improving early learning and childcare by increasing early years provision from 600 hours to 1,140 hours is both ambitious and challenging. There is a need to increase the number of qualified staff, to increase building capacity and to ensure that local authorities, private nurseries and childminders will deliver the number of places that are required.

As a member of the Education and Skills Committee, like Rona Mackay, I attended Rutherglen town hall this week, where I took part in the focus groups discussing the introduction of 1,140 hours of funded childcare by August 2020. We discussed the issues with local authority representatives, private nursery providers and childminders. The major concern that they all raised was staff retention.

We are in a transition period as we move towards full implementation. Therefore, not all providers have moved to providing 1,140 hours, which is causing problems. As providers move over to the new contract, their hourly rate increases. For example, in Edinburgh, providers on the 600-hour contract receive £3.80 per hour from August this year, but those on the 1,140-hour contract are in receipt of £5.31 per hour. The result is that providers on the new contract are able to offer higher salaries, which makes it difficult for those on the 600-hour contract to retain their staff.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Gordon MacDonald: I have only four minutes.

I am aware that staffing levels are being addressed and that in 2018-19, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council increased further the number of childcare training places by delivering 1,500 additional places on higher national certificate courses and more than 400 additional graduate-level places. However, the staff retention problem will remain until enough newly trained staff are in place and all providers are on the 1,140-hour contract.

In relation to building capacity, we heard that many local authorities are examining how they use their existing nursery school estate and whether they can better utilise the buildings so that they can open from 8 am to 6 pm.

In Edinburgh, thanks to a capital grant from the Scottish Government of £40 million, the council has an expansion plan that will refurbish or rebuild nursery provision in many schools including—in my constituency—Dean Park, Canal View and Clovenstone primary schools, which will undergo refurbishment, and Nether Currie and St Mark's

primary schools, which will have new-build nurseries in 2019-20.

Of course, private nurseries in Edinburgh that plan to move over to the new contract can budget for a substantial increase in funding and, with 100 per cent rates relief for day nurseries and the possibility of receiving a capital grant, businesses are able to put together business plans to grow their nursery provision.

Since August 2017, 25 council-run nurseries in Edinburgh have been providing 1,140 hours of early years childcare. During phase 2, from August 2018, 38 local authority nurseries will offer up to 2,520 places. That represents nearly a quarter of the 11,000 three-year-olds and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds who currently receive 600 hours of funded childcare and are already on 30 hours a week.

There are issues that we need to address, but we should remember that the primary aim of the policy is to improve outcomes for all children and to close the attainment gap. The secondary aim is to support parents back into work, training or study that will help family budgets in the long term. I am sure that we can all support the policy intention, so we all need to work together to ensure that we deliver it for all of Scotland's children.

16:37

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): We all want our children to have the best start in life, and that could not be more important than when it comes to the quality and choice of childcare. I welcome the private providers to the gallery.

The Scottish Government has expanded the entitlement of hours of childcare over the years, which has been a positive and welcome step to help more parents to return to work. However, we know that the latest expansion attempt has been severely hampered by the Government's poor planning and lack of preparation for the roll-out.

In February this year, Audit Scotland warned that there were significant risks to the expansion. If we do not address and discuss the issues, as we are doing today, they will continue to rumble on in the background, which will severely damage the viability and sustainability of private childcare providers.

I want to use the short time that I have to concentrate on a couple of issues and problems that private providers are facing. They need to compete, often unfairly, with the state sector. The problems include lack of engagement with local authorities, and not just in my constituency but throughout Scotland; lack of access to capital funding, as we have heard from Alison Harris;

funding uncertainty; and increased competition from public nurseries, which should be complementing, not inhibiting, the existing private providers. To deliver the expansion, we need private nurseries to survive and thrive, not to shut their doors because they cannot compete. It is about parents being able to choose the best-quality care setting for their child.

I will give the example of a private provider that was concerned that it would need to make a staff member redundant this week, because the nursery has lost three children. I was told that the children left because they are registered with school nurseries from January—the term after their third birthdays—and if school nurseries have places available, they let children start as close to their third birthday as possible. I will quote from the provider:

“The Council’s answer to this is that if we have space and staffing then we can follow the same rule and let the children start their funded place as close to their 3rd birthday as we can, but the crux is that we won’t be paid by the Council for those places until January, or the April, depending on when their birthday falls. In this situation those children were due to leave in January—it’s not feasible to fund them from the business in the way the school will until January and as they were leaving anyway, to give them free hours doesn’t make sense. But the nursery will have planned for them leaving in January ... they’ve been poached for an early start at school nursery, and it leads to a shortfall in expected funds and so sadly a staff member has lost their job”.

I would like the minister to respond to the point about the lack of flexibility for partnership providers and fairness with regard to choice for parents. The minister constantly reassures us that the private sector is a valued partner, but the evidence suggests that it is not.

Private providers also face a lack of consistency over hourly rates. The letter that I quoted continues:

“the hub school at Chirnside is charging £3.20 per hour for wraparound in their nursery, which is open for 50 weeks of the year. The plan is for there to be a hub school nursery in every town with a high school, so for us we’ll be competing with the local schools from August 2019 for year round children. If they’re charging £3.20 per hour for their wraparound vs our £4.70 per hour (and many private nurseries are more than £5.00 per hour) then it looks like we can’t compete with that level of undercutting.”

On that point, clarity and consistency are needed. Again, if the Scottish Government is to be believed, it values the role of private providers. Perhaps listening to the concerns of the sector and acting on them would be helpful.

Staff retention is proving to be an increasingly large problem for private providers. We have heard examples of that today, so I will not go into specific examples.

The situation simply cannot continue. The Scottish Conservatives want early learning and

childcare to be a true partnership between local authorities and the private sector. I urge all members across the chamber to support our motion without question. This is an untenable scenario that must be addressed urgently.

16:41

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): What the chamber needs is a little positivity. We should not forget that the SNP Government’s commitment to double the number of hours of free nursery education is the most ambitious expansion of funded early learning and childcare that this country has ever seen, bar none. Doubling provision is a huge investment in terms of social infrastructure as well as bricks and mortar, and as we have heard, by 2021 the annual revenue investment in early years will be almost £1 billion, which is a phenomenal sum. By that time, 11,000 additional workers will have been employed.

I am aware of the concerns that some people in the private and third sectors have expressed—indeed, I have heard them at first hand in my constituency. An excellent childcare provider in my area is Sparklers Nursery, which operates in Gretna and Annan. The facilities are excellent and have won several awards, including for staff development. They offer everything that a local authority can offer, including the flexible wraparound care that we have heard about today.

Providers such as Sparklers have raised with me concerns about the fact that they were not involved in the planning of services in the past, and have expressed their frustration about councils expanding their provision in areas where good quality private sector providers already operate. I sympathise with those concerns, not least because those businesses were founded and built up by female entrepreneurs. That is why I welcome the minister’s assurance today that she has been listening to those providers and that the agreement that was reached in April represents only an early stage of the process, with more money being rolled out, and that the concerns of those providers will be taken on board.

The Government’s track record shows that, like me, it has been listening and responding to concerns. That is evident not least in the 100 per cent rates relief that has been extended to private sector providers, and in the funding follows the child model, which seeks to give parents a choice between a range of high quality providers, including childminders, who are an important aspect of provision in rural areas such as the one that I represent, because many villages do not have a nursery and childminders provide the flexibility that is needed.

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Joan McAlpine: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

The Government has listened to the concerns of the National Day Nurseries Association and is acting on those concerns, which is important. We have heard that the NDNA asked for a better funding rate and that the Government reached with COSLA an agreement that will, among other things, enable all childcare workers to be paid the Scottish living wage by 2020 at the latest.

I also want to mention the deposit guarantee scheme, which particularly helps the private sector and third sector providers that we are discussing today. Thousands of parents no longer have to pay expensive up-front childcare deposits. In Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dumfries and Galloway, the Scottish Government will cover that cost for eligible families until December 2019. Almost half of parents in the pilot areas with a child under two who take up childcare for the first time can benefit from that scheme.

I also welcome the establishment of the ELC partnership forum, which will promote co-operation between local authorities and partner providers. That has also been welcomed by the NDNA's chief executive.

Time and again in the chamber the Government is urged to work in partnership with local authorities and to respect democratic local decision-making. In my experience—and from what I have heard in the chamber today—many of the difficulties that have been outlined by private and third sector providers are related to decisions that have been made at council level, not by the Government. People cannot tell the Government that it should respect local democracy and simultaneously demand that it should blunderbuss councils that do not do as they are told.

The Government has suggested constructive ways to encourage everyone to work in partnership for delivery of our ambitious early years commitment. I hope that people will take the Government's lead on that and will work in partnership and collaborate for the good of Scotland's children.

The Presiding Officer: Conclude, please.

Joan McAlpine: At the end of the day, that is what it is all about.

The Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:46

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): This is one of those afternoons on which the idle observer might

think that we have managed to construct an argument out of something that we all agree on. Many speakers have made the point that we agree that the move to 1,140 hours is very welcome. However, disagreement lies around people's confidence in the measures that the Government has taken, and is taking, to deliver the policy, and there is serious and significant evidence to fuel those concerns.

We have very strong evidence of the concerns of those critical partner providers, the private nursery sector. We also have the report that was published by Audit Scotland earlier this year and the experience of the previous policy commitment of 600 funded hours. Although that policy has been in place for many years, many families still find it difficult to access their entitlement.

The fair funding for kids campaign has told us for months and years about the lack of flexibility in the sector. Something like half of all nurseries—private or council run—provide only half days, and 90 per cent of council nurseries offer provision only in term time. In 19 local authority areas, no council nursery opens from 8 until 6 and there are cross-border problems for parents who want to place their children in a different authority from the one in which they live.

All those problems remain under the previous policy, and that is why some providers of childcare lack confidence that the new policy will be introduced properly and on time. The minister was very strong on her commitment that this policy is about closing the attainment gap and helping to address poverty, which is very welcome. However, under the current 600 funded hours policy, fewer than half of the vulnerable two-year-olds who have an entitlement have been able to take it up. It is those very children that the current policy has failed.

Audit Scotland commented on all that in its report and also made it clear that it did not believe that the 1,140-hour policy would be delivered on time. It said that planning started too late and that there was a difference of view on the finances that were available. Although the report came out before the agreement with COSLA, the evidence that Audit Scotland gave to the Education and Skills Committee took account of that. Audit Scotland also said that it could not see how the 11,000 additional workers would be found. It took account of the measures that the Government has introduced—the additional apprenticeship places and so on—but it still could not see how that would work.

The strongest concerns, which have dominated the short debate this afternoon, are those of the partner providers: funding shortfalls and the pressure of paying the national living wage. I heard Mr Swinney make the point—

John Swinney: Will the member take an intervention?

Iain Gray: No. I heard Mr Swinney make the point that the agreement means that there should be enough funding for the funded hours to allow providers to pay the living wage, but only 3 per cent of private nursery providers are accredited living wage employers, so we have a long way to go.

John Swinney: Will the member give way?

Iain Gray: I am sorry; I do not have time.

The private nursery providers are not convinced that they will be able to do this, which is why two thirds of them are saying that they will not engage with the 1,140 funded hours at all. That is a serious position. The minister says that it has been sorted. She says that

“a spirit of joint endeavour is radiating from the forum.”

However, those partner providers are not feeling bathed in the warmth of that spirit of joint endeavour. They are seriously concerned and we need to hear what more the minister will do to convince them that this expansion will work.

16:50

Maree Todd: The debate has largely focused on governance and in my closing remarks I aim to provide the reassurance that my colleagues seek.

We have the right and robust governance mechanisms in place. We have established a joint delivery board, which Councillor Stephen McCabe and I co-chair. It also has representatives from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and from the directors of finance. Therefore, the people who are seeking data to assure us that the policy is being delivered appropriately are not the Scottish Government—it is very much a joint endeavour.

The board met earlier today in Greenock, where we discussed the first set of progress data that I have received from the local authorities, and we had an update on the meeting in the partnership forum. The board monitors workforce, uptake, capacity and infrastructure, and I am pleased to report that all are largely on target. We can identify where there are challenges, and we are ensuring that action is taken to quickly address those challenges.

I assure the chamber that we are also monitoring quality. We are determined to ensure that quality is maintained during the expansion. We plan to publish that information regularly, starting with the first data set in the next few weeks, to ensure that there is transparency about how the expansion is progressing.

We heard a report from the partnership forum today and we reaffirmed our commitment to attend if required. We will work tirelessly to ensure that the pockets of excellent practice become standard right across Scotland. Let me reassure members that we have not handpicked quiet wallflowers for the partnership forum; there was really good representation at the meeting from right across Scotland and from different sectors. I heard that there was robust challenge from many of the partner providers there, but it was an overwhelmingly positive meeting. The passion and the commitment that all the parties feel for this expansion was palpable, as was the sense of everyone working together to the same end.

I understand that there are private providers with concerns about their role in the expansion in some areas and I hope that I have provided reassurance in that regard. Our provider-neutral approach makes it clear that we value the role that private providers currently play and the role that they will play and we know that more can be done to improve engagement and involvement in the roll-out of our expansion plans.

Brian Whittle: I appreciate the minister's commitment to this programme, but the people from partnership nurseries who are behind me in the public gallery have said to me that they feel that local authorities are setting themselves up in competition with partnership nurseries rather than working collaboratively as equal partners. Can the minister respond to that?

Maree Todd: I can assure the member that in local authorities, private providers and childminders together currently provide 24 per cent of the provision and in 2021-22, local authorities expect them to still provide 24 per cent of the provision. I hear what members are saying about what is going on in their communities in relation to particular situations and providers. I want to reassure them that I have listened; I want to reassure them that my door is open and I am happy to meet any member to discuss particular issues or concerns about providers. In particular, I want to hear about the experiences of parents and children.

Although I accept that not everything is perfect in our roll-out programme, not everything is bad either. There has been progress and what we are doing is already making a difference in communities and to families up and down the land.

Michelle Ballantyne: The minister says that she wants parents to be able to have choices and that the money should follow them. Will she comment on people's right to have their free hours of childcare outside the area that they live in? I have been contacted by a number of constituents who want childcare where they work and not where they live.

Maree Todd: I reassure the member that that is not going to be a problem. In the future there will be absolutely no barrier to an out-of-area placement because, as I have explained many times in the chamber, the only requirement for a parent is that the funded partner meets the national quality standard and has a place available.

The Government remains absolutely committed to this most ambitious expansion of early learning and childcare in the UK, and we have fully funded it. I assure members that we are making good progress. At the meeting today, I was really pleased to hear from the data return from local authorities—it is data that they are collecting anyway, so there is no extra work for them to collect it—that more than 1,000 two-year-olds right across the country are already receiving more than 600 hours of funded entitlement. I am delighted that uptake for eligible two-year-olds is exceeding our forecast at this stage.

Because of our policy decision to ensure that children who need it most benefit from the policy first, the first phase of the expansion was always going to involve largely local authority nurseries, because they are the nurseries that operate in areas of high deprivation.

The Presiding Officer: I ask the minister to conclude.

Maree Todd: However, I assure members that we remain committed to the provider-neutral approach.

We are making really good progress with our plans to transform early learning and childcare for current and future generations of Scottish families. I acknowledge that there is more that we can do and I will ensure that we deliver on our aspirations and commitment.

16:56

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I begin my speech by agreeing whole-heartedly with what Iain Gray said. He set out the context of the problem that we face.

I say to the minister that I entirely accept her ambitions, what she is trying to deliver and the efforts that she is making to make that happen. However, this debate is not just about the promises; it is about ensuring that we can put in place the ways in which we deliver the policies that we all aspire to. We must ensure that the two sectors, in the way in which they provide the childcare that we need, complement each other if we are to fulfil those policies.

I also say to the minister that it is so important that we listen carefully to the concerns that the private sector has set out, which were listed by my

colleague Brian Whittle. Rona Mackay, in a very good speech, flagged up some of the concerns that she has heard in her constituency, and we heard Alex Neil, Kate Forbes and even Joan McAlpine echo some of the concerns that have been put about by the Conservatives this afternoon. It is important that we empower people in the private sector so that we can deliver on the policy requirements.

As with anything that the Government undertakes, if its policy is to be effective, there has to be a solid basis of evidence in front of us. As Rachael Hamilton set out—Tavish Scott and Mary Fee mentioned this as well—we must not ignore what was said by Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission, because it was a stark message about what has to happen if we are to fulfil the policy.

I think that it was Daniel Johnson who mentioned the concern that we have not been able to move on significantly from the 600 hours policy in a way that satisfies people that we have the confidence of parents and that the private sector has the ability to engage. This debate is not just about extending the number of hours; it is about flexibility, parental choice and ensuring that people in the private sector can engage with those things. At present, the private sector is telling us that it does not feel that confidence and that it does not have the ability to take on board a lot of the things that it would like to do to ensure that so many of our children will be able to have the additional support.

We cannot just talk about this; we actually have to do something. As I said, the issue is not just about the extra hours and the financial commitment; it is about flexibility and structure in the system. If we do not do something about those issues, we are in danger of not being able to achieve what we want.

There are good examples of local authorities working on a partnership deal, but I say to the minister that the evidence shows that they are few and far between. If we are to ensure that all local authorities have partnership funding in the way that we want, we will have to take drastic action to make that happen. In some cases, the state sector is pushing out the private sector, which is not acceptable if we are to deliver the number of places that are required. I take on board the minister's determination to do something about that.

John Swinney: Will Liz Smith give way?

Liz Smith: I cannot give way on this occasion.

The minister has to clarify the advice that she gives to local authorities because, as Alison Harris rightly said, too many local authorities are not

abiding by the policy, which is letting down many people in the private sector.

The debate is exceptionally important. We have no problems with the Scottish Government's ambition, but we—and, I think, many SNP members—have a problem with exactly how we deliver that. We have to take on board the concerns that we are hearing from many people in the private sector.

Business Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-14535, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 6 November 2018

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Impact of the UK Government Welfare Cuts and Universal Credit on Poverty

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Ivory Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Committee Announcements

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 7 November 2018

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Finance, Economy and Fair Work

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Safeguarding Scotland's International Research Collaborations and Reputation for Scientific Excellence from the Threat of Brexit

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 November 2018

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Motion of Remembrance

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Members' Business

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scotland's Plan to Improve the Educational Experience of LGBTI Young People

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Prescription (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 13 November 2018

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Committee Announcements

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 14 November 2018

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 November 2018

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, in relation to any debate on a business motion setting out a business programme taken on Wednesday 7 November 2018, the second sentence of rule 8.11.3 is suspended and replaced with "Any Member may speak on the motion at the discretion of the Presiding Officer"

and

(c) that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 8 November 2018, in rule 13.6.2, insert at end "and may provide an opportunity for Party Leaders or their representatives to question the First Minister".—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-

14536, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 timetable for a bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by Friday 21 June 2019.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I call Graeme Dey to move motions S5M-14537, on designation of a lead committee, S5M-14538, on the office of the clerk, and S5M-14556, also on designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the South of Scotland Enterprise Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on Thursday 27, Friday 28 and Monday 31 December 2018.—[*Graeme Dey*]

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Agriculture Bill (UK Legislation).

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-14520.4, in the name of Paul Wheelhouse, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14520, in the name of Jamie Greene, on concern over the state of Scotland's ferry services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-14520.3, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Jamie Greene, on Scotland's ferry services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

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

Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-14520, in the name of Jamie Greene, on concerns over the state of Scotland's ferry services, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)

Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

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

Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 62, Abstentions 0. As Parliament has been unable to reach agreement, I use my casting vote against the motion. Therefore, the motion falls.

Motion, as amended, disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-14521.2, in the name of Maree Todd, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14521, in the name of Alison Harris, on early years, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 62, Abstentions 0. The vote is tied and Parliament has again been unable to reach agreement. In this case, I cast my vote against the amendment, which falls.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-14521.1, in the name of Mary Fee, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14521, in the name of Alison Harris, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-14521, in the name of Alison Harris, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

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

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 62, Abstentions 0. Again, Parliament has not agreed a position, and I cast my vote against the motion, which falls.

Motion, as amended, disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I propose putting a single question on the three Parliamentary Bureau motions. There being no objection, the question is, that motions S5M-14537, S5M-14538 and S5M-14556, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the South of Scotland Enterprise Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on Thursday 27, Friday 28 and Monday 31 December 2018.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Agriculture Bill (UK Legislation).

Caledonian Pinewood Forest

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-13223, in the name of Joan McAlpine, on restoring the Caledonian pinewood forest. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that only 1% of the original Caledonian Pinewood forest remains today across Scotland, including areas in the south of Scotland; understands that the environmental and ecological consequences of this are significant as the pinewood forest is an important habitat for a number of wildlife species, including aspen, black grouse, capercaillie, golden eagle, juniper, wood ant, pine marten, red squirrel, tree lungwort, twinflower and wildcat; believes that many of the remaining fragments of forest are not being actively managed and that the Caledonian Pinewood Recovery Project, being implemented by Trees For Life, aims to save these remnant pinewoods; notes that the project sees Trees for Life working in partnership with The Woodland Trust Scotland to assess the health of the remaining pinewood fragments and work with landowners to promote their better management, thereby restoring Scotland's unique pinewoods, and commends the work of Trees for Life and The Woodland Trust Scotland.

17:11

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure as species champion of our national tree—the Scots pine—to introduce the debate. The Scots pine is symbolic of Scotland. It is a majestic tree whose distinctive silhouette on the horizon tells the Highlander that he is home. If we close our eyes and imagine a Scots pine, we will most likely visualise it solitary against the sky. However, several millennia ago, the Scots pine did not stand alone; it was part of what the Romans later called the great wood of Caledon. At one time, it covered 1.5 million hectares. It was Scotland's rainforest. The forest contained other trees including birch, rowan, aspen and juniper, and it was carpeted with a lush variety of ferns, mosses and lichens. It sheltered a vast array of wildlife, some of which—the lynx, the brown bear and the wolf, for example—are long extinct.

The ancient Caledonian forest itself is now threatened with extinction. Only 1 per cent of the 1.5 million hectares survives, in 84 fragments, some of which are very small. Although that is a tragedy for my species—the Scots pine—it is also potentially heartbreaking with respect to the animals and plants that continue to depend on our pine forests. The capercaillie, the red squirrel, the black grouse, the golden eagle, the Scottish crossbill, the pine marten, the wildcat, the twinflower and the wood ant are all found in the forest, and they have a stake in its survival.

Another purpose of the debate is to allow other members to champion their species and illustrate just how biodiversity works in practice. Although the 84 areas of ancient woodland that I mentioned have been identified by the Forestry Commission Scotland as part of the old Caledonian woodland, there are other pine forests elsewhere in Scotland, particularly in the south of Scotland, my area, that are hundreds of years old and are home to many of those species. In particular, I mention Shambellie wood near New Abbey, which is certainly worth a visit.

There is international recognition of the richness of Scotland's pinewoods. They receive protection from the European Union habitats directive and are included in the Scottish biodiversity list. Despite that, they face enormous challenges, including overgrazing by deer, climate change, invasive non-native species, and diseases such as *Dothistroma* needle blight, which can cause defoliation and even death. Foresters have to be very vigilant to it.

When the Trees for Life charity approached me to help to promote its Caledonian pinewood recovery project, which is a partnership project with the Woodland Trust, I immediately agreed. I am delighted to welcome Trees for Life representatives Alan McDonnell and Fiona Holmes to the gallery. The project focuses on the 84 surviving fragments of ancient forest and is supported by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Land & Estates. It offers owners a free survey of their woods to assess their ecological health and resilience to the threats that I have mentioned. Ecologists can then suggest ways in which the challenges can be met. It is a really positive collaborative venture that we all hope will contribute to the Scottish Government's aim of meeting the international biodiversity target to restore 10,000 hectares of native woodland.

How does one go about assessing and addressing the ecological health of a pinewood forest? I decided to see for myself by visiting the Dundreggan conservation estate in Glen Moriston near Loch Ness, which is Trees for Life's 10,000-acre flagship restoration project. It was purchased 10 years ago entirely through fundraising, and has been described as

"the most ambitious rewilding project anywhere in the UK."

Through natural regeneration and planting more than 1 million saplings, Trees for Life and its volunteers aim to create an unbroken native woodland link between Glen Moriston and the magnificent Glen Affric to the north. That directly addresses the fragmentation that afflicts pinewoods and will create a corridor to allow birds and animals that depend on the woods to increase their range and to flourish.

Natural forest regeneration is hard work. My visit allowed me to see how enormous the task is. Doug Gilbert, who is the operations manager at the Dundreggan estate, walked me up Glen Moriston to see a small clump of picturesque but very gnarled Scots pine, which he said dated back to the time when the glen was cleared of people after the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. That is a poignant and romantic story in itself, but as Doug pointed out, those 18th century survivors are poignant for another reason. The trees are known as geriatric trees. Once the estate was given over to sport in the Victorian era, few trees survived to maturity, because deer devour saplings and young trees. Only the geriatric or granny trees survive, and they eventually become infertile.

To combat that, Dundreggan has an impressive tree nursery that allows conservationists to collect and grow pines and other trees on site. That is very important for biosecurity, not only because of the diseases that I have mentioned, but because it is more natural to propagate from local stock. The nursery workers spend a lot of time recreating the conditions in which wild tree seeds are fertilised and dispersed by birds and animals. They also grow species that they can then sell on in order to earn an income to sustain the charity. The work is labour intensive, and it illustrates that forest regeneration can help to sustain other species that we all want to prosper in rural Scotland—particularly, human beings.

Natural regeneration is considered to be vital, but young Scots pine trees are very vulnerable, especially in winter, when they pop up through the snow, advertising themselves as a tasty snack to any passing deer, who apparently prefer them to birch, which is the last tree they will eat.

The charity has begun using special clip-on shields to protect the saplings. There is also fencing, but it has a finite lifespan and is not foolproof. Furthermore, there is a view among ecologists that fencing cages woodland and the creatures who live in it and prevents natural spread.

Dundreggan employs a gamekeeper, whom I believe it inherited from the previous sporting estate, and it uses innovative ways of keeping the deer out, including using groups of noisy volunteers to disturb them. I am told that bagpipes are particularly effective.

Commercial monoculture is another threat to forest regeneration. Some of the ecologists whom I spoke to asked whether it is right that natural regeneration attracts smaller grants than commercial planting attracts. That debate is perhaps for another day.

Today is an opportunity to focus on the Caledonian pinewood recovery project of Trees for

Life and the Woodland Trust. I hope that members will promote it—and their own species—in their constituencies. I hope that we will dwell on how best to ensure that the ancient Caledonian pine forest does not become extinct.

As the writer Ali Smith once said, the Scots pine may be

“noble and solitary ... sculpted into aloneness by the wind.”

Our pine is not lonesome, but a much-loved companion to the crossbill, the red squirrel, the marten, the capercaillie and many more. That is why I hope that it will flourish.

17:19

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands (Con): I thank Joan McAlpine for bringing the motion to the chamber for debate. Protecting our Caledonian pinewoods is vital.

Managing the hills of Scotland, where our Caledonian pine naturally grows, presents unique challenges, and nature itself is probably the most difficult thing to predict.

I had the privilege of managing areas of upland Scotland for 12 years, and I believe that I helped to preserve the Caledonian pinewoods that we are talking about. I would like to highlight some of the issues that are involved in expanding the Caledonian pinewood, the importance of which, I am sure, we all agree on. One project that I did involved trying to establish 600 hectares of replacement native Caledonian pinewood. I can tell members that I have the scars to prove it. For years, we collected seed from registered Caledonian pines, which we propagated. We took cuttings from the trees and grafted them on to pine rootstock. Woodland grant scheme approval from the Forestry Commission was key to the project; I thought that getting it would be relatively simple. That was probably my first big mistake, because the level of consultation that was required was massive. Six years later, after hundreds of hours spent consulting every interest group that came forward, we were no further on, except that I had thousands of trees outgrowing their pots in a nursery.

Among the areas of contention was the fact that the pinewood that I wanted to plant would reduce the hunting grounds for eagles, so bird groups were against it. Some people were against the removal of rabbits, which was encouraged by Scottish Natural Heritage, because their removal would reduce prey for predators. It was also argued that the pinewood would reduce the area of calcareous grassland, which happened to be damaged by overgrazing by the rabbits that were important to the raptor groups but despised by SNH.

It was felt that pedestrian gates in fences might put off walkers, so gates were not supported by the Ramblers Association, but were approved by the Forestry Commission.

Some groups objected on the ground that the scenic view would be curtailed by trees that would merely be replacing native woodlands that had died out. On and on the process went; one day, a group would support the application, and the next day it would not.

However, there was one constant—the support of the Forestry Commission. Like my client, it knew about the importance of Caledonian pinewood. I am grateful for the commission's support, because it meant that, eventually, we succeeded in getting thousands of trees planted, which was extremely important in helping to preserve the Caledonian woods. I make the observation that I wish that people would sometimes take a more holistic approach to achieving that goal. It is great that the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy has streamlined the process of applying for woodland grant schemes, and I hope that it is progressed.

I turn briefly to needle blight—I will not use the Latin name, because I would probably get tongue-tied—which is a problem that faces pinewoods across the UK. The Forestry Commission's advice is that planting should be undertaken only when it is deemed to be essential to the short-term survival and long-term integrity of a pinewood ecosystem. That means that we need to encourage natural regeneration. I believe that the commission is right about that. To achieve that, as Joan McAlpine made clear, we will probably have to fence the fragile young pine to protect those tasty morsels from all the animals that prey on them, which include mountain hare and deer. If fencing is not acceptable—I know that it is not acceptable to everyone—we must accept that there needs to be a significant reduction in deer and hare numbers, which might in turn be unacceptable to other people. Such decisions, which are forced on land managers by nature, are the real decisions that we must make. Although they are difficult to make, we have to make them.

I welcome the debate, I welcome the work of Trees for Life, the Woodland Trust Scotland and private landowners who are trying to improve the situation, and I welcome the commitment of the Forestry Commission. All of them are working to promote our Caledonian pinewoods and jointly, as a Parliament, we should support them in making the hard decisions that they have to make, based on knowledge, not on emotion.

17:23

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Joan McAlpine, as the species champion for our iconic Scots pine, for bringing this important matter to the chamber for debate.

From the Caledonian pine forests of the Scottish Highlands to the Atlantic oak woodlands of the western seaboard, trees provide us with a fabulous array of benefits. We value them for everything from the recreational opportunities that they provide to the carbon that they sequester and the home that they provide for some of our favourite wildlife, including red squirrels, woodpeckers and species of global importance such as the lichens and mosses that are found in our Atlantic woodlands.

It must also be recognised that native woodlands and commercial forests are important sources of timber and other products. Our woods and forests are important national assets, and it is evident that more of them would be beneficial.

I whole-heartedly support any measure to bring sustainable, biodiverse pinewoods into suitable places and to protect existing pockets of ancient woods, which Joan McAlpine highlighted, whether they are of pine or of other species that are appropriate in that place.

The ancient pinewoods that are scattered across the northern parts of Scotland are an important part of our natural history and, with proper management, should remain an important part of Scotland's natural future.

Climate change is a significant factor in the decline of ancient, indigenous Scots pinewoods. I understand that the trees, surprisingly, can thrive only in relatively dry conditions. That is one more example of why we need more joined-up approaches to tackling individual issues and wider climate change problems—the two are unavoidably and inextricably linked.

Whether they are pinewoods in the Highlands or native hardwoods such as willow, birch and aspen in the south of Scotland, it is hugely important that natural woodlands are preserved and managed responsibly. Carrifran wildwood near Moffat, in my region, is a brilliant example of the ecological clock being turned back 6,000 years—and hopefully forward another 6,000 years.

Although this is perhaps not confusing for the members here in the chamber, I clarify that the work to maintain and promote the regeneration of the remaining ancient pine woodland is different from the planting of monocultures in Scotland in previous times.

The Scottish Government has committed to afforestation targets, and focusing on re-establishing our ancient pinewoods, alongside

other native woodlands, provides important benefits for biodiversity.

I applaud the efforts of Trees for Life and the Woodland Trust Scotland in engaging with landowners to protect and regenerate ancient Scots pinewoods.

Regardless of the species of tree or where the woodland is located, an often-overlooked contribution to biodiversity and our natural environment is work to ensure that areas of less intensive woodland are provided, especially as corridors for wildlife.

Finally, I have two questions for the minister to consider. Both the current Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, of which I am a member, and its predecessor committee in the previous session, have highlighted and worked hard on deer management arrangements. Joan McAlpine and Edward Mountain both highlighted that issue in their speeches. The main challenge to restoration is large numbers of red deer grazing on young trees. Can the minister provide an update on the latest SNH review in that context?

The Government recently announced a biodiversity challenge fund in the programme for government. Will projects that seek the restoration of ancient pinewoods be eligible for that funding? Given the major challenge to the future of ancient Caledonian pinewoods, does the minister have plans to prevent the loss of existing ancient woodland, too?

Together, let us protect the Scots pine and our ancient forests and woodland more broadly in order to protect biodiversity for the enjoyment of everybody.

17:28

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I thank Joan McAlpine for securing the debate. As someone who left school and went straight into forestry and spent a lot of time campaigning in Aberdeenshire to protect pinewoods on the Mar Lodge estate and so on, I am delighted to be able to talk about native pinewoods. However, the fact that we have been talking about 1 per cent for the best part of half a century is testament to the brutalising, destructive and degrading forms of extractive land use that have dominated too much of Scotland for too long.

Members have mentioned excellent work that is being done by organisations such as RSPB Scotland, the Woodland Trust Scotland, Trees for Life and Forest Enterprise over long periods in places such as Glen Affric and the recent work done by Arkaig Community Forest and the Woodland Trust on the south side of Loch Arkaig. Other examples include work by community

groups such as Birse Community Trust on the Forest of Birse community and work by private landowners, some of whom have made significant efforts—most notably Anders Povlsen and his company Wildland Ltd in Glenfeshie.

Glenfeshie was where I learned some harsh truths about land and power in my 20s. The estate is one of the jewels in the crown of our natural heritage and yet it has been owned, managed and abused by a succession of rapacious landowners who are determined to manage it purely as a hunting playground, destroying, in the process, one of the most important remnants of Caledonian pinewood.

In 1992, I was working in international forest conservation across the Boreal region through the Taiga Rescue Network, which was established in Jokkmokk in northern Sweden in 1992. We used Glenfeshie and Mar Lodge as powerful examples of the hypocrisy of the Scottish Office and the UK Government, which, along with many other northern Governments, were lecturing the global south on the need to conserve tropical rainforests in their countries, while presiding over unprecedented levels of native forest destruction here. Our work with the global environmental community then helped to draw attention to the fact that the worst-performing countries in forest protection were those such as Scotland. The then Secretary of State for Scotland Ian Lang's press conference at the earth summit certainly did not go as he had intended.

Conservationist Dick Balharry was a key influence on me then. Sadly, Dick died in April 2015, but, a week before he left us, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society awarded him the Geddes environmental medal for his lifetime achievements in conservation. His involvement with Glenfeshie ran from 1964 to his death. In his Geddes lecture, he argued:

"Traditional sporting estates cannot stand on the moral high ground of estate ownership as they have tried to claim for over the last 200 years. Rather they embody the selfish greed of a Victorian era, outdated and ludicrous."

Dick Balharry was particularly critical of the use of fencing as a means to regenerate native forests, which we have heard about in today's debate. He had been instrumental behind the scenes in the very heated public campaign to protect what is now the Creag Meagaidh national nature reserve from being converted into a non-native commercial plantation. That drew heavy criticism and political hostility from the then Tory Government. As he argued in his lecture:

"The sad fact, witnessed throughout Scotland today, is that in many areas fencing deer out of young native woodland has become a way to maintain easier stalking opportunities and to protect established relationships and social networks. In effect many deer fences are built to protect the interests of the few."

The Scottish Government has commissioned two independent reviews that could play a critical role in reviving the fortunes of our native forests. The grouse moor management group, chaired by Professor Alan Werritty, is due to report by June next year, and the deer working group—I think that Claudia Beamish mentioned it—by the end of April. The latter was chaired, until his recent tragic death, by Simon Pepper, to whose efforts through WWF Scotland and on his own account over many years, in advancing the case for the restoration of our natural environment and the place of people in it, I would like to pay tribute in this debate.

The core reason that Scotland's native pinewoods are still dying is the continued preservation of vast tracts of Scotland as playgrounds for the idle rich to hunt all manner of its wildlife. Political will can change that—and I hope that it will do so soon.

17:32

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I congratulate Joan McAlpine on securing this particularly relevant debate, which is timely, given the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's recent report, which points to the fact that an increase in global temperatures is a very real danger. A debate on the protection and recovery of woodland is extremely pertinent to our efforts to provide and enhance the carbon sinks that can mitigate the effects of carbon emissions—effects that cost us dear as regards human health and wellbeing, as well as having a negative impact on our economy. That gets lost in the debate, but we really have to ramp up the chatter on that, too.

Before I talk about the value of trees for climate change, I will proudly mention my interest as the species champion of the yew. Scotland's and Europe's oldest living trees are yews, and it is fairly likely that the ancient forests of Scotland would have had many yews in them.

Trees have a vital role in the balancing of CO₂ and oxygen levels, and widespread deforestation across the world has had a hugely negative impact by releasing more CO₂ into the atmosphere. The impact of the threats of the newly elected Brazilian Prime Minister and his plans for the Amazon will not be lost on anyone. However, what we have growing naturally in Scotland is not nearly reaching our potential for sufficient mitigation of carbon emissions, so, as a matter of urgency, we have to do what we can to regenerate lost woodlands.

Particularly helpful in the battle around CO₂ and climate change are the ancient Caledonian pinewoods, which live on undisturbed soils. The fact that such soil is undisturbed and protected underneath the ancient forest means that it acts as

one of our most efficient carbon sinks, locking up carbon. The Caledonian pinewoods contribute significantly to the ecosystem services that are gained from native woodlands generally in Scotland, with the most relevant means of climate change mitigation that we have being carbon sequestration. Pine trees also happen to be one of the top species that can sequester the most carbon.

The work of Trees for Life to protect the existing areas of ancient Caledonian pinewoods and to increase the extent of Caledonian pinewoods across Scotland via tree-planting programmes is a big step in the right direction for Scotland's efforts to tackle climate change. I thank Trees for Life and the Woodland Trust, which are putting tremendous effort into running the Caledonian pinewood recovery project, along with their partners in Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, and Scottish Land and Estates.

I pay tribute to those individual home owners, primary schools, small communities and farmers who give over land to voluntarily plant indigenous trees, with or without the help of any funding that may be available. Coming from a rural constituency, I have many constituents who take individual responsibility for planting trees to provide a degree of carbon sequestration and improve habitats for wild animal, bird and insect species.

I want to mention specific tree-planting projects that I have visited in my constituency, in the village of Cultercullen and at Fintry primary school, which have done new planting to play their part. In my area, it has been proven that even the smallest tree plantation is enough to attract red squirrels, just one Scottish species that we know is under threat; I recognise that Gail Ross, who is sitting next to me, is the species champion for the red squirrel.

Like everything with regard to environmental protection, the small actions of individuals in taking responsibility is hugely impactful cumulatively. I thank Joan McAlpine for highlighting the work that is being done to ensure that that is done on a wide scale with the Caledonian forest. The forest will provide local protection against flooding and improve biodiversity, not to mention making a significant impact in our drive to become one of the world's first carbon-neutral nations.

17:36

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank Joan McAlpine for bringing this important subject to the chamber, and I recognise the work that Trees for Life and the Woodland Trust Scotland are doing to preserve the Caledonian pine forest.

I am pleased to be taking part in the debate, with particular relevance to my role as the natural environment spokesperson for the Scottish Conservatives. Barely a day goes by now when we are not hearing through the media, or indeed working in this Parliament, that we need to do more to protect our environment and stunning landscapes. That is one of the reasons why I am an enthusiastic supporter of a Galloway national park, as I am sure that the minister will find out now that she is in the role. It is also why debates such as this are so important in raising awareness of issues facing our natural environment and the amazingly diverse species that we have in Scotland.

I am particularly delighted to be taking part in the debate, because I cannot resist the opportunity to speak about an animal that lives in the Caledonian pine forest and other native woodlands. Tonight of all nights, Halloween, I am pleased to say that I am the bat champion. More specifically, I am the species champion for the Leisler's bat. The Leisler's bat flies fast and high near the tops of the trees, and toonies might also spot it flying around lamp posts looking for insects attracted to the light. The Leisler's bat forages for flies, moths and beetles, locating its prey using echolocation. Sometimes it can even be heard by the human ear if one listens out for it just before it emerges at sunset.

Most importantly for this debate, it roosts in holes in trees, as well as in buildings, and you might be lucky enough to attract one to live in your bat box. They are sweet wee animals. During the summer, the females form maternity colonies and usually have a single pup. During the winter, Leisler's bats mainly hibernate in tree holes, but occasionally they will hibernate in buildings or underground. The Leisler's bat has golden-tipped or reddish-brown fur, which is darker at the base and longer over its shoulders and upper back, giving it a lion's mane appearance, so it is very cute.

Although the Leisler's bat does not specifically reside in pinewood forests, it does thrive in habitats of native woodland. You will be delighted to know, Presiding Officer, that one of the biggest colonies is just up the road from your former home in Minnigaff at the Wood of Cree. In the United Kingdom, bats and their roosts are protected by law, meaning that it is illegal to damage, destroy or disturb bats or their roost sites. A roost is defined as any place, including a tree, that wild bats use for shelter or protection.

All bats in the UK feed on insects, and because trees can support a large variety and abundance of insects they are really important for foraging bats. Native trees such as those in the Caledonian pine forest support the greatest abundance of

insects, with veteran or ancient trees being of particular value.

Bats not only feed in woodland but live within trees in sheltered locations that are known as roosts, and all UK bats utilise those natural features to roost in trees.

While researching for tonight's debate, I was astonished to discover that the native pinewoods, which formed the westernmost outpost of the forest in Europe, are estimated to have once covered 1.5 million hectares as a vast primeval wilderness of Scotland with pine, birch, rowan, aspen, juniper and other trees. The deforestation has been so extensive that the Trees for Life group, which helps to plant trees in order to restore the Caledonian forest to some of its former glory, says that our generation is the last with the opportunity to save it. We do not want to be accused of not seeing the wood for the trees, but it is not just about trees; it is about the plethora of species that rely on the forest to provide the homes and food that they need to thrive.

I am hugely grateful to Liz Ferrell of the Bat Conservation Trust for providing me with the information for tonight's debate, which supplements a recent, excellent bat walk with bat detectors in Holyrood park. I thoroughly recommend the bat walk to anybody who wants to give it a shot.

Once again, I thank Joan McAlpine for bringing the subject to the chamber and the Trees for Life group and the Woodland Trust for their hard work. We must continue to protect our species and champion them at every opportunity. I am pleased to have had the opportunity on Halloween to do that for the bat.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. Would you clarify whether it is the Leisler's bat or the lesser bat?

Finlay Carson: It is the Leisler's bat.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was wondering about the greater bat, but I understand now that it is the Leisler's bat. I am sure that the *Official Report* will sort all that out.

Due to the number of members who wish to speak, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 that the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes. We will not need 30 minutes, so do not panic.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Joan McAlpine]

Motion agreed to.

17:42

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I, too, thank Joan McAlpine for this important debate. I agree that the Scots pine is, indeed, a magnificent tree—in fact, I have a couple in my garden.

I am the species champion for the red squirrel—unfortunately, I have none of those in my garden—and the expansion of our Caledonian pinewood forests offers hope for the species from the threats that contribute to its decline. Red squirrels were once a common sight across the UK, but they have been in decline for decades. Scotland is home to 75 per cent of the estimated 121,000 reds that are left. Non-native grey squirrels are a major threat and are capable of arriving in an area and wiping out the native population of reds in as little as 15 years. They do this by spreading squirrel pox, which is a virus that is fatal to reds but not greys.

Reds can also be affected by habitat isolation. In broadleaf woodlands, grey squirrels have the advantage of being able to process tannins in food sources such as acorns earlier in the year, helping them to out-compete the reds for food and territory. However, the reds do not suffer that disadvantage in Caledonian pinewoods and have a much greater chance of establishing populations there. At the moment, the isolation of many Caledonian pinewoods can leave red squirrels isolated with limited ability to face challenges like fluctuations in food availability or climate change. Very small sparse patches of ancient Caledonian pine forest are not great for red squirrels; the canopies are so open and unconnected that squirrels often do not use them, and moving across heathery ground exposes them to too great a risk from predators. Connecting the pinewoods will give red squirrels greater ability to develop strongholds and cope with difficult times, particularly by allowing reds to look for alternative sources of food and move across landscapes to seek the best shelter in the harshest weather and by increasing breeding opportunities to help with recovery from periods of low population.

Trees for Life and the Woodland Trust Scotland are currently running the Caledonian pinewood recovery project—or CPR project, which is so appropriate—with advice and guidance from Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Land & Estates. A particular focus of the project is to work with private landowners and managers with what remains of the forest to identify the practical steps that are needed to first protect and then expand it.

As members said, the trees face particular challenges, such as being eaten by deer, disease and climate change.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Has the member heard of the species for which I am species champion, the sticky catchfly? It lives where I live, in the Ochil hills, and where I work, in Holyrood—it exists only in those two places. I mention it not to test the member but to try to get “sticky catchfly” into the *Official Report*.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have been used, Ms Ross, but do not mind.

Gail Ross: I thank Keith Brown for that important sticky catchfly intervention.

The CPR project seeks to provide landowners with support and guidance so that they can successfully apply for funding from the forestry grant scheme for help with things like deer fencing, removing invasive non-native species and planting a range of tree species associated with Caledonian pinewoods.

I am happy to say that we have just had some great news. I congratulate Trees For Life on winning a vote for a major European funding award. The charity’s pioneering reds return project has just been awarded more than £25,000 from the European Outdoor Conservation Association funding stream.

I thank everyone who voted for the reds. The money will fund a project to reintroduce red squirrels to four carefully chosen woods in the north-west Highlands. That will significantly expand the species’ numbers and range, with the new populations able to flourish, safe from the threats that greys present.

The project will also help the natural expansion of Scotland’s native woodlands, because red squirrels plant new trees when they forget where they buried their winter stores of nuts and seeds.

On behalf of the red squirrels, I thank Trees For Life and everyone else who is involved in saving this iconic species.

17:46

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank Joan McAlpine for securing this important debate.

I did not realise that I was sitting next to—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Just bear with me a moment, Mr Bowman. Ms Beamish, we understand that you need to leave, and that is fine—just say your farewells and go. Mr Bowman is getting a bit distracted, and we do not want you distracted, Mr Bowman.

Bill Bowman: Not while I am trying to crack my joke—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sorry. Can you reprise it?

Bill Bowman: I was going to say that I did not know that I would be sitting next to Batman in this debate. [*Laughter.*] Finlay Carson is sitting between me and Edward Mountain, so if he is Batman, I hope that that makes Edward Mountain, and not me, Robin.

My speech is more about flower power, because I am species champion for the twinflower. I have had the pleasure of learning about the importance of the Caledonian pine forest during my visits to see the twinflower in north-east Scotland.

The twinflower has two rather attractive pink, bell-like flowers on a single, slender stem. A thicker stem below creeps across the ground to create a rather large mat of the plant. In Scotland, the twinflower is found only in Caledonian pinewoods. Large patches of twinflower are an indicator of ancient or long-established pinewood. That is mainly because the flower reproduces slowly and cannot spread quickly into new habitat, so it is generally restricted to areas of ancient pinewood.

The species has no special legal protection, so the twinflower's future in Scotland is directly linked to the future of the Caledonian pinewoods. Many of the Caledonian pinewood remnants are made up only of ageing Scots pines, as we heard, which are reaching the ends of their lives, so the overriding priority is to secure a new generation of trees for the future.

The clearance of native woodland, continued habitat destruction and changes in woodland management have reduced the incidence of the twinflower to about 50 unrelated sites. Although the twinflower is one of Scotland's most iconic flowers and is often regarded as an emblem of Scotland's ancient Caledonian forests, it is under threat.

Work has been undertaken to ensure that the Cairngorms national park is a stronghold for the remaining population. The Cairngorms rare plant project, which was launched in March 2010, aimed to deliver urgently needed action and was a partnership between the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Scottish Natural Heritage and the University of Aberdeen.

Past fragmentation of native pinewoods has meant that the distances for pollinating insects to travel between patches of the twinflower are too great. That has contributed to the twinflower's continued decline, which has resulted in the twinflower being classed as "nationally scarce" in the UK. However, the project has developed innovative new methods to move carefully selected plants closer to existing patches of the twinflower. That pioneering project, alongside

projects with the objective of expanding the area of native pinewoods, such as the Caledonian pinewood recovery project, should help to ensure that twinflower populations will be safeguarded long into the future.

About 6,000 years ago, an estimated 1.5 million hectares of Scotland were covered in rich native pinewoods. Now, only about 1 per cent of the original extent of forest remains, often as small and isolated fragments. Much of the wildlife that is dependent on the forest has been lost.

Native pine woodland is categorised as a priority habitat under the UK biodiversity action plan, and many populations of twinflower in Scotland are on designated sites, so the plant enjoys a fair measure of protection. However, it is still felt that further action should be taken to improve the plant's chances of survival in this country.

Over the past two decades, there has been welcome enthusiasm for revitalising Scotland's old Caledonian pinewoods. Management has focused on the regeneration of pine trees in the few remaining natural woods and on creating new native woodlands. The Caledonian pinewood recovery project aims to save the remnant pinewoods and, over the next two years, Trees for Life, working in partnership with Woodland Trust Scotland, will work with landowners to promote the pinewoods' better management, thus restoring and protecting Scotland's unique pinewoods for the future.

Glen Derry, Glen Lui and Glen Quoich—I hope that I have pronounced that correctly—are three areas in which Caledonian pinewood recovery will be concentrated. I was lucky enough to visit those areas in July this year during my visit to the Mar Lodge estate and the twinflower sites that are found there, and I hope to go back next year to see the continued success and recovery of the area and the twinflower populations.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you—the things that you learn in this chair about the twinflower and Bill Bowman. I had never put the two together before.

17:52

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): It is always such a pleasure to attend a species champion debate. I thank Joan McAlpine for bringing the motion to the chamber for debate. She has raised the vital issue of the Caledonian pinewood forest, and the debate has given us the chance to hear about some other species.

Edward Mountain: Will the minister accept that I was entirely incorrectly associated with the robin species? As a species champion, I represent the

golden plover, which is a bird from the high hills of Scotland. Does she agree that the golden plover is a beautiful bird?

Mairi Gougeon: I absolutely agree. I thank Edward Mountain for clarifying that for the *Official Report*.

I will consider some of the points that were made earlier. I know that Claudia Beamish had to leave the chamber early tonight, but Andy Wightman confirmed that we will be hearing from the deer working group and the Werritty group next year. I will write to Claudia Beamish with a response to the other questions that she raised.

I will move on to some of the other speeches. Gillian Martin raised a lot of important points, but one element that was missing was the yew tree. I was expecting to be regaled with tales of her Gothic youth, which I believe she has raised in the chamber. That would have been pertinent, given the day on which we are discussing these issues.

Finlay Carson's speech about the bat was very interesting and, also, timely. Gail Ross talked about the red squirrel; I am very lucky because it is a regular occurrence to see them in my constituency.

There have been some fantastic speeches. I also welcome the speeches from members from the south of Scotland. Particularly this week, I have spent quite a lot of time travelling around the south of Scotland. This morning, I was at the Barony campus to discuss the forestry strategy with young foresters and people who are involved in the sector, and they are keen to contribute to that strategy. The south of Scotland is a beautiful part of the world where forestry is vital.

As we have heard, the Caledonian pinewoods are dominant through the northern mainland of Scotland, and they thrive on thin soils in low-fertility conditions. As well as being a beautiful and prominent component of our Highland landscape, they create an important habitat for wildlife, from mosses to mushrooms to pine martens. The pinewoods are home to some of our most iconic and rare species, including Britain's only endemic species of bird, the Scottish crossbill, which is unique to Scotland.

Individual species are so important that, as I have said, many members of the Parliament are Scottish Environment LINK species champions for iconic or threatened animals and plants. I had a meeting with the Woodland Trust last week, at which I was told about all the fantastic work that Joan McAlpine has done. The trust claimed that she is the best species champion—of course, I personally took issue with that, but we will let it slide for now.

I did not realise initially that the trees are called "granny pines", as Joan McAlpine said, but they are immediately recognisable to people who are familiar with the Scottish Highlands. However, they may not be as well known as some of the iconic species for which they provide both a home and protection, so I am delighted to have had this debate today in order to recognise their value and to explore opportunities for their further enhancement and restoration.

These pines create a rich habitat that is internationally recognised. As well as providing a home for common plants such as bell heather and blaeberry, other internationally scarce flowers grow alongside them, including the twinflower. I did not realise that Bill Bowman is the species champion for that flower which, as he said, is the emblem of Scotland's ancient Caledonian forests. Rare and important animals live alongside them, too, such as the red squirrel, which Gail Ross mentioned, and invertebrates such as the Scottish wood ant and the highly endangered pine hoverfly.

We should not forget the remarkable cultural and tourism importance of the forests. They attract visitors from far afield, who come to enjoy the ancient green scenery of places such as Glen Affric, Abernethy and Rothiemurchus, and the incredible wildlife that we have there. That beauty has been brought to many across the world through films, and through television programmes that have been dedicated to it, depicting the Scottish Highland scenery and wildlife in all its true drama.

Unfortunately, as we have heard, there are threats to the future health of these iconic forests. Joan McAlpine discussed them in her opening remarks; they include browsing pressure, climate change and invasive non-native plants. However, there is good news. Actions are being undertaken by the Government, public bodies, our partners, non-governmental organisations, communities and businesses to protect and improve the condition of the habitat. That work is effective only with strong collaboration, co-ordinated effort and long-term commitment from all of us, and I am glad that today's debate has shown how much of that is happening.

Joan McAlpine talked about the positive work that is being done by the Trees for Life and Woodland Trust partnership project. I am glad that they could join us for the debate and I add my congratulations to those from Gail Ross for their recent funding award. I am pleased to hear that their project includes action on the ground and work to better understand these precious forests. We must have both if we are to succeed in protecting that unique woodland for the future.

The Government is also a keen and active partner in work in the pinewoods. Through Forest

Enterprise Scotland, we are supporting an ambitious programme of conservation work to restore all the 22 remnants of native pinewoods on the national forest estate, which has been under way since the early 1990s. That is clearly a long-term project; it involves bringing the iconic woods of Glen Affric, Black Wood of Rannoch and Glenmore back to thriving healthy woodland communities and creating the conditions to allow them to regenerate and expand. With the completion of the devolution of forestry, the Scottish ministers will be leaders in sustainable forest management and sustainable development through their stewardship of those assets—so, no pressure there!

Through our national parks, we are also leading conservation work for a number of pinewoods, including Glen Falloch in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, which is the most southerly of our pinewood remnants. I am particularly pleased to hear about the positive conversations being had there to encourage owners to produce long-term management plans to bring those sites into good condition. Also, of course, the Cairngorms national park famously contains some of the best remnants of Caledonian pinewoods in Scotland, such as Mar Lodge, Abernethy, Glenmore and Rothiemurchus. All of those are enthusiastically supported by the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

I also welcome the great innovations coming from others that we have heard about today. The Cairngorms Connect partnership of four adjoining public and charity land managers—RSPB Scotland, Wildland Limited, Forestry Enterprise Scotland, and Scottish Natural Heritage—announced the successful award of a grant of approximately £3.75 million from the endangered landscapes programme. That grant will fund the biggest habitat restoration project in the UK, encompassing 600km² of land. The partnership will work on restoration projects across the landscape, including expanding and restoring Caledonian pinewoods to their natural limit at 1,000m above sea level.

The physical work on the ground is vital, but it needs to be underpinned by good information, as Edward Mountain mentioned in his contribution. The public investment in the native woodland survey of Scotland, which was published by Forestry Commission Scotland in 2014, is particularly valuable. The survey recorded that a high level of grazing by herbivores is the main contributor to the poor ecological condition of many native woodland habitats, including the Caledonian pinewoods.

Of course, there are other threats and challenges. I was sorry to hear about the issue that Edward Mountain had when he was trying to

do his bit for Caledonian pine forest restoration. As far as I am aware, that is not as much of an issue any more.

One particular issue in the Scottish Government's biodiversity route map to 2020, and one of the areas that we have focused effort on, is the reduction of browsing pressure. Grant support is available under the current rural development programme for action to reduce browsing impacts and encourage regeneration on designated remnant Caledonian pinewood sites, which demonstrates our commitment to protecting and improving these important habitats in Scotland.

We are also supporting work to identify and address threats from long-term climate change-induced pressures, which Gillian Martin emphasised in her remarks. That research suggests that the potential for future loss of biodiversity and species is high, and that the smaller and more isolated the woodland, the more vulnerable it is to those losses. As Gillian Martin and Claudia Beamish said, even these small areas of woodland are very important. That is why we are helping the forests to adapt to future changes through actions that will encourage regeneration and expansion, and thereby build greater resilience and adaptability.

All of that work is part of the Scottish Government's prioritised plan for meeting the international targets in our route map to 2020. We have taken an ecosystem approach that focuses on the need to protect ecosystems in order to support nature, including Scotland's native woodlands, and to support our own wellbeing and a thriving economy.

I very much welcome the attention that has been given to these important habitats and the efforts of the public, private and third sectors to secure them for the future. I support Joan McAlpine's motion, which recognises the importance of this woodland, the threats that it faces and the work and passion of all those involved in its conservation.

Meeting closed at 18:02.

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