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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 12 December 2018

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

Portfolio Question Time

Health and Sport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The first item of business today is portfolio questions on health and sport. I will try to get as many members in as possible, so I ask for short and succinct questions and answers, please.

Scope Capacity

1. **Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in meeting the target in its cancer strategy to increase national health service scope capacity by an additional 2,000 per annum on a sustainable basis. (S5O-02669)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): Since 2016, £6 million of funding has been released directly to NHS boards, including £1 million annually since 2016-17, for scope capacity. In 2018-19 alone, that will support an additional projected 2,250 scopes through 560 endoscopy sessions.

Stewart Stevenson: I was the grateful recipient of a negative diagnosis after a scope a couple of years ago and, like others, I very much welcomed that. Will the Scottish Government indicate how it is monitoring the spend by individual health boards and the outcomes that the 2,250 additional scopes in the current year will deliver?

Jeane Freeman: I am sure that Mr Stevenson will recall our waiting times improvement plan, which I published in October. That plan includes an operational board that has senior health board and other expertise on it, and it will monitor for me both the delivery of the plan against the trajectories that are in it and the individual actions of specific boards against the funding that we release. We release the funding in response to specific requests to increase diagnostic, elective or other capacity in a particular board in order to deliver specific results. The money is allocated and the monitoring is done on that basis.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I refer to the announcement of the endoscopy action plan. What progress has been made in reducing the number of people who are waiting for an endoscopy—I think that the target that was set for

December was a reduction of 5,000—and how much of that work has involved using the public sector?

Jeane Freeman: I do not have the exact number to hand, but I am happy to send it to Mr Briggs following today's meeting. Use is made of the private sector by some of our boards, but he will recall that we have a specific action under the waiting times improvement plan. In effect, that plan is in two parts, one part of which is on immediate action to reduce the longest waits and the most clinically serious waits, which will include, for example, using mobile facilities and so on. That will include agreement on a national contract with the private sector for specific, time-limited use in specific procedures. I will be happy to ensure that, once that contract has been concluded, Mr Briggs is made aware of its contents and what it requires.

Maternity and Paediatric Services (Dr Gray's Hospital, Elgin)

2. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in implementing the recommendations of the chief medical officer's advisory group on maternity and paediatric services at Dr Gray's hospital in Elgin. (S5O-02670)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): NHS Grampian's phase 1 plan for the reinstatement of maternity services at Dr Gray's hospital includes a summary of actions that it will take against all the recommendations from the CMO's advisory group. It is making progress against implementation of the actions in that plan, which resulted in 38 per cent of local births being in Dr Gray's in November.

In addition to those actions flowing from the CMO's group's report, the Scottish Ambulance Service has implemented a test of change to improve local ambulance cover in Moray and has recruited additional staff to cover the service.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: The cabinet secretary will be aware that the advisory group's report pointed out that communication with the women affected had been poor. Almost a month later, there are still regular complaints from patients, with cases arising of women being left not knowing who to contact if problems arise during their pregnancies, not knowing—even weeks away—where they will give birth and without information about how to get the support that they need. How can she have confidence that communication from NHS Grampian is working effectively? Will she encourage the chief executive of NHS Grampian to attend the keep MUM—the maternity unit for Moray—campaign's proposed public meeting in January, and will she consider attending it?

Jeane Freeman: I accept Jamie Halcro Johnston's point about communication with regard to this matter. From the earliest days, it has been poor. I think that NHS Grampian recognises that now, and I certainly do. The Government has worked closely with the board to improve its communication, particularly with the keep MUM campaign and with residents in and around the Dr Gray's hospital area as well as more widely. I think that improvement is there to be seen, although I accept that there are still areas where more can be done. Earlier today, I read an email exchange about a forthcoming meeting between the keep MUM campaign and the executive manager of the board, who is currently taking a lead role in and around Dr Gray's, and the delivery of the plan.

With regard to the issue of the meeting in January, it is a matter for the chief executive of NHS Grampian to determine what her diary priorities are, but I hope that she would consider the matter to be a priority.

Addiction Support Services (Highlands)

3. Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to improve addiction support services in the Highlands. (S5O-02671)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): NHS Highland recently redesigned parts of its drug and alcohol services. An NHS service improvement group is leading on-going work to reduce the time that individuals wait to access drug and alcohol treatment services, with a specific focus on reducing waits for those requiring opioid substitution therapy. Further, our new alcohol and drug strategy, as set out in the document "Rights, Respect and Recovery", outlines how £20 million of additional investment a year will be available to support the quality and provision of local services in order to better meet the needs of those who are at risk.

Gail Ross: Having been contacted by a number of my constituents on the issue recently, and given the online petition about increasing addiction services in Caithness, can the minister tell me how the additional funding that was recently announced to accompany the new alcohol and drugs strategy will be distributed to rural areas, where the problem is sometimes not as visible as it is elsewhere?

Joe FitzPatrick: The additional funding that was recently announced as part of the strategy is being allocated across three funds. A total of £20 million is being made available to support service redesign and system change in this financial year. Those three funds are: the local improvement fund, with £17 million being made directly available to our drug partnerships; the challenge

fund; and the national development project fund. More than £1 million of that additional investment will go directly to the Highlands to support efforts to make services more accessible and attractive to people who are seeking help.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The minister will be aware that there were 19 drug-related deaths in the Highlands in 2016, which was an increase of five on the previous year. The minister will also note that police officers are often the first on the scene of such incidents. Can the minister engage the Cabinet Secretary for Justice regarding police officers routinely carrying naloxone?

Joe FitzPatrick: I thank the member for that question, which is an important one. He is absolutely right to say that, across Scotland, and probably particularly in rural areas, police will be the first people to come across someone who is experiencing an overdose. I know that discussions about the suggestion that Mr Finnie makes are on-going and that positive noises have been made in that regard. I hope that there will be a positive announcement on that issue soon.

Scotland was ahead of the curve in making naloxone routinely available. I have personally undergone the training that is required to administer naloxone, as have two members of my office staff. We have a naloxone kit in the office, which is in the town centre in Dundee. I encourage anyone else who thinks that their office is in a location where such a kit might be useful to consider speaking to service managers to see whether that training could be extended to them as well. However, the point that the member makes about the police is a good one.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does the minister share the view of Alcohol Focus Scotland that a new public health supplement would provide substantial additional funding for addiction support services in the Highlands and the rest of Scotland? The Parliament has already approved that proposal in passing the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Act 2010. Surely, the time is right to provide additional funds to offset the significant cost to the public sector of dealing with the consequences of alcohol harm.

Joe FitzPatrick: The member makes that point almost weekly in the chamber, and he is right. The Government is sympathetic to the proposal, as I am. The argument is that, with the introduction of minimum unit pricing, there may be a potential windfall. The point that I have made previously to the member is that we need to see what that windfall is. I hope that there is not a windfall, because I hope that alcohol consumption goes down. However, when we have the assessment, if we find that there is a windfall, that will be the point at which to consider any further action.

Oral Health (Adults)

4. Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to improve adult oral health. (S5O-02672)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): In January this year, we published the oral health improvement plan, which sets out the strategic direction for national health service dentistry, building on the considerable achievements that we have made on child oral health and access to NHS dentistry. We will be introducing a new programme of preventive care and, over time, we will introduce an oral health risk assessment for adults. We also have a programme for government commitment to provide new oral health domiciliary care services, which will be rolled out next year.

Mark McDonald: In 2017, the number of mouth cancer deaths in NHS Grampian rose from 21 to 28. Late presentation is often a factor. My father ignored an ulcer in his mouth as something that could be dealt with later, but later turned out to be too late. What steps can the Scottish Government take to encourage people to check their mouth regularly and to seek medical advice at the earliest possible opportunity if they notice anything at all unusual?

Joe FitzPatrick: I recognise the member's personal interest in the subject.

The early detection of oral cancer lies at the centre of our proposals. The focus of the oral health improvement plan for adult patients is to introduce a more preventive system for NHS dental care. Over time, we will introduce the oral health risk assessment, which I mentioned in my first answer. In the improvement plan, we envisage a new system of preventive care, at the centre of which is that assessment of adults. That will be a considerable enhancement of the current check-up regime. Patients will receive tailored services on how to manage and look after their oral health, including advice on lifestyle factors such as smoking and drinking, which are clear risk factors associated with oral cancer.

As well as maintaining free NHS dental checks for patients, we have taken the lead on public health measures. For example, we are the first country in the United Kingdom to announce our intention to implement, as soon as practically possible, a human papillomavirus vaccination programme for adolescent boys.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

5. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and what issues were discussed. (S5O-02673)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): Ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly meet representatives of all health boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to discuss matters of importance to local people. On Monday, I met with the chair of that board.

Neil Bibby: A young constituent of mine in Paisley who is suffering from a severe ear infection has had their operation, which was planned for later this month, cancelled due to the closure of the central decontamination unit in Glasgow. She now faces an extra month of agony when she should be studying for her prelims. Another Renfrewshire woman has been told that she will have to wait for an ear, nose and throat appointment as an out-patient for 52 weeks, when the target is 12 weeks. The response to a freedom of information request that has been passed to me shows that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has only once managed to see more than 70 per cent of patients within 12 weeks. In August, the target was met in only 41 per cent of cases.

Does the health secretary believe that any of that is acceptable? What will she do to ensure that patients in Renfrewshire and the west of Scotland get the treatment that they are entitled to for ear, nose and throat conditions?

Jeane Freeman: As Mr Bibby will know, and as I have put on record many times in the chamber and elsewhere, I find such long waits completely unacceptable and I am very sorry personally for the distress that they cause his constituents and any other patient who is waiting longer than they should for the treatment that they require. The waiting times improvement plan, which is backed by significant additional resources, is designed to reduce, with effective targeted action, as we touched on earlier, those long waits and to tackle the areas in which we have a particular challenge in terms of physical capacity or workforce capacity, where we may need to do additional work to secure the specialisms that we need.

When I introduced the plan, I undertook to report to Parliament the progress on the trajectories that the plan sets out, and I will continue to do so. I am very happy to keep individual members up to date on the relevant propositions that come from boards in their area and which are approved by the operating board that I mentioned. I approve specific actions that are designed to produce specific results, that are backed by a particular amount of money and which are monitored as I have described.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If supplementaries are fairly short, we will get through more of them.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Last week, I was contacted by Anne Hughes, a 75-year-old lady who was unable to visit the out-of-hours general practice service at Glasgow's Queen Elizabeth hospital due to staff shortages on 1 December. [*Interruption.*] I am trying to rush now.

Instead of being able to access the accident and emergency services at the hospital, Anne was told that she had to go to the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley or to the new Victoria hospital, so she did not arrive home until 10 hours after first seeking medical assistance. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that action is being taken to guarantee that out-of-hours care is available at all times to patients in our country's largest health board?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Annie Wells for her question. As it happens, before this session I had a longer discussion with Professor Lewis Ritchie, who has undertaken work on out-of-hours services. He updated me on where we are. Our out-of-hours services are undoubtedly displaying some degree of fragility, so the action that we are taking, and planning to take, is needed in order to strengthen the services. That action is part of the whole-system approach and will link strongly to accident and emergency departments and to the integration of health and social care. We are trying to drive forward that whole-system approach very quickly.

There has been a significant increase—more than what is expected at this time of year—in the number of people who are attending A and E departments across the country. That might be related to the availability of out-of-hours services, or it might simply be because of the nature of the weather. We are working to investigate and understand who the additional attendees are and what can be done.

I appreciate the point that Annie Wells makes. The individual who contacted her is absolutely right that the length of time that it took to be treated and the additional travel are completely unacceptable. I assure her that we are looking in detail at what we can do, and I would be happy to discuss with Annie Wells the specific actions that we are taking on out-of-hours services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Shorter answers would be helpful, too.

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Skills

6. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making with its plan to equip an additional 500,000 people with CPR skills by 2020. (S5O-02674)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): The Scottish

Government is working in partnership with Save a Life for Scotland, which has provided CPR learning for almost 300,000 people since the launch of the out of hospital cardiac arrest strategy in 2015. It is on track to reach the 500,000 target by the end of 2020.

Rona Mackay: Last week, East Dunbartonshire Council committed to training all secondary pupils in lifesaving CPR; it is the 14th local authority in Scotland to do so. In addition, the British Heart Foundation Scotland is offering to equip every local authority school with a free CPR training kit. Will the minister join me in encouraging all remaining councils to offer such training?

Joe FitzPatrick: Yes, I will. It is really encouraging that local authorities have committed to CPR training for their secondary school pupils. I appreciate the contribution that communities and schools are making by purchasing defibrillators. They are taking a huge step towards creating a country of lifesavers, and they are contributing to Scotland's out of hospital cardiac arrest strategy. We welcome the efforts of all our partners in helping to introduce CPR to everyone, particularly our young people. The British Heart Foundation is doing a great job in supporting schools by providing its call push rescue kits and heartstart training programme.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): What is the Scottish Government doing to increase the number of defibrillators across the country? What is it doing to highlight the need to register defibrillators with the Scottish Ambulance Service?

Joe FitzPatrick: We encourage the roll-out of public access defibrillators across Scotland. The point that the member makes about the need to know where they are is important.

Prompt access to defibrillators is vital, so part of our strategy involves the Scottish Ambulance Service public access defibrillators register. The register allows defibrillators to be mapped, maintained and kept accessible to the public, and it enables ambulance service call handlers to direct a caller at the location of a cardiac arrest to any public access defibrillators that might be near. However, it is critical that members of the public, communities, businesses and other partners who are responsible for public access defibrillators register those details, and I encourage people to do so.

Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Framework

7. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the development of new tools for HIV prevention and treatment, what action it is taking to update its

2015 to 2020 sexual health and blood borne virus framework. (S5O-02675)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): I am delighted at the developments that we have seen since the publication of the update in 2015, including Scotland becoming the first part of the United Kingdom to make HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis available through the national health service. Work on developing a further update to the framework will begin next year, and officials will engage with a wide range of stakeholders to identify areas for further action with a view to publishing an update in 2020. We will adopt the co-production approach that has been taken in the past and which has supported the progress that has been made across Scotland, such as our recently exceeding the United Nations AIDS 90-90-90 target for HIV. I am happy to engage with the member and others across the chamber who have a particular interest in taking the issue forward.

Patrick Harvie: I am aware that I am asking this question well in advance of the development of a successor to the framework that runs to 2020, but that is deliberate, because we now have not only PrEP but effective post-exposure prophylaxis and levels of treatment that lead not only to HIV-positive people living long and healthy lives but to the level of viral load being undetectable and the virus being untransmittable. Given such developments, many in the field feel that it would be appropriate and possible to set a target of zero new HIV transmissions in Scotland. Will the Government seriously consider putting such a target into the next framework update?

Joe FitzPatrick: First, it is important to re-emphasise the undetectable equals untransmittable—or U=U—message; indeed, we as politicians must spread that important message as widely as possible, because it tells anyone afraid of having the test because they think that it is a life sentence that treatment is available that will make their viral load undetectable and therefore untransmittable.

It is correct for us to be ambitious in this area, and the Scottish Government supports the ambition of there being zero new HIV infections. I am happy to work with the HIV community, the member and other stakeholders to look at what would be required to get us to the point where we would be confident to put such a target into our new strategy, but I think that all of us across the chamber will share that ambition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must ask for short supplementaries and answers, please.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): HIV Scotland estimates that 13 per cent of people with the virus are unaware of their status. What action can the

Government take within the sexual health framework to raise awareness in that respect and reduce that worrying statistic?

Joe FitzPatrick: The good news is that, because of the progress we have made, the 13 per cent figure that Mary Fee has mentioned is now down to 9 per cent, which puts us ahead of the international targets. However, I absolutely want to get to the point where everyone knows their status. The test is not difficult for people to take, and the U=U message makes it clear to people that there is a really good reason why they should take the test and that the virus is treatable. We need to keep sending that message and keep encouraging people to get tested, but we also need to look at new and innovative ways of going out into communities, identifying people who might be at risk and encouraging them to take the test.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The HIV prevention drug PrEP is accessed almost exclusively by men, but given that a third of all people living with HIV are women, what is being done to redress the imbalance of access to the drug?

Joe FitzPatrick: First, we must make it clear that PrEP is available to women. It is right that women who are at high risk of becoming HIV positive have access to it, but the member is absolutely right about the lack of awareness in that respect, which has resulted in a lack of uptake, and organisations such as Waverley Care and the Scottish Drugs Forum have received funding from the Scottish Government and are working to raise awareness of PrEP for women who might benefit from taking it. It is really important that we recognise the work of those third-party organisations in going out and finding communities who are at risk and ensuring that they are aware of their right to PrEP.

NHS Fife (Meetings)

8. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS Fife, and what issues were discussed. (S5O-02676)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I chaired NHS Fife's annual review on 3 December and discussed a number of matters with the area clinical forum, the partnership group and patients and carers. I also discussed matters concerning the board's performance and improvement plans with the chair and chief executive. On Monday, I met the chairs of all the health boards, including NHS Fife.

Claire Baker: The cabinet secretary will be aware that 18 general practitioner practices across Fife currently have full patient lists, including all of those in Kirkcaldy and Lochgelly and most of

those in Dunfermline. According to NHS Fife, seven surgeries are experiencing recruitment difficulties, with two considered to be at high risk.

I recognise that we have seen a small rise in the number of GPs compared with the position this time last year. However, yesterday it was revealed that, compared with a decade ago—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we get to a question, please?

Claire Baker: It was revealed that we still have fewer GPs, but far more patients. What guarantees can the cabinet secretary give that the pressure on Fife GP services will ease in the interests of patients—and when?

Jeane Freeman: As Ms Baker recognises, the issue affects GP practices in other areas as well. Since 2017, there has been a 10 per cent increase in GP recruitment fill rate. Across Scotland, 352 doctors are currently in GP training posts. As the member knows, we have also introduced the £20,000 GP training bursary incentive to attract doctors to placements that have previously been hard to fill. Our new Scottish graduate entry medicine programme, ScotGEM, is largely located in Fife; it is co-located across the universities of St Andrews and Dundee. That programme is specifically focused on a GP career.

We are working hard to increase the number of GPs that we have available to us and the number of GP training posts. In addition, the new GP contract looks to introduce a multidisciplinary team to GP practices to ensure that GPs are freed from some of the bureaucratic work that they have had to endure in the past and up to today and have time to deal with the complex issues that we need them to deal with, as the local clinical leaders that they are.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The health secretary will be aware that I oppose the proposals to close the GP out-of-hours facility in St Andrews. The decision on that will be made by Fife health and social care partnership on 20 December. Does the health secretary agree that it would be sensible to give further time to consider new options for the provision of the service in north-east Fife?

Jeane Freeman: Mr Rennie and I have discussed that issue on previous occasions. Indeed, he has a members' business debate tomorrow that I am looking forward to taking part in. I absolutely understand the concerns that have been expressed by a significant number of people in north-east Fife. It would be wise to wait for the proposals that are taken to the meeting on 20 December before we jump to conclusions as to what might happen in that area.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 9 was not lodged.

Sport and Physical Activity (Availability)

10. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that sport and physical activity are available to all, irrespective of background or personal circumstances. (S5O-02678)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): The Scottish Government believes that there should be no barriers to participating in sport—everyone should be able to participate in and enjoy sport, whoever they are and whatever their background. In July, we published the active Scotland delivery plan, which sets out our aims to enable people in Scotland to be more active, with a key objective of decreasing inactivity in adults and teenagers by 15 per cent by 2030.

Brian Whittle: Scotland's cities have some magnificent national stadium venues. However, with so many local venues closing their doors, access is difficult, especially in rural communities. Does the minister agree that the most viable route to ensuring access to sporting activity is to utilise the Scottish schools estate more efficiently?

Joe FitzPatrick: Brian Whittle makes a good point, and he knows that I agree with him on the issue. Community access to sporting facilities is important, which is why there has been significant investment from sportscotland in our community sports hubs up and down the country to ensure that sport is accessible at community level. The resource has been particularly targeted at more deprived communities and people from sections of the community who are less inclined to participate in sport, and at encouraging more women and girls to get involved in sport.

We do not run schools, so the partnership of the Scottish Government, sportscotland, local authorities and community groups needs to work together to get this right. However, if we get it right, we can make a difference to the health of our nation, which is a goal worth aiming for.

Hospital Visiting

11. **Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what authority the national health service has to stop family members visiting a patient in hospital. (S5O-02679)

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): People should normally be able to see the friends and family members who are important to them while they are in hospital. The national health service has authority to prevent family members from visiting someone in hospital when

that is the expressed wish of the person, when the family member has been abusive or presents a risk to staff or other patients, or for sound clinical reasons.

Richard Lyle: One of my constituents has been trying to see their daughter in hospital for several months but has been stopped at the entrance to the ward and told that there is an on-going police investigation. They spoke to Police Scotland and were told that there was no investigation. I have written to the local health board about the case. I recognise the limitations of the minister's response, but I ask her to ask health boards to ensure that the families of patients are treated correctly in future and that information is up to date, as what is happening is causing severe distress to my constituents.

Clare Haughey: As Richard Lyle acknowledged in his question, I am limited in what I can say. I cannot comment on an individual case. I normally expect staff to take such a decision at the request of a patient, but there might be a small number of cases in which a family member is prevented from visiting for other reasons. Health boards should always ensure that patients and their families are treated correctly. If Richard Lyle's constituent feels that that has not been the case, I encourage them to raise the matter directly with the board.

The Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 provides a right for people to make complaints, raise concerns, make comments and give feedback about the care that they or a family member have received from the NHS, and the patient advice and support service exists to help them. The act also places a duty on NHS boards to thoroughly investigate issues and take improvement actions, where appropriate.

General Practitioners (Recruitment)

12. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of recent figures reportedly showing that the number of doctors in training in Scotland is at a five-year low, how it plans to address general practitioner recruitment issues. (S5O-02680)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I think that the figures that Jeremy Balfour refers to are the most recently issued from ISD Scotland. In that set of figures, he needs to look at the two lines on "doctors in training" and "other grades", where he will see an overall increase between 2013 and September 2018. The reason why I ask him to look at both lines is that under "other grades" are doctors in training who are also clinical fellows or locums. We must take both figures together to understand the real picture.

That said, Jeremy Balfour will know that I am not the least bit complacent about our workforce numbers and the work that we need to do to increase accessibility and capacity across our whole health and social care workforce.

Without repeating myself, as I know that you are keen for us to move on, Presiding Officer, I make the point that Scottish general practitioner recruitment has increased by 10 per cent. We have the measures that I talked about, such as the bursary, the Scottish graduate entry medicine programme and the increase in the number of medical undergraduates, and there is a focus in some of those programmes on GP training, particularly in remote and rural areas. I am very happy to talk to Mr Balfour outside of portfolio question time and take him through further details of the specific measures.

Jeremy Balfour: I remind members that I have a number of close family members who are doctors or training to be doctors.

The cabinet secretary makes some interesting points, but the programmes that were created in 2015, 2017 and summer 2018 are simply not working overall. Does the cabinet secretary agree that a radical new action is needed to get more doctors and GPs working here in Scotland?

Jeane Freeman: It is an interesting proposition, but it falls down by not telling me what that "radical new action" might be, so I am a bit stuck to say whether I agree that it is needed. We are taking a number of steps. I remind Jeremy Balfour that we do not produce GPs quickly—quite rightly, because we want them to undergo extensive training as undergraduates and then as graduate medical doctors in training.

I also remind Jeremy Balfour that we are talking about a health and social care workforce across a whole system. The GP contract is specifically designed, negotiated and agreed with the British Medical Association general practitioners committee to ensure that our GPs, in particular, can come forward as the local clinical leaders within multidisciplinary teams so that we can focus their highly specialised and important skills on the patients who need them most. In the absence of detail on a "radical new action", my answer is no, I do not agree with the member.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the biggest threat to the NHS workforce is the danger that Brexit poses to the staffing of Scotland's NHS, as reported in the new survey of European Economic Area doctors by the British Medical Association?

Jeane Freeman: I agree, and I am sorry that the members to my left—purely in the geography of the chamber, clearly—have groaned about that

matter, because it is self-evidently the case. What makes it worse is when the United Kingdom Government will not assist the Scottish Government to meet our objective of paying the resettlement fees, which is a ridiculous proposition for people who live and contribute to our country. It will not assist us in meeting those fees in order to demonstrate—in the practical way that we can in the absence of any other half-decent powers—that those individuals who work in our health service are welcomed and valued and that we want them to stay.

Ophthalmology Services (Repatriation to Island NHS Boards)

13. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in repatriating ophthalmology services from NHS Grampian to island NHS boards. (S5O-02681)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): As Tavish Scott will know, NHS Grampian provides a visiting ophthalmology service to NHS Shetland every two months; a multidisciplinary team provides four clinical sessions over two days. Some treatments, however, require patients to travel to Aberdeen to receive their care. A meeting has been scheduled between NHS Shetland and NHS Grampian for January 2019 to discuss the provision of those services on Shetland. Actions to progress that, including whether services can be sustainably delivered on Shetland in the future and associated timelines, will be agreed at that meeting.

Tavish Scott: Does the cabinet secretary recognise that there are older people in the islands in Shetland who now do not travel to Aberdeen for essential eye injections, simply because of the disruption, the travel and the difficulties for people who undertake those visits? Will she redouble the efforts to make sure that, when the meeting happens, it will make decisions to ensure that these essential services can take place on Shetland for the great benefit of those elderly people in particular?

Jeane Freeman: I recognise the issues that Tavish Scott has raised and I will take a personal interest in how that meeting progresses, the actions that it agrees to and the timelines that it sets. I will ensure that Mr Scott is made aware of those.

Power of Attorney (Effectiveness in Health Cases)

14. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the effectiveness of the power of attorney in health cases. (S5O-02682)

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): We recently undertook a consultation on making changes to the adults with incapacity legislation. We know from that work that using powers of attorney can encourage people to think through how they might want their health, welfare and financial affairs to be managed in the future if they are unable to make decisions themselves on those matters. That means that adults who use powers of attorney are better placed to be as involved as possible in decisions about their lives, even if their circumstances change.

John Finnie: Does the minister believe that there are sufficient checks and balances in place for all parties when a public body seeks to take over a power of attorney?

Clare Haughey: As I alluded to in my previous answer, there is a review of the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, and I am sure that the subject will be reviewed during the review.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will take question 15, because I know that it can receive a short answer.

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Skills

15. Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making with its plan to equip an additional 500,000 people cardiopulmonary resuscitation skills by 2020. (S5O-02683)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): I refer the member to my earlier answer to Rona Mackay.

Bill Bowman: The British Heart Foundation Scotland is offering to equip every local authority school with a free CPR training kit, and training takes less than 30 minutes to complete. The Scottish Government has made lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex education compulsory on the curriculum; will it do the same for life-saving CPR, given that there is international evidence that such an approach has the potential to triple survival rates from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest?

Joe FitzPatrick: What the British Heart Foundation is doing is fantastic, and the work that schools up and down the country are doing is great, but, ultimately, it is for schools to decide when it is appropriate for them to provide that support.

Brexit Update

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a statement by Michael Russell on a Brexit update. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement; there should, therefore, be no interventions or interruptions.

14:41

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): When this statement was agreed by the Parliamentary Bureau, it was intended to give the Scottish Government's response to the outcome of the so-called meaningful vote in the House of Commons. Right up until early Monday, even in the face of press reports to the contrary, the United Kingdom Government was adamant that such a vote was going to take place. On Sunday, the Brexit secretary said:

"The vote is going ahead".

On Monday morning, the Scottish secretary—the always loyal and always straightforward David Mundell—speaking from Peterhead fish market, was adamant that the vote was on. And that paragon of plain speaking, Michael Gove, when he was asked directly on Monday,

"Is the vote definitely, 100 per cent, going to happen?"

answered with a single word: "Yes." Yet, just minutes later, the press was being briefed by other Cabinet ministers that the vote was off.

Monday morning was a watershed moment. It revealed for all to see that what is now in office in the UK is a Government in a state of collapse. A Prime Minister who could not command the support of the House of Commons on Tuesday does not now command the confidence of many in her own party. It is a Government that is out of ideas, out of talent, out of time and needing to be put out of office. Most serious of all, it is a Government whose word—from any minister—cannot be trusted and, indeed, is not trusted by anyone who has to work with it. That is why the European Union is insisting so strongly on a watertight backstop; it simply does not trust the UK Government to honour its commitments, no matter what any minister says.

Moreover, it is a Government that makes crucial decisions—decisions that affect business, commerce, investment, health, public services, food security and the fate of all its citizens—on the basis of what that decision will mean not in terms of the public good but in terms of what is good for the Conservative Party, as the Prime Minister herself confirmed outside Downing Street this

morning. Later this afternoon, my colleague Derek Mackay will deliver his budget statement against that backdrop of uncertainty and insecurity in the public finances caused by the Tory Brexit chaos. That is an intolerable situation in which the UK Government is placing the people of Scotland, and it cannot go on. Scotland and the UK must not continue to be blighted by this never-ending Tory civil war, in which we are all now merely collateral damage.

The Speaker of the Commons described the decision to delay the vote as "discourteous", but it is more than that: it is disgraceful and it is contemptuous. But why should that surprise us? That has been the UK Government's attitude for months, perhaps even years, and the Scottish Government has experienced it regularly at first hand. The Prime Minister and her Government have persistently proffered false choices, absolutist positions and self-defeating red lines, to the EU and to the devolved Administrations. The approach does not, could not and would never, in the Prime Minister's hypocritical words, bring the country back together.

Nothing that she or her Government has done in the past two and a half years has achieved that. Nothing that they are doing today will achieve that. Nothing that they can offer could achieve that, not least because, by removing Scotland and the UK from the single market and the customs union and adopting, with relish, a hard-line rhetoric and practice on migration, the deal will make every one of us poorer, will deprive us of the company and contribution of many of our fellow EU citizens, especially in key areas such as health, research and agriculture, and will lead to many more years of uncertainty and protracted negotiations.

Not just this deal but this Tory Government is divisive and damaging, and it must be defeated. The first step to resolving a political and constitutional crisis the like of which none of us has ever seen is for the Prime Minister to get out of the way. Her back benchers and her payroll vote may not agree tonight, but there is no doubt that she is entering the endgame of her time in office.

However, we need more than that. What happens now is about much more than who leads a single political party, and the decision about where we now go has to be taken by more than a single political party. So, the second step is for all of us who recognise the huge dangers of this moment to coalesce around a way forward that can resolve the crisis. At the same time, we must strain every sinew to avoid what the extremists want—time to pass, so that no deal is the only possible outcome. That must never happen.

As the Taoiseach indicated yesterday, it does not need to happen. Speaking in the Dáil, he said this:

“There is the option to revoke Article 50 and the option to extend it. While there may not be a majority for any deal in the House of Commons, I am of the view that there is a majority which believes the United Kingdom should not be plunged into a no-deal scenario. It is in their hands, at any point, to take the threat of no deal off the table either by revoking Article 50 or, if that is a step too far, extending it.”

It is incumbent on those who desire a better alternative—one that protects jobs, livelihoods and communities—to come together, first of all, to remove the threat of no deal, and then, in a determined but realistic way, to consider and choose the best way forward.

Let me set out the alternatives and indicate the Scottish Government’s preference. People in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union. In line with their wishes, the Scottish Government has always said that the best option is to stay in the EU. Of the available alternatives, the one that needs to be at the top of the list is, therefore, a second EU referendum with the option to remain on the ballot paper.

As we know from the European Court of Justice, it would be for the UK Government to decide to revoke the article 50 notification. That judgment makes it clear—subject to referral for final decision back to the Scottish courts—that, under EU law, a member state that has notified its intention to leave can, in layman’s terms, change its mind and think better of it. It is no longer an option for the UK Government to claim that no such process is possible. With that certainty in place, putting the choice back in the hands of the people must now be taken seriously. The European Court of Justice has said that notice of revocation must be made in accordance with the constitutional requirements of a member state and must be unequivocal and unconditional. It therefore seems likely that, consistent with the process for notification in the first place, a referendum followed by an act of Parliament would be a sensible way forward.

First, though, the Prime Minister must go to Brussels and make a request to extend the article 50 period. She could do that at the European council tomorrow, presuming that she is still in office. As we have seen, the Taoiseach and others have said that they would consider that if the request was made for reasons of significance rather than just to save her political scalp for a few more days. Those reasons would include a referendum with a clear choice to remain. That approach is possible. It would be likely to succeed and to create the space needed for calm thought and wider agreement.

By contrast, renegotiation, on which the Prime Minister is now fixated, is not possible, nor will it

succeed in producing a majority in favour of the Prime Minister in the House of Commons. That way lies more confusion, more insecurity and more constitutional chaos. An extension would be needed, as the UK Parliament would then go on to pass legislation to set the rules for a referendum and agree a timetable that, although truncated, would probably mean nothing happening earlier than late spring or early summer.

I trust that those in the chamber, across all parties, who campaigned to remain in the EU will agree that a second referendum that resulted in our retaining our EU membership would be a good outcome for Scotland. However, short of the best option of staying in the EU, the only other acceptable compromise, which the Scottish Government has advocated for two years, is continued membership of the single market and the customs union. I stress that that would be acceptable only if there was absolutely no chance of our staying in the EU. That option could be achieved only if the UK accepted all the obligations—and benefits—that go with continued membership, including the four freedoms. That, of course, would allow the continuation of freedom of movement, which is essential for Scotland and almost every sector of our economy.

The UK Government could request an alteration to the political declaration, to make it clear that the UK wishes the basis of the future relationship to be membership of the European Economic Area and a customs union, with all the rights and obligations that would go with that. In such circumstances, the Irish backstop would never need to come into force. We could then use the transition period to negotiate the detail of the UK’s EEA agreement, including in those areas that do not come as part of the existing EEA agreement for European Free Trade Association countries.

The third possibility is a general election. I suspect that that option would be harder to pass in the House of Commons, but the Scottish National Party would support such an option arising out of a successful vote of no confidence. However, such a vote of no confidence would need the votes of the principal Opposition party to succeed.

I will say two final things. First, on preparedness for all eventualities, no responsible Government should allow the UK to fall out of the EU in a disorderly way or even in a “managed” way, which is what some of the Brexit fanatics are now talking up. As we have seen, the UK Government could remove that threat this week. Unfortunately, the Scottish Government cannot take that step unilaterally, so, as a responsible Government, we must continue our preparations for such an outcome. As indicated, I intend to make a further statement on those preparations next week. I assure the chamber that the Scottish Government

is doing everything that it can to prepare for such an eventuality; however, equally, I must make it clear that no Government will be able to do everything that will be required in such circumstances.

Secondly, I make it clear that it is not just the Brexit clock that is ticking. For two and a half years, the Scottish Government has proposed compromise after compromise and has spent hundreds—probably thousands—of hours in discussion and negotiation. I believe that we, at ministerial and official level, have shown exemplary tolerance in the face of sometimes wilful ignorance of devolution, the flouting of the norms of co-operation, the withholding of information and the refusal to discuss and negotiate in the positive spirit that we—and, I have to say, the Welsh Government—constantly brought to the table. We have not been treated as partners, still less equals. I believe that most MSPs in this chamber have similarly tried to save the UK from the worst excesses of Brexit but, so far, to no avail.

We continue to offer solutions, as I have done again today. If those solutions are constantly ruled out and arrogantly dismissed by Westminster and by the Prime Minister herself, we, in this Parliament, must ask ourselves this question: why should people in Scotland—the people whom we are here to represent—have to pay the price of such a catastrophic policy that they do not support and that will harm their life chances and opportunities for generations to come? Put bluntly, if we cannot save the UK from itself, we must find a way to save ourselves from the UK. Scotland deserves better—no reasonable person looking at the clusterbùrach at Westminster this week could deny it. Finding a way to do things better must inevitably become an increasingly important task for everyone who believes in our country, its potential and our future, as all of us in this chamber should.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow 30 minutes for that.

I have a lot of requests to speak. I will do my best to allow everybody to ask the question that they wish, but members should bear in mind that, to allow that, questions and answers should be succinct.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement. Everyone here will understand that today is a difficult day, with the Prime Minister under unprecedented pressure. [*Interruption.*] Whatever the limitations on what they may be able to say in public, I know that there are members across this

chamber who privately admire the Prime Minister, her resilience and her tenacity. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Tomkins. We have just started this session. Can we at least start off with a bit of good behaviour from members?

Adam Tomkins: Whatever our differences, I think that most of us would concede that the Prime Minister has worked tirelessly to secure from the European Union a deal that she genuinely believes is in the country's best interests. For my part, I wish her well, and she continues to have my support.

My role in the on-going Brexit saga has, I suppose, been twofold. First, I have sought to resist the SNP's attempts to use Brexit as an excuse to launch a second independence referendum campaign. Whatever happens, I will continue to do that. Secondly, I have tried—as I hope that the cabinet secretary would acknowledge—to ensure that Brexit is delivered compatibly with our devolution settlement. That is why I, and colleagues, resisted clause 11 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and ensured that it was replaced and amended before that bill was enacted earlier this year.

The cabinet secretary and I have crossed swords on Brexit many times in this chamber, and I am sure that we both wish that we could talk about something else. Today, I find myself in agreement with much of what he has said—but not with everything. In particular, I agree that all necessary steps should be taken to ensure that we do not crash out of the European Union on a no-deal basis. Does the cabinet secretary not agree with me that one means of achieving that result would be to back the Prime Minister's deal and to support her on-going attempts to get it through the House of Commons?

Michael Russell: I am sure that it will surprise Neil Findlay to hear me say that, when I listen to Adam Tomkins, I am reminded of the Scottish socialist John Maclean's famous speech from the dock at his trial—I can see that Mr Findlay does indeed look surprised by that. The reason for my being reminded of Maclean is his own words, which I read again the other night. In the last paragraph of his speech, he decided to say that he was satisfied that he had squared his conduct with his intellect.

I have to say to Mr Tomkins that I am not satisfied that he has done the same on this matter. As I said last week, I do not believe that he believes a word of this. The way to achieve a solution to this problem is not to back the Prime Minister; it is to refuse to accept Brexit. That is the way to do it. Indeed, that is the position that Mr Tomkins took during the EU referendum campaign

and it is the position that Scotland still takes. An increasing number of people across these islands take that to be what they wish to do. It is bizarre that Tory members of Parliament can get a second vote—in this case, on who should be the leader of their party—but that nobody else can do so on the issue of Brexit. I think that that needs to change.

Let me also say this to Mr Tomkins. I respect him, and I agree with some of what he has said today, just as he would agree with some of what I have said. However, I will not agree with him in his admiration for the Prime Minister. My thoughts are not with her in her suffering today; they are with EU nationals, who have had months of agony over this matter. My thoughts are with the farmers of Scotland, some of whom I met yesterday, who have no idea what will happen next, and with the fishermen in my community in Argyll and Bute, who have been left with no defence and no prospect of selling their products because of the ridiculous nature of the Conservatives' sell-out. My thoughts are also with the businesses of Scotland, which are facing endless insecurity as a result of Brexit. Therefore I am afraid that, as far as the Prime Minister is concerned, if I may quote Shakespeare:

“Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye.”

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I fear that I feel the rumblings of Maclean, following his comparison with Adam Tomkins in the same sentence.

In his statement, the cabinet secretary mentioned the Welsh Government. I congratulate Mark Drakeford on his election as the First Minister of Wales.

These are very dangerous times for our country, our economy and our communities. Businesses are in a state of flux, with no idea of how to plan for the future, the pound has fallen and jobs are at risk. For the first time in a thousand years, the Government has been held to be in contempt of the Parliament at Westminster, and the Prime Minister is weak, incompetent, shambolic, embarrassing and utterly hopeless.

The Tory party has taken us to the brink of a chaotic departure from the European Union, with the Prime Minister existing only in the fantasy world of her own mind. Her level of delusion is matched only by her level of incompetence. However, she can always rely on the supine sheep in the Scottish Conservative Party, even following the humiliation of David Mundell on Monday at Peterhead fish market. She has spent weeks warning a diminishing band of people who pay any attention to her that this deal cannot be changed, only to pollute the atmosphere by flying around Europe in a vain attempt to change the deal that she said was fixed. The Prime Minister

has zero credibility. She is sidelined in Europe, in contempt of Parliament and loathed within her party. The Democratic Unionist Party has bailed out, her time is up and the country is crying out for change.

Does the cabinet secretary accept that this goes way beyond Brexit, and that for those affected by universal credit and by poverty, pay cuts and the impact of a broad sweep of Tory policy we need a general election now to end this shambolic paralysis?

Michael Russell: I have indicated that I would support a general election, and Neil Findlay's points are well made. The problem is not simply the Prime Minister, but the Tory Government. Brexit is the huge symptom of a Government that is completely out of ideas, out of time and operating against the national interest, so if the opportunity exists to remove that Government at a general election, of course the SNP will support that.

I associate myself with Neil Findlay's remarks about Mark Drakeford, who I am very pleased to call a friend. I have worked with him over the past two and a half years in very difficult circumstances. I congratulated him privately on Thursday when he was elected leader of the Labour Party in Wales and I am very pleased to see him as the First Minister of Wales. I hope that I will have the opportunity to go on working with Mark Drakeford, because I regard his contribution as significant. It shows that we can work across parties on these issues and maintain a constructive, positive and effective working relationship. We may not agree on the final destination, but we certainly agree on the road that we have to take.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): On behalf of those of us who took the case to the European Court of Justice, I thank the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government for their supportive words since the ruling came in. We always knew that article 50 could be revoked, and we now have absolute legal clarity that that is an option, that this crisis can be ended and that a people's vote is the most likely way of achieving that. What is the Scottish Government—rather than the SNP as a party—doing to ensure not just that a people's vote becomes more likely but that, were a bill to be passed in the House of Commons, it could be facilitated as easily as possible here in Scotland?

Michael Russell: I congratulate Ross Greer on the part that he played in the case. He had a faith and a confidence in the outcome that some of us did not have, and I am always pleased to be proved wrong in such propitious and happy circumstances. I pay tribute to those involved. I gave Ross Greer a name check in an answer to a

question from Mr Crawford, and I do it again here today.

If we have a role to play in facilitating a referendum, we will of course play that role. At present, as I understand it, it would be a United Kingdom referendum, so it would be run according to United Kingdom electoral law, but there would be a role for returning officers in Scotland to be involved. Wearing another hat, given my responsibility for elections, I would be glad to do everything that we can to help facilitate that. Should a referendum bill be passed, we will endeavour to ensure that that takes place. We have some experience in referendum bills, so if people would like advice on a referendum bill we would be happy to give it.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): The Prime Minister refused at Prime Minister's questions today to remove the threat of a no-deal Brexit. I am sure that the cabinet secretary noted that. Given that Jeremy Corbyn seems so reluctant to propose a motion of no confidence in the chaotic UK Government, what will the Scottish Government do to try to make that happen with other parties at Westminster?

Michael Russell: I tried to indicate in my statement that it is important for us to continue to have dialogue and to talk about how we can move things forward, so I will not use this opportunity to attack the Labour Party on this; I know that that will disappoint some. As I said in my statement, I do not think that a motion of no confidence could succeed without the support of the principal Opposition party.

Neil Findlay: Or the DUP.

Michael Russell: Mr Findlay shouts, "Or the DUP." There are circumstances in which that might not be the case, but we must ensure that we continue to find a way to work together. I return to what I said about Mark Drakeford. Over the past two and a half years, I have often been struck by the potential that comes from trying to work with people across parties even if they do not agree on the final constitutional destination.

I have tried hard in this chamber to do the same. We did it on the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill. I hope that we will continue to do it as these issues arise. I would be keen that this moves on in the House of Commons. The SNP stands ready to help move this on in the House of Commons. We have to find a way to do it together.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that we must have brevity if we are to get through the questions.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I wonder whether the cabinet secretary, like me, has

businesses the length and breadth of his constituency that are concerned about the huge uncertainty that surrounds Brexit—businesses such as McQueen Gin in Callander, which is just trying to get on with growing its business.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Prime Minister made the uncertainty worse by postponing the promised meaningful vote in a doomed attempt to save her bad deal? Now the vicious civil war that is taking place in the Tory party is heaping uncertainty upon uncertainty. When will all this uncertainty end? Surely it is time to put the people in charge and hold another referendum on EU membership.

Michael Russell: I am tempted to pluck a date out of the air, give it to the member and see what happens. Unfortunately, nobody can say when this will end. There is a heavy irony—it is also distressing, particularly to businesses such as that which the member mentioned in his constituency—when the Prime Minister stands outside 10 Downing Street and says, "People want us to get on with Brexit", having only 48 hours before that cancelled a vote that was meant to conclude the matter. The reality is that this is all about the Tories. It is about the internal division that has bedevilled the Conservative Party to start with, and now the whole of the country, for far too long.

I feel sorry for those people who were trying to back the Prime Minister's deal, not because they thought that it was good but because they thought that it would bring an end to uncertainty. I regretted that we had to say to people that it would not have brought an end to uncertainty and that the uncertainty would continue and grow. However, the Prime Minister proved that by her actions of Monday in pulling the vote.

We will do everything that we can to offer support, reassurance and assistance to companies in those circumstances. What would really help them, however, would be to get the nightmare over with by deciding that we were not leaving the EU, and then we could get on with life.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The cabinet secretary set out a hierarchy of alternative outcomes that he would prefer, the second of which was continued membership of the single market and of the customs union, which has been described elsewhere as the Norway plus proposal. The proposal has its pros and cons. Does the cabinet secretary accept that one of the benefits of that proposal is that there would be no requirement to negotiate a bespoke set of arrangements, so it could be agreed to straight away, which would deliver the referendum result on schedule?

Michael Russell: Yes—I broadly agree. That has been on offer for a long time. There are issues in respect of EFTA membership. Not unnaturally, Norway is balking substantially at the prospect of having to get into bed with the UK Conservative Party. It would be possible to construct a bespoke deal that has the advantages that Donald Cameron interestingly raised.

The Norway plus proposal would be clear: it is obvious how it would work and it would have the enormous advantage for Scotland of continuing the four freedoms—in particular, freedom of movement. As a Highlands and Islands list member, Donald Cameron knows perfectly well that freedom of movement is essential for the Highlands and Islands. Without freedom of movement, there will be continuing depopulation of the constituency that I represent, which he sought to represent at the previous election and which he might—who knows?—seek again to represent. In that constituency, depopulation is chronic and is getting worse. It will only be accelerated by what is taking place in respect of cancelling freedom of movement.

I agree with Donald Cameron and am grateful to him for his enlightened question.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that, under the Prime Minister's current withdrawal agreement, Northern Ireland will, in effect, be in the single market and Scotland will not. That is extremely worrying for ports such as Cairnryan in the South Scotland region. Will the cabinet secretary give me assurances that the Scottish Government will continue to fight against this boorach of a Brexit deal that will surely put Scotland at a competitive disadvantage?

Michael Russell: The details of how the Northern Irish situation would work still require to be fleshed out, but there would certainly be substantial problems for the ports on the western side of these islands when they look to Ireland—in particular, Northern Ireland. The matter has not been thought through.

When Emma Harper asked the question, I heard some dissent from Tory members about whether Northern Ireland would continue to be in the single market. To all intents and purposes, it would, as is absolutely clear from what has been said and in answers that UK ministers have given. There was an attempt by David Lidington to play that down when he gave evidence to the joint meeting of the Finance and Constitution Committee and the Culture, Tourism and Europe and External Affairs Committee.

However, when we see the list of areas that are involved, we see that Northern Ireland will, to all intents and purposes, have membership of the

single market. That would disadvantage Scotland and create issues in respect of there being a border in the Irish Sea.

I seem to remember that prominent Conservatives in Scotland said that they would resign in those circumstances, but I do not remember seeing their resignation letters.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Notwithstanding the despair across the country today, does the cabinet secretary agree that there is still common ground to fight for among the remain parties, especially if we were to be part of a customs union, which would negate the need for the backstop to protect the interests of Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland?

Also, is it worth reminding people that we do not really have a deal? What we have is a withdrawal agreement with the detail of a future deal still to be negotiated.

Michael Russell: That is a very important point. The withdrawal agreement is a legally binding agreement about how to get out of the EU. It says nothing about what happens next. The political declaration is not legally binding: it is vague and insubstantial and it uses the language of aspiration but offers nothing beyond that. That is why there is no security or confidence in Theresa May's deal. There is no certainty about what will happen next, which is another reason for saying that it should not be supported.

I remind members that what we have just been through was meant to be the easy part of the negotiations. We are about to go into negotiations, over a number of years, that will be much more difficult. As the Government has not been able to manage that first part, who knows how bad things could become when it starts to manage the hard part?

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): The cabinet secretary was absolutely right to quote Shakespeare, because for the Tories "the native ... resolution" has been "sicklied o'er". I cannot believe that we are in the position that we are in today—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can you get to your question, please, Mr Arthur?

Tom Arthur: —and that the Tories are still parroting the line that Theresa May's deal is the only one on the table.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the European Court of Justice's judgment that article 50 can be revoked by the UK is all the proof that is needed that the Tories' barely credible claims have been blown out of the water?

Michael Russell: I agree with that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Russell. You caught me unawares.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): The minister made prudent reference in his statement to preparations for all potential exit outcomes. I appreciate that we will be updated on that next week. However, can I ask that, in addition to the papers that his Government has already produced, he will in that statement provide specific details on any further scenario-planning that his Government has done, including potential legislative consequences for this Parliament?

Michael Russell: Jamie Greene will have to wait for my statement next week.

However, allow me to say that it is how the Tory Party has behaved that has created these difficulties. That is resulting in an enormous amount of additional work for civil servants, ministers, public officials and businesses. Given that, Jamie Greene would be wise to accept that we will, in doing our best, bring to Parliament as much information as we can. To ask for more information would simply add to the burden that has been created by a problem that he helped to create in the first place. It would be useful if he would just read the statement, listen to what we say and, perhaps, regret his role in this complete mess.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): My constituent Dr Petra McLay has lived in Scotland since 2003. She is married to a British citizen and both her children were born in this country. Dr McLay is a faculty head who has taught in our schools for more than 14 years. What assurances can the cabinet secretary provide to my constituent, who now faces a settled-status fee as a direct result of the callous actions of the UK Government?

Michael Russell: I have the most enormous sympathy for people who find themselves in that situation. I read a tweet this morning from somebody admitting that when they were trying to fill in the form on their phone, in the human resources department of their company, they suddenly burst into tears in distress that was caused by the experience that they were going through. I hope that every single member in this chamber regards what EU nationals are having to go through as utterly unacceptable. We apologise to them for their having to go through it. It is not of our making, but we are deeply sorry about the circumstances.

We, as a Government, are doing everything that we can to help our own employees, although that is not being made easy by the UK Government. I hope that we might get to the stage at which all this is just a bad memory—when we again have the freedom of movement that is, like the

contribution of the people who have come here, so valuable to Scotland, and we can say to those people honestly that it will never happen again.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am going to an actual pantomime tonight, but first I will deal with the pantomime of Brexit and the current Conservative Party. Does the cabinet secretary have more detail on the Court of Justice ruling as to what actions would be in accordance with constitutional requirements? Does he believe that it is possible to deliver a process that is unequivocal and unconditional, given the divisiveness of the debate as it currently rages across the UK?

Michael Russell: Claire Baker has raised a good point. The reality is that the Court of Justice ruling is clear. It is quite obvious that there is a process to be gone through. Interestingly, I saw a Tory MP denounce the Court of Justice ruling as attacking the UK. Actually, one of the biggest losers in the ruling is the European Commission, whose interpretation of how article 50 should be rescinded was rejected by the court.

There is a simple process to be gone through. Insistence on constitutional due process is not unexpected or unusual. Quite clearly, that is how article 50 should be implemented. Article 50 refers to the constitutional due process that is required to give notice of withdrawal from the EU, so it is quite obvious that the court would say, "If you're going to revoke, you must go through the same process." That process is clear.

Constitutional due process in a country that does not have a written constitution could be variable—there would be a number of ways in which it could be done. I would have thought that a resolution of the House of Commons would be one. A people's vote to inform that resolution of the House of Commons might put a double lock on it.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Has the cabinet secretary received any assurances from the UK Government about when the House of Commons vote will take place, or does he consider that the delay is just a cynical attempt to run down the clock, thereby forcing a choice between Theresa May's shambolic deal and a no-deal Brexit?

Michael Russell: We have had no indication of when the vote will be. There is an indication that the UK Government regards itself as being bound by the previous resolution that says that there should be something by 21 January, but given that it changes its mind and its promises all the time, that could mean absolutely nothing.

In the circumstances, I do not overthink the motivations. It seems to me that Theresa May wanted to continue as Prime Minister and the

delay allowed her to do so. I do not think that the motivation is any greater than that, but it is a shameful thing, given the damage that is being done because of her individual ambition.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary says that any notice of revocation must be made in accordance with the constitutional requirements of a member state. What does he understand those requirements to be? Could the Prime Minister do it under her prerogative? Would it require an act of Parliament or a referendum?

Michael Russell: I do not like to correct a lawyer, but it was actually the ECJ judgment that said that about notice of revocation. I think that any or all of those would do. As I said in answer to a previous question, the real question is the determination to do it. Once people were determined to do it, they would find the right way to do it. It could be done by resolution in the House of Commons, which could be added to by having a referendum.

If Liam Kerr is keen on making that happen, he might bring a resolution to this Parliament advising the UK Government that it should happen. I do not think that that would be enough, but it would be a start. Now that the Tories seem to be so fixated on it, I encourage them to follow through their interests with some actual action.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): After a chaotic week in Westminster, Theresa May has become the first Prime Minister in the UK for 70 years to cancel a vote on a major international treaty. With Theresa May having ceased to govern in Westminster, does the cabinet secretary agree that it is time for all parties to unite to remove the Prime Minister and pave the way for a people's vote?

Michael Russell: I rarely, if ever, disagree with George Adam. On this occasion, I agree with him absolutely.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): What would be the financial implications of a no-deal Brexit for the national health service in Scotland?

Michael Russell: A no-deal Brexit has financial implications for all parts of the public sector. When I make a statement next week on preparations for a no-deal Brexit, I will try to say what those would be.

I do not want to pre-empt anything that my friend, Derek Mackay, will say in a few moments, but it is important to say that—as I said in my statement—the budget is being announced in the shadow of Brexit. A hard Brexit will require a different set of budgetary figures and requests being made. That would be a very serious situation.

I will do my best to give as much information as I can next week, but I do not think that we will go down to the level of detail of finances on each portfolio. However, I can say that, for example, the stockpiling of drugs, some of which will have to be stockpiled in Scotland, and of consumables in the health service, will cost the Scottish Government money. That money will have to be brought forward from future years in order to stockpile this year, which will have implications.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The cabinet secretary said that the first step must be to rule out a no-deal Brexit. Given that the cabinet secretary also objects to the deal that would do that, what mechanism does he propose to ensure that that could not happen?

Michael Russell: I have a great deal of time for John Scott, but he was clearly not paying a great deal of attention when I made my statement. I will, therefore, go back and quote a much greater authority than I on these matters: the Taoiseach. Speaking in the Dáil yesterday, he laid out exactly what would take place. He said:

“There is the option to revoke Article 50 and the option to extend it.”

Speaking about the UK Government, with which he is familiar and which, I understand, he would still support—although I cannot for the life of me understand why—he said:

“It is in their hands, at any point, to take the threat of no deal off the table either by revoking Article 50 or, if that is a step too far, extending it.”

I am fascinated by Tory members' detailed interest in the issue. There might be, on this darkest of days, some hope that they are beginning to realise what absolute mayhem they are wreaking on the country. In those circumstances, if they were to approach me to seek a common front in order that we try to find a way to send that message to Westminster, I would work with them.

Scottish Government Draft Spending and Tax Plans 2019-20

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work, Derek Mackay, on the Scottish Government draft spending and tax plans for 2019-20. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work (Derek Mackay): This Scottish budget prepares our economy for the opportunities of the future, enables the transformation of essential public services and builds a more inclusive and just society. It does so in the context of continuing United Kingdom austerity and against a backdrop of a UK Government careering toward Brexit at any cost. In sharp contrast to the chaos and uncertainty of the UK Government, the Scottish Government will keep on delivering good governance for Scotland.

Just this week, we have had confirmation of 80,000 affordable houses built since 2007, record low unemployment, the numbers of teachers and teaching students increasing, school attainment improving and the new best start grant starting to provide help for low-income parents. For the benefit of the Tories in the chamber, that is strong government—some might even say strong and stable government—doing its job, delivering for the people. This budget builds on that strong base. It provides an economic stimulus and supports the sustainability of our public services. It is a budget that safeguards the people of Scotland as best we can from the risks that we face using all the powers and resources at our disposal.

We all know that, despite the UK Government's promises, it has not ended austerity. The UK budget in October 2018 failed to provide much-needed direction and leadership for our longer-term finances and wider economy. On spending, the Office for Budget Responsibility confirmed in October that the UK Government could spend £15.4 billion more and still meet its fiscal rules in 2020-21. There can be no doubt that the Prime Minister did not keep her promise to end austerity. Instead we have austerity that is delivered by choice and not necessity and which has been condemned by the United Nations. The price that Scotland is paying as part of the UK is economic and social vandalism.

The facts are these: Scotland's resource block grant will be almost £2 billion lower in real terms in 2019-20 than it was in 2010-11, which is a fall of 7

per cent. If this year's budget consequential for investment in the national health service are excluded—which is reasonable, given our commitments to pass all those consequential on to health—our 2019-20 resource block grant is £340 million less in real terms than it was in 2018-19. That puts a huge strain on public spending, which this budget works hard to manage.

It is not just austerity that puts pressure on our budget; economic consensus warns us of the damage of Brexit. Two weeks ago, in a watershed moment, the UK Government admitted that it does not matter what kind of Brexit it secures; any kind of Brexit will make us poorer. The Scottish Government's position is clear. The best option for the future wellbeing and prosperity of Scotland is to remain in the European Union. If Scotland is forced out of the EU as a result of the actions of the UK Government, it is vital that the UK Government ensures that there is no detriment to the Scottish budget.

The UK Government's decision to take us out of the EU single market and the customs union—a market of more than 500 million people—is reckless and unnecessary and our growth forecasts are subdued as a consequence. Today, the Scottish Fiscal Commission has published its latest set of independent economic and fiscal forecasts for Scotland. The commission has revised up its forecasts for gross domestic product growth in every year. It now forecasts GDP in Scotland to grow by 1.4 per cent in 2018, which is faster than the growth expected in the UK as a whole. The commission then expects the Scottish economy to grow by 1.2 per cent in 2019, 1 per cent in 2020 and 2021, 1.1 per cent in 2022 and 1.2 per cent in 2023. However, the commission highlights that Brexit is a key factor that is expected to lead to slower growth in productivity, population and trade in future years. That means less money for public services and it risks making Scotland a less attractive place for businesses.

As a responsible Government, we are preparing, as far as possible, for all exit possibilities and we are intensifying preparations in order to protect the Scottish economy, our businesses and our workers. We have set up new teams in the Scottish Government to support preparations, including an international trade and investment policy team. We have doubled Scottish Development International's presence in Europe and we are investing £20 million over the next three years to enhance and intensify support to businesses that are looking to export.

Significant resources have had to be diverted, not just in the Scottish Government but across the public sector to prepare for the impact of Brexit. A no-deal Brexit and continued chaos from the UK Government will only make that worse. It is

disappointing but necessary for me to advise Parliament that, if the UK ends up in a no-deal Brexit, I may be required to revisit the priorities in this budget. However, stepping back from the brink and remaining in the EU would mean that resources could be returned to supporting front-line priorities. That is just one of many reasons why the Government believes that we should remain in the EU.

Unlike the UK Government, we have chosen to use the levers that are at our disposal to boost our economy and support our public services. In 2019-20, we will continue to deliver a public sector pay policy that lifts the 1 per cent cap on public sector pay. I confirm today that I have agreed a public sector pay policy for 2019-20 that will provide a 3 per cent pay rise for all those who earn £36,500 or less, which is higher than forecast inflation. It will cap the pay bill at 2 per cent for all those who earn between £36,500 and £80,000, and it will continue to contain pay rises at the higher end, capping any increase for those who earn more than £80,000 to £1,600. That is a reasonable and affordable public sector pay approach, which continues the journey of restoration of public sector pay. However, I must disappoint my colleagues by saying that ministerial pay will once again be frozen at 2009 levels. Our commitment to public sector workers is part of our commitment to high-quality public services.

The Government has made it clear that our priority is closing the attainment gap and improving education. We are determined to improve the life chances of children and young people in Scotland, and to change the lives of our future generations for the better. That is our defining mission, and it is why I announce today that the education portfolio will receive a real-terms increase in investment in 2019-20. We will provide almost £500 million to expand early learning and childcare, by supporting the recruitment and training of staff and investing in the building, refurbishment and extension of about 750 nurseries and family centres. We will invest more than £180 million to raise attainment in schools and close the attainment gap. That includes £120 million that will go directly to headteachers through the transformational pupil equity fund.

We will invest more than £600 million in Scotland's colleges, and we will maintain investment in Scotland's universities at more than £1 billion. To ensure that a range of avenues are open to young people, we will invest more than £214 million in apprenticeships and skills, in order to support the on-going expansion of apprenticeships in Scotland as we progress towards 30,000 starts per year.

The Government will continue our work to tackle poverty and mitigate the worst impacts of the UK Government's welfare cuts. We are already using the newly devolved social security powers to create a social security system that is based on dignity and respect. In a recent report on the UK, the UN rapporteur on poverty and human rights condemned the UK Government's

"punitive, mean-spirited and often callous"

treatment of the country's poorest and most vulnerable. I welcome the rapporteur's references to the very different approach that is being taken by the Scottish Government. The report notes the establishment of a social security system that is guided by evidence and the principles of dignity, fairness and respect. It recognises that we are mitigating the worst of the UK Government's welfare cuts and it describes our plans for tackling child poverty as "ambitious".

The Government will continue our work to tackle poverty, support new families and ensure that every child has the best possible start in life. We will also continue to mitigate the worst impacts of the UK Government's welfare cuts. The delivery of the new social security system and the safe and secure transition of the new powers will continue to be key priorities for the Government.

In 2019-20, we will deliver fair and dignified social security assistance, over and above what the UK Government provides, with a total forecast expenditure of £435 million. That will include a forecast spend of £37 million for the carers allowance supplement, which will provide vital support for our carers. It will include £12.4 million for the new best start grants, which will assist low-income families with essential expenses on the birth of a child and at key transitions in the early years. The grants will support families with young children who are feeling the impact of the UK Government's welfare cuts. We will provide £6.2 million for our new funeral expense assistance, which will help those who are on lower incomes with funeral costs. We will provide nearly £100 million to continue our mitigation of the bedroom tax and the UK Government's welfare cuts. We will increase the budget for our fair food fund from £1.5 million in 2018-19 to £3.5 million in 2019-20, with £2 million being provided specifically to tackle food insecurity during school holidays.

To safeguard Scotland, we will continue to protect the police resource budget in real terms, provide over £5 million of additional resources to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to support its transformation and increase Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service funding by £5 million for the recruitment of additional legal staff to manage increased case loads.

The Scottish economy is the powerhouse that fuels ambition for Scotland, and we are determined to unlock its potential. I want to see a country that is globally competitive, with innovation, sustainability and fairness at its heart. That is why this year I launched our new economic action plan with a number of decisive measures to improve the competitiveness of our business environment. We will support an advanced manufacturing challenge fund of up to £18 million to ensure that all parts of Scotland benefit from developments in advanced manufacturing; invest £5 million as part of our three-year £20 million plan to boost exports; and work with partners to enhance the digital skills that businesses require, including a new £1 million digital start fund to support people on lower incomes. We will also invest around £2.4 billion in our enterprise and skills bodies and develop the work of the enterprise and skills review and the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board.

In addition, the Scottish Government has committed around £1.3 billion to support Scotland's seven cities and their regions in maximising economic opportunity. In 2019-20, we will secure fully agreed city region deals for Stirling and Clackmannanshire and for the Tay cities region; progress growth deals for the Ayrshires, the borderlands and Moray; progress discussions on Argyll and Bute, Falkirk and the islands; and continue our financial commitment to the city region deals in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness and Edinburgh. Those investments will benefit all of Scotland, creating thousands of jobs, upskilling local labour markets and building on the economic strengths and opportunities for each region.

As part of our clear commitment to fair work and employability, we will invest £5 million over three years to support around 2,000 women to return to work following a career break; support parents in addressing barriers to work and provide in-work support to help low-income parents remain in work; and develop our fair work first principle for public procurement to ensure that as much of our funding as possible supports a fair and inclusive economy.

Investment in people is crucial, and creating meaningful employment is the best social policy. We also know that greater investment in infrastructure improves quality of life, boosts productivity and makes our country a more attractive place to do business in. That is why this Government will increase capital investment by £1.56 billion per year by the end of the next Parliament, and the budget begins that journey by setting out capital investment of more than £5 billion over the coming year, including investment of £1.7 billion in our transport infrastructure; more than £180 million towards city region and growth

deals; and £175 million of investment in nursery and childcare buildings.

Of course, it is vital that the right investments are made to generate inclusive growth and to deliver our low-carbon objectives. After all, we must act on climate change. Our investments in broadband, transport and utilities will provide the foundation for companies to invest and bring new economic opportunities across Scotland. As part of that vision, I will continue our groundbreaking work to establish a Scottish national investment bank, with the budget providing £130 million to establish the bank and precursor investments.

The next £50 million of the £150 million building Scotland fund announced last year will provide debt and equity support to the private sector, and organisations such as housing associations and universities, to support the development of housing across all tenures; to develop modern industrial and commercial space; and to support industry-led research and development. In 2019-20, we will invest a record £826 million as part of our total investment of over £3 billion to deliver 50,000 affordable homes over the course of the Parliament across the length and breadth of Scotland. We are building for Scotland, and building new homes, too.

As well as building more homes, with our progressive land and buildings transaction tax we are continuing to protect those who are buying their first home and those who are progressing through the property market. For those purchasing additional properties, I propose to increase the additional dwelling supplement from 3 to 4 per cent. Legislation will be laid before Parliament tomorrow and, if approved, the rate change will come into force on 25 January 2019.

I have listened carefully to the business community; it seeks investment in skills, people, innovation and infrastructure. This budget delivers such investment. We are committed to providing the best possible environment for businesses, supported by a competitive non-domestic rates regime. Last year, I limited the increase in business rates to consumer price index inflation. This year, I will go further—I announce today that we will cap the increases in the rates poundage in Scotland in 2019-20 at the below inflation level of 49 pence, limiting the increase to 2.1 per cent. That will ensure that over 90 per cent of properties in Scotland and all small and medium-sized businesses will pay a lower poundage than they would in other parts of the UK. I can also confirm that I will continue to uprate the poundage in line with the CPI for the remainder of this parliamentary session. Our package of business rates relief, including the small business bonus, is the most generous anywhere in the United Kingdom. It is worth an estimated £750 million in

2019-20, and continuing the growth accelerator will give us a further competitive advantage.

I also propose changes to non-residential land and buildings transaction tax that will mean that Scotland has the most competitive rates in the UK. Under those proposals, two thirds of all non-residential transactions will pay less tax in future than at present. Again, I will lay legislation on that change before Parliament tomorrow, and, if approved, the rate change will come into force on 25 January 2019. Those measures will help our businesses to grow, prosper and be successful.

We are proceeding with the Barclay review recommendations to reform non-domestic rates. Businesses have asked me to rule out the introduction of an out-of-town levy, which was a recommendation of the Barclay review. Although the Barclay review recommended that we explore that possibility as a means of supporting our town centres, in light of proposed UK taxes I do not believe that it would be right or fair to introduce such a tax at this time. We will, of course, keep that under review. However, I share the view that our town centres require support in a changing retail environment and I therefore announce that we will establish a new £50 million capital fund to support our town centres to diversify and develop, ensuring that they are thriving and sustainable places where people choose to spend their time.

Last year, we took the decision to introduce a new, progressive, fair and balanced income tax system that raises additional revenue from those who can most afford it, and to protect public spending. Those decisions help us to make Scotland the kind of country that we want it to be—they fund our public services and support our economic infrastructure and those most in need. Our income tax proposals will continue to follow the four key tests that the Scottish Government introduced last year: protecting the lowest-paid taxpayers, improving progressivity, raising additional revenue for public services and protecting the Scottish economy.

I have decided that, this year, I will not increase any of the rates of income tax: tax rates will remain the same. As a result, 99 per cent of all taxpayers will see no increase in the tax that they pay. However, in 2019-20, I will increase the starter and basic rate bands by inflation to protect our lowest and middle-earning taxpayers. The higher rate threshold will be frozen. That will ensure that 55 per cent of Scottish taxpayers continue to pay less than they would if they lived elsewhere in the UK, and that Scotland will continue to be the lowest-taxed part of the UK. For example, a pensioner who earns £15,000, with access to free personal care, free bus travel and cheaper council tax, will be better off by around £9,700 in 2019-20 relative to the rest of the UK.

However, someone earning £62,149—the same as an MSP—will pay just over £30 a week more in income tax in Scotland than they would elsewhere in the UK. That is before we consider any of the benefits of Scotland's social entitlements, such as state-funded university tuition, which we will continue to protect.

At a time of constrained growth, prolonged austerity and growing economic uncertainty, all as a result of a failing UK Government, it is not the time to cut tax for the highest earners at the expense of our public services. Instead, I will use the additional resources that are raised through my tax decisions in this budget to support our public services and ensure that our health service gets all the additional money that was promised. The UK Government failed to deliver in full the resources that it promised our health service, leaving us £55 million short. My decisions will ensure that we can restore that amount, which is the right decision for Scotland.

Our tax policy supports our public services and investment in our economy, while Scotland continues to be the fairest-taxed part of the UK. Our economy has grown faster than the rest of the UK in the first six months of this year, and there is no evidence in the Scottish Fiscal Commission's report that our income tax policy is slowing growth in Scotland. However, I always want my decisions to be based on the best evidence, so I will ask our council of economic advisors to expand its analysis of the potential impact of behavioural effects on future revenues.

Providing the necessary investment for health in a fair and balanced way is equipping our front-line services to take forward the measures that are set out in the health and social care financial framework and waiting times improvement plan. We recognise that our NHS and wider health and social care system must continue to adapt to the changing needs of our population and, in 2019-20, we will continue our improvement of those vital services.

I announce today that I am increasing the health portfolio resource budget by almost £730 million, which is an increase of almost £500 million in real terms. That decision confirms that health is a top priority for the Government and will take spending levels to £754 million above inflation since 2016-17, which is the equivalent of 19,000 nurses.

We will also deliver a further shift in the balance of spend towards mental health and primary, community and social care. As part of that, we are increasing our package of investment in social care and integration to more than £700 million in 2019-20. We will increase our direct investment in mental health services by £27 million, taking the overall funding for mental health to £1.1 billion in

2019-20, which includes our work to improve mental health services support in schools.

The decisions that I have taken in this year's budget will also allow me to increase funding for local government in 2019-20, providing total support of £11.1 billion. That provides a real-terms increase in revenue and capital funding, and an overall real-terms increase in the total local government settlement of more than £210 million.

This budget safeguards Scotland, using all the powers, resources and tools that are available to do so. If Opposition parties choose to argue for additional spending in any area above what I have set out in the budget, to have any credibility they need to indicate where the money should come from. Should it come from a rise in the basic rate of income tax and hit those on lower incomes, or should it come from a cut to public services? If the latter, which public services would they cut: the NHS, education or local government?

The Scottish Government cannot completely protect Scotland from the recklessness of the UK Government, but the decisions that we have taken in this budget ensure that we protect what matters most. We have chosen to transform our early learning and childcare; protect funding for education and improve attainment; invest record sums in our health services; provide a real-terms increase in total funding for local government; expand free personal care; and deliver a fair and just new social security system that will support those who are most in need.

We are doing all that while the UK Government implodes on its journey of economic self-harm. That is why the people of Scotland have entrusted us to focus on the delivery of our public services and the economy. This budget delivers for the Scotland of today and invests for the Scotland of tomorrow. I commend it to the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: I encourage members to press their request-to-speak buttons if they wish to ask a question.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement, heavily redacted as it may have been.

It is a source of regret for us all that today's big statement has been overshadowed by events at Westminster. I refer, of course, to the £950 million increase in the Scottish block grant that was announced by the chancellor in his October budget, which means that, according to the Scottish Parliament information centre, the finance secretary's total budget has not been cut by the Conservatives but is up in real terms by nearly £1 billion since 2010.

In advance of today's budget, every business representative group in Scotland had one key ask from the finance secretary. Those groups asked that the tax differential between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom not increase. They were concerned about the impact that a growing tax gap would have on their ability to recruit talented people to Scotland, which is a concern that has been echoed by those in the public sector.

However, the finance secretary has chosen to ignore all those calls with today's announcement that the threshold for paying higher-rate tax will be frozen. That means that, from April, those in Scotland who earn between £43,430 and £50,000 will face a marginal tax rate of 53 per cent on every extra pound that they earn. It means that a police sergeant who earns £45,942 will pay more than £700 in tax more than his counterpart south of the border; a senior nurse manager who earns £49,000 will pay £1,350 more than south of the border; and a principal teacher who earns £51,330 will pay more than £1,500 more. That is the price of living in the Scottish National Party's Scotland.

Anyone who earns just over £26,000 will be paying more than their equivalents south of the border. Surely no one will seriously argue that a household with an income of just over £26,000 is rich, yet those are the people who are being punished in the SNP's Scotland. There was no need to do that, because the finance secretary had more money in his budget—£950 million more in Barnett consequentials. There was no requirement for the tax rises that we have seen today.

We will scrutinise carefully the spending pledges in the budget. We welcome the additional money for the NHS, which was made possible by spending choices that were made at Westminster and a UK Conservative Government's commitment to health spending. We will look at the figures for local government in detail, but the headline sum that has been announced today falls short by £1 billion of what the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities assessed is needed just to stand still. People will be paying more in taxes, but they will face poorer local services. This is a pay more, get less budget.

It does not have to be this way. There is a different route that the finance secretary can choose. We are happy to sit down and have a serious discussion with him about his budget, if he commits to reducing, not increasing, the tax gap with the rest of the UK, and if he commits to dropping the SNP's ruinous plans for a second independence referendum. Will he join with us and develop a budget to help the people of Scotland and not punish them?

Derek Mackay: That was an offer from Murdo Fraser on the budget that I would like to refuse.

Our budget from 2018-19 to 2019-20, excluding the health uplift, to which I will return, has a real-terms reduction of £340 million for public services in Scotland. That is the outcome of the chancellor's budget.

Through our tax position, we are restoring the amount by which the Conservatives short-changed the health service when they took £50 million away from it. Our tax decisions restore that amount, taking NHS funding to record levels.

Of course, the chancellor's budget does nothing to undo the £2 billion real-terms reduction since 2010, which has had such a damaging impact on our public services.

I wonder whether Murdo Fraser has been discussing the position on tax with Ruth Davidson. Ruth Davidson said that we should forgo tax cuts so that we could invest in the health service, but in her absence the Tories have changed their minds.

I will take no lectures from the Conservatives on the performance of the economy. The Scottish economy is outperforming the UK economy, with higher GDP growth, lower unemployment and more international exports from Scotland.

Of course, if I were to follow the Tory income tax plans, we would have to cut Scotland's public services by half a billion pounds. That would mean that there would not be £1 billion more for local government; there would be £0.5 billion less for our public services. Those would be the consequences if I followed Murdo Fraser's plan.

We are investing in innovation, internationalisation and the infrastructure of our country, while the Tories deliver economic self-harm.

Murdo Fraser talked about what businesses are asking for. Right now, businesses are asking us to invest in skills and infrastructure and a competitive tax regime, and that is exactly what we are going to do—with Scotland having the lowest tax in the UK for small and medium-sized businesses. We are the lowest-taxed part of the UK and the fairest-taxed part of the UK.

Yes, the business community is speaking out today, and this is what it is saying. The British Chambers of Commerce said:

"The utter dismay amongst businesses watching events in Westminster cannot be exaggerated."

The Federation of Small Businesses said that the chaos makes planning ahead "impossible". Small firms are crying out for some certainty. I will take no lectures from the Conservatives on the economy of our country.

We are aspirational. We are building the country that we seek. We hear talk about tax divergence and divergence between pay packets in Scotland and pay packets in England, but if I were to follow the Tories' planned cuts to public expenditure, many of those people would not have a job, because of the cuts that the Conservatives would have us deliver.

This is a fair and progressive budget for the people of Scotland, which I am sure will deliver stability and stimulus for our country.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement.

Public services are at breaking point. Headteachers are writing to parents about unprecedented cuts. One in four children in Scotland is living in poverty. Our rail system is in chaos.

This is yet another woeful SNP budget that will let the people of Scotland down. Yet again, ministers refuse to use their powers and continue to force cuts on to councils. Scotland is being let down by Nicola Sturgeon's timid Government and Derek Mackay's timid budget. Scotland needs a radical budget, which supports public services, tackles rising poverty and fixes the mayhem in our rail system.

If members want to see just how badly the SNP is failing the people of Scotland, they need only look at how councils are struggling. There are nearly 3,000 fewer teachers in our schools, and nearly a third of children fail to reach the required level of literacy by the end of primary school.

Few things better sum up the cruelty of the Tory Government than the two-child cap on tax credits and universal credit, which punishes people for raising a family, yet the SNP has refused to use its powers to put an end to that vile policy. With 230,000 children in Scotland living in poverty, the cabinet secretary should have backed calls to increase child benefit by £5 per week; that would lift 30,000 children out of poverty and put money in the pockets of families across Scotland. With over 4,000 families in Scotland affected by the two-child cap, why has the cabinet secretary sat on his hands, refusing to use the powers of this Parliament to cancel that vindictive policy?

If education really is the SNP's top priority, why has this SNP Government continued to penalise councils with £95 million in swingeing cuts? At a time when one in four children in Scotland is living in poverty, why has the cabinet secretary retained more than £300 million in reserves?

Derek Mackay: While we have been safeguarding Scotland, the Labour Party has been selling Scotland out, leaving its powers with the

Conservatives in Westminster. How about trying this? How about trying to resolve the problems—
[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary, please.

Derek Mackay: How about removing the Tories' pernicious policies by removing the Tories and taking these decisions in our own Parliament, with the powers to do that? I was waiting eagerly for the Labour Party's alternative budget, but there has been a leak: there is not going to be an alternative budget from the Labour Party. According to *The Times*, there will be no alternative budget. What Labour has said—
[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary please.

Derek Mackay: In previous years—
[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, order. One second please, cabinet secretary. I ask members to please keep quiet for a second. Let us hear the questions without members bellowing out, and I am referring to Mr Swinney and Mr Kelly in particular. Do not bellow at each other across the chamber when a question has been asked and the cabinet secretary is replying.

Derek Mackay: I will try to help the Labour Party out a wee bit. In this budget, the Government is proposing to substantially increase NHS spending in real terms. Spending on education and local government is being increased in real terms. On social security, we are spending over and above what the UK Government has given to us. We are taking an approach that is based on dignity and respect, but if the Labour Party wants an alternative, it has a duty to set out what an alternative budget would look like.

I can see what the Labour Party said. According to *The Times*, a Labour Party source said that, in previous years,

"We could justify our spending decisions with how we would raise the money. Now we have nothing. It's a shambles."

Yes, it is—it is a shambles from the Labour Party. The same source said in relation to Labour's budget plans, or lack of them:

"At least when we had a plan, ridiculous as it was, we had a plan".

That is the clarion call from the Labour Party. Where is the industrial strategy today? We are investing in the infrastructure of our society. You see—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, please. I am going to ask two things. Cabinet secretary, could

you move your microphone slightly closer, and could Labour members in particular please keep the noise down? We cannot hear a word that is being said. I am sitting a matter of feet away from the minister and I cannot hear what he is saying. Please keep the noise down.

Derek Mackay: The Labour Party has no alternative to our budget, because it is no alternative whatsoever in this chamber.

Could Labour's alternative be tax? Will it propose an alternative tax plan? Bear in mind that, in Westminster, the shadow chancellor has said that he will not reverse the Tories' tax plans in the budget. That is the position of the Labour Party in the House of Commons. What about here in Scotland? What is the alternative revenue-raising option in Scotland? A Labour spokesperson confirmed that

"an alternative income tax plan would not be set out this year to show how the alternative policies would be paid for."

There we have it—a totally incompetent Labour Party Opposition. It has no alternative to our plans, which would increase investment in our country by £2 billion. That is what the Labour Party would be voting against, if it opposes this very positive and progressive budget.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It is clear that, after two budgets in a row in which the Scottish Government had proposed deep cuts to local government only to reverse them under Green pressure, the Scottish Government no longer feels able to turn the screw on local councils and the services that they provide across the country. I am pleased that that pressure has been brought to bear. It is equally clear that, in the face of rising demand for those services, councils urgently need the power to raise the funds themselves in order to meet that demand fairly.

Why is there no mention in the budget statement of the need to reform local taxation? The cabinet secretary did not say a word on that agenda. Towards the end of the local government section in the budget document, a paragraph is buried away confirming that the Scottish Government continues to commit to ending the council tax, but there is no word at all about the timescale or the actions that it will take to implement that policy. What will the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government be doing in the coming weeks, months and years to give real effect to the urgent need for local tax reform and to put our local services across Scotland on a stronger footing and make them less reliant on a single block grant every year from the Scottish Government?

Derek Mackay: I am pleased that Patrick Harvie welcomes the package of support—no doubt, he is

the first—for local government amounting to £11.1 billion, which represents a real-terms increase of more than £210 million in the overall settlement.

In relation to engagement on the council tax, since I have been finance secretary, the Parliament has looked at and provided a critique of the council tax, but there has been no majority in the chamber for an alternative. My pledge, which I have repeatedly made in the chamber, is that I will work with anyone who is interested on what local taxation should look like—it should be fair and progressive—and I am happy to do that engagement in an open and constructive way.

It is important to find consensus, so that we can give stability to local government finances, and it is important that we design a system that is fair and progressive. I remain open to that dialogue and those discussions, which can be on a cross-party basis.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The finance secretary has rightly focused on the chaos and uncertainty of the UK Government over Brexit, which is bad for the economy and public services. Just this week, the Fraser of Allander institute highlighted the low productivity levels in Scotland. I have asked for a cessation of this Government's campaign for independence, because that would bring even more chaos on top of the Brexit chaos at a time when we need stability to focus on the big challenges that this country faces.

Our priorities for this budget are investment in mental health services, a decent pay deal for teachers and a fair deal for local government. Why will the finance secretary not agree to put aside independence for now, so that we can work together on those important matters?

Derek Mackay: I did not mention independence in my budget speech. I mentioned how we are getting on with the day job, delivering our services, growing and stimulating our economy and delivering a more progressive tax system. I was not focused on independence, although I happen to support Scottish independence—that should not be a surprise to Willie Rennie and the Liberal Democrats.

Willie Rennie is so obsessed with independence that he could be willing to vote down the resources for which he has been asking for years on mental health, education, the NHS, the local government settlement and colleges. The Liberal Democrats are even willing to vote down the resources that we are offering up for ferries in this budget, which has growth of around £2 billion. That is reckless, which is not the approach that the Scottish Government is taking.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for getting on with the day job and delivering for Scotland with a budget that is

fair, balanced and sustainable. In stark contrast, we see Westminster being consumed by constitutional mayhem and the Tory party busy tearing itself apart. The cabinet secretary has set out an income tax policy that will raise additional income. How much would it cost Scotland's public services if we were to replicate the Tories' UK plans here in Scotland? Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Tory party recipe would be an absolute disaster for our vital public services? The Tories are causing chaos and crisis at Westminster and are planning to do the same with Scotland's public services.

Derek Mackay: I agree with Bruce Crawford's sentiment. On the figure that he seeks, if we were to follow the Tories' tax plans on income tax alone, it would cost us £500 million from investment in our public services. More widely, if we were to follow the other tax plans that they have, we would have to cut around £650 million from public services to fund their tax cuts. It is interesting: when every other Tory member in this chamber stands up with funding requests and demands over this and that, it is true to say that they want tax cuts at the same time as spending more. The Conservatives' position is just not credible. If they want to change the budget, let them identify which public services they would cut in order to follow their tax plans.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The SNP has made Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK, not only for workers who earn above £26,000 per year but for businesses that are looking to expand. The Barclay review made that clear. The doubling of the large business supplement under the SNP has made Scotland less competitive for business than the rest of the UK. With almost £1 billion of additional funding coming from the UK Government, why has the cabinet secretary not used today's budget to cut the large business supplement and make Scotland's economy more competitive?

Derek Mackay: Clearly, Dean Lockhart was not listening when I pointed out that 90 per cent of properties in Scotland will pay a lower poundage than those in other parts of the UK, so every single small or medium-sized business in Scotland will pay less tax by being in Scotland than it would if it were south of the border. As well as that, we are fairer and more progressive on income tax, we invest more for our public services and we protect the economy. Therefore, in fact, not only are we the lowest-taxed part of the UK, but—even more important—we are the fairest.

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): Given the on-going uncertainty and chaos at Westminster, will the cabinet secretary tell us what the consequences for Scotland's public services

and our economy will be if the Scottish Parliament does not support this budget in the new year?

Derek Mackay: The total budget for 2019-20 that is proposed for approval will provide £42.5 billion of investment in Scotland, which is almost £2 billion more than in 2018-19. The main elements of that are £660 million in extra capital, £730 million in extra health resource and £340 million more for social security, compared with last year's budget. That is what is at risk if this budget is not passed.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): In the budget proposals there is no mention of an industrial strategy; they simply reheat initiatives that have not worked. There are no new ideas to boost our economy. Yet again, the cabinet secretary has taken the opportunity to announce his intention to set up a Scottish national investment bank, with funding of £130 million, which is some distance short of the £20 billion that Scottish Labour would invest. [Laughter.] SNP members seem to find that amusing.

Despite the cabinet secretary announcing that initiative over and over again, we do not know when it will happen. When will the funding that has been reannounced today be in place to benefit our businesses? Can the cabinet secretary tell us when the Scottish national investment bank will be open for business?

Derek Mackay: I am sorry—I do not think that I caught all of that question because of the laughter at the mention of Labour's industrial and economic position. It has asked for an industrial strategy before. I do not think that we need one. We need—and are delivering—industrial actions, such as more investment and more interventions where they are right and proper, and we are supporting the industry of Scotland. Yet again, we hear from the Labour Party empty rhetoric and words that are totally meaningless.

The investments that we are making are clearly making a difference. We have foreign direct investment that is second only to that in London and the south-east of England, we have rising exports and our GDP is outperforming that of the rest of the UK. Unemployment is at a record low level and lower than the rest of the United Kingdom, and our economic efforts include investment in infrastructure of some 50—I was going to do a Labour thing for a moment there and just totally make up a number, but I will not do that. The actual investment in infrastructure under this Government is £5 billion.

That is real money: real cash and real investment in the infrastructure of our country. We will have a more competitive rates regime that leads to more jobs and to economic growth and stimulus. We are developing the national

manufacturing institute for Scotland and building the Scottish national investment bank. There is finance forthcoming and precursor investment, the legislation will be working its way through Parliament next year, and the bank will be operational if this Parliament approves that legislation. However, even before the bank is established, we are investing now through the building Scotland fund to support our economy, so across that range of measures we will be stimulating the economy, leading to more purposeful and meaningful jobs while delivering inclusive growth and fair work at the same time.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I agree with the cabinet secretary that this is a progressive budget from a strong and stable Scottish Government that stands in stark contrast to the chaos and confusion of the UK Government. However, given that the Tories' self-indulgent, self-obsessed, self-centred civil war now risks the UK crashing out of the European Union without a deal, will the cabinet secretary set out exactly what level of risk there is to the Scottish budget spending plans in the event that the shambolic UK Government leads us to a catastrophic no-deal Brexit?

Derek Mackay: I agree with Tom Arthur. I thought that he put it very well. There is a serious point here, because this budget, just like the Chancellor's own budget, was based on the assumption of a deal with the European Union and an orderly Brexit. That was the basis on which the Chancellor made his budget, and those are the numbers that underpin the Scottish budget. In the event that there is a change, yes, we may have to return to Parliament with a revised budget, but we have been trying for some time to get the UK in a better position in terms of the Brexit negotiations, while recognising that no Brexit would be the best possible outcome. However, if no deal can be agreed and there is a further UK budget, we will need to understand the implications for Scotland's public finances before revisiting our budget assumptions and presenting revised proposals to the Scottish Parliament.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): Last year's draft budget estimated that Scottish income tax revenues would be £12.582 billion in 2019-20. Today's draft budget estimates that revenues will be £11.684 billion in 2019-20. That is a massive drop. Why?

Derek Mackay: Maurice Golden is not as fortunate as other Conservative members who are on the Finance and Constitution Committee and who understand that the forecasts are based on Scottish Fiscal Commission numbers. The SFC looks at the baseline, and as it gets more evidence, it moves from the estimates that it has been working to and focuses on the actual outturn

based on the latest data. I am sure that, if he pays close attention to the SFC's forecasts, he will find that the difference is explained by forecasting issues rather than by any substantial change in the Scottish economy.

That said, Brexit is the major challenge to Scotland's economy. The impact that Brexit will have on population, productivity and related issues such as wage earning is what is leading to the subdued GDP growth. If we had all the economic levers that come with being fully empowered as a country, we would be able to make the right economic decisions to grow our country. The SFC has made it clear that the issues are around its methodology and the forecasts that it has set out.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Scotland has made huge progress in tackling homelessness, but there is still a lot more to do. I know that, like me, the cabinet secretary is not prepared to see the progress that we have made being undone. Will he outline what funding there is in the Scottish budget to tackle homelessness?

Derek Mackay: Local authorities clearly have a function in that respect, as tackling homelessness is partly funded through the local government settlement. The settlement has been increased by £23.5 million in recognition of local authorities' responsibilities for temporary accommodation. They can choose how best to use the funding to respond to the needs of their areas.

This year, the budget also contains another £10 million from the £50 million ending homelessness together fund, which is to be spent on implementing the transformational recommendations from the homelessness and rough sleeping action group.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): In real terms, the budget cuts funding for colleges, it cuts funding for universities and it leaves councils unable to restore school budgets, which are currently £400 million lower than they were in 2010. Did the finance secretary not get the memo about education being the Government's top priority, or did he just choose to ignore it again?

Derek Mackay: Iain Gray should reflect on the fact that the budget includes a real-terms increase for education. We will also support local government with a real-terms increase, and we are investing in skills and the attainment gap. We are making great efforts to support education. If the Labour Party wishes to spend even more on education than we propose, it should set out how it would raise the necessary revenues, rather than hiding away without any serious alternative plan and only making spending requests.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The finance secretary spoke in his statement about the expansion of free personal

care. Can he confirm the amount of resource that has been made available to implement Frank's law and to expand free personal care to people who are under 65?

Derek Mackay: In 2019-20, we will invest an additional £30 million in the local government settlement to implement Frank's law and to extend free personal care to under-65s, which was set out in the programme for government.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I start by thanking the finance secretary for listening to me and others, and for committing £30 million to Frank's law. Amanda Kopel, the wife of Frank, is here today in the gallery. I pay tribute to her campaign. *[Applause.]*

In the wider health context, could the finance secretary confirm that underfunding of health boards through the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee funding formula will today see no health board in his budget receive parity or above?

Derek Mackay: The front-line health budget is being increased, as is the budget to health boards.

I heard the campaigning that Miles Briggs and others engaged in on Frank's law. I, too, pay tribute to the family and am delighted that we were able to progress the matter.

It is now incumbent on those who have campaigned on many issues to support the budget so that what they want can happen. I have provided the resources and will produce the necessary budget bill to take Frank's law forward. I look forward to the support, perhaps of even just some Conservatives, that will allow us to make that investment. There is record investment in the national health service, and more is going to health boards as well.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary confirm that, as in previous years, the money that is made available to schools through the pupil equity fund is to fund additional initiatives that are chosen by schools in order to close the attainment gap, and that it comes on top of the funding for core education responsibilities that councils receive through the local government settlement?

Derek Mackay: Yes. The pupil equity fund is £120 million of additional funding that is allocated directly to schools to invest in targeted interventions to close the poverty-related attainment gap. That money is in addition to the more than £5 billion core funding that local authorities expect to spend to deliver core education responsibilities.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased that the cabinet secretary said that health is a priority for the Government. If it had

been a priority all along for SNP ministers, perhaps we would not be seeing life expectancy in Scotland fall for the first time in 30 years, health inequalities widen, Audit Scotland warn that the future of our NHS is not financially sustainable, NHS staff overworked and stressed, and a crisis in our underfunded social care services.

We need a transformative budget for health and social care that will end the deprivation gap and give everyone the same chance to live long and healthy lives. Can the cabinet secretary explain how the budget will tackle Scotland's shocking health inequalities, rather than simply being an attempt to keep health boards afloat?

Derek Mackay: A rough guess leads me to suggest that the investment of more than £700 million that we are proposing in the budget might help. I have this to say to the Labour Party: I do not know whether Monica Lennon is aware of this, but we are delivering more than the Labour Party committed to delivering in its manifesto for the Scottish Parliament elections in 2016. Labour has opposed every increase for the national health service that I have proposed since I became Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work. We could do with a bit more support for investment in our national health service, rather than hearing empty rhetoric from members including Monica Lennon.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The cabinet secretary knows that many of us do not like the council tax and would like to see it being replaced. However, so far, no alternative has received widespread agreement. A local income tax might be fairer, but would take no account of property, and land valuation tax is not widely understood and has some anomalies. Does the cabinet secretary agree that if we are to replace council tax we want widespread cross-party agreement, so that there can be a longer-lasting—in fact, permanent—settlement for local government?

Derek Mackay: John Mason is always the voice of reason. I agree that we should work together to find consensus and a majority in Parliament on what local taxation would look like. I am open to that, as I have said repeatedly when Parliament has debated council tax and local taxation. My offer is for all the parties to discuss the matter together to see what alternatives we can find.

There are various workstreams under way, including in the Scottish Land Commission. We can also draw from existing evidence. I commit to being open, balanced and fair in respect of how we take the matter forward. A key element for the Government is that we want whatever tax system we have to be progressive.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): With reference to the investment in infrastructure section that is set out on page 40 of the budget paper, can the cabinet secretary confirm how much money will be available from the Scottish Government for the essential cross-Tay link road?

Derek Mackay: I will need to refer the question to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, who takes forward the work on infrastructure in both the city region deals, but I am happy to get back to Liz Smith.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The budget outlines a significant investment in Scotland's health and care services, which will go towards reducing health inequalities for my South Scotland constituents. How does the increase in the Scottish health budget compare with the uplift in England?

Derek Mackay: By passing on the resource consequentials and reinstating the UK Government's reduction of £55 million to health funding, the uplift for the health budget in Scotland amounts to 5.5 per cent, which compares with 5.1 per cent for the health budget in England.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind): Yesterday, I spent some time volunteering with the giving tree appeal that is being run by Instant Neighbour Aberdeen, which is a charity in my constituency. Thousands of children across the north-east will have to rely on the kindness of strangers to enjoy a merry Christmas this year, because of the poverty that they and their families are experiencing. Can the cabinet secretary outline how his budget will help to support families in my constituency, whose poverty is often masked by the wider prosperity of the city of Aberdeen?

Derek Mackay: In the budget, I have outlined the support that is available through our new social security system, and I have said that we will be spending more than was allocated to us by the UK Government for food and other payments, including the best start grant. We are also supporting housing investment and other welfare measures.

It is important to recognise that a range of partners have roles in supporting people who are in times of hardship. That is why I have tried to protect public services and have made a different choice from the Conservatives, whose choice is, of course, tax cuts.

The package of measures that we are undertaking will help us to mitigate poverty as far as we can, but it would be better if we had all the powers for the economy and welfare in Scotland. The damning report from the United Nations about the pernicious welfare reforms of the Conservatives and the impact that they are having

should cause us to reflect on where power lies and how we use the resources that we have. However, there are in the budget a range of measures to support families who are in need throughout the year.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I warmly welcome the announcement of a new £50 million capital fund to diversify and develop our town centres and to help them to thrive. Can the finance secretary advise Parliament how communities and local authorities will be able to access those funds?

Derek Mackay: I am glad that Kenneth Gibson welcomes the £50 million capital fund for town centres. I will deliver the fund in partnership with local authorities, and I will engage with them in the period ahead on how it will be designed. I want it to be a stimulus for our town centres so that we can unlock their potential, support the economy and help them to diversify and adapt, which we know is what is required at this time.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests.

The SNP minority Government will need allies to get the budget through—allies of the Green variety. Patrick Harvie wants local tax reform and a tourist tax. UKHospitality has pointed out that a tourist tax would be detrimental to Scottish tourism businesses and detrimental to businesses that already pay hundreds of millions of pounds in business rates. Will Derek Mackay give an assurance today that businesses will not have to endure a tourist tax? Will he rule it out once and for all?

Derek Mackay: I know that Rachael Hamilton is very interested in this subject. As part of the Scottish Government, I am engaging in a national conversation. As I said in my budget speech, I am looking at the evidence in relation to taxation including, specifically, the transient visitor levy—or tourist tax, as it is sometimes called. We are having that national engagement and I look forward to seeing the evidence.

Rachael Hamilton might want to welcome some of the other elements of the budget, including the lowering of the poundage for non-domestic rates. I think that I am getting a thumbs-up to that from Rachael Hamilton. We also have the most competitive package of business rates relief anywhere in the United Kingdom and the continuation of the growth accelerator, as well as all the investments that we are making to stimulate the economy.

I am quite sure that the tourism sector will welcome the further infrastructure investment in housing, digital and transport. That will all be very well received as, too, will the transitional relief for

the hospitality sector that I am continuing in our non-domestic rates regime.

The Presiding Officer: For the cabinet secretary's information, I note that we have made good progress through questions. About 15 members still wish to ask questions, and we have just under 30 minutes to go. Several members have added their names. If others wish to press their request-to-speak buttons and add their names, they may do so, or we might finish early or the cabinet secretary might take longer to reply.

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): The cabinet secretary has set out plans to invest almost £500 million in the expansion of early learning and childcare, which will be warmly welcomed across Scotland. Is he aware that some councils are already delivering the 1,140 hours in some nurseries, including in Dundee, where an estimated 290 extra jobs will be created by 2020? Will he join me in urging all councils to use the money to deliver the policy as soon as possible?

Derek Mackay: Presiding Officer, some people have said that I might wish to engage in time travel. That is an interesting request to keep going until 5 o'clock.

On the specific question from Shona Robison, some councils have gone ahead and delivered the commitment in advance, but the delivery phase of the expansion is now well under way for early learning and childcare. That is why the multiyear revenue and capital package is so important for funding the expansion fully.

I encourage local authorities to continue to use the funding that we are providing to phase in increased hours in line with their local delivery plans and the expansion planning guidance, in order to ensure that children who will benefit most from the expansion also benefit first. I also encourage them to continue to work together with us to ensure that all eligible children benefit from the expansion from August 2020.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I was wondering whether the cabinet secretary could expand on the single sentence that he devoted to justice issues in his statement.

The Scottish Police Authority states that the recently agreed police pay deal will cost more than £125 million and, indeed, the police overspent by £38 million last year. The modest increase in the budget will be more than swallowed by that overspend alone. Therefore, will the cabinet secretary confirm that the police will need to make savings to meet their commitment on pay? What assessment of the impact on front-line police numbers has been made as a result of that?

Derek Mackay: It was the SNP Government, of course, who committed to increase police

numbers, and that is exactly what we have done. In sharp contrast to the decrease in numbers in England and Wales, numbers have grown in Scotland.

There is a real-terms protection for the police resource budget, which is £19.1 million. It is important to say that, as is right, we have allowed the Scottish Police Authority to retain the spending power from the decision to enable VAT to be reclaimed. Further, the Scottish Police Authority would be in an even better financial situation if we got back from the Conservatives the VAT that they took from the police, and the same thing applies to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

We are investing in the justice system and we have, once again, given real-terms protection to our police resource budget.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary set out what provision there is in the budget to ensure that the Scottish Government funds the inquiry into child abuse, to ensure that victims' voices are heard?

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government will continue to fully fund the inquiry, which, like any enquiry, operates entirely independently of Government, to ensure that the voices of survivors of in-care abuse are heard.

The purpose of the Scottish child abuse inquiry is to raise public awareness of the abuse of children in care. It provides an important opportunity to publicly acknowledge the suffering of those children and a forum for the validation of their experience and their testimony.

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

The budget states that the devolved elements of the social security system will be administered by Social Security Scotland, with a total administrative budget of £41.5 million in 2019-20. Earlier this month, it was reported that the Scottish Government has asked the Department for Work and Pensions to control the carers allowance for two more years at a cost of £2.4 million, and we know that the devolution of disability benefits will be delayed until the end of this parliamentary session. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that there will be no further delay, past 2021, in the Scottish Government assuming executive competence for those benefits?

Derek Mackay: To be fair, I think that that is a question for the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, who could give an accurate answer about how the position stands. However, I have outlined in the budget the resources that we are allocating towards the new

social security system and the commitments that we have made around the payments, and I have also mentioned what we are doing with regard to the safe and secure transition. We are putting investment in place.

I have to say that the Scottish Government's view of fairness is quite different from the Conservatives' view of fairness. We are putting in place the necessary infrastructure and resource to deliver the commitments that we have set out, but I am happy to defer to the social security secretary on the specifics of the question.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware of submissions that have been made to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee by residents and traders in the Garnethill and Sauchiehall Street areas of Glasgow, whose lives and businesses have been completely disrupted in the aftermath of the most recent fire at the Glasgow School of Art, as has the whole area around that part of the city. Will the budget offer them any comfort?

Derek Mackay: The Glasgow fire recovery fund, which I established in July, is providing up to £5 million to Glasgow City Council to support businesses that have been affected by the fires at the Glasgow School of Art's Mackintosh building and Victoria's nightclub.

The fund has provided 200 businesses with around £3 million in direct support—£20,000 for businesses within the immediate fire cordons and £10,000 for eligible businesses within the wider Sauchiehall Street area. I will shortly be announcing plans for the remaining £2 million and I can assure all members that businesses that have been affected by the fires will benefit from the full £5 million.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The discretionary housing payment budget is split into two parts, which are for bedroom tax mitigation and "other", and that "other" budget has remained static for two years, at £10.9 million. The cabinet secretary will know that termination of tenancy due to rent arrears is a major driver of homelessness and that, in universal credit areas, the rate of such termination is two and a half times higher. In fact, there is a case to be made for universal credit now being the biggest driver of poverty. To enable local authorities to tackle that, Labour is calling on the Scottish Government to double the "other" part of the discretionary housing payment budget to £20 million. Will the cabinet secretary consider that if that was included in his budget, he would prevent more evictions due to rent arrears and would do a great deal to prevent homelessness?

Derek Mackay: If I put that in the budget, would the member vote for it? It seems that she would.

[*Interruption.*] I understand that the purpose of this is for the Opposition to ask me questions, and I absolutely am answering questions. However, it is important to point out that when I ask whether the member would vote for the budget if I did what she is asking of me, I get silence. There is silence because the Labour Party has no alternatives to our budget, which invests more in social security, welfare, housing and supporting the most vulnerable in our society. If the Labour Party wants any amendments or changes, the duty is on Labour members to show how they would fund those. I am open to constructive engagement with the Labour Party to ensure that we have consensus to pass a budget.

Pauline McNeill: That is a no, then.

Derek Mackay: I hear Pauline McNeill heckling me. If I made the change in the budget that she has asked for, would the Labour Party vote for it? If Labour comes up with a credible set of alternatives and a position, I will of course engage constructively with it, but I fear that, as a Labour source has suggested, the Labour Party right now is just a shambles.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for heeding the repeated calls of those on the Liberal Democrat benches for extra resources for mental health. What confidence can the cabinet secretary give the chamber that the money will do anything to reverse the national scandal that is waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services? Will the resources that are defined in his statement for mental health support in schools ensure that sufficient resource is available to ensure that every child in Scotland has access to the services of a trained mental health counsellor?

Derek Mackay: I understand the point that Alex Cole-Hamilton is making. It is right to reflect on the evidence that we have heard and the calls that have been made. We have been asked to increase mental health funding to improve signposting, provide support across the mental health landscape and recalibrate systems to ensure that support is there when it is needed, including in schools and in the education environment. It is a serious question, which is why we have allocated more. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills take a close interest in the subject. We are confident that those extra resources will, indeed, make a difference.

However, I say again that if the budget is not passed, those resources will not be released to the health service, to schools and colleges and to those who will benefit from the investment. Members ask me what difference the extra investment will make. If they support that

investment—if it is so important—surely they should vote for it.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): At the Local Government and Communities Committee this morning, Graham Sharp, the chair of the Accounts Commission, confirmed to me that, despite the desperate claims of our political opponents, if we include council tax and other revenue-raising measures, the funding available to local authorities has not fallen at all. What action is being taken to ensure that local authorities continue to be protected, despite the on-going austerity cuts that the Scottish Government continues to receive from the Conservative Westminster Government?

Derek Mackay: I have set out a budget that ensures that the total core funding package for local government amounts to £11.1 billion, which is an increased settlement in cash terms and real terms. The budget provides a real-terms increase in the revenue and capital settlements in 2019-20 and a real-terms increase of more than £210 million in the overall settlement.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

Can the cabinet secretary explain why he is proposing a decrease in spending in real terms on the prevention of flooding, while so many communities remain at risk, including several in my constituency?

Derek Mackay: Would that be another funding request from the Conservatives? They want to cut spending at the same time, of course. The funding of flood prevention and the work of our environmental agencies take into account the evidence. The resource is satisfactory, and the member should not be scaremongering about flood prevention measures.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that tackling poverty effectively depends on increasing household incomes and on moving away from the unacceptable society in which the use of food banks is the norm? Since he will not boost family incomes and immediately lift thousands of children out of poverty by implementing the £5 per week child benefit top-up, will his Government at least bring forward the planned implementation of the income supplement? Yesterday, churches, charities and experts on eradicating poverty called for it to be introduced. Families who are living in poverty cannot wait until 2022.

Derek Mackay: If members have alternatives, they should explain the alternative revenue-raising mechanisms that they would use to pay for commitments, over and above what is already in the budget. I am sure that Elaine Smith will

welcome the extra investment in health, education, housing and all forms of infrastructure to support our economy. I believe that the best social policy is getting people into employment, so surely unemployment being at a record low is to be welcomed. We want fair, meaningful and purposeful employment. The support for families includes a social security system that is based on dignity and respect.

We are working on our more targeted income supplement measures, because targeted measures will make a greater difference than some of the alternatives that have been proposed would make.

Elaine Smith: Bring it forward.

Derek Mackay: I hear Labour members shouting, "Bring it forward." My job is to deliver a balanced and competent budget, and that is exactly what I am doing. We have to make available the necessary revenues to fulfil our commitments, and that is what we have done. We have committed to investing in the national health service, to tackling the attainment gap and to mitigating the pernicious UK welfare policies. Labour members need to reflect on the fact that, for as long as they leave the economic and social levers at Westminster, there is only so much that we can do to safeguard Scotland and to mitigate the impact of Westminster's decisions. That is why the Scottish Parliament should have the power and resources to fully protect the people of Scotland.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Tackling climate change is one of the most pressing challenges that faces the world today. In what ways will the budget help Scotland to meet its climate change obligations?

Derek Mackay: I will give some examples. We are doing more work on energy efficiency. We are on track to make £0.5 billion available over the four years to 2021, in order to improve energy efficiency through the energy efficient Scotland route map. We are investing nearly £59 million in forestry priorities, including support to stimulate and enable woodland creation across Scotland. We are investing £80 million in active travel to help to build an active nation and to make our towns and cities friendlier and safer places. We are investing £50 million in low-carbon transport measures, which include the expansion of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. We are continuing to deliver the climate justice fund, and to invest £42 million annually in local authority flood prevention projects, which were mentioned earlier. That is a flavour of some of the actions that we are taking to protect the environment. In addition, we will introduce the most ambitious climate change targets in the world.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): The cabinet secretary and his predecessor have talked much about progressive taxes. Data from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs shows that the bottom 20 per cent of earners pay 38 per cent of their income in direct and indirect taxes, while the top 20 per cent pay 37.4 per cent. He knows that a tax is progressive when the rate rises with the tax base. Given the data that I have noted, and given that a large reason for it is the regressivity of the council tax, when will he provide leadership by delivering the commitment that was made, in the commission on local tax reform, by his party, my party, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats that

"The present council tax system must end"?

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government was elected on a 2016 manifesto that outlined a more progressive council tax, which I have delivered through increasing the higher-value bands and through council tax caps. I have been delivering what was in the SNP manifesto.

However, I recognise that this is a minority Government, and we need to look at the matter in a consensual, cross-party way in order to find alternatives. I am going to be constructive and open in engaging in that discussion, and I am sure that Andy Wightman will be, too.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I know that the cabinet secretary is a keen sports fan and that the Scottish Government is committed to improving health and wellbeing. With that in mind, can he tell me what funding has been made available to sportscotland to boost activity and participation in sport?

Derek Mackay: I thank George Adam for what I think was a compliment. I did not realise that supporting St Mirren qualified me.

George Adam: Of course it does.

Derek Mackay: I hear the member shout "Of course it does" from a sedentary position.

In 2019-20, sportscotland will receive a 3 per cent funding uplift to support the priority of getting Scotland active, and the Scottish Government will continue to underwrite the potential shortfall in lottery funding of up to £3.4 million for sportscotland in 2019-20 and to encourage the UK Government to take the necessary actions to address lottery reductions.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): We have been promised for some time that, under the reaching 100 per cent programme, there would be a spend of £600 million to deliver superfast broadband to everyone in Scotland. However, I see from the budget just published—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Peter Chapman: I see from page 146 of the budget just published that total spending on digital connectivity in 2019-20 will be only £32.9 million. What has happened to the £600 million and when will superfast broadband be delivered to remote and rural areas?

Derek Mackay: We are still committed to spending that £600 million to take superfast broadband to every part of the country. That is an incredible investment, considering that it relates to the UK Government's responsibility with regard to telecommunications. We are investing in our infrastructure, with a total infrastructure spend of £5 billion proposed in the budget. That is a fantastic investment in the infrastructure of our country, and it is no doubt opposed by the Conservatives.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): This week, ScotRail introduced a new timetable, but it is business as usual for Scotland's hard-pressed rail passengers with delays, overcrowding and cancellations, and performance at its worst since this rail franchise began. However, come January, fares will increase by 10 per cent. Why did the cabinet secretary not use the budget process to try to give Scotland's long-suffering rail passengers a break instead of simply rubber stamping yet another fare hike?

Derek Mackay: As a former transport minister, I know that it would be helpful if we had control of Network Rail in Scotland instead of leaving it to the UK. That is a significant issue, and the Labour Party could greatly help the rail network if it supported us in transferring that power to Scotland. Of course, it is this Government that is investing in more trains, in new trains, in an electrified service that will be better, in Queen Street and in the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement project. The Labour Party talks about the railway network, but we are actually getting on with delivering.

James Kelly: What about rail fares?

Derek Mackay: I hear James Kelly shouting about the rail fares freeze that the Labour Party is proposing. What Labour is proposing is a shambles of an alternative budget—it is not a competent budget whatsoever. Rail fares in Scotland will go up by an average 2.8 per cent in January 2019, which means that the average rate of increase in Scottish rail fares will remain lower than the average increase across Britain, which is 3.1 per cent.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary outline what his announcement today with regard to the health budget means for NHS Grampian?

Derek Mackay: I do not have the specific figure to hand, but I am quite sure that Gillian Martin will

welcome the overall increase that the health service will enjoy.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In its programme for government, the SNP promised to drive forward police transformation, including vital IT upgrades. The budget appears to cut police funding by around £25 million. Has the cabinet secretary broken his promise to police officers?

Derek Mackay: No, I have not—the commitment was to protect the resource budget in real terms and that is exactly what we have done.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): People are supposed to be Scotland's greatest asset, yet 1,000 of them a year are dying on our streets due to drugs. There is no extra money in the budget to address that national crisis; it is a crisis not just in this city, but in every town across Scotland. However, it is not even mentioned in the whole of the budget. Why?

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government invests in strategies through health and local government, and those portfolios will enjoy an increase in real terms. As I have set out clearly, had I left it to the numbers that I inherited from the Conservative Party, it would have been real-terms reductions in all portfolios other than health. However, I have invested in both health and local government, and there will be strategies and support in those areas to support the people mentioned by Neil Findlay.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Significant building of affordable houses is taking place in my constituency; unfortunately, we need more. Will the cabinet secretary outline what the budget can do to continue that welcome and vital work? If I get a good answer, I will definitely vote for the budget.

Derek Mackay: I really hope that I can get Gil Paterson's support for the budget, otherwise I really am in trouble.

The specific commitment for housing that I have set out in the budget is more than £800 million for the next financial year. That is a contribution to the £3 billion commitment to housing to reach the 50,000 target. We are on track—it is good news. That is necessary and welcome investment in housing, and I am sure that it will cover every part of the country, including Gil Paterson's constituency. I hope that that, and everything else in the budget, will encourage Gil Paterson and all other members to vote for it.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of clarity, the Scottish Government has set aside £121 million for the next two years for two new ferries. I believe that the cost of the two new hybrid ferries was £97 million. Is the Scottish Government committing to

a further new ferry, or is it anticipating that the contract for the two hybrid ferries will exceed the £97 million cost by £24 million?

Derek Mackay: We are investing in the ferry network. We have clearly set out a position on the current procurement issue at Fergusons. We continue to invest in our ferry network, including direct investment around the road equivalent tariff. We have also set out a vessel replacement and investment strategy. I am sure that the transport secretary will be keen to set out more about that in due course.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): This afternoon, I hosted a successful meeting of the cross-party group on older people, age and aging. Loneliness and isolation came top of the agenda with regard to what older people expect. Is there a timescale for the framework policy and strategy on older people?

Derek Mackay: That is a matter for other colleagues, principally the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government. However, I know that significant investments have been put in place around social inclusion and that the uplift to local government will also be welcome. We are taking a preventative approach, and there will be further welcome action to support people in their own homes through health and social care integration. Such investments will help to tackle social isolation. We are doing everything within our powers to support older people in our society.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I refer the cabinet secretary to the section in his budget document on Scottish Water. Try as I might to find it, there is no mention of the single person's discount. Could he therefore confirm that he has abandoned proposals to cut the single person's water discount, or is he still intent on robbing half a million people in Scotland, the majority of whom are on low and fixed incomes?

Derek Mackay: I can advise Jackie Baillie that Roseanna Cunningham is taking that consultation forward and will look at the submissions to it. No decisions have been taken, but I am sure that the chamber will be updated in due course.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Although I welcome the increase of £175 million in the budget for education and, in particular, nurseries, will the cabinet secretary ensure that support that is intended for capital investment in infrastructure will be reasonably and fairly distributed between public and private sector providers, particularly in South Ayrshire?

Derek Mackay: The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will take forward that exciting programme. The arrangement that we have with local government, to which we have committed, is for a multiyear

settlement, which has been agreed with local government in a formula and fashion that represent a partnership approach. The resources that we are putting in to meet our commitment on early learning and childcare are substantial, and of course we want to work with private sector and partnership nurseries, too.

We are taking forward our investment in early years and childcare in a constructive fashion, and we are putting our money where our mouth is. We are ensuring that that entitlement, which is welcomed around the country, is being delivered in accordance with the plan set out by the Deputy First Minister.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-15118, 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 18 December 2018

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Ministerial Statement: Preparations for EU Exit
followed by Ministerial Statement: The Conduct of Reviews and Inquiries
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Damages (Investment Returns and Periodical Payments) (Scotland) Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 19 December 2018

1.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 1.15 pm Members' Business
followed by Portfolio Questions: Social Security and Older People; Communities and Local Government
followed by Ministerial Statement: Reforming Mental Health Services
followed by Ministerial Statement: Early Learning and Childcare Expansion
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Contribution of EU Citizens to Scotland
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 20 December 2018

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.45 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 8 January 2019

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

Wednesday 9 January 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Finance, Economy and Fair Work
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 10 January 2019

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 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 19 December 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 Thursday 20 December 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-15119, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the stage 1 timetable of a bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 1 February 2019.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-15120, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the designation of a lead committee.

Motion moved,

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 Fisheries Bill (UK Legislation).—[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The only question to be put today is on motion S5M-15120, in the name of Graeme Dey, on the designation of a lead committee.

Motion agreed to,

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 Fisheries Bill (UK Legislation).

Remembering the Korean War

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-15011, in the name of Gordon Lindhurst, on remembering the Korean war. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament remembers the UK service personnel who fought and died in the Korean War, including the thousands of veterans who were held as prisoners; notes that 2018 saw the 65th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice on 27 July 1953 between representatives of the UN Command, the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army, which put into place the demilitarized zone close to the 38th parallel and a cease-fire that brought to an end the armed conflict that had lasted since June 1950; recognises that almost 100,000 British troops fought in the war, with more than 1,000, including over 230 Scots, losing their lives and that around 1,000 were taken prisoner; acknowledges that many veterans have expressed the feeling that they were part of a "forgotten" war and have said that, on return home, people did not want to hear their story; welcomes the Scottish Korean War Memorial, which was opened on 27 June 2000 in the Bathgate Hills, West Lothian; appreciates the project, West Lothian and the Forgotten War, which was set up in 2008 and worked for two years with veterans and children from a school in the area to educate the young people about the campaign; recognises the recent action taken by West Lothian Council to install more signage in relation to the memorial, and notes the calls by the Korean War Memorial Trust for Transport Scotland to place signage on the M8 and M9 so that veterans and visitors can more easily access the site.

17:04

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): I am proud to stand here as a Lothian MSP to lead the debate to remember the Korean war. I lodged the motion during the summer recess, to mark 65 years since the signing in 1953 of the armistice that brought an end to the fighting. We now have the opportunity, before the end of that 65th year, to remember those who fought in the war, including more than 230 Scots who paid the ultimate sacrifice—they were a quarter of the British dead.

We also recognise the service of the veterans who came home without some of their friends. I am pleased to welcome to the public gallery some of those veterans with their friends and families. They include Major Allan Cameron, who is former president of the Lothians and West of Scotland branch of the British Korean Veterans Association and who sits on the Korean War Memorial Fund's board of trustees; Adam McKenzie; and Ronnie Wilson. They are all veterans of the Korean war. Other veterans present are Jock Barr and Jim Bain. Many of them have played key roles in ensuring that the Korean war and their fallen comrades are not forgotten. To all of you, I thank

you for the service that you have given to your country. [*Applause.*]

1950s Britain was, understandably, a country that was tired of war and threadbare because of it. It was, after all, fewer than five years since the end of the second world war, and Korea was either a wholly unknown country or too far away for many to care about. Prime Minister Clement Attlee admitted that Korea was

"Distant, yes, but nonetheless an obligation",

reflecting the UK's membership of the newly formed United Nations Security Council.

That indifference pervaded society, not helped by an inglorious culmination to the war that saw both sides back to where they had started territorially before the war, along the 38th parallel. In interviews with the BBC's Jackie Bird in 2012, one veteran said of his homecoming:

"We were only young ... we'd start to talk about our war and be told: 'Away lad, that was nothing ... I was at Dunkirk'."

That is why, on both sides of the Atlantic, the conflict is often referred to as the "forgotten" war. Yet the stories from it would have reflected the infamous conditions of trench warfare in France, sodden and rat-infested. It was a war of attrition and stalemate that involved ferocious hill fighting, because in Korea the force that controlled the hilltops controlled the country, and culminated in infamous battles such as that of hill 235, where the British Army's 29th infantry brigade resisted a force that outnumbered it by 18 to 1. It was all made worse by the fact that the first winter of fighting in Korea was the coldest in a decade, with cold that we can hardly begin to imagine in western Europe. Indeed, the late George Younger, who was a platoon commander during the conflict, recalled how the boiling water that he used to shave turned to ice before he finished.

The Scottish Korean war memorial is at Witchcraig in the Bathgate hills in my Lothian region. It is the only war memorial in the UK that is devoted solely to those who died in the Korean war. It lists names from across the whole of the UK, not just Scotland. It is in a beautiful setting, with an historical Korean-style pagoda between two grass mounds that are arranged like the yin and yang on the Korean flag. The pagoda contains the names of around 1,100 British troops who died in the war, who are represented further by roughly the same number of native Scottish trees and 110 Korean fir trees for every 10 of those soldiers. I encourage members, if they have not done so already, to visit and pay their respects if they are able to.

The memorial can be difficult to locate, but members will be guided by local road signage that was recently installed by West Lothian Council. I

commend councillors, including Charles Kennedy and Tom Conn, who are also in the chamber, for their role in getting that signage put up. It is disappointing that despite their calls, and those of the board of trustees, including Major Cameron, trunk road signage to complement the local signage has not been forthcoming. A request for trunk road signage was made to Transport Scotland following instances of those who wanted to pay their respects getting lost when trying to find the memorial from the M8 and M9. That includes an incident last year, when a number of Koreans, among them the London attaché, exited the motorway at the wrong junction and spent the next hour trying to find the memorial.

That is all the more embarrassing when we consider the efforts that the South Korean Government has taken in funding the majority of the return visits to Korea that veterans from this country have made over the years under the revisit programme, and the warm welcome that veterans have been given by an appreciative Korean public. People have broken into spontaneous applause in cities such as Seoul, as medal-clad Scottish veterans walked by.

The minister and I have corresponded on signage and I repeat my calls to him to ensure that appropriate signage is installed. The Scottish Korean war memorial is not simply a tourist destination, in the normal sense, and although it might not get the 50,000 visitors per year that are asked for in the signage criteria, its importance to Scottish and British military history should not be diminished.

The costings for signage that I have seen appear excessive, but I understand that the memorial trust has offered to pay. I regularly travel around West Lothian on the M8 and M9, and it does not appear to me that there is excessive existing signage that would prevent signs to the war memorial from being put in place.

The Korean war might be known as the forgotten war, but there are steps that we can take to mitigate that perception. What better year to do so than the 65th year since the signing of the armistice?

17:11

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to today's act of remembrance and I congratulate Gordon Lindhurst on securing the debate and providing members with a chance to keep the memory of the Korean war alive. It is a war that is often forgotten, as Gordon Lindhurst said, although it brought more British deaths than any other post-world war two conflict. I welcome veterans of the Korean war to the gallery.

When war broke out in 1950, Scotland and Britain were still recovering from world war two. Of necessity, the fighting force in Korea was made up mostly of young national servicemen. The majority were teenagers, many of whom had never left their home towns. It is hard to imagine being sent to a far-off Asian peninsula at such a young age and with such meagre life experience, but that was the reality for many young soldiers.

After just 16 weeks of training, those young soldiers faced gruelling ordeals, including ferocious hill battles, trench warfare and attacks by human waves from the well-drilled Korean People's Army, which was backed by tanks, artillery and aircraft supplied by the Soviet Union and China.

Of the 14,198 British soldiers who served with United Nations forces, 1,114 lost their lives, including 236 Scots. United Kingdom forces suffered total losses of 4,502, including the missing, wounded and captured. Almost a third of the entire contingent were casualties in one way or another. It is therefore right that we pay tribute to the men who lost their lives, as well as those who were maimed or who endured the nightmare of a North Korean prison camp.

Scottish soldiers made up nearly a quarter of the dead. It seems that Scotland has long had disproportionate casualties in conflicts, from the Napoleonic wars onwards, as was evident from the 134,712 names of men and women that were projected on to this building on 11 November.

The soldiers who were lucky enough to return from Korea did not receive a hero's welcome. Veterans report that after experiencing the horrors of war in the brutal cold of a Korean winter and the searing summer heat, young fighters returned home to a Britain that simply did not want to know.

Although Scotland might not have recognised the courage and sacrifice of those young men, in South Korea, United Nations veterans who fought in the war are considered heroes, as Gordon Lindhurst said. The South Korean Government even helps to fund the revisit programme, which enables veterans to pay tribute to fallen comrades who are buried in the Commonwealth cemetery in Busan. Scottish veterans who have returned to Korea, dressed in their regimental blazers and military berets, and with well-polished medals, have been met with bows and applause in recognition of their role in saving South Korea from the Stalinism that still grips the north.

I am heartened that the Scottish Korean war memorial has duly commemorated the sacrifice of each British soldier who lost their life. The 1,114 native Scottish trees and the shrine, which is surrounded by landscape that is indicative of yin and yang, provide a fitting setting for a place of

remembrance. In July this year, Ayrshire veterans visited the site and were moved by its serenity and symbolic significance.

I support Mr Lindhurst's calls to ensure that the site is accessible to all, not only so that veterans can recall that chapter of their lives and pay tribute to fallen friends but so that visitors—young and old—can understand the significance of this forgotten war and the tragedy of young lives lost.

We must not allow the Korean war to be just a footnote in Scotland's public consciousness. Although people at home might not have felt involved in a war that had no real victor, the conflict is intrinsically linked to international relations today. To understand the harrowing reality of human rights abuses, enslavement and imprisonment for North Korean citizens, we must first understand the history of the region, and our part in it. Although it is often easier to look away and forget, to do so would be to fail people who lost their lives in the conflict, and those now relying on the international community to recognise the scale of the abhorrent situation in North Korea.

In 2018, when we commemorated the 65th anniversary of the signing of the armistice on 27 July 1953, we also witnessed some modest steps forward in the painfully slow Korean peace process. Although there is still much to be done, I hope that the armistice will eventually be replaced by a comprehensive and permanent peace treaty to officially end the Korean war that we commemorate today.

17:15

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank Gordon Lindhurst for bringing forward this interesting debate to commemorate the Korean war armistice.

I have to admit that my knowledge of the Korean war is somewhat limited. I am sure that this will be the case for many people, as the Korean war is known as the forgotten war, as noted by the two previous members. My main information came from "MASH", the satirical American television show about a mobile army surgical hospital during the Korean war. When I was 17, I spent time with family friends who lived in Canada, and much of my time was filled watching back-to-back episodes of "MASH" on the novelty of multi-channel TV—we had only four channels in the UK at that time.

Although that dark comedy drama was fictional, depicting a group of doctors and nurses who served as the fictional 4077th mobile army surgical hospital during the Korean war, it exposed some of the horrors of the war and often used satire to do so. That was undoubtedly because it was semi-autobiographical, as it was based on the 1969 novel by Richard Hooker, "MASH: A Novel About

Three Army Doctors". The book was based on Richard Hooker's own experiences as a surgeon in 8055th MASH in South Korea, and the main character, army doctor Hawkeye Pierce, is based on the author.

However, I really had no knowledge of the thousands of UK service personnel who fought and died in the war; nor that there was a memorial in West Lothian, which I am now keen to see for myself. The war was part of the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States, with Korea split into two sovereign states and both Governments claiming to be the sole legitimate Government of all of Korea, neither accepting the border as permanent. The conflict escalated into open warfare when North Korean forces, supported by the Soviet Union and China, moved into the south on 25 June 1950.

The United Nations Security Council authorised the formation and dispatch of UN forces to South Korea to repel the North Korean invasion, and 21 countries eventually contributed to the UN force, with the United States providing around 90 per cent of the military personnel.

The UN force included service personnel from three Scottish regiments, as recognised tonight. I was harrowed to read that the youngest soldiers went out to Hong Kong and Japan to wait until they were 19 and considered old enough to go into battle.

I am pleased that Gordon Lindhurst has raised the profile of the memorial in West Lothian. The Lothians and west of Scotland branch of the British Korean Veterans Association, supported by the local authority, created the memorial nearly 18 years ago, but it is not well known. Therefore, it would be helpful if veterans and visitors could have improved signage on our motorways to help them to locate the memorial—not least myself; if I am going to go and visit it, that would be helpful.

The development of wider education programmes would also be welcome, building on the excellent work that has been done so far in West Lothian. Educating our young people about the reality of war and the sacrifices of those who were injured and died is so important. Education about the horrors of war takes many forms, be that in the classroom, in our museums and galleries, or through satirical dramas such as "MASH".

In 1945, after millions of lives lost in two world wars, 51 countries signed up to the Charter of the United Nations, which provided a framework for international co-operation, dialogue and discussion to provide solutions to international social and economic problems, rather than conflict.

Tonight's members' business debate has given us a chance to reflect on the impact of war on

families and communities who have lost their loved ones, and we know that those who have seen war and suffered its effects, think that more should be done to avoid it. Revisiting our history, remembering forgotten wars and adhering to international treaties that respect human rights and freedoms are vital if we are to build a world free of wars and conflicts.

Once again, I thank Gordon Lindhurst for bringing the debate to the chamber.

17:19

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): It is a privilege to speak this afternoon, and I thank my colleague Gordon Lindhurst for bringing forward this members' business debate. I am delighted to welcome the veterans who are in the public gallery, particularly Jock Barr and Jim Bain, my fellow Argylls.

As this year saw the 100th anniversary of the first world war armistice, hundreds of thousands took part in remembrance and commemorations of that war. This year also saw the anniversary of another war, but one that lacks the same coverage and awareness—the Korean war, otherwise known as, sadly, the forgotten war, as Gordon Lindhurst said. As a veteran, I am keenly aware of how important it is to remember the sacrifice of those fallen in war. The Korean war—and every other conflict—deserves to be remembered, as do our British soldiers who fought in it.

The cold war left Korea a split nation, with worsening tension between both sides. In response to North Korea's invasion of South Korea in 1950, the UN commenced its first act of military operations. Indeed, over 21 countries from around the world joined forces in a UN coalition. Britain also had its part to play, which was not insignificant.

Not even a decade had passed since the second world war, yet almost 100,000 Britons committed themselves to fighting in yet another conflict, which was separate and distant from their own country. Many were young men, who had no idea of what they were involving themselves in. Along with other Scottish regiments, my regiment, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, joined those forces.

In 1953, fighting came to an end, with an armistice signed and a demilitarized zone created as a result. Territorially, the end result proved no different from the beginning for both nations. Over 1,100 British lives were lost and over 230 of those men were Scottish, as a previous speaker has mentioned.

Their bravery should not be forgotten. However, on their return, many British soldiers felt their

communities indifferent to their sacrifice. Some were made to feel that their fighting in the Korean war was inferior to the sacrifices made in the second world war. Their cost and commitment were not given the validation that they needed. Perhaps that was due to there being no clear victory; perhaps it was because the nation had just emerged from horrors that it wished not to endure again. Whatever the reason, we need to make sure that we also count the cost of those who fought and died in the Korean war.

There are memorials scattered across Scotland and the wider UK in remembrance of soldiers lost in the two world wars. Edinburgh alone has 37. In Scotland, there is just one memorial to remember the cost of the Korean war.

The Scottish Korean war memorial can be found tucked away in the Bathgate hills in West Lothian. It is designed to create a space of peace and a space to reflect. Surrounding the memorial are Korean firs and more than 1,000 native Scottish trees, which stand as a collective reminder of the lives lost. A traditional pagoda lists the names of those who did not return home. The tribute marks the bravery and admiration that are owed to veterans of the conflict. Their experiences and the casualties from the war are worth no less than any other. It shows a connection that we are proud to share with South Korea, which is one that should not be ignored.

Creating awareness of the project is key, and I congratulate the efforts that have been made to do that. For instance, the 2008 West Lothian and the forgotten war project described what life was truly like as a Scottish soldier fighting in Korea. It brought individuals to the fore who endured injury and captivity. Projects such as that, just like the Scottish Korean war memorial, emphasise the reality of this conflict and give it the detail and nuance that it deserves.

The memorial serves to encourage not just our remembrance but our appreciation of the link that Scotland has with South Korea. I support the calls for greater signage in order to clearly direct visitors to this special place. In this 65th anniversary year, I hope for greater awareness and understanding—for it is only with that that we can have true gratitude for those who fought in the Korean war.

17:23

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): I begin by thanking Gordon Lindhurst for securing an opportunity to highlight the Korean war, and for his scene-setting opening speech.

As we have heard again tonight, support in the chamber for our veterans is cross party. We remember the hardships that they have endured,

the courage that they have displayed in the face of adversity, and the ultimate sacrifice that has been made by many.

Over the past four years, we have been commemorating the many centenaries that are linked to the great war. Although those commemorations have focused attention on one major conflict, they have also raised more general awareness of other conflicts, and have led to recognition of the dedication and determination of previous generations.

It is important that we continue to remember those who served and who lost their lives in all conflicts. That is not to glorify war, but to recognise the sacrifices that in many cases were made to protect the freedoms that we enjoy today. Tonight's debate has helped us to do just that, so I thank members for their contributions. I should explain to the veterans who are in the gallery that my colleague Fiona Hyslop would have added her voice to those contributions but for the fact that she is, as a cabinet secretary, prevented from doing so.

As we have heard, 2018 marks the 65th anniversary of the conclusion of the Korean war. It was a brutal conflict in which many lives were lost, including approximately 1,100 UK lives, of whom 236 were Scots. As we have also heard, in June 1950, just as the UK was rebuilding, regenerating and recovering from the second world war and was still subject to rationing, many families were plunged, yet again, into the uncertainty and worry that were caused by loved ones fighting overseas. Some people who had survived the second world war, which had taken place only a very short time before, and who thought that they would never again be involved in such conflict, were recalled for service in Korea. We can only imagine how they must have felt.

Three Scottish regiments served in Korea: the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Black Watch. We should acknowledge—as Kenny Gibson did—that many combatants were very young national servicemen.

The Korean conflict has been labelled by some as “the forgotten war”, but for many—certainly in the services community—it is one that is recognised just as much as others. At last month's national remembrance event—which was held in Dundee's Caird hall and which I attended as the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans—veterans of the Korean war were rightly afforded their place.

For the Black Watch, with its near 300-year history, Korea is up there with the other conflicts in which it served. On Monday, I visited the Black Watch museum in Perth, where I saw a number of

references to the regiment's involvement in the Korean war. They include a photograph of the first battalion of the Black Watch being inspected by Her Majesty the Queen Mother before it embarked for the east.

Let me commend the efforts of all those who have been concerned with making sure that the Korean war receives wider recognition and is remembered by the current generation. In particular, I acknowledge the two-year education project called West Lothian and the forgotten war, which involved veterans and local schoolchildren in developing educational material and raising awareness of the conflict. It is essential that our young people today continue to understand such parts of our history. For them to learn directly from veterans of the conflict—many of whom would have been in their late teens in the 1950s—is a unique experience, the significance of which should not be underestimated.

Let me also recognise the Scottish Korean War Memorial Trust, Major Allan Cameron and his predecessor, the late Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Johnston, West Lothian Council, and the previous work of the Lothians and West of Scotland branch of the British Korean Veterans Association in establishing, promoting and maintaining the Scottish Korean war memorial in the Bathgate hills. All Scottish war dead are commemorated at the Scottish national war memorial, including Scottish servicemen who served in the Korean war. However, it is also fitting that such a striking memorial—it is a Korean-style wood-and-slate crafted pagoda—to all those who fought in Korea is sited in Scotland. The unique nature of the commemoration is emphasised by the trees around the site that represent the total number of UK personnel who were killed in that war.

I am well aware that the Korean War Memorial Fund has asked for improved signage to the site, as has been noted in the speeches of a number of members. As we have heard, Transport Scotland has been involved in discussions with the trust about signs on the M8 and M9 motorways, and has assessed the application for signage, in line with tourism signage policy. Members will appreciate that a national policy for signs needs to be in place to ensure consistency and suitability of tourism signage on the trunk-road network.

The M8 and the M9 are high-speed routes that carry large volumes of traffic. It is therefore necessary to ensure that signage is limited to that which is essential to the continued safe operation of the routes. Unfortunately, the Korean war memorial does not meet the strict eligibility criteria, which is why it has not been considered to be appropriate to sign it from the M8 and M9 motorways. That is due in particular to the criteria on visitor numbers to the site. However, I am

pleased that West Lothian Council has installed brown signs for tourist attractions that direct visitors to the Scottish Korean war memorial from its local—

Elaine Smith: Will the minister clarify a point? He mentioned visitor numbers. Is he saying that because there are not enough visitor numbers, signage cannot go up? Obviously, that is a chicken-and-egg situation, because if there were signage perhaps there would be more visitors to the memorial.

Graeme Dey: I accept the member's point and I will deal with it as I close. As I said, I am pleased that West Lothian Council has installed the brown tourist signs on its road network; they were erected earlier this year. I hope that they are now enabling improved visibility and access to this important memorial. In addition, I have asked Transport Scotland to make contact with West Lothian Council to explore what opportunities exist to improve the travel information that is provided on the memorial's online page.

I have listened to views on signage and representations from my colleague Fiona Hyslop, in whose constituency the memorial stands. As a consequence, I have entered into discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, and as a result of those discussions we will be tasking Transport Scotland with scoping a potential review of its signage policy as it pertains to war memorials that are of national significance, such as the Korean war memorial. I stress that, should it proceed, it would look only at war memorials that are of national significance, and that any changes that might be made would have to be consistent with the other wider requirements for such signage.

However, I hope that that commitment will be seen for what it is—a demonstration of the respect that this Government holds for its veterans community, and of our genuine willingness to explore whether we can address concerns around signage in relation to the Korean war memorial.

Meeting closed at 17:31.

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

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