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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 4 June 2019

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader is Mr John Howieson, who is a celebrant of the Humanist Society Scotland from the Isle of Skye, and he will lead it in Gaelic. Interpretation facilities are available, so members who want to listen should plug in their headphones, on channel 1. With that introduction, I pass to Mr Howieson.

Mr John Howieson (Humanist Society Scotland): Feasgar math, a chàirdean, agus taing mhòr airson cuireadh a thoirt dhomh an t-àm cnuasachaidh a tha seo a dhèanamh.

'S e daonnaire a tha annam, is mi nam bhall de Chomann Daonnairean na h-Alba, còmhla ri mu cheithir mìle deug duine eile air feadh na dùthcha. 'S e neach-fèille daonnachais a tha annam cuideachd, agus mar sin bidh mi a' dèanamh phòsaidhean, thiodhlacaidhean agus ainmeachaidhean às leth dhaonnairean eile. Bidh daonnairean a' creidsinn dà phrìomh rud: sa chiad àite gum bu choir dhuinn ar n-earbsa a chur ann an reusanachadh; agus san dàrna àite gun tàinig mac-an-duine gu bith tro mhean-fhàs. Dìreach mar a thachair le ar càirdean as dlùithe, na h-apaichean mòra, thàrmaich dà thaobh annainn— an taobh farpaiseach fòirneartach, agus an taobh sìtheil gaolach, le comasan co-obrachaidh.

'S ann a' sìor-fhàs a tha àireamh nan daoine a bhios a' creidsinn an aon rud. Mar eisimpleir, ann an dà mhìle 's a seachd deug—a' bhliadhna mu dheireadh a chaidh figearan dha leithid fhoillseachadh—rinn luchd-fèille daonnachais faisg air dà-dheug sa cheud de na pòsaidhean a thachair ann an Alba.

Agus abair dùthaich airson pòsaidh! Mar neach-fèille stèidhichte air an Eilean Sgitheanach, tha mi fhìn air an t-snaidhm a chur ann an cuid de na h-àiteichean as brèagha san t-saoghal—aig bonn a' Chuilthinn, ri taobh Bodach an Stòir, ann an caistealan agus air cladaichean, fon uisge agus fon ghrèin agus leis a' ghaoith a' sèideadh.

Air cuspair na gaoithe, seo an dàn "Ceithir Gaothan na h-Albann", a sgrìobh am bàrd Deòrsa Mac Iain Deòrsa mu na bha an dùthaich àlainn againn a' ciallachadh dhàsan:

M' oiteag cheòlmhor chaoin teachd deiseil nam bheitheach Samhraidh i,

mo stoirm chuain le dìle cur still 's gach alltan domh,
a' ghaoth tuath le cathadh sneachda nì dreachmhor
beanntan domh,
a' ghaoth tha 'g iomain m' fhaloisg earraich ri leathad
ghleanntaichean.

Duilleach an t-Samhraidh, tuil an Dàmhair, na cuithean 's
an àrdghaith Earraich i;
dùrd na coille, bùirich eas, ùire an t-sneachda 's an
fhaloisg i. ...

Fad na bliadhna, rè gach ràithe, gach là 's gach ciaradh
feasgair dhomh,
is i Alba nan Gall 's nan Gàidheal is gàire, is blàths, is
beatha dhomh.

Mòran taing airson èisteachd. A-nis, tha mi a' guidhe dhuibh deagh dheasbad, deagh reusanachadh agus deagh cho-obrachadh às leth ar dùthcha—Alba nan Gall is nan Gàidheal. Latha math dhuibh uile.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Good afternoon friends. Many thanks for inviting me to do this time for reflection.

I am a humanist and a member of the Scottish Humanist Society, along with about 14,000 others throughout the country. I am also a humanist celebrant and, as such, perform weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies for other humanists.

Humanists believe in two main principles: that we should trust in reason, and that humanity came into being through evolution. Just as happened with our closest relatives, the great apes, two sides of our nature developed—the competitive, violent side and the peaceful, loving and co-operative side.

The number of people who hold such views is constantly rising. For example, in 2017, the most recent year for which figures are available, humanist celebrants conducted nearly 12 per cent of all weddings in Scotland. What a country for a wedding it is. As a celebrant who is based on the Isle of Skye, I have tied the knot for others in some of the most beautiful places in the world: at the foot of the Cuillin; beside the Old Man of Storr; in castles and on beaches; in rain, sun and blowing wind.

Talking of the wind, I will read the poem, "The Four Winds of Scotland", by the poet George Campbell Hay, about what this beautiful country meant to him.

My melodious, gentle breeze blowing from southward in
my Summer birchwood is she;
my ocean storm, with downpour sending in headlong
spate each burn for me;
the north wind with driving snow that makes beautiful the
hills for me;
the wind that drives my Springtime muirburn up the
slopes of glens is she.

The leaves of Summer, the spate of Autumn, the
snowdrifts and the high Spring wind is she;

the sough of the woodland, the roaring of waterfalls, the freshness of the snow and the heather ablaze is she; ...

All year long, each season through, each day and each fall of dusk for me,
it is Scotland, Highland and Lowland, that is laughter and warmth and life for me.

Many thanks for listening. I wish you a good debate, good reasoning and good co-operation for the sake of our country, Scotland—Highland and Lowland. Good day to you all.

The Presiding Officer: Tapadh leibh. Thank you.

Topical Question Time

14:05

Out-of-hours General Practitioner Services

1. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve out-of-hours GP services in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area, in light of reports that only one in five centres was open on Sunday. (S5T-01686)

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): I expect all integration authorities to take every measure possible to ensure that safe and sustainable out-of-hours services are provided. However, arrangements are in place for Sir Lewis Ritchie and senior Scottish Government officials to meet the management team in Glasgow regarding their review of out-of-hours care and the difficulties that are being experienced by the service.

Since 2016-17, the Government has provided an additional £6.6 million to the Glasgow integration authorities to support implementation of Sir Lewis Ritchie's review of out-of-hours services.

Jamie Greene: The reality is that, this weekend, only one centre was open across the whole of the city of Glasgow. I pay tribute to the staff at Vale of Leven hospital, who had to deal with the huge amount of people coming in to see them.

When people in the south side or east end of Glasgow phone NHS 24 and are directed to an out-of-hours service, it is virtually impossible out of hours to get to that location because it requires a taxi or a lengthy car journey. Most people will turn up at an accident and emergency unit, which puts more pressure on our emergency centres on busy Saturday nights.

What I did not hear in the first answer is what action the minister—or, indeed, the Scottish Government—is taking to address the issue of GPs who are not contracted to do out-of-hours shifts choosing not to do them. What are the reasons behind GPs choosing not to do those shifts? Why is it becoming a systemic problem in Glasgow?

Last year, more than 211 shifts in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area were not filled because of staff shortages. In her second answer, perhaps the minister can go into more detail about what action she is taking to address the problem.

Clare Haughey: My understanding is that arrangements were put in place between NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS 24 over the weekend to deal with the closures. Home visits by

GPs were available to people who had clinical need for that.

I am not happy with the level of service, and I expect NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the health and social care partnerships to take every possible step to stop that happening again.

As I said in my first answer, Sir Lewis Ritchie and the out-of-hours policy team have a planned meeting with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to discuss progress on the review of its out-of-hours services. That meeting will be on Monday 10 June; this weekend's issues will form part of the discussion. We expect to receive an update in due course following that meeting.

I also pay tribute to the staff at the Vale of Leven centre, who were under pressure at the weekend because their centre was open.

Jamie Greene: I thank the minister for that further update.

However, the reality is, as we learned last week, that across Scotland, more than 100,000 patients have had to find new GP services because their local practice has closed due to excessive shortages of GPs. Every member will have constituents who are struggling to get an appointment—who are queuing on a Monday morning or who cannot get through on the telephone to get an appointment. This is not just an out-of-hours problem; it is an in-hours problem.

I would like to hear what action the Government is taking to address the systemic problem of GP shortages right across Scotland. Can the minister assure us and the wider public that what happened at the weekend in Glasgow was just a blip—that it was just a one-off—and that there is not a systemic problem that is facing us right across the country on a continuous basis, because that would simply not be good enough?

Clare Haughey: I assure Jamie Greene that I share his concerns. I want to ensure that the people of Glasgow—and, indeed, the people of Scotland—get the NHS that they need. Jamie Greene will be aware that we have recently rolled out the new GP contract, which helps to reduce GPs' workloads so that they can spend more time dealing with the more complex cases and patients in their case load. We are considering expansion of the primary care team, which encompasses advanced nurse practitioners and other allied health professionals, in order to free up GP time so that they have smaller workloads and can use their skills more effectively. We have also been investing in primary care pharmacy and the minor ailments service. I assure the member that we are looking at GPs' workload.

We are also looking to expand the number of GPs. We have increased the number of medicine

places in Scottish universities, which will increase by 22 per cent—an extra 190 places—between 2015 and 2021.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am delighted that the Vale of Leven hospital's out-of-hours service was open, and join other members in praising the staff. Of course, the irony is that it is normally the Vale's out-of-hours service that is closed. Last year alone, there were more than 80 shutdowns of the out-of-hours service, and there have been more than 40 so far this year. Will the minister consider use of salaried GPs, or even allowing local GPs who cover the Vale of Leven catchment area to arrange out-of-hours care at the hospital?

Clare Haughey: I expect that that will be discussed in Lewis Ritchie's review, in looking at what NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is doing to ensure that it has GPs to cover out-of-hours services. My understanding is that there are some salaried GPs in the out-of-hours GP service as a whole, but most of the GPs who work in the service are not salaried.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): As the minister will be aware, staff can be deployed throughout the system to ensure that adequate cover is maintained across the health board area. Given that, is the minister aware of whether there is a preference as to which out-of-hours centres will be open on any given weekend?

Clare Haughey: I do not have that information to hand for Stuart McMillan, but I make a commitment to request that he gets it as soon as I have it.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Obviously, Saturday night is a peak time for accident and emergency services across the west of Scotland and the whole of Scotland. There are two impacts. One is on patients who perhaps have to wait longer to access NHS 24, or who show up in A and E departments when they would not normally do so, which increases their waiting time.

There is also an impact on the NHS staff, who are already overworked and who face more pressures because there are fewer staff and more requirements on them. I understand the point about the review, but if the minister recognises those two pressures, what urgent steps will she take to reassure patients across Glasgow and the west of Scotland that they can have a wraparound out-of-hours service?

Clare Haughey: As I said in answer to Jamie Greene, I am not happy with the level of out-of-hours service that was provided at the weekend. We expect NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the health and social care partnership to look at the service to ensure that we do not end up in the same situation again. Mr Sarwar has raised valid

points. I again pay tribute to the staff who were on duty on Saturday night and Sunday night and who provided a service to the people of Glasgow.

Prisoner Transport (Family Vehicles)

2. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that prisoners are being transported in family vehicles. (S5T-01687)

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): The prisoner escort and court custody services contract is with GEOAmev. The services that are provided under the contract include the movement of those arrested from police custody to court and the movement of those held in prison to court or to any other location, including hospitals and other prisons.

GEOAmev has a range of vehicles in its fleet. The contractor carries out robust risk assessment and makes a decision about the most suitable vehicle in which to escort the individual. The type of vehicle is only one factor in ensuring the security of an escort. For example, the type of vehicle to which Daniel Johnson refers is used to transport sentenced children and young people as well as pregnant women in custody. Non-cellular vehicles are used where it is appropriate to do so. The safety and wellbeing of the staff, those being transported and the general public are of paramount importance to the Scottish Prison Service and the Scottish Government.

Daniel Johnson: The reality is that, according to press reports at the weekend, a convicted murderer who was being transported in such a family vehicle went on to strike prison staff while it was doing 60mph on the A90. Surely, the question is whether those kinds of vehicles can ever be considered suitable for transporting violent individuals such as the one who was featured in those reports.

Ash Denham: I checked with the SPS this morning. As the member will no doubt be aware, a new prisoner escort service contract was recently awarded and started in January this year. To date, no incidents have been reported to the SPS under that contract.

A dynamic risk assessment is carried out before deciding the most appropriate vehicle in which to escort an individual. If someone is considered to present a high risk, it is unlikely that a non-cellular vehicle would be used. At appropriate stages of their sentences, individuals who have committed serious offences such as murder, which Daniel Johnson mentioned in his example, are escorted in non-cellular vehicles. Although their offences might have been serious and of a high-profile nature, individuals who are escorted by that means of escort will have been subject to risk

assessment to determine that they are suitable for it. Such individuals are most likely to be accessing the community while they are on licence and therefore are not considered to present a high risk at that time.

Daniel Johnson: I thank the minister for her response, but does such an occurrence not at least hint at the possibility that the risk assessments are inadequate? Does she not feel that, at the very least, a partition should be installed in such vehicles to protect hard-working prison staff from the risks that prisoners might pose? Will she agree to meet the GMB union, which represents those staff, to discuss the safety concerns that they continue to have?

Ash Denham: On Mr Johnson's point about safety in cars, in April 2019, GEOAmev tested new bulkheads, which are now being installed throughout the fleet to improve driver safety. I have been advised that that roll-out will be complete at the end of this month. That additional measure has the support of the Community trade union, which is the recognised union that represents staff who work in the area. The member has requested that a meeting be held with the trade union that he mentioned. I am sure that the cabinet secretary would be happy to take part in such a meeting.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Up to five members wish to ask supplementary questions, so I ask all members to keep their questions brief.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Will the minister confirm whether non-cellular vehicles have been used routinely to transfer high-risk offenders, including those who have been convicted of serious crimes such as murder?

Ash Denham: About 180,000 prisoner movements are undertaken every year, the vast majority of which are in cellular vehicles. There are occasions on which non-cellular vehicles are used and will be appropriate—for instance, when children and young people, or pregnant women who are going to hospital appointments and so on, are being transported. I am sure that the member will recognise that in such instances non-cellular vehicles will be the most appropriate form of transport.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Still on the subject of appropriate equipment and staff safety, I stress that prison officers have to deal with an increasingly high-risk environment. Those who work south of the border have been equipped with body-worn cameras, but the Scottish National Party has refused to give such cameras to our officers in Scotland. Why does the SNP think that their safety is less important?

Ash Denham: We absolutely do not think that. The Scottish Prison Service does not have a record of staff raising such concerns, but if any instances were to be raised with the contractor they would be passed on to the SPS, which would investigate every single incident to see whether lessons needed to be learned in such cases. I assure the member that a robust process is in place to monitor and investigate all incidents that are reported by the contractor. However, I reiterate that, as I said in my previous reply to Daniel Johnson, under the current contract, which began in January, no incidents have so far been reported.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Is the issue here not that there was only one bidder for a contract that is worth £238 million? The minister talked “robust risk assessment”, but then qualified that by saying that it is carried out where it is “appropriate”, and she used the word “unlikely”. Is it not time that the Scottish Government reviewed the provision of prisoner escort and court custody services and took them back in-house?

Ash Denham: I thank the member for that question. I take on board the concerns that he has raised. The escorting contract has, of course, freed up front-line staff in both the Scottish Prison Service and Police Scotland and allowed them to undertake their core duties. Prior to the inception of the contract, staff were required to be diverted from key tasks to escort prisoners to and from prisons, police stations, hospital appointments and so on.

The Scottish Government and its agencies set the standards of the service and they assess bidders on a number of criteria, including their organisational values. That allows us to ensure that the terms of how they operate are well aligned with what the Scottish ministers want to see from the service in Scotland. The contracts are then rigorously monitored to ensure that they provide the taxpayer with the best possible service delivery.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As John Finnie said, GEOAmev was awarded the £238 million contract after alternative providers dropped out and despite a track record that includes multiple violent escapes and critical equipment failures. Does the minister believe that in such circumstances, companies must be held accountable? Does she agree that that could be achieved by extending the remit of the freedom of information legislation to include private companies that operate public contracts?

Ash Denham: The member has raised an important point. I believe that contractors should be held accountable for their level of service. I do not have any further information on the point that

the member has raised, so I undertake to write to him with a fuller answer to his question.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Following on from the answer to Rona Mackay’s question, will the minister clarify which vehicles children and young people travel in?

Ash Denham: Children and young people are transported in non-cellular escort vehicles that have a range of securing measures. For example, each vehicle must be fitted with a locking system such that the child or young person cannot operate the windows and doors. The vehicle must not in any way identify the purpose for which it is being used. It must be of a size such that it is capable of accommodating a minimum of three adults in the rear seats in order to ensure sufficient comfort on a long journey.

Whole-life Custody Sentences

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-17503, in the name of Liam Kerr, on whole-life custody sentences.

14:22

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Imagine you are sitting in the High Court in Glasgow. You have spent weeks or perhaps even months sitting through a trial for the brutal, calculated and remorseless murder of someone you love. It has been emotionally draining and traumatising. It has forced you to relive every excruciating detail. Now the verdict has been returned: guilty. The judge addresses the court. He says that he has no option but to impose a sentence of life imprisonment. However, some time later—perhaps after 14 years, or 16, or 20—you receive a letter that tells you that the person who murdered your loved one is being considered for release on parole. They will be back on the streets in your community and free to offend again.

That happens, Presiding Officer—

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Liam Kerr: I will.

John Finnie: I am grateful to the member. I know that he does not like the Parole Board for Scotland, but does he have no confidence at all in its judgment in these matters?

Liam Kerr: I thank Mr Finnie for the intervention. On the contrary, the Parole Board does a very difficult job. The point that I am making, if he will allow me to develop my argument, is that we need to give judges the power to put down a whole-life sentence so that the Parole Board is not in the position where it has to consider the matter.

As I said, that happens. “Life imprisonment” does not mean life imprisonment. It is time to give judges the power to sentence as they say it. It is time to say to victims, their families and the Scottish public that when our judges hand down a sentence of whole-life custody, they mean it. It is time to give judges the genuine, unmitigated ability, which we should remember they do not currently have, to put the very worst offenders behind bars for the rest of their lives.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: I ask Mr Johnson to be very quick.

Daniel Johnson: Is that actually correct? Do judges not have the ability to request an assessment for an order for lifelong restriction, which would do exactly that, if the risk is posed by the individual?

Liam Kerr: There is an awful lot of misunderstanding in the debate about whether judges in Scotland can hand down a life sentence. It is very disappointing to see such errors creep into Mr Johnson’s intervention and the Scottish National Party amendment to the motion, so let us take some time to understand the reality. When a judge in Scotland hands down a so-called life sentence, it is made up of a minimum period that the offender must spend in custody before being eligible for parole—the punishment part—and, after that, the possibility of further time, if the Parole Board so decides. The court has no power to mandate that the worst criminals will never get out.

We are told that the Scottish courts already have a power to set a punishment part that is longer than the rest of an offender’s life. That is the case if the criminal happens to be elderly or terminally unwell, but it turns on chance and cannot be designed.

Daniel Johnson also misses the point that judges are bound by case law, which says that the murderer of a child or a police officer should receive a punishment part of only 20 years. That is not a lifetime. The longest punishment part that has ever been handed out by a Scottish court is 37 years, and even that most extreme example is not the rest of someone’s life if they are in their 20s. The incontestable fact is that Scottish courts cannot, by law, guarantee that the worst criminals will not be let back on to our streets.

Before I get the inevitable intervention, I say that it is a persistent myth that whole-life custody sentences are contrary to human rights. That is not true. In January 2017, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that whole-life orders as they exist in England and Wales are not in breach of the European convention on human rights.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: If it is brief, Mr Findlay.

Neil Findlay: Why does Mr Kerr not cut to the chase and tell us the reality? What he probably wants is to bring back the death penalty.

Liam Kerr: I do not thank Mr Findlay for wasting my time with his intervention. Of course I do not think that, Mr Findlay; just sit down.

Some people accept that we do not have whole-life custody sentences, but we should ask why we need them. Why bring in a sentence that would apply only to the worst criminals, and which would

give Scottish judges the same powers that judges in England and Wales have? One of the core functions of our justice system is punishment, but the constraints on the length of punishment parts, which I have already set out, do not allow the Scottish courts to discharge that function for the very worst criminal acts.

Punishment is not the only reason that we send people to jail, but neither should it go ignored. The length of time for which society removes someone's liberty must measure up to the appalling consequences of their actions. We must also think about the public and victims' experiences. Too many people who have never had that experience—directly or indirectly—ignore the strength of public feeling on the issue and elevate their concerns for the offender. To them, I simply say: Linda McDonald, the family of Paige Docherty and others are completely right to demand that life means life.

I will address the public safety point. Some offenders commit crimes that are so appalling that the risk of reoffending should be removed altogether. There is a justified public outcry when a violent criminal is released only to reoffend and inflict devastation on yet more lives. Yes, releasing an offender comes with risks, and it is right that society takes that collective risk for most prisoners in the pursuit of rehabilitation. However, for the most despicable offenders, that is a fruitless effort. It is time to protect Scotland's communities by removing the worst criminals from society for good.

Our proposal for whole-life custody would ensure that those who protect us from danger have the full weight of the justice system behind them. Police officers are among the most selfless people in our communities—they put themselves in harm's way every day to keep us safe. Prison officers manage difficult and high-risk offenders in an environment that is increasingly plagued by the threat of dangerous substances and weapons. Tragically, some officers' lives are taken while they are carrying out those duties on our behalf. Those are especially appalling crimes, because they are attacks on not only individuals, but society itself. Those officers can be distinguished from other public servants by the role that they perform and their routine contact with dangerous offenders. Their duties and the risks that they face mean that they stand apart from others. That is why we propose that whole-life custody should be the starting point for the murder of a police or prison officer in the course of their duty.

I have launched a consultation on a member's bill to enable our judges to give a genuine whole-life sentence for the worst offenders in society. The SNP has an opportunity to demonstrate that it is not a soft touch on criminals. My consultation

sets out the facts in a clear plan for how to go about this. The only question left is whether the SNP agrees with the principle that the very worst criminals deserve a lifetime behind bars. It can work with us to make that law, or it can confirm what the public already suspect; whatever it does, the Scottish public will know that a Scottish Conservative Government led by Ruth Davidson will put victims first, punish the crime, and keep Scotland's communities safe.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that Scotland's judges should have the power to impose whole life custody sentences.

14:30

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): One of the most difficult and important decisions that anyone working in our criminal justice system can face is that which is faced by High Court judges who are tasked with sentencing those who are convicted of the most appalling crimes, such as serial murder, the murder of police officers or others who are tasked with protecting the public, and horrific sexual crimes, which are often committed against our most vulnerable citizens.

It is, of course, vital that the public has confidence in our justice system's ability to deal effectively with those who are convicted of the most terrible crimes and that judges have the powers that they need to sentence appropriately the most serious offenders that come before the High Court.

The Appeal Court has confirmed that Scottish courts can impose a punishment part that exceeds the rest of an offender's life. In 2009, in the case of *HMA v Boyle*, the court stated:

"while the statute does not empower the judge to specify a 'whole life' period, in an appropriate case a prisoner in Scotland may be sentenced to a period which in practical terms will extend until his or her death."

For example, Angus Sinclair, who was convicted of the World's End murders in 2014, was sentenced to life imprisonment with a punishment part of 37 years. That meant that he would not have been able to apply for parole until he was 106 years old.

There are other examples of people who were convicted of the very worst crimes having been given punishment parts of 30 years or more. Thomas Smith, who was convicted of the murder and sexual abuse of a woman and her 10-year-old daughter, was sentenced in 2010 to a life sentence with a punishment part of 32 years. James McDonald and Raymond Anderson, who were convicted of murder, received life sentences with a punishment part of 30 years.

It is important to remember that the punishment part of a life sentence only sets the minimum period that the convicted person must spend in prison before being able to apply for parole. Whatever the punishment part of their sentence, someone who is given a life sentence will remain in prison for as long as they are considered to be a risk to the public. It is for the independent Parole Board for Scotland to consider whether a prisoner no longer represents a risk to public safety, and it is worth noting that the Parole Board directed the release of only 35 of the 342 life sentence prisoners who were referred to it in 2017-18. Of the 67 prisoners serving an order for lifelong restriction who were considered by the Parole Board in that year, none were directed to be released.

Any life sentence prisoner who is approved for release by the Parole Board is subject to a life licence and continuing supervision in the community. If they breach the terms of that licence, they can be recalled to custody. Therefore, the court already has the power to impose very long punishment parts on people who are convicted of the most serious crimes, and, when a life sentence prisoner has served the punishment part, they can be released only if they are not considered to pose an unacceptable risk to public safety.

For those reasons, I am not persuaded that Liam Kerr's proposal for whole-life sentences would add to the extensive powers that Scotland's courts already have to deal with the most serious cases that come before them, and I am not alone in that. On 29 May, Mike Nellis, a professor of criminal and community justice at the University of Strathclyde, was interviewed on "Good Morning Scotland". He said that Mr Kerr's proposal is

"exaggerating the importance of ... creating whole-life custody".

I hope that the Parliament agrees that it is important that we take an evidence-based approach to criminal law reform and prevention and that any changes that we make to the sentencing powers of our courts will make a real difference. We will, of course, carefully consider any proposals for reform of our sentencing law that are put forward, but I am not persuaded that whole-life sentences would make a real and practical difference to the ability of the courts and the justice system to deal with the most serious offenders.

I move amendment S5M-17503.2, in the name of Humza Yousaf, to leave out from "believes that" to end and insert:

"notes that the courts' powers to deal with the most serious offenders have been strengthened by the introduction of orders for lifelong restriction in 2006 and the reforms to clarify the calculation of the punishment part of

discretionary life sentences in the Criminal Cases (Punishment and Review) (Scotland) Act 2012; acknowledges that the Parliament will give appropriate consideration to any further proposals to enhance the courts' sentencing power, but notes that Scotland's judges can already impose a punishment part of a life sentence that extends beyond the likely remainder of a prisoner's life in appropriate cases."

14:35

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The proposed bill is a meaningless stunt. The Tories argue that it would be another tool in the sentencing box for judges, but, if that is an attempt to make those who do not support the proposal look weak, it is a cynical attempt. Liam Kerr admitted as much when he mentioned that only Ruth Davidson can make justice actually work.

Judges already impose a no-limitation punishment element, and they can extend the punishment beyond the likely remainder of a prisoner's life, which has happened on numerous occasions. Judges use their discretion on a daily basis. The most notable case was that of Angus Sinclair, who was sentenced to 37 years and who died in jail.

Liam Kerr says that judges will be bound by case law; unless he is mistaken—and I think that he is mistaken—judges would still be bound by case law even if we were to pass a whole-life sentence into law.

The Parole Board for Scotland has a difficult job to do, and it is made up of experienced people. On release, prisoners remain on licence and will be recalled for small offences. A part of the proposal that gives me real cause for concern says:

"However, as long as the Board has the power to release offenders who the public feel should never leave prison, our system cannot ensure proper punishment or public safety."

Perhaps, when summing up, the Tories will explain what they mean by that. Either they believe in a criminal justice system in which judges make decisions or they believe that the public should make those decisions. It is incompatible with their sentiment that the Parole Board for Scotland is doing a good job. As the minister has said, an order for a lifelong restriction is another sentence that is open to judges. I do not think that the Tories have real trust in the Parole Board.

Liam Kerr: I do not doubt that Pauline McNeill's point will be picked up in the closing speeches. We are not compromising the independence of the judiciary at all—not one bit. The point about Angus Sinclair, which the minister refused to take, is that he was 69 at the time. The fact that he died behind bars was an accident—it did not happen by design. Our criminal justice system should simply not countenance that approach.

Pauline McNeill: I will deal with the member's point when I outline what I think would be the right way forward for guidelines and sentencing.

The proposed bill also states that, if a trial judge hands down a sentence that is

"deliberately long, with a view to outlasting a criminal's natural life, that sentence is liable to be overturned".

A sentence is just as likely to be overturned if we pass this proposal into law. All decisions by judges face being overturned in an appeal court.

With regard to Liam Kerr's point about the European Court of Human Rights, my understanding is that the European convention on human rights says that we cannot have whole-life sentences—at least, not without a periodic review of prisoners who are in that situation. Who decides what are the most serious murders and sexual offences? Judges decide that every single day of their lives. It is not clear to me, in the proposal, whether further guidelines are going to be given to judges on what would be regarded as such offences. Perhaps that could be clarified. *[Interruption.]* Liam Kerr says that it would be the murder of police officers, but he needs to make that clear.

The only element of the proposed bill that tempts me to further investigate the need for an improvement to sentencing guidelines for murder is the statistic that, according to the Parole Board for Scotland, 70 per cent of lifers serve a 14-year sentence. I admit that that gives me cause for concern, but it suggests to me that a simple review of the guidelines would be sufficient to rectify any perceived leniency. Sentences are going up, not down, despite a drive for short-term sentencing. Figures that were released today show that the number of serious assaults is coming down but that the length of sentences is going up. However, the proposed bill will raise the public expectation that the wholesale application of whole-life sentences will solve the problem, and I do not believe that it will.

Introducing the concept of whole-life prison sentences would have implications for the management of prisons. I hope that Liam Kerr will attempt to draw out such implications in the consultation period. People who believe in whole-life sentences must believe that there is no possibility for the rehabilitation of prisoners, so consideration must be given to how a prison system would be run if it contained a number of offenders who would never be released from jail. Consideration must be given to safety inside prisons as well as to the safety of the public outside.

Scottish Labour fully understands the need for constant review of the criminal justice system—as we say in our amendment, which was written

before we saw the Government's amendment—including the sentencing powers of the judiciary. The safety of the public is paramount, and the criminal justice system must punish offenders severely—in some cases, a life sentence should, in effect, mean life—but judges already have the option of giving such a sentence. The way forward is to review sentencing guidelines and await the outcome of the Scottish Law Commission's review of the definition of murder.

I move amendment S5M-17503.1, to leave out from "Scotland's" to end and insert:

"the sentencing options available to the courts, including in relation to the most serious offenders, should be kept under review, and further believes that any changes to sentencing powers must follow an evidence-led debate about what is in the public interest, and full consultation with all relevant parties, including the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, Scottish Prison Service, Parole Board for Scotland and wider public."

The Presiding Officer: I call John Finnie to open for the Green Party.

14:41

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Liam Kerr was with me at this morning's Justice Committee meeting, in which we discussed the presumption against short sentences. The committee is deliberating on the matter, and one of the most compelling contributions was from Professor Tata, who said that, if we are to have a presumption against short sentences—my party and I certainly support that—we need to think about the longer-term and wider implications of such a policy, such as the demands on the prison estate.

This morning, we heard some compelling evidence, which I will repeat. I am sure that Liam Kerr will acknowledge that these comments were made. Colin McConnell, the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, said that prison is about deterrence, rehabilitation and punishment. I do not know whether he said those things in a particular order, but rehabilitation is important. James Maybee, who was representing Social Work Scotland, recognised some of the challenges that might be associated with a presumption against short sentences. There are always such challenges, and Liam Kerr had the good grace to acknowledge that point—indeed, I agree with what he said about it being right for society to take a "collective risk". If we are risk averse, we will bring about a situation similar to that which has happened with home detention curfews, where we have seen a plummeting of the use of one of the facilities.

Liam Kerr always says that there needs to be an evidence base, and I commend him for taking that approach to his duties. The Labour amendment

mentions that point, too. Let us take evidenced decisions. James Maybee talked about assessing risk and need. We also heard from Dr Katrina Morrison, from Howard League Scotland, who said that we need a conversation about what punishment is and what it is not.

I fear, however, that Mr Kerr's proposal is pandering to a certain audience. I align myself with the comments of my colleague Pauline McNeill, who said that the proposal is a stunt. It is very unhelpful and is completely out of kilter with the direction of travel that the criminal justice system is taking.

Liam Kerr: To answer those points, I can tell John Finnie that the proposal is not a stunt, because I have been working on it for the guts of the past two years. A stunt is not something that someone pulls out after two years of very difficult work.

John Finnie: Of course, I acknowledge the work that goes into a member's bill. Again, Liam Kerr had the good grace to say that someone being sentenced for 37 years has been the most extreme example, but I happen to think that confining someone in a room for 37 years is an extreme measure. If we confine people for that length of time, we should take every opportunity to ensure that they do not repeat the conduct that put them in prison in the first place. We need to have that conversation, and not just in relation to the proposal that we are discussing.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Is it Mr Finnie's view that the vast prison population will always be subject to rehabilitation and will never present a danger to the public? We are targeting that very small number of people who cannot be rehabilitated for whatever reason—perhaps they do not have empathy—who do not respect the values of others in society and who will always pose a danger.

John Finnie: Mrs Mitchell identifies a group of individuals—fortunately, it is a small group—for whom provisions are already in place: they are unlikely to be given parole and are likely to be subject to lifelong restriction provisions.

Another point that Mr Kerr will have picked up from this morning's meeting of the Justice Committee came from Dr Sarah Armstrong, from the Scottish centre for crime and justice research, who said that Scotland's prison population, which is the largest in Europe, is akin to those of Texas and Louisiana. We should not take Texas and Louisiana as models of a criminal justice approach at all. We should not be proud of following those examples as we try to make progress.

There is an opportunity to take a different approach. I noted that Dr Hannah Graham said that

“punitive populism is the wrong direction for Scottish justice”

and I agree with that.

I am sure that Mr Kerr will tell us that he is not politicising sentencing, but I lost track of the number of times that he said “SNP” in his speech. It is about making an evidenced case. It is such an important issue. We cannot have a situation where the significant work that already takes place in respect of risk management and the work of the Parole Board to keep the public safe is undermined by the creation of unwarranted fears. Mr Kerr shakes his head, but that is exactly what he is doing. There is ample evidence—the minister cited many examples—that robust sentencing can take place.

I lodged an amendment commending the continuing role for rehabilitation. We know that for some people who find themselves involved in the criminal justice system, such as those with addiction, there is a clear opportunity to get them sorted. Fundamentally, the criminal justice system should be about prevention: the main role of the police should be to prevent crime and protect life and property. I commend the violence reduction unit's role and its holistic approach. The proposed bill is way out of kilter with any of that, which is very unfortunate.

It is important that we have lively debates. When we talk in the Justice Committee, Mr Kerr always wants evidence-led debates, and, in this case, the evidence would not lead him to the conclusion that he has reached.

The Presiding Officer: I call Liam McArthur to open for the Liberal Democrats.

14:47

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Even after Liam Kerr's performance this afternoon, I firmly believe that, when it comes to justice, his instincts are broadly liberal. I see him more in the mould of his colleague, Rory Stewart, than a latter-day Michael Howard; far less a ready-made solution to plugging the Anne Widdicombe-shaped hole in the Tory Party.

I say that despite much of the poorly-evidenced nonsense stuck out in his name denouncing “soft-touch justice” and alleging that Scotland's prisons are being emptied—at a time when, as we heard again this morning, our prison population stands at 8,242 and rising and when the UK has more people under penal measures than any other country in Europe save Russia and Turkey. How Liam Kerr squares all that with what appears to be a genuine concern for restorative justice and demands for ministers to better resource diversionary and rehabilitation programmes is not at all clear.

Like others, the Scottish Liberal Democrats will consider the detail of the member's bill that Mr Kerr has promised to introduce. However, today's debate and the rhetoric surrounding it bear all the hallmarks of political posturing, rather than a serious attempt to reform sentencing to better meet the needs of victims and their families, those in our prison system and communities across Scotland. In playing to the gallery, Mr Kerr either chooses to ignore or is unaware of the options already available to judges.

Liam Kerr: I do not recognise Mr McArthur's characterisation. The motion, which I have made very short and to the point, is clear: Scotland's judges should have the power to impose whole-life custody sentences. It is a simple motion. Do the Liberal Democrats agree with it or not?

Liam McArthur: As I have made abundantly clear, I do not agree.

In sentencing, a judge will set a punishment part, which is the minimum term that must be spent in prison. After that time, a person can be considered for release by the Parole Board. That decision is based on an assessment of risk, which should be explained. Even if a person who has been given a life sentence is released into the community, they will be on licence for the rest of their life and can be recalled to prison in the event of a breach.

Under those provisions, World's End murderer Angus Sinclair was given a sentence that would have prevented him from even seeking parole until he was 106, as we heard. As Lord Matthews explained—with little room for ambiguity, let me say to Mr Kerr—that was intended to “make matters easier for” the Parole Board.

Let us not forget that, under the terms of the European convention on human rights, prisoners need to be sentenced in a way that allows them a realistic prospect of release, even if, for reasons to do with on-going risk, that release does not happen.

The same approach applies south of the border. In England, whole-life orders are compatible with the ECHR only because the justice secretary has a statutory duty to review such cases and to exercise the power of release for life prisoners in such a way as to ensure compatibility with the convention. Moreover, the secretary of state's decisions on possible release are subject to review by the domestic courts, which are also bound to act within convention rights:

“the High Court would have the power to directly order the release of the prisoner, if it considered this to be necessary in order to comply with Article 3”.

However much Liam Kerr wishes to portray the approach as lock-'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key justice, the facts say otherwise.

Of course, some individuals who are guilty of the most serious, violent crimes and who continue to present an unacceptable risk to their victims and/or the wider public, will need to remain in prison.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: No, thank you.

We also need to keep under review the sentencing options that are available to our courts, although the process for doing so is the one that is set out in Pauline McNeill's amendment, rather than the dog-whistle, grandstanding approach of Liam Kerr.

As Fergus McNeill, professor of criminology at the University Glasgow, points out:

“Legislating for whole life tariffs is regressive and unnecessary. It also communicates a troubling message about giving up on the possibility of human development, turning imprisonment into warehousing.”

Jamie Buchan, lecturer in criminology at Edinburgh Napier University, adds that the likely longer-term effect of introducing the measure would be that

“either judges don't use it in which case it's been a waste of time, or the definition of 'most serious' creeps outward to encompass more & more cases”,

as we are seeing in England and Wales.

Neither outcome represents progress or would lead to a more effective justice system. I support the amendment in the minister's name.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

14:52

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I will give the Conservative motion the benefit of the doubt and say that it is probably well intentioned. Liam Kerr's proposal reflects the anguish that victims and their families go through after experiencing the worst of crimes, as he vividly described. It would allow Scottish courts to impose a whole-life sentence for the most serious offenders, which would see them remain in custody for the rest of their lives, with no possibility of parole.

However, it is not clear what Liam Kerr's proposal would add to the existing, extensive powers that Scotland's courts have. Courts already have the power to impose the equivalent of a whole-life sentence in the most serious cases, if they see fit to do so. A court can impose an order for lifelong restriction, depending on the risk.

As we know, in Scotland, a life sentence must be given for murder and can be imposed for other

extremely serious offences, such as repeated rape. If a person is sentenced to life imprisonment, the judge must, by law, set a punishment part of the sentence. That period can extend beyond the remainder of a prisoner's life, which means that an offender can never be considered for parole. That is, in effect, a whole-life sentence.

Liam Kerr: I am afraid that the member is completely missing the point about my proposition. At the moment, judges cannot set a whole-life sentence. They can do so in England and Wales, but they cannot do so in Scotland, as the member has just conceded. Will she at least concede that point?

Rona Mackay: Will the member concede that judges have the power to do exactly that, in a different way? They can impose an order for lifelong restriction.

If a person who was sentenced to life imprisonment under an order for lifelong restriction is released into the community, they will be on licence and can be recalled to prison if they breach the terms of their licence.

It is right that the courts have far-reaching powers to deal with the worst offenders, and it is right that sentencing in any given case is a matter for the courts. Every case must be considered on its own, and a blanket policy would not work.

Criminal law experts are sceptical about Mr Kerr's proposal. Hannah Graham, who is a criminologist and senior lecturer at the University of Stirling, objects strongly to the proposal and says:

"this type of punitive populism is the wrong direction for Scottish justice."

I agree with her.

Sentencing policy must not be based on the extremely tragic but thankfully rare cases that hit the headlines. Each case must be considered individually, and if we adopt a lock-'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key attitude, it brings into question the meaning of our entire justice system and the purpose and practice of rehabilitation.

The SNP has always been clear that prison is the right place for the most serious and dangerous offenders. Life sentence prisoners will remain in prison for as long as they are considered a risk to the public, and it is for the independent Parole Board to consider whether a prisoner no longer presents a risk to public safety. Any life sentence prisoner approved by the board for release is subject to a life licence and continuing supervision in the community.

The judiciary is not calling for more powers to impose whole-life sentences, because it already has them. The Sentencing Council has confirmed

that no issues or concerns in relation to the law on the sentencing of serious offenders have been raised with it. As the minister said, the Scottish Government will consider the detail of a draft bill, once it is available, to understand its purpose and effect.

I will conclude on an optimistic note. Recorded crime is down 42 per cent—a record low—and people feel safer in their communities. The vast majority of people in Scotland—87.5 per cent—experience no crime; in the East Dunbartonshire Council area, which is partly in my constituency, crime is down by 44 per cent. In 2017-18, only 2.3 per cent of adults were victims of violent crime, which of course does not diminish the trauma that those adults suffered. Under the SNP, those who commit the most serious crimes are receiving longer sentences and spending longer in prison before release. As I said at the start, although the motion and the proposed bill may be well intentioned, I do not believe that it is necessary for our justice system to go down that path, when the powers being called for already exist.

14:56

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I welcome the debate and thank my colleague Liam Kerr for his proposal. The idea of whole-life custody may seem too harsh a prospect for some, but the proposed bill neither represents an unfounded vindictiveness nor suggests an overbearing constraint on Scotland's judges. Instead, it puts forward a reasonable, already tried-and-tested proposal. We currently have a system that allows the most violent perpetrators to evade the punishment that they deserve. When we look closely at that system, it seems that justice often slips through the cracks. Surely, there is an argument that the most serious crimes should be met with the most serious punishment—life imprisonment.

We have to be clear: a whole-life custody sentence would be the starting point when sentencing an individual who has been found guilty of specific crimes, and it would be used solely in those cases where there is sufficient justification to do so. With whole-life sentences only for the most serious crimes, the proposed bill would set a benchmark against which a judge could consider factors that may reduce the length of a sentence. That would ensure that we see more sentencing that accurately fits the crime, while removing a constraint on the agency of Scotland's judges.

Of course, for the majority of prisoners, rehabilitation is the right course of action. When there is a chance for a perpetrator of a low-level crime to turn their life around and reintegrate well into society, that should be supported. Sadly,

though, we cannot deny that, in some cases, perpetrators have shown, through horrendous crimes, that they can genuinely never be rehabilitated. In those circumstances, the seriousness of their crime should not be ignored. Victims and their local communities deserve that much. When there is a high risk of reoffending with the worst crimes imaginable, a whole-life custody sentence is the safest route.

The proposed bill is a sure way to put victims in Scotland first. For those who have experienced the worst crimes, the proposal would protect their safety as well as their mental health. Not one of us here would want victims to be retraumatised by the dread of knowing that the perpetrator could be granted early release in a matter of years. The bill would give those victims a much-longed-for feeling of security with the knowledge that the perpetrator would not enjoy a freedom that their crime certainly did not call for.

Linked with that, the bill would significantly reduce the likelihood of potential future victims. Is it not in everyone's best interests, therefore, that we, as parliamentarians, limit in our law the chances of that happening? We can see that the proposal is workable. For instance, England and Wales have the option of dispensing whole-life orders. Such orders are reserved for only the most exceptionally serious crimes, which is as it should be, and they are used only in cases where the perpetrator is over 21.

Of course, we recognise that those whole-life orders are not handed out generously and are imposed only for certain especially grievous crimes as a starting point for further deliberation. In that connection, they respect the European convention on human rights, and our equivalent would do the same.

We must prize the safety of our communities—that is paramount. Under whole-life custody sentencing, there would be less chance of reoffending, so our local streets and homes would be made safer. Currently, a prisoner who is released on so-called life licence is supervised by criminal justice social workers for the remainder of their life, but the varying effectiveness and scrutiny of that supervision can be called into question.

Similarly, orders for lifelong restriction—even though they stipulate that more risk assessment requirements must be met—cannot guarantee that the prisoner will not be released at some point in the future. Even in the past five years, two prisoners under lifelong restriction orders have been released. It is safe to say that, in cases involving the most serious crimes, those measures are incapable of going far enough.

I know that we are all united in the belief that public confidence in Scotland's justice system is

important. The ability to rely on our sentencing process is critical for enabling trust, but that public confidence is knocked each time a released perpetrator reoffends.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Come to a close, please.

Maurice Corry: The fact that only 38 per cent of Scottish people believe that sentencing currently fits the crime shows their disillusionment in abundance.

I hope that Liam Kerr's proposed member's bill will not be swept under the carpet. It proposes a sensible and justifiable change that would give some much-needed security to not only victims and their communities, but the justice system that serves them.

15:01

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Sentencing is a hugely emotive issue. For victims, it can mean justice. For families, it can allow for closure. For politicians, it is an area into which we rarely stray—as Mr Kerr knows, that is because of the independence of the judiciary. However, that is not to say that we should not hold opinions on sentencing. Perhaps the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service put it best when he told the Justice Committee this morning:

"It is right that sheriffs are left unfettered but have guidance".

I am sure that we have all had constituency cases in which the justice system has let down victims and witnesses of crime. On that, I hope that Mr Kerr welcomes the cabinet secretary's establishment of the victims task force, which is a direct response to the need to make the justice system more victim centred. Yesterday, I was pleased to meet Victim Support in Glenrothes to discuss its vital work across communities in Fife and in our courts.

Of course, there is still a role for our prisons in Scotland's justice system in 2019, but we should be careful not to focus our attention solely on life sentences, as the motion invites us to do. Eighty per cent of all jail terms that were imposed in 2017-18 were for less than 12 months. Indeed, Scotland's imprisonment rate remains one of the highest in western Europe. As Professor Cyrus Tata told the Justice Committee this morning:

"Prison never has to prove itself; everything else has to prove itself."

Therefore, I am disappointed not to see any mention in Mr Kerr's motion of the causes of crime: poverty, inequality, poor educational opportunities, geography, and social class. In fact, I still have a few modern studies lessons on that very topic if Mr Kerr should wish to expand his

horizons. To focus exclusively on the end result of the criminal justice system through sentencing is to ignore the bigger picture.

If Mr Kerr does not like to hear it from the SNP, maybe he should listen to the Conservative Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor David Gauke MP, who stated just four months ago:

“we should be extremely cautious about continuing to increase sentences as a routine response to concerns over crime. We have to recognise that such an approach would lead us to becoming even more of an international and historical outlier in terms of our prison population.”

Alternatively, Mr Kerr might care to listen to the other Liam on the Justice Committee. In December last year, Liam McArthur said:

“We know that 60 per cent of people”—

Liam Kerr: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise to the member for making a point of order, but my motion is very specific and so is the SNP amendment. The member is not addressing either the SNP amendment or my motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, that is for me to decide.

Jenny Gilruth: This morning, the Justice Committee was looking at the approach to short-term sentences, on which the Government has brought forward proposals. The Howard League Scotland told us:

“Despite the recommendations of the Scottish Prisons Commission over a decade ago, we still rely on imprisonment to do too much, with too many—and have done so for too long.”

Dr Sarah Armstrong told us—John Finnie mentioned this—that, if Scotland were an American state, we would be on a par with Texas or Louisiana in respect of our imprisonment rate. Laura Hoskins told us that sending people to prisons for short periods is creating social problems. Professor Cyrus Tata told us that prisons are still used in 2019 as a form of penal welfare.

The Conservative motion is solely and narrowly focused on life sentences. However, as we have heard, judges and sheriffs already have the power to impose a lifelong restriction order. Indeed, of the 67 prisoners in Scotland with a lifelong restriction order, none was directed as due to be released.

If judges see fit, they can sentence quite deliberately according to the age of the accused. Members will be aware that that happened in the case of Angus Sinclair, as we have heard.

Our problem in Scotland’s prisons is not that we are a soft touch on sentencing; it is the other

extreme. We are locking up far more people than ever before. To what end? We want to move to a country that, as set out in the Scottish Government’s aspirations, is

“a modern and progressive nation in which imprisonment is used less frequently”.

Part of the solution is a presumption against short sentences, and part of it is about ensuring that a greater range of alternatives is readily available and that those alternatives have been risk assessed accordingly. However, a huge part of the solution is a cultural shift in how we deal with punishment in Scotland. That is exactly what the Justice Committee heard in evidence this morning. What a pity that Liam Kerr is more interested in headline hunting.

15:06

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I will strike what is maybe a slightly incongruous note following previous speakers. I genuinely welcome the debate, not because I agree with the motion but because I completely disagree with it. The Conservatives are wrong in fact and in law and, above all else, they are wrong about the impact that the debate will have. However, I welcome the debate, as it gives us an opportunity to discuss the undoubtedly hugely important issue of prison.

Prison is the default option in our justice system, but it is simply a Victorian inheritance, and it is flawed. It does not work. Surely, after all this time, our recidivism rates should teach us that something is not right with the way that our prison system works and that that needs to be put right.

Above all else, there can be no room for complacency in Scotland, because the Scottish record on incarceration is appalling. We have an incarceration rate that is among the highest in the world. As other members have mentioned, we are on a par with Texas and Louisiana. Our incarceration rate is ahead of that of England and Wales. That should give us pause for thought.

Let me give Liam Kerr the benefit of the doubt because, in my time working on the justice brief, I have always found him to be thoughtful and wanting to engage with both evidence and principles. In a sense, it is a shame that it has taken an Opposition debate for us to be able to talk about incarceration and its principles. This is a debate that should be happening in Government time—although perhaps not necessarily on the letter of the motion. If the Government is serious about reforming the prison system and the justice system, we should be discussing the role of prison and the alternatives to it in the Government’s time, not in Opposition time. The Conservative Opposition has lodged a motion on prison

sentencing, and one of our recent motions was on the Scottish Sentencing Council. It is time for the Government to use its time in the chamber properly.

Let me deal with the Tories' motion. The Tories are wrong in fact. As other members have pointed out, the reality is that it is possible to keep people in prison when they pose such a risk. The judge might not be able to absolutely determine that at the point of sentencing, but an order for lifelong restriction of liberty absolutely makes that eventuality possible.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Daniel Johnson: I do not have very much time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time.

Daniel Johnson: The Parole Board for Scotland likewise has a responsibility and a duty to ensure that people pose no further risk.

The Tories are also wrong in law. Although whole-life sentences may have that name in England, the reality is that there is no such thing as a whole-life sentence because, in 2012, the European Court of Human Rights determined that there has to be the realistic prospect of rehabilitation. The reality is that the Secretary of State for Justice has to review those cases and give people the possibility of being released. There is no such thing as a whole-life sentence; that is bogus.

That is where the final part of where the Conservatives are wrong comes in. They are wrong in fact and in law, and the effect of that is appalling. In a sense, they are creating a straw man to whip up sentiment. Fundamentally, they are misrepresenting the situation in Scotland. If people remain a danger and a risk to society, they will stay in prison; it is as simple as that.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Daniel Johnson: No, I have no time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If you wish to take the intervention, Mr Johnson, I can give you time.

Liam Kerr: Thank you, Presiding Officer. Does Daniel Johnson know that more than 70 per cent of supposed life prisoners who have been released since 1971 spent fewer than 15 years in prison?

Daniel Johnson: Liam Kerr has a problem with the terminology, and I agree with him that we need greater transparency in sentencing. However, the Conservatives have not made the case for the fundamental point: why is life—an arbitrary

sentence—necessary, rather than a risk-based assessment of the individual? They have fundamentally misrepresented the situation.

It is a simple bit of parliamentary timetabling. Mr Kerr knows that he has no realistic possibility of his proposed bill being passed. I started the process for my bill in the first year of the session, and I have not yet introduced the final draft. Liam Kerr knows that his proposed bill is nothing more than parliamentary grandstanding, and that is why it is so irresponsible.

Ultimately, it comes down to this: if our incarceration system is to have any validity, there must be hope—a pathway to release. Justice must give people the possibility of repentance, reform and rehabilitation. If it does not have those components, it is nothing more than a blunt and barbarous system that has no justification.

15:11

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I find today's motion to be quite shameful. Using the most tragic situations, which should unite all of us in the chamber, for an attempt at political gain is not good politics. The thought that any of us here do not have empathy for the families that Liam Kerr mentioned is absolutely disgusting. Mr Kerr knows that I have learned to respect him in committee, and I cannot believe that he is leading on the motion. Perhaps that exchange with our other committee colleague, Daniel Johnson, is an example of the exchange that happens off the record. During his opening speech, Liam Kerr gave away who he hopes will form the next Government. Was there an election a couple of weeks ago, in which the result did not quite go the Tories' way? That is what it looks like to me.

At its heart, what Mr Kerr proposes is a step backwards for what is an increasingly progressive country. As a member of the Justice Committee, I fail to see how imposing whole-life custody sentences would benefit the already extensive powers of the Scottish courts, as others have also said. I do not believe that judicial discretion in Scotland is currently limited by mandatory sentences. The Tories should know, as Maurice Corry clearly does, that a life sentence prisoner who is approved for release is subject to a life licence.

The proposal also fails to grasp that Scotland's judges already have the power to impose a sentence that exceeds the likely remainder of a prisoner's life, depending on the severity of the crimes committed—a point that has been well made countless times today. That is, in effect, a whole-life sentence. It has been confirmed by the Sheriff Appeal Court and the Scottish Sentencing

Council that the long-standing powers of the Scottish courts to sentence murderers and the most serious offenders remain in place, and the independent Parole Board appropriately assesses the risk of the individual to the public.

The real outcomes for serious offenders under the current legislation are that only 10 per cent of life sentence prisoners who were referred to the Parole Board last year were released, and of those, as the minister said earlier, none was under an order for lifelong restriction. The reality is that people who pose a serious risk to society will remain in prison indefinitely, so I do not think that anyone can say that the SNP Government or any other party in this chamber—Labour, Greens or Lib Dems—is engaged in soft justice for serious offending.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: I do not have time.

In the past 10 years, serious crimes across Scotland have declined by 42 per cent, as Rona Mackay pointed out, which validates the considerable progress made by the Scottish Government in tackling serious crime where we should tackle it—through early intervention. The motion is nothing but a political stunt by the Tory party.

We need to look at rehabilitation as a whole. John Finnie, Jenny Gilruth and others have already made the point that, in committee earlier today, we sat with Liam Kerr and heard evidence on the presumption against short-term sentences and how that impacts on the system. There is debate around how much impact it will have. There was general agreement among most people, but where do the Tories sit on it? They are the only folk who are against it. What a surprise. They are not into rehabilitation. They want to play the card that suggests that members are supporting a soft-touch agenda. It is completely and utterly a political stunt.

Presiding Officer, as you—and probably the rest of the chamber—can tell, I am pretty disappointed in the motion. I am disappointed that Liam Kerr has lodged it. I think that he has misjudged the mood of the chamber and the country on the matter, and at voting time, I hope that the chamber realises what the motion is—a shameful political stunt, with which half of the members on the Tory benches probably do not even agree, that follows the European Union election results of a couple of weeks ago.

15:15

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): I speak in support of Liam Kerr's members' bill proposal. I

am a qualified advocate who has dealt with these sorts of cases on both sides of the court room, and it appears to me that a move towards ensuring that whole-life custody sentences can be handed down by Scottish judges could be part of a positive way to restore confidence in our justice system.

As the consultation on the proposed bill continues, the question that will probably be raised, time and again, is: why is that not the case already?

Liam McArthur: I respect Gordon Lindhurst, particularly with respect to the hinterland that he has in this area. When he was that advocate, was he making the case for whole-life sentences and a bill of this kind?

Gordon Lindhurst: When I was an advocate, I was acting in the courts in either prosecution or defence, and I was not involved in the political process in this chamber as I am now. I am sure that that the member will agree that we always have to look at revising and improving the law, and at addressing gaps in it. The proposed bill would do that.

John Finnie: Will the member take an intervention?

Gordon Lindhurst: I will not at this point. I need to make some progress.

In the media, we regularly read and hear of life sentences being handed down for the worst criminals, but we have seen some criminals being released after serving as little as 14 years. How is that justice for the victim's family? Over 70 per cent of lifers have been released after less than 15 years in prison, and more than 800 of those who have been sentenced to life since 1971 have been released within 14 years.

The Scottish crime and justice survey of 2017-18 highlights the low public confidence in the justice system and its ability to ensure that the punishment fits the crime. Only 38 per cent of adults were confident that the system does that.

The option of whole-life custodial sentences is not a solution to fix every problem, but it can be a start to restoring confidence. Protecting our communities should be at the forefront of everyone's minds across this chamber. Unfortunately, too often, we hear of criminals who have been behind bars who reoffend on release and bring more misery to communities and families. Keeping the worst offenders off our streets is part of the solution to the issue of public safety.

The bill would send a powerful message—

John Finnie: I accept that, while the member was operating as an advocate, he would not have been able to take an individual position, but the

Parliament is lobbied by the Faculty of Advocates on issues. What is the Faculty of Advocate's position on Mr Kerr's proposal?

Gordon Lindhurst: Mr Finnie will presumably refer to the faculty's position when he speaks on the matter again. I am not here speaking on behalf of the Faculty of Advocates, but on the specific bill and the proposal by my colleague that I am supporting. I think that Mr Finnie would also accept that he does not always accept the faculty's or the Law Society's position on any specific issue.

Daniel Johnson: He is not an advocate. You are.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me. We have had enough shouting across the chamber. Please carry on, Mr Lindhurst.

Gordon Lindhurst: I could go into the faculty's position in detail, but I do not have time to do so, so I will conclude by saying that a message must be sent that the worst criminals will not be released back into society, and that, for the most heinous crimes, we will guarantee that the punishment really can fit the crime. The person who knows that detail is the trial judge—the one who passes the sentence. That is what the bill seeks to provide.

15:19

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Presiding Officer,

"this type of punitive populism is the wrong direction for Scottish justice."

Those are the words of Hannah Graham, who is a criminologist and senior law lecturer at Stirling university, and they have been shared many times this afternoon. I have to say that I agree with them.

It is not at all clear, even after all the speeches, what the Tory proposal would add to the extensive powers that Scotland's courts already have. The courts can already decide to impose the equivalent of a whole-life sentence in the most serious cases, as minister Ash Denham set out in her opening speech.

Currently, life sentences must be given for murder, but they can also be given for extremely serious offences such as repeated rape. If someone is sentenced to life imprisonment, the judge must, by law, set the punishment part of the sentence. That can extend beyond the likely remainder of a prisoner's life, which means that an offender can never be considered for parole. That, in effect, is a whole-life sentence.

Life sentence prisoners will remain in prison for as long as they are considered to be a risk to the public. Rehabilitation is important, and sending a

message that there is never any hope of release is regressive and unnecessary. Sentencing is a matter for the judiciary—

Liam Kerr: Does the member believe that someone convicted of murdering a police officer should be released from prison—yes or no?

Ruth Maguire: I believe that such decisions should be based on the evidence and the risk to the public.

Sentencing is a matter for the judiciary, and my understanding is that there have been no calls from the judiciary at any time in the recent past suggesting that they lack the necessary sentencing powers to deal with the most serious offenders.

The European Court of Human Rights says that it is up to states to decide how to punish people for committing crimes, provided that they do not do so in a way that violates human rights. That means that states can impose whole-life sentences. However, sentences have to be reducible in order to be compatible with human rights. In other words, people who are given whole-life sentences have to be given a meaningful chance of a review of their detention to ensure that there continues to be a justification for that detention.

Maurice Corry: Does the member recognise that some crimes are so appalling that there should never be any option of release at all?

Ruth Maguire: I recognise that, in justice, we have to deal with things case by case, based on the evidence and on the risk to the public; I also recognise that what the Tories are doing is a cheap political stunt, and it is disgusting.

The state can impose whole-life sentences. Life prisoners have to remain in prison for as long as they are considered to be a risk to the public. Having the chance of review means that life sentences do not constitute a form of inhuman or degrading punishment.

Freedom from inhuman or degrading punishment is a human right under article 3 of the European convention on human rights, and the possibility of review is important to ensure that we do not have a situation in which states are free to lock people up and throw away the key. That would be unacceptable.

I said at the beginning of my remarks that it was not clear what the Tory proposal would add to the existing extensive powers of Scotland's courts. Listening to the speeches today will have done little to reassure people that this is anything more than headline grabbing from the Tories.

15:23

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): The suggestion from Liam Kerr in his proposal for a member's bill and from the Tories in their motion today is that we change the law in order to introduce whole-life sentences.

It is clear to me, having listened to the speeches from across the chamber, that everyone agrees that anyone who has committed a serious crime and continues to be a threat to public safety should be retained in prison. The debate has centred around whether the current law allows that to happen. From the contributions that we have had, it is quite clear that it does, because judges have the power to set a life sentence and, as part of that, to set a minimum term. As Ash Denham pointed out in relation to the case of Angus Sinclair, that allows a position to be set so that the person will spend the rest of their life behind bars if the courts feel that that is justified.

Even if the term runs its course, any release has to be authorised by the Parole Board for Scotland. I have not heard any member question the authority and expertise of the Parole Board, so it seems to me that the Parliament has confidence in it to make judgments in those cases. In addition, there is the ability to bring into effect orders for lifelong restriction, which can be used to continue to retain prisoners behind bars if they are a threat to public safety. The debate has shown that, as Daniel Johnson said, the Conservatives are wrong in fact and in law.

We should always continue to review sentencing guidelines, and we need a constructive debate on that. That debate must be evidence led and take account of the views of the Parole Board, the Scottish Prison Service and various groups that feed into justice policy. We need to consider Pauline McNeill's point that, although we have a presumption against short sentences, the reality is that the time that is spent in prison is going up. We need a greater understanding of that. Some of the causes were explained by Jenny Gilruth. Anyone who is close to their community and who sees poverty going up and, to be frank, the effect of Tory policies such as universal credit will know that those issues can result in people moving towards a life of crime. We need to understand that and have a proper debate about it. We also need to consider why rehabilitation is not working properly, given that the time spent in prison is going up.

I agree with those who say that the proposal that the Conservatives and Mr Kerr have put forward this afternoon is headline grabbing. We need a constructive debate on all justice issues, but the proposal does not help with that. Therefore, the Labour Party will oppose the

Conservative motion and support the Government's amendment.

15:27

Ash Denham: This has been a useful debate that has highlighted the importance of ensuring that our sentencing law provides our courts with the powers to sentence offenders appropriately while meeting the three objectives of deterrence, retribution and rehabilitation. We have heard informative speeches from Jenny Gilruth and Fulton MacGregor, and quite a consensus has emerged among all the parties in the chamber except the Conservatives.

Members have expressed concerns about sentences that have been imposed in individual cases. I trust that those members will understand that, as a Government minister, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on our courts' individual sentencing decisions. I accept that people, especially victims of crime and their friends and families, will have strong views on individual sentencing decisions, especially in the most serious cases that come before our courts. I consider that such decisions are best made by an independent judiciary, taking account of all the facts and circumstances of each case.

However, in looking at the bigger picture it is worth noting—this is an important context for the debate—that operational data from the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service shows that the average minimum tariff for life prisoners has increased significantly, from less than 14 years in 2007-08 to more than 17 years in 2017-18. That has occurred at a time when we have been making real progress in tackling crime. "Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2017-2018: main findings", which was published in March 2019, shows that crime fell by 42 per cent since 2008-09 and by 16 per cent since 2016-17, to the lowest level ever estimated. The proportion of adults experiencing crime fell from 20.4 per cent in 2008-09 to 12.5 per cent in 2017-18, compared to an equivalent victimisation rate in England and Wales in that year of 14.4 per cent.

Research on non-sexual violent crime in Scotland was published this morning. It found that there being fewer cases of violence between males in the west of Scotland, which often involve relatively young people—those up to the age of 29—and use of weapons, has driven the 35 per cent reduction since 2008-09 in attempted murder and serious assault cases.

As I said earlier, the Scottish Government is open to considering suggestions as to how the sentencing powers of our courts might be improved. In 2015, the Scottish Sentencing Council was established with the aims of

promoting consistency in sentencing, assisting the development of sentencing policy and promoting greater awareness and understanding of sentencing.

When the issue of whole-life sentences was first raised in Parliament by the Public Petitions Committee, and by Ruth Davidson MSP at First Minister's question time, my predecessor wrote to Lady Dorrian, who is the chair of the Scottish Sentencing Council. He highlighted concerns that parliamentarians had expressed about the consistency and comparability of sentencing in murder cases, and about whether the judiciary had the necessary powers to deal with the most serious cases. He asked also whether the Scottish Sentencing Council was aware of any issues or concerns having been raised about operation of the existing law with reference to mandatory life sentences, following convictions for murder. Lady Dorrian noted that consideration of the introduction of whole-life sentences was a policy matter for Parliament, and she confirmed that, other than the exchanges that the council had had with the Public Petitions Committee, no issues or concerns in relation to the operation of the current law on life sentences had been raised with the council.

As members might expect, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice regularly meets the Lord President to discuss matters of mutual concern. At no point has he, or any other members of the judiciary, expressed concern that their existing powers to sentence our most serious offenders are not sufficient. That point was well made by Rona Mackay and Ruth Maguire in their thoughtful speeches.

It is important that our sentencing law works to ensure that members of the public are protected from those who pose a serious risk to their safety, while also working to reintegrate offenders into society and to reduce reoffending. Prison is still the right place for the most serious offenders. That is why we have ended the previous system of automatic early release for serious offenders, which was, of course, introduced by the Conservative UK Government in the 1990s. The average length of prison sentences has increased by 21 per cent over the past decade.

Liam Kerr *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is closing.

Ash Denham: I am not persuaded that introducing whole-life sentences for a small minority of the most serious cases would make a practical difference to our justice system. I understand that, as of March 2019, of the 7,038 prisoners who are currently serving life sentences in England and Wales, just 63 are serving whole-life sentences.

If the Scottish judiciary were to take the same approach to use of whole-life sentences as the courts in England and Wales, I expect that very few such sentences would ever be imposed—considerably fewer than one per year—and that the small number of cases in which the judiciary might consider that to be appropriate would be cases such as those of Angus Sinclair or Peter Tobin, which we have discussed in the debate, in which it would be highly unlikely that the offender would, in any event, ever be released.

15:33

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): This important debate has attracted many differing views, and has included comments such as “political posturing”, “political stunt”, “headline hunting” and “lock-'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key justice”. I want to put our proposal in context. I genuinely hope that, once I have done so, members will reflect on those comments, which I consider to have been very ill advised.

Our criminal justice system has a huge spectrum of criminal offences for which perpetrators might be convicted. At the lower end of the spectrum, the disposal on conviction might be a deferred sentence, a fine or a community payback or community service order. At the higher end are crimes that attract prison sentences.

Within that huge spectrum of offences are individuals from all walks of life who, for various reasons, fall foul of the law. Many offenders have underlying issues that contribute to their offending behaviour. Others who commit offences for reasons that are difficult to understand will never reoffend, as a result of appropriate early intervention measures and effective rehabilitation programmes and throughcare support. For the avoidance of doubt, I note that the proposed whole-life custody (Scotland) bill is not targeted at individuals who fall within the category of perpetrators that I have just described. Instead, it targets the thankfully small number of individuals who commit the most horrendous, depraved and heinous crimes, whom it will never be possible to release safely into society.

John Finnie: Will Margaret Mitchell take an intervention?

Margaret Mitchell: I ask John Finnie to be brief.

John Finnie: I am grateful. I know the regard that Margaret Mitchell has for Lady Dorrian. Having heard the minister's comments, does Margaret Mitchell not believe that, if Lady Dorrian had concerns, she would have articulated them before now?

Margaret Mitchell: It is not up to the judiciary to influence policy. That is the whole point. This is about the discretion of the judiciary.

Perpetrators such as I just described fall within the wide category of criminals who receive a so-called life sentence, which is mandatory for anyone who is convicted of murder, but which by no stretch of the imagination means that they will spend the rest of their life behind bars. When imposing that mandatory sentence, judges in Scotland are required to set the punishment part of the sentence, which equates to a minimum period that the offender will actually spend in prison. As many members have said in the debate, the longest punishment part that has been handed down is 37 years, with most murderers serving between 12 and 20 years before becoming eligible for release.

When the person has served the minimum number of years that is set by the judge, there is the option for the Parole Board to consider them for release back into society on licence, with conditions and with them being supervised by criminal justice social workers for the rest of their life. The intensity of the supervision varies. A breach of the conditions, depending on the circumstances, may—only may—result in a return to custody.

I say to Daniel Johnson that an order for lifelong restriction will make release slightly more difficult, with extra risk-assessment requirements, but it still does not guarantee that there will be no release. That is the point that so many members today, including the minister, have failed to understand and accept.

A whole-life custody sentence would address the unacceptable situation in Scots law whereby there is no guarantee that dangerous offenders who are convicted of the most serious and vile offences involving, for example, brutal murders and vicious serious sexual offences, will never be released. With the power to hand down a whole-life custody sentence, the judiciary in Scotland would have the same discretion as their counterparts in England and Wales, where judges can give whole-life orders for offenders over the age of 21 who have committed extremely serious offences. The definition of that is in Liam Kerr's consultation. It is significant that those orders have been held to comply with the European convention on human rights.

More important still is that our judges would be able to decide for themselves that a crime that had been committed was of such an abhorrent, violent and odious nature that "life" should mean "life", and communities would be safer as a consequence.

To address John Finnie's point about pressure on the prison estate, I note that there are 63 whole-life prisoners in England and Wales. Given that the population in Scotland is 10.8 times lower than the population south of the border, on a pro rata basis there would be approximately six whole-life prisoners in Scotland.

In addition, giving judges the power to hand down whole-life custody sentences would build trust in the justice system for victims and help to restore honesty in sentencing.

Contrary to Liam McArthur's assertion, if a judge had good reason not to impose a whole-life custody sentence, they would never be compelled to do so, but when the victim's family—and society at large—heard a judge say that a murderer would be going to prison for life, the judge would mean just that. The proposed bill would give judges the discretion and the power to ensure that the most deadly dangerous perpetrators spend literally the rest of their lives in custody in order to ensure that they will never again pose a threat to the public.

Realising Scotland's Potential

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-17504, in the name of Dean Lockhart, on realising Scotland's potential.

15:41

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives will use our time today to set out a new direction in economic policy and a comprehensive new approach to skills and training.

The need for a new economic model has never been greater. Last week, the Scottish Fiscal Commission forecast that Scotland's economy will continue to underperform for the next four years. As a result, income tax revenues are forecast to be £1 billion lower than expected. Although there is no doubt that the outcome of Brexit is creating uncertainty, the economic underperformance stretches back 12 years.

According to the Scottish Parliament information centre, had growth in Scotland kept pace with the rest of the United Kingdom over the past 12 years, our economy would be £7 billion larger. We agree with the recent comments of the Fraser of Allander institute, which said:

"Brexit should not be the only focus of attention"

and that there has been

"little ... discussion of the ... structural challenges and opportunities"

that Scotland's economy is facing.

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): Will the member take an intervention?

Dean Lockhart: I will later.

That is why we will set out measures to address those challenges and opportunities. With regard to Scotland's trade, more than 60 per cent of our business is with the rest of the UK, but enterprise policy does not reflect that economic reality. The Scottish Government has set up more than 30 trade offices across the world, but only one trade office in the rest of the UK. No business in the world would neglect its biggest single market in that way. If we can increase our trade with the rest of the UK by just 3 per cent, that would be equivalent to a 10 per cent increase in our trade with the entire European Union. That is why we have announced policies to establish a series of trade hubs across the UK to help Scottish business become part of the supply chains in the major economic regions of the UK.

We need to equip Scotland's business to expand into new markets—fast-growing economies such as China and south-east Asia. Those countries are moving their global trade on to e-commerce and other technology platforms, and we need to ensure that Scotland keeps pace with such developments. At the moment, only 9 per cent of Scottish business embeds digital in its operations. That is why we have proposed the creation of an institute of technology and e-commerce, an agency that would work with a new Scottish exporting institute to help up to 3,000 firms a year to move their business online in order to access new markets.

We also propose the creation of a new Scottish diaspora network. There is a powerful Scottish diaspora across the world, which is ready to help Scottish business expand into overseas markets. Our proposals would see a new global diaspora network, with more than 5,000 active members across the world, helping Scottish firms to expand into those new markets. The new network would also tap into the expertise of the Scottish domestic diaspora—Scots who have significant overseas contacts and connections and who have returned to Scotland.

The proposals would help Scottish business to increase global exports and, in turn, productivity and wage levels. The proposals could be actioned today, by using the existing powers of the Scottish Government, and would require no additional funding to the overall enterprise and skills budget.

I will give way to the minister, if she wants to intervene.

Kate Forbes: I will intervene on a different point. In the spirit of gaining consensus, on the point around attracting skills, one of the biggest threats to that—particularly in the digital sector—is the restriction on freedom of movement, which some businesses have called an "obstinate approach" that neglects business interests. What does Mr Lockhart say to that?

Dean Lockhart: Immigration will continue to play an important part in Scotland's economy, but it is a derogation of duty for any Government to ignore the training needs of its young people and look for immigrants who have been trained in other countries to address the skills gap.

I turn to our proposal to introduce a comprehensive new approach to skills and lifelong training in Scotland. The need for a new approach is clear. Last week's forecast from the SFC shows that Scotland has become a low-growth, low-wage and low-skilled economy. We need a new skills system that values a vocational education every bit as much as an academic one.

The first thing that we propose is to replace the current school leaving age of 16 and introduce a

compulsory skills participation age. That would mean that young people would either stay in education or training until the age of 18, or—if they want to start work earlier—undertake a structured apprenticeship or accredited training programme. That will ensure that they receive relevant and on-going training for their future needs.

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

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Dean Lockhart: I will in a second

Our skills participation policy, which will focus on those who leave school without going into education or formal training, will be targeted at those who are most in need of extra help and support. The policy is based on an approach that was championed by the Institute for Public Policy Research late last year. It would transform the number of young people who are getting the training that they need, help to address the skills gap in the economy, and help to reduce the gap in attainment between children from rich and poorer areas.

Clare Adamson: Given your commitment to keeping people in education and training, can you explain why the United Kingdom Government did away with the education maintenance allowance, which we maintained in Scotland for the very reason of keeping people from disadvantaged backgrounds in education and training?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should always speak through the chair, please.

Dean Lockhart: I will come to that point later. Today we are announcing a comprehensive set of new proposals that will address the skills gap that the Scottish National Party has created.

It is not just young people who need a transformation in the level of support for training. We need a comprehensive new system to prepare our workforce for rapid changes in technology and for workers who will have several jobs in their career. To achieve that, we will introduce a new lifelong skills guarantee. The proposal is that Government, helped by business, would guarantee that anyone who wants to retrain or upskill during their career would get the chance to do so. It would see the introduction of a new scheme in which firms and workers can invest in a personal learning account, match funded by Government for the lowest paid and lowest skilled, to be used for lifelong training and upskilling.

The new policy of a lifelong skills guarantee would include the expansion of the lifelong apprenticeship, aimed specifically at workers over the age of 25, to ensure that apprenticeships are available to all workers who want one.

The increasing emphasis on vocational training and lifelong learning would be supported through a series of additional measures, the first of which would be the expansion of vocational-focused schools for talented pupils aged between 14 and 16 who are disengaged from traditional education. We want to see the creation of a vocational-focused school in every Scottish city, modelled on Newlands Junior College and aimed at talented pupils who do not benefit from a mainstream education.

We would introduce second-chance centres in areas of need across Scotland to give people another chance to get the core skills that they really need. Second-chance centres, which would offer basic qualifications in core subjects, could be set up within colleges or jobcentres or as standalone organisations, depending on the most appropriate approach for the local area.

The measures that I have outlined today would represent a transformation in training and lifelong learning opportunities across Scotland. Those who are most likely to benefit are the lowest paid and lowest skilled, and those who are most at risk from the changing nature of work.

After 12 years in government, the SNP has failed to deliver sustainable economic growth and we have a skills system that is not fit for purpose. It is time for a new approach. Today we have announced ambitious proposals that would transform the skills system in Scotland and boost economic growth. In the months to come, the Scottish Conservatives will announce further proposals to grow Scotland's economy and deliver on Scotland's true economic potential.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern that economic growth and long-term growth rates for Scotland continue to trail behind the rest of the UK; recognises that the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy has failed to deliver sustainable growth, meet productivity targets or create a high-wage economy; acknowledges the need to address the skills gap in the economy through a comprehensive new approach to skills and training, and calls on the Scottish Government to use its existing powers to introduce a new policy framework to address the structural challenges facing the Scottish economy.

15:49

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): I welcome the opportunity that the debate provides to outline the strength of Scotland's economy and labour market. I also welcome the opportunity to recognise the drive and resilience of Scotland's business community and the ambitions that I believe are shared across the chamber for future success.

A strong economy is essential to supporting jobs, incomes and quality of life. Alongside growing, competitive and innovative businesses, our economy must be environmentally sustainable and inclusive; it must provide benefit and opportunity for all our people and communities.

The value of the Scottish Government's commitment to securing a sustainable and inclusive economy is widely recognised, both here in Scotland and beyond. Our distinctive approach is built into the national performance framework, which provides a purpose not just for Government but for the whole country. Through the NPF, we measure performance through a range of outcomes that are consistent with the United Nations sustainable development goals.

However, I recognise that there is still much to be done to ensure that our country continues to flourish, while increasing wellbeing for all and tackling the global climate emergency. The greatest challenges that we face in being able to deliver the Scotland of our ambitions are the constraints on the powers of this Parliament, which are compounded by the current uncertainty that is being created by Brexit and the UK Government.

On 30 May, in an open letter to the ever-growing list of candidates who are seeking to become the next leader of the Conservative Party and the next Prime Minister, Carolyn Fairbairn, the Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry, said of where we stand with Brexit:

"Prolonged uncertainty is damaging our economy now—driving up costs and reducing sales. Stockpiling of raw materials and goods among SMEs is at a record high. Billions of pounds in investment are being diverted from the economy, harming future jobs and prosperity."

Those words resonate with this Government's analysis and with what we hear from business. A no-deal Brexit remains a significant and live risk that would impact significantly on the Scottish economy through disruption to logistics, supply, trade, investment, migration, skills and market confidence. Brexit is already impacting negatively on the confidence and security of our businesses, regions and communities in Scotland.

Dean Lockhart: Last week, the Fraser of Allander institute highlighted that Brexit is a UK-wide issue. Why is Scotland's economy forecast to continue to underperform the rest of the UK?

Jamie Hepburn: Mr Lockhart says that Scotland underperforms the rest of the UK. However, I was just about to set out the strengths of the Scottish economy. I noticed that there was a distinct absence of that in Dean Lockhart's opening speech and in his motion.

For the record, Scotland's economy is growing, unemployment is at a record low, exports are

growing faster than anywhere else in the UK and productivity is increasing. Over the past year, the number of people in employment has risen by 23,000; our exports of goods grew by 6 per cent, which was faster than in any other country in the UK; productivity has grown by nearly 4 per cent, compared with 0.5 per cent in the UK as a whole; and business research and development has increased by almost 14 per cent, exceeding the growth of 2.9 per cent that was experienced in the UK. That is the reality of the Scottish economy, not the doom and gloom that Mr Lockhart persists in speaking of in this chamber.

Speaking of doom and gloom, I give way to Neil Findlay.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister reflect on what has been done in New Zealand, which has proposed budgets based on wellbeing rather than the continued pursuit of economic growth as a Government objective, which clearly runs contrary to sustainability principles?

Jamie Hepburn: I do not concur that it contradicts sustainability principles. The record on our ambitions with regard to a sustainable and inclusive form of economic growth is well laid out. I may have been uncharitable about Neil Findlay's intervention, because I think that what has been explored in New Zealand is worthy of our exploration here. I refer the member to my opening remarks, when I said that issues of wellbeing around economic growth are firmly laid out as part of the national performance framework.

It is important to lay out, as I did a few moments ago, that Scotland has the sound economic and labour market foundations to move in a different direction in an inclusive fashion. We have a commitment to inclusive growth, which combines increased prosperity with great opportunities for all and distributes the dividends of that prosperity fairly—I am sure that that will be welcomed by Mr Findlay and other Labour members.

Again, let me say to Dean Lockhart that I do not recognise his characterisation of Scotland's skills system. I am in the fortunate position of being able to get out and about across the country to engage in the school and college environments and with young and not-so-young people, who are undertaking a variety of training. Every day, I see excellence and people's commitment to equip themselves with the skills that they need.

However, I recognise that we need to do more, by responding to technological disruption and demographic change, to ensure that people are equipped for our society and for the economy of tomorrow. In recognition of that, we have committed to introducing a future skills action plan, which we will publish shortly, and we continue to engage with the Scottish Trades Union Congress

and the CBI on their proposition for a national retraining partnership.

The title of today's debate is rather more positive than the Conservative motion. I believe that Scotland can realise its potential. I believe that it can best do so by being an independent country with membership of the European Union. However, in advance of that happening, the Government will be ambitious for Scotland and will continue to work tirelessly, day in and day out, to ensure that we have a sustainable and inclusive economic future that works for all the people of this country.

I move amendment S5M-17504.3, to leave out from "with concern" to end and insert:

"that the National Performance Framework's purpose is to create a sustainable and inclusive economy that increases the wellbeing of people living in Scotland, with outcomes aligned to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals; recognises that Scotland's GVA per head is the third highest in the UK behind only London and the south east of England; recognises that productivity growth in Scotland has been 0.9% per year since 2007, compared with 0.2% per year for the UK; acknowledges that unemployment in Scotland is the lowest on record at 3.2%, which is lower than the UK rate of 3.8%, but, in recognition of the need to make sure that Scotland's labour market works for all, supports efforts to make Scotland a Fair Work Nation as set out in the Fair Work Action Plan; welcomes that the Scottish Government is on track to meet its target of 30,000 modern apprenticeship starts per year by the end of the current parliamentary session; notes that the Scottish Fiscal Commission has downgraded its growth forecast as a result of continued Brexit uncertainty, and considers that Scotland's sustainable economic future is best served as an independent member of the EU."

15:56

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Labour Party is always happy to take any opportunity to make our case for real and radical economic change, for more investment and less austerity, for more planning and less market, and for more democracy, because too much economic power rests in too few hands.

I am bound to begin by making a couple of points to the Conservatives, who called for this afternoon's debate. First, they are of course right to remind us that, in the last quarter, Scottish gross domestic product growth once again lagged behind total UK GDP growth. However, they should not be supercilious. Last year, output from the manufacturing base in Scotland rose by 2.6 per cent, but output from the UK as a whole contracted by 1.3 per cent. It was only through a growth in services that the UK rate of output moved marginally above the Scottish rate of output.

Secondly, although it is of course good to see a Conservative representative move a motion in this Parliament in favour of a "high-wage economy", it

is a pity that, where they are in Government, the Conservatives will not support a real living wage. They have presided over the biggest fall in real wages for 200 years; not since the great slump of 1798 to 1822 have we seen a wage squeeze quite like it. More than a decade on from the financial crash, the wages of working people are still stuck below the levels that they were at before the crash. The shameful result is that one in four children in Scotland lives in poverty, and two out of three of them are brought up in poverty in households in which at least one adult is in work.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I do not doubt the seriousness of the member's comments, but does he realise that economic growth is paramount to address those concerns and that Labour's policies of high taxation would undermine such growth?

Richard Leonard: The critical issue is the distribution of economic benefit from economic growth, which is one of the fault lines in our society.

We say to the Scottish Government that the last thing that we need is yet another referendum on the creation of a separate Scottish state. Let me say to the ministers and their party that the people of Scotland do not want yet another referendum on the creation of a separate Scottish state. The figures that the Scottish Government produces tell us that Scottish exports to the European Union were worth £14.9 billion in 2017, whereas our exports to the rest of the UK were worth £48.9 billion in 2017. In other words, our exports to the rest of the UK are worth three times more than our exports to the whole of the European Union put together, which is why we want to remain in the European Union as well as in the United Kingdom union. There are too many national boundaries, not too few; we should be breaking down barriers, not building them up.

The long-term structural weaknesses of the Scottish economy—slow growth and poor rates of investment, a narrow export base, too narrow a concentration of research and development spending, an overreliance on foreign direct investment, endemic low pay and low productivity—do not remain unaddressed because we do not hold the powers in the Scottish Parliament. They remain unaddressed because the current Scottish Government has failed to use the powers that the Parliament has got.

We could have a Scottish industrial strategy in which the Scottish Investment Bank does not just respond to market failure but is a proactive catalyst of economic change. Led by a Government that is prepared to act and not just react, we could have a properly resourced Scottish economic development agency, as well as one for the Highlands and Islands and the south of

Scotland. We could have the institutional and investment firepower to diversify our export base and boost R and D.

We could use the powers of public procurement and skills development to better plan our economy in co-operation with trade unions and businesses. We could make the just transition to the sustainable economy that we need to make in the face of the climate emergency. Finally, with an alternative economic strategy, we could spearhead a radical reduction in inequality. That is something that the Government's own poverty and inequality commissioner has today chastised it for failing to do. In his words:

"very little has changed"

to stop

"the rising tide of in-work poverty".

It is time for a wholly new approach. It is time to end the low pay economy and the failed policies of neoliberal economics. It is time for us to develop a policy that is based on economic diversification and economic democracy, which promotes new forms of ownership as part of a new economic strategy and plan—an economic strategy that puts people first and an economic plan for real change.

I move amendment S5M-17504.4, to insert at end:

“; recognises concerns that Scotland's economy would be further impacted by uncertainty from another referendum on independence; considers that any such referendum would be a distraction from the issues facing the people of Scotland; believes that the failure to create a Scottish industrial strategy has resulted in low earnings and stagnated economic growth, in particular failing to deliver the much-needed green jobs promised to Scotland, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to deliver an industrial strategy to a create well-paid jobs and to grow and sustain viable enterprises.”

16:01

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): What are the timings for speeches, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I am sorry, Mr Harvie, I thought that you knew. Mr Harvie and Mr Rennie, you have four minutes, but there is time for interventions.

Patrick Harvie: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

On one level, I welcome the fact that the debate is beginning to include a wider range of views on the wider question of economic growth—its meaning, role and place in our economy. For a long time, only the Greens raised an objection to the fixation on economic growth and the primacy that the GDP metric is given in our economy. Relentlessly chasing after economic growth measured in GDP terms has always prioritised private riches over public wealth. It is inextricably

linked to climate change and biodiversity loss from the fragmentation, pollution and degradation of habitats, the extraction and depletion of finite resources, and the exploitation of human beings around the world.

GDP growth fails to capture inequality, economic justice, people's health, the state of our environment or wellbeing. It also fails to recognise the need to share economic benefits or to protect people from the consequences of economic activities. I am not surprised that the Conservative Party has not yet joined us in that deep debate about the meaning and role of GDP growth, although more and more people are having that discussion.

I was interested that Neil Findlay raised that question, too. Although the Labour Party amendment mentions economic growth, there is much in the second half of it that I can agree with. We are not going to agree on the independence question—not at this stage, although perhaps, one day, more people in Labour will come with us on that. However, even if they do not come all the way, there is a lot more that we could be doing to address low wages. We could be doing that here and now if the Labour Party had backed devolution of employment law in the debates in the Smith commission. We could have repealed anti-trade union legislation to help to restore the balance of power in the workplace. Even if the Labour Party does not join us in arguing that independence should be the ultimate trajectory for Scotland, I hope that it will come at least so far as to say that we should be seeking control of employment law.

I have mixed feelings about the Government's amendment. It is clearly a significant improvement on the motion. It recognises that we should not just trumpet low unemployment and high employment rates, because we need to acknowledge that the canard that work is the route out of poverty no longer applies. That notion is broken. We know that a huge proportion of the poverty in our society is in-work poverty, so the quality of employment matters, too.

However, the amendment describes how the national performance framework should work, not how it works at the moment. The NPF still prioritises and places far too much emphasis on GDP growth. Moreover, the measurements of progress against the NPF show close to zero progress on issues such as poverty wages and income inequality.

The Green amendment, which was not selected for debate, agreed that a new policy framework and a new direction are necessary but asked: to what end? Just to race ahead with more GDP at any cost is not the approach that we should be taking. Instead, we should be learning from the

likes of the enough coalition, which was launched recently. The coalition questions the notion of growth and asks: what is real prosperity? How do we create it and share it, without continuing today's extractive, polluting and exploitative economy?

I look forward to the debate continuing. I am certain that those questions are the ones that all political parties will have to face up to in the coming years and decades.

16:06

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I was pleased with Richard Leonard's speech, because he gave an unequivocal position on Europe. That is to be welcomed. I waited for the caveat that I thought might come, but there was no caveat, which I hope is a positive sign that Richard Leonard will try to influence Jeremy Corbyn in London to adopt a similar position, because we are coming to the critical point at which the Labour Party needs to stand up on Brexit, which is critical to the whole debate about skills, the economy and opportunities in the country. I welcome Richard Leonard's contribution and I hope that it has an effect elsewhere.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Willie Rennie: Certainly.

Neil Findlay: What influence did Mr Rennie have over the coalition Government, of which his party was a member, which cut budgets in all those sectors across the UK?

Willie Rennie: That was a nice try from Neil Findlay, but this is a debate about the economy and the future of this country. We can have another debate about the matter that he raised, any time that he wishes. I would be delighted to have that debate. I would also be delighted to debate the performance of the Labour Opposition on Brexit over the past three years, which has been woeful.

We need to focus on the big challenges that Scotland faces. I believe that the answers lie in participation in our economy, which helps the economy to grow while providing opportunities for individuals to succeed. That is why we are strongly in favour of early intervention, particularly through nursery education and in the context of the pupil premium—or pupil equity fund, as we call it in Scotland—which give young people the foundation that they require if they are to grow their skills and get work in future. Participation is the answer to questions about the sustainability of our economy and opportunities for everyone.

I have to say that the start of this debate involved a fruitless trading of statistics on

performance. There are marginal differences on growth, productivity and employment, and it is pointless to argue about them as though they were significant. We need to recognise that our economy faces a massive hurdle—indeed, there is a massive cosh over it, because of the threats of Brexit and independence.

Both threats are as bad as each other, and both governing parties are as bad as each other if they think that the differences that they highlighted are significant. We need to recognise that the constitutional upheaval that has been imposed on our country over the past 10 years has had a significant impact on our economy and that we need to make it stop if we are to give people the opportunity to achieve more.

Skills and workforce shortages are at the heart of our problems in this country, too. Today I met pharmacists—there is a big shortage of pharmacists. Yesterday, I heard about the massive shortage of general practitioners in our country. There is a massive shortage of nurses. Processing businesses are struggling to get the workforce that they need. Farms and the hospitality sector are also struggling. There is a shortage of engineers.

There are massive shortages of skills and workers, throughout the country. That is partly to do with fears about freedom of movement and our cutting off opportunities to attract people from other parts of the globe, including Europe. However, some of the problems are born here. We heard this morning about the colleges that are having real problems with their finances. That has gone on for years. We know that, year after year, the SNP Government cut a massive number of college places, and the effects are still being felt. The apprenticeship levy is not working either. Businesses tell me that because of the levy, they are cutting their training budgets rather than increasing them. If that is the effect that the levy is having on training in our businesses, it is not working.

My final point, which I hope the minister addresses in his conclusion, is that the last time that we debated this, Jamie Hepburn said that there would be immediate action to clamp down on regional selective assistance grants going to businesses. I have not yet seen any evidence that any action has been taken. There was a debate about whether it was a pilot. I would be interested to get an update on that.

Finally, 99 per cent of businesses in Scotland have not signed up to Jamie Hepburn's business pledge. Have more of them signed up since the previous debate?

16:11

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am pleased to take part in this Conservative debate on the economy. I will first focus on the part of the motion that talks about

“the need to address the skills gap in the economy”.

As others have said, it is true that there are skill shortages, but that is not because we have loads of unemployed people—unemployment is at a record low of 3.2 per cent—or people with the wrong skills. Rather, the biggest problem is that there is a lack of people. When we went into the union, in 1707, we had something like one fifth of the population of England; now it is more like one tenth. It is very hard to grow an economy if the population is not growing. It is a failure of the British project since 1707 that England's population has grown much more than Scotland's. Scotland has been let down.

Agriculture, construction and tourism are all sectors that are dependent on EU and other workers coming to Scotland. Tourism specifically is worth some £9.7 billion to the economy, and EU citizens are reckoned to make up 13 per cent of the local tourism workforce, 15 per cent of the workforce in the accommodation sector and 19 per cent of the workforce in hotels and restaurants. If boosting Scotland's economy is linked to growing Scotland's population, how can we boost the population? Well, how about being part of the European Union, which would allow the free movement of workers? How about relaxing our immigration policy so that more people can come here and work?

Of course, the UK is going in exactly the opposite direction. The UK wants to leave the EU, stop free movement and tighten immigration policies. Therefore, it seems that the UK is deliberately following policies that will damage the Scottish economy. Is the UK Government consciously following a policy to damage Scotland? Even I do not think that it is quite as bad as that, but, at the very least, the UK is pursuing policies without considering their negative impact on Scotland.

Dean Lockhart: I would like to bring John Mason into the 21st century by referring to last week's Scottish Fiscal Commission report, which blamed the £1 billion black hole in the Scottish budget on low wages and the fact that there is now a low-wage and low-skilled economy. Does John Mason not think that the priority is to focus on increasing skills and skills participation in Scotland?

John Mason: If the people are not there, I do not know how we can improve their skills. However, I am happy to make some comments about training in a moment. Bringing the

discussion right up to date, the member might note that, this afternoon, at approximately 2.32 pm, NFU Scotland issued a press release about the lack of people to work in the agricultural sector. Perhaps his party should be a little bit more worried about that.

When the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee conducted its inquiry into the Scottish economy a few months ago, we found that it compared very favourably with those of most of the English regions, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, we are always struggling to compete with London and the south-east. As the Lib Dems have said, London is like a black hole, sucking the life out of the rest of the UK.

The spread of the skills that are available in our society is an issue that the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee has touched on as part of our inquiry into the construction sector, the report on which will, I hope, be published in the next few weeks. We have heard that there is a shortage of several skills, including technical skills. In their evidence, young people have told us that the schools push university far too much and treat trades as a last resort. That should not be the case. We want able young people to be spread across our economy, and it would not be ideal if every young person went to university. If the Conservatives are arguing that more and more young people should go to university, I, for one, would question that.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will Mr Mason take an intervention?

John Mason: I am sorry—I do not have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his final 30 seconds.

John Mason: It is also worth considering the gender stereotypes that are still having an impact on the choice of career of many young people. The economy as a whole is losing out because women are not setting up their own businesses at the same rate as men, nor are they going into science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects or construction trades as much as men are. We must accept that that is a challenge for businesses, schools, colleges, Scottish Enterprise and others to take up. I was interested in the evidence from City Building in Glasgow, which said that, although it trains only 4 per cent of all the craft apprentices in Scotland, it trains 20 per cent of all the female craft apprentices.

There is a lot to be done, but my key point is that we need more people in this country, so we must allow immigration.

16:16

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It goes without saying that the ability to harness the vast pool of diverse skills in the working population of any country matters hugely to the likely economic success of that country. It also goes without saying that Scotland has a very proud history when it comes to the mobilisation of her workforce and that we are extremely lucky in modern times to be sitting on huge potential because we have so many different companies that are at the cutting edge of enterprise and innovation, whether in engineering, food and drink, digital technology or medical science. Just yesterday, I had the privilege of visiting the maritime department of the City of Glasgow College, where I saw at first hand the expertise that makes it one of the top five colleges in the world for marine engineering.

We should be clear about the fact that the potential for Scotland to lead the world in so many different sectors is immense, but we should also be clear about the challenges that we face in delivering success. The first of those is the fact that, as the recent Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland survey predicts, by 2030 Scotland will be short of 410,000 skilled workers. That skills gap is costing Scottish organisations £350 million per year according to the Open University. We know, too, that the size of that shortage has doubled since 2011, which is undoubtedly a reflection of the fact that four fifths of Scottish businesses are reporting recruitment difficulties in one form or another.

However, the debate is not just about the numbers; it is about having the right skills and, of course, tapping into as-yet-unused or underutilised potential. For example, the oil and gas sector, which is one of Scotland's best assets, reports that just under half of its companies are having to deal with shortages in key disciplines such as engineering, information technology and technical skills. It is no coincidence that the Parliament's Education and Skills Committee begins its inquiry into STEM education tomorrow, in order to understand better why Scotland is failing to recruit more STEM graduates. The committee will look at STEM education in schools, including whether there is any direct correlation between the take-up of such subjects and subject availability and choice, what the barriers are to many women entering STEM professions and why key sectors are failing to attract a sufficient number of quality STEM graduates. Those are serious questions, given the rich potential of our country.

The other worry must be the growth in the number of university graduates who end up in low to medium-skilled jobs when it is clear that Scotland is in greater need of filling higher-skilled

jobs with the necessary expertise. Since 2011, the number of university graduates who enter low to medium-skilled jobs has risen from 15 per cent to 19 per cent, and there has been a rise in the number of pupils who leave school with no qualifications at all. That is an added concern that we must take seriously.

That is just one of the powerful reasons for ensuring that all young people are actively involved in training until they are 18 and that we tackle head-on the concerns of entrepreneurs such as Jim McColl, who believe that we need to do much more to encourage young people to achieve positive destinations. Through Newlands Junior College, Jim McColl has done his level best—against some very disappointing opposition—to provide much richer training experiences for young people who have become wholly disengaged from school. We believe that his ideas have considerable merit when it comes to expanding the skills participation programme.

Surely, we need to complement the increased motivation for the majority of young people to stay on in school and training with quality opportunities for those who presently leave school with very little to their name and very little opportunity to succeed in the future. That is why the Scottish Conservatives want to increase the training participation rate among those who have not secured an apprenticeship, college place or university place and among those whose circumstances prohibit their undertaking additional training.

My colleague Dean Lockhart is absolutely right to talk about economic policies, but the skills base of our working population must be at their core.

16:20

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): The latest GDP growth rates, which were issued in May for quarter 1 of 2019, indicate that the UK's GDP grew by 1.5 per cent. In conjunction with the Office for National Statistics, the Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence has estimated that Scotland's growth rate was 2 per cent, which was the third highest growth rate of the 12 regions of the UK.

The "State of the Economy" report that the Scottish Government's chief economist issued in February 2019 opens with the words:

"Overall, 2018 has been a positive year for the Scottish economy, with growth returning across all sectors of the economy, the labour market delivering record levels of performance and further growth in exports."

A House of Commons library briefing that was published in September 2018 showed that average Scottish regional growth between 1999 and 2016, based on annual gross value added

growth, was 1.9 per cent per annum. That was the same as the UK's rate and was exceeded only by that of London, which was 3.1 per cent.

Growth in Scotland's economy is driven by consumer spending, business investment, Government spending and export activity. A lack of confidence because of the Brexit referendum resulted in annual GDP growth in Scotland and across the UK dropping significantly in 2016 and 2017. However, there is no mention of that in the Tories' motion. The motion highlights productivity and wage growth, and the latest data on productivity for Scotland show a significant rise in 2018. Productivity was up 3.8 per cent, which compared with a rise in UK productivity of only 0.5 per cent.

Dean Lockhart: Will the member give way?

Gordon MacDonald: No.

Since 2007, productivity in Scotland has increased by 10.8 per cent, which compares with a 2.7 per cent increase in the UK. In 2018, Scotland's productivity was 96 per cent of that of the UK—up from 89 per cent in 2007 and 90 per cent when the Scottish Parliament was created. The latest regional productivity analysis, which was released in February, highlighted that Edinburgh was performing 24 per cent better than the UK average and that Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire were performing 13 per cent above the UK level. On international comparisons, Scotland has higher productivity than Italy, Spain, Canada, Japan and New Zealand, to name but a few countries.

On the level of wages, the House of Commons library has highlighted that, under the SNP Government, from 2007 to 2018, wage growth in Scotland—taking the median weekly pay for full-time employees—was 28 per cent, which was four percentage points higher than the UK average of 24 per cent. The increase in the median wage in Scotland over those 11 years was the largest in Britain—it was larger than the increases in London and all the other eight regions of England, which were controlled by the Tories.

Of the 11 regions in the UK that the ONS compared, Scotland had the second lowest percentage of jobs that paid below the real living wage. At 22 per cent, that figure is still too high but is substantially lower than the figures of 29 per cent in the East Midlands and 28 per cent in Wales.

Those improvements in Scotland's economy are now under threat. The chief economist has stated that

“a no-deal Brexit remains a significant ... risk and would lead to a major dislocation to the Scottish economy.”

A report for the GMB by the Fraser of Allander institute that was published in April found that the European Union is Scotland's principal international trading partner and that Scotland exports nearly £15 billion of goods and services there. More than 45 per cent of Scotland's international exports go to the EU, with nearly 144,000 jobs having been linked to EU demand for Scottish exports in 2015. Last week, the independent Scottish Fiscal Commission reduced its growth forecasts for 2019 and 2020 as a direct result of continuing Brexit uncertainty, with no deal being worse than its current projections.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There, I am afraid, you must conclude.

Gordon MacDonald: Can I have two seconds?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. When I say you must conclude, you must conclude. You have had more than your time.

16:25

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): In order for Scotland to realise its potential, we must ensure that Scotland's greatest assets—its people—are able to achieve their full potential. For far too many people in Scotland, that is not happening. In further education, we have seen massive cuts from the SNP Government—cuts that have had a detrimental impact on colleges and college places, and particularly on places for adults.

We have to recognise that at the heart of any industrial strategy there must be a link to education and skills, and that in the modern economy skills and reskilling are essential for good jobs and a high-waged, sustainable economy. Across Scotland, we are seeing cuts to school budgets as local education authorities struggle to balance their books. The Tory motion talks about a

“comprehensive new approach to skills and training”,

but we know that the plans that the Tories set out for Scotland in the Scottish budget debate would have led to deeper cuts in public services. We cannot make changes or deliver skills or education on the cheap. It is therefore quite staggering for a party that has cut taxes for the better off, given handouts to big businesses, failed to tackle tax avoidance, chosen to force austerity on the poorest and created Brexit in order to sort out internal division to come here today to talk up their economic credentials.

Dean Lockhart: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Rowley: I am sorry, but I have only four minutes. The Tories should have put in for a longer debate.

In the time I have left, I want to touch on the Labour amendment and, in particular, another independence referendum. My view is that any attempt to hold another independence referendum without knowing the full implications of Brexit would be irresponsible. Even if a Brexit deal is reached this year, which is unlikely, we will not know enough about the consequences of Brexit to make an informed choice in any independence referendum that takes place before 2021. England, after all, is our largest trading partner, so I ask the SNP Government to think again, take the issue of indyref 2 off the agenda and seek a fresh mandate in 2021, if at that point it still believes that that is the best way forward.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Rowley: I have only four minutes.

I do not believe that any politician can tell the people of Scotland that they cannot have a referendum if there is clear majority support for one, but right now, given all the uncertainty, the threat to jobs and the unacceptable cuts that have taken place in public services, there is no appetite for more uncertainty, disruption and division. The majority of people in Scotland want us to get on with fixing those issues.

I say to the SNP that proposing another referendum is music to the Tories' ears. They do not want to talk about failed Tory austerity, failed welfare reform, failed energy policy and so on. They do not want the people of Scotland to know that under Scottish Tory plans there would be even deeper cuts to public services in Scotland, so they are happy to frame the debate around the constitution. The Tories are happy to stoke division, for it creates a smokescreen that hides their failings from the people of Scotland and the UK.

Let us focus on the big issues impacting on people and communities and get those issues sorted. That is what the people want.

16:30

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): When I saw the titles of the two debates today, I thought that they might be quite serious in nature, but unfortunately for the Tories, it has been one of those days of knockabout politics.

Earlier, we heard the Tory claims about the whole-life sentences that would happen under a Tory-led Scottish Government. Unfortunately, in this debate about Scotland's economy, once again the Tories have talked down Scotland's economy,

to feed into the narrative of the so-called strong and stable Tories who know best.

Dean Lockhart: I highlight to the member that we are not talking down Scotland's economy; we are talking down the SNP's performance over the past 12 years. We now see a £1 billion hole in the public finances that will have a direct impact on public services in Scotland.

Stuart McMillan: Mr Lockhart obviously forgets that that is a forecast about the future. We already know, because of their plans for this year's budget, that if the Tories were in power, there would be a £500 million cut to Scotland's budget.

Let us look at the record. Under the SNP, Scotland's economy is growing faster than that in the rest of the UK; unemployment is at a record low; exports are growing faster than of the rest of the UK; and productivity growth is outpacing that in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is positive, but there is still more to do. It is not a bad record, but nobody can be complacent, and I know that the Scottish Government is certainly not complacent.

The biggest threat to our economy is Brexit, and no matter how many legions of Tory MPs put their names forward to captain the political equivalent of the Titanic, it is clear to almost everyone that Brexit will have economic consequences for all parts of the UK, particularly if it is a no-deal Brexit. On that point, I do not know whether the Tories are aware of this, but in the European election last month, Scottish voters gave the Tories their worst result in a national election since 1865. I think that that tells a story about what the Scottish voters think about them.

We have heard from the Tories about last week's report from the Scottish Fiscal Commission, but the SFC reduced its forecast as a direct result of the continuing Brexit uncertainty and a no-deal option that was worse than its current projections.

The Fraser of Allander institute has suggested that a no-deal Brexit could push Scotland into recession, highlighting the challenges to Scotland's economy. According to the ITV news website on 18 April, Graeme Roy said:

"The lack of clarity about the UK's terms of exit from the EU continues to cast a shadow over day-to-day decision making, with businesses clearly struggling to make long-term plans in such times."

Scottish Government analysis also suggested that Scotland would go into recession and that unemployment would increase by up to 100,000.

In earlier comments, Dean Lockhart spoke about it being a dereliction of duty by any Government to reduce the skills and training of its young people. I hope that that is an admission of

guilt from the Tories, and an apology for what they did to the population of Scotland—and the rest of the UK—when they came to power in 1979, cut apprenticeships across the board and introduced a youth training scheme.

Dean Lockhart: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I am sorry, but I do not have any more time. I have taken an intervention from Dean Lockhart already, and I am conscious of the time.

Scotland has a good story to tell, but there is still more to do. Liz Smith spoke about skills shortages. That takes us back to the point that the Tories cut apprenticeships, which led to some of the skills shortages that Scotland and the UK have faced over the last 20 to 30 years.

There is still more to do, but I encourage colleagues in the chamber to reject the Tories, just as the population of Scotland have, and to back the Scottish Government's amendment.

16:34

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): The debate comes at a critical time for Scotland's economy. As the convener of the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee, I am acutely aware of the challenges facing our economy in the coming years. Representing the capital and the wider Lothian region, I think that we can be at the heart of an economic revolution, but that will require a bold economic vision.

It is clear that a skills shortage is severely hampering future growth prospects, and that is why the Scottish Conservatives are using this debate to outline policy that is led by a focus on technology, innovation, global trade, employment and regional growth.

We plan to introduce a new skills participation age, so that everyone up to the age of 18 is required to go to school, college or university, or, if they want to start work, to do so through a structured apprenticeship or traineeship.

There has been too much focus on pushing our youngsters through to university. That may be appropriate and it can work for many, but there needs to be a shift away from seeing vocational education as the poorer relation of the academic route.

Tom Arthur: Would the proposal that the member has outlined still allow 16 and 17-year-olds who wish to start their own businesses to do so, independently of his scheme?

Gordon Lindhurst: Yes, it would.

With the IPPR highlighting a worker shortage in Scotland of 410,000 by 2030, we need to give businesses the support that will bolster skills training. The skills shortage has doubled since 2011 on the SNP's watch; in 2018, 6 per cent of employers reported vacancies linked to the skills shortage, with such vacancies at STEM employers also on the increase.

I am therefore pleased that the UK Government has provided £270 million for data skills training over the next decade, as part of the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city region deal. The data innovation project will train 100,000 Scots and ensure that the country can be at the forefront of exciting technological advancements. That needs to be combined with a boost in productivity, which has been one of the SNP's greatest failures when it comes to our economy.

Scotland has not progressed up productivity league tables, despite the number of hours that Scottish workers work being the highest since 1998. It is time that Scotland had an economic plan that gives a lifelong skills guarantee to anyone who wishes to retrain or upskill during their career. That would give businesses confidence that they can provide workers with greater opportunities, especially low-paid and low-skilled workers, whatever their age and whatever stage of their career they may be at.

During its 12 years in charge, the SNP Government has presided over many failures when it comes to delivering for Scotland's economy. In 12 out of the last 15 economic quarters, growth across the UK has outpaced that in Scotland—a trend that is set to continue until 2023.

Scotland's economy continues to stagnate under the SNP, which continues to create uncertainty with its plans for independence and referenda as well as making us the highest taxed part of the UK and failing to seriously address the major skills shortage that is facing our economy.

That is the challenge for the SNP in the coming years—otherwise, Scotland's economy will continue to lag behind not only the UK but other equivalently sized European nations.

16:38

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I have been listening with interest, and it seems that the Tories want to talk about everything but Brexit this afternoon. There is certainly no mention of Brexit in the Tory motion. They should reflect on their dreadful performance in the European Parliament elections just a week ago.

Dean Lockhart: The Fraser of Allander institute said last week that Brexit is a UK-wide issue. Can Clare Adamson explain why Scotland is underperforming compared with the rest of the UK and will do so for the next five years?

Clare Adamson: I do not agree with Dean Lockhart's assertion. We do not control all the powers that we need to grow Scotland's economy. I will outline reasons for the Westminster Government's failure in this area.

We are in a parliamentary chamber—not an echo chamber for the Tories' empty rhetoric. If they will not listen to the verdict of the Scottish people, they should listen to our universities, our medical staff and our science and technology professionals, who tell us that the biggest threats to our economy and to skills are Brexit and the policies that have been adopted by the UK Government.

The issue is not just about the economy; it is also about demography. Scotland faces a big demographic problem that is intrinsically tied to our economic future. Ending of freedom of movement will not help, and the hostile environment will not help. Cancellation of the post-study work visa for our universities certainly did not help. It has been reintroduced for some universities down south, but where is the equity for Scotland in that? Another way in which Scotland has been disadvantaged, in the context of Brexit, is that the UK Government is talking about introducing three-year study visas for students, which completely ignores the fact that Scotland has a tradition of four-year undergraduate degrees.

The motion mentions growth. In 2018, GDP per person grew more rapidly in Scotland than it did in the UK as a whole. The motion mentions productivity. In 2018, Scotland's productivity grew by 3.8 per cent, compared to 0.5 per cent for the UK as a whole. The motion mentions wages. In 2018, Scotland had the highest proportion of employees being paid the real living wage of all the countries in the UK, with a figure of 80.6 per cent. That is a success for Scotland.

The motion also mentions skills. Last Friday, I was privileged to witness the prodigious talent that was on display at the Scottish Council for Development and Industry's STEM showcase in Glasgow. The event, which was run by the SCDI's young engineers and science clubs programme, was a demonstration of the skills of the future, with more than 300 young people representing 50 schools demonstrating the skills that will take us into the fourth industrial revolution. The event was supported by business and by organisations including the Royal Society of Chemistry, and was an excellent example of what we are doing to

ensure that the skills for the future exist here, in Scotland.

Dean Lockhart talked about second-chance centres and vocational schools. I say to him that all Scotland's schools are vocational, because we are implementing the developing the young workforce programme. The programme will run until 2021, and our schools are embracing it, along with curriculum for excellence. Our young people can take up foundation apprenticeships and can work in college and school to do vocational courses. The Tories talk down that approach as somehow disadvantaging our young people. Let us get behind Scotland and our pupils and teachers, and let us get behind the spirit of the developing the young workforce programme, which seeks to do exactly what the Tories' new ideas suggest. The Tories speak as if we are not doing anything, but we are getting on with the day job.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me just a minute, Ms Adamson. I am listening to you, but two front-bench members—I will not shame them by naming them—are talking across you, which is not polite, and I want them to stop.

Clare Adamson: We have a hulking spectre coming to haunt our doorsteps on Halloween. It is Brexit, and it is time that the Tories recognised the impact that it will have on Scotland's economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise for interrupting you, but members were just getting away with it, and that is not going to happen.

We move to the closing speeches.

16:43

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To protect our citizens and to build a fair country, we need to get the economy right—to quote a phrase, “It's the economy, stupid.” None of our aspirations can be realised without a fair and inclusive economy that meets our citizens' needs. If people are not working and paying taxes, we cannot fund an inclusive welfare state. Daily, we see the failings that arise from not doing that. Last week, we learned that there is a black hole in the Scottish finances, and that the only way to plug it is to build the economy. We need an economy that is built on fair pay and secure employment.

There are many opportunities to do that, but instead of capitalising on them, we watch many of them go abroad while our Governments cause uncertainty at home with nationalist constitutional wrangling. It is time that the SNP refocused its efforts on the domestic issues at hand, rather than wasting time on a second independence referendum. We could be building our economy, but instead the SNP wishes to cause further chaos

and uncertainty. Willie Rennie said that Brexit is “as bad as” independence, but if Brexit is bad, independence will be at least four times worse.

Jamie Hepburn talked about the constraints on the powers that he has, but the Scottish Government cannot set up a welfare system in the time that has been allowed, far less set up the institutions that we would need to run an independent country. The SNP should aspire to use the powers that we have before it asks for more.

Jamie Hepburn: Will Rhoda Grant give way?

Rhoda Grant: Very quickly.

Jamie Hepburn: I was referring to our fair work agenda, our ability to implement the real living wage as a statutory minimum wage, and our desire to see the Trade Union Act 2016 repealed. Does Rhoda Grant regret that, during the Smith commission process, the Labour Party opposed devolution of employment law to the Scottish Parliament?

Rhoda Grant: I wonder whether, had employment law been devolved, the Scottish Government would have been able to implement it. It has not been able to implement a lot of the powers that it received through the Smith commission process, and it has handed some back, so I would have no confidence in its being able to implement any other powers that it might get. Instead, it has given us a cuts commission, and under independence it would give us a decade of austerity and would cut off our biggest trading partner. As Richard Leonard told us, that would involve £14.9 billion-worth of trade with the EU and £48.9 million-worth of trade with the UK. How can the SNP think that our economy would work if we cut off our nearest neighbours?

Richard Leonard also spoke of the need for a Scottish industrial strategy. The Scottish Labour Party is firmly behind that, and it should be a top priority for the Scottish Government. We believe that it is time for a new approach to industry. We should rebalance and grow the economy differently, while retaining and building on the sectors on which Scotland once thrived, and of which it was proud, and we should pursue opportunities in new technology in order to broaden our economic base, and to help to pave the way for a green industrial revolution.

It is sad that the Scottish Trades Union Congress’s report has shown how past promises of employment in the low-carbon and renewable energy economy have not yet been delivered, and that the number of people who are employed in that economy has fallen.

Many members have spoken about the skills gap. I agree that our workforce needs to be better

skilled. Alex Rowley mentioned the cuts that have been made to further education. It is not only young people who need skills in STEM subjects; people who are working also need to reskill in order that they can keep up with new technologies. We cannot afford to leave behind anyone in our economy.

To create a fairer society, we need to grow our economy. I agree with Patrick Harvie that using GDP to measure progress on that leaves much to be desired. We need to consider whether we could do something similar to what New Zealand is doing. However, we still need secure and well-paid jobs if we are to build our economy and share wealth and power. The Scottish Government has the levers to do that, if it would only use them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Kate Forbes will close the debate on behalf of the Government. You have five minutes.

16:47

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): I will start on a point of consensus. Some good ideas have been debated today.

The debate has focused on the Scottish Government’s responsibilities for the economy. I am happy to concede that we should, because the Scottish Government has partial responsibility for the economy, celebrate our role in achieving record low unemployment, in exports growing faster than they are anywhere else in the UK, and in productivity increasing. As the EY attractiveness survey that was published today recognises, Scotland has proven strengths in its record on attracting new investment and in respect of the perception of Scotland as an investment destination. Just under a year ago, Barclays announced that it was setting up its tech hub in Scotland, thereby creating more than 2,500 new jobs. Further, last week, I welcomed the newest fintechs in Scotland. There is a lot to celebrate.

However, if we look at independent research from the Fraser of Allander institute or the Scottish Fiscal Commission, or if we speak to most businesses in Scotland, they would identify two key problems. As Stuart McMillan and Gordon MacDonald outlined, the first is Brexit. However, the second, which is particularly relevant to the debate, relates to restrictions on freedom of movement. No matter how hard Dean Lockhart tries to spin it or weasel out of it, the party that has brought the motion to the chamber is responsible for those.

Dean Lockhart: The minister mentioned the Fraser of Allander institute. Last week, it said that Brexit is a UK-wide factor. The cuts to income tax that have been forecast by the SFC arise because

income tax receipts per head in Scotland are growing more slowly than those elsewhere in the UK. Is that because the SNP has created a low-skilled and low-wage economy?

Kate Forbes: The fact that the Tories keep talking about a black hole, and displaying their misunderstanding of the whole concept of forecasts, shows that we should never let them near implementing economic policies. The Fraser of Allander institute has shown that a disorderly no-deal Brexit could push the Scottish economy into recession. No matter how much Dean Lockhart tries to whitewash reality, he cannot get away from that independent analysis.

Liz Smith talked quite powerfully about the skills base and the need for STEM skills. Having responsibility for digital skills, I take a keen interest in those matters. Tech is forecast to be the fastest-growing sector in Scotland by 2024, and only last week I launched the new £1 million fund to upskill and retrain people, which will target in particular people who are in low-wage jobs or in no job, but who have aptitude, so that we expand the workforce.

The point of all of this is that the pace of change and the changing demand for skills mean that Governments need to be agile and quick to respond—not just the Scottish Government, but all Governments around the world.

However, unemployment is at a record low, with Scotland outperforming the UK on overall unemployment, youth unemployment and women's unemployment. In the light of the figures, immigration is important. When I intervened on Dean Lockhart, in his answer he dismissed the need for immigration. That will not reassure the business community, which says that the UK Government's immigration policy is "obstinate" and "economically illogical" and that it shows that the UK Government is

"hell-bent on ignoring the business community."

Those are not my words; that was a quotation.

Dean Lockhart: Actually, I stressed the importance of immigration, going forward. I said that it is the primary responsibility of the minister's Government to make sure that young people in Scotland are fully trained.

Kate Forbes: I do not dismiss the point about adequate training, which is why I talked initially about the need to retrain and reskill. However, Dean Lockhart cannot just dismiss the end of the post-study work visa, the minimum earnings level of £30,000 and the hostile environment as though they do not have a current and present impact on our skills base, as Clare Adamson powerfully set out.

We could dwell on the negatives, but we are getting on with supporting the economy. Last month, we published "A Trading Nation: a plan for growing Scotland's exports", which sets out how we will grow the value of Scotland's exports as a percentage of GDP from 20 per cent to 25 per cent over the next 10 years. Over the next year, we will establish a Scottish national investment bank, with funds for precursor activities of £130 million. We will continue to support the building Scotland fund, which supports the Scottish economy through loans and equity investments. We have established the national retraining partnership and invested £6.3 million of capital in order to continue the national manufacturing institute for Scotland.

The Tories came to the chamber today with a wish list for a strong economy, but it was just a wish list. It utterly ignored both their role right now in jeopardising the economy, and the well-articulated views of the business community. We do not have a wish list: we have an action plan that is upskilling and retraining the workforce as well as boosting exports and supporting innovation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I call on Jamie Halcro Johnston to close for the Conservatives. You have until decision time, Mr Halcro Johnston.

16:53

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We have had a number of debates, in recent months, looking at aspects of Scotland's economy. We have looked at trade, specific sectors such as energy, and—all too briefly, unfortunately—entrepreneurship. However, those are only small parts of a far larger overall picture. In bringing this debate to the chamber, we wanted to consider the deeper structural challenges that our economy faces, as well as the need for a fresh approach from Government.

Many of the problems are easy to identify. Scotland's growth is predicted to lag behind that of the rest of the UK. Many employers report skills shortages in their sectors and have real concerns for the future. While we look to address the real issues that Brexit undoubtedly forces us to face, we have a Scottish Government that is obsessed—despite the minister's rosy appraisal of Scotland's economy—with adding to that uncertainty by pushing a damaging second referendum and building barriers with the UK, which is our largest trading partner.

Scotland must strive for economic growth, yet business confidence is low and the various strategies that the Scottish Government has

produced have resulted in little real progress—just a far more cluttered landscape.

We hear again and again from businesses that the most important requirement for investment is a skilled workforce, and I am sure that many members across the chamber can agree on at least some of the principles, such as that we need to value vocational education at least as much as we value the more academic routes, that there must be recognition that the labour market is changing, that there are few jobs for life and that, over their working lives, most people will change jobs and even sectors a number of times.

Jamie Hepburn: Does Mr Halcro Johnston acknowledge that the Government recognises those issues, which is why we have established the developing the young workforce programme, to tackle the misperceptions about undertaking vocational education as opposed to academic education and, with regard to the wider challenges in having a skilled population, why we have committed to the new skills action plan and a national retraining partnership?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I am happy to look at where the Scottish Government has taken action and praise it, but it has had 12 years to get this right and we are still in the same situation. The problem is that business does not think that it is going to get better in the future, and that is what the Government should be hearing.

There must be a real recognition that the labour market is changing and that there are few jobs for life. That is why we believe that a lifelong skills guarantee is so important. It will acknowledge that many people will have more than one career in their lifetime and that the ability for all to reskill is becoming increasingly essential.

As Dean Lockhart said, we want to see a new skills participation age and thereby ensure that everybody under 18 is in school, college or university, or is receiving structured training while in work. We want to ensure that no young person is left behind.

In several speeches in the chamber, I have emphasised the need for both a national and a local approach. Our economic statistics are generally national, and they often neglect the underlying problems in Scotland's regions, as we heard in the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee. For too many parts of Scotland, the experience of the past decade has been of being left behind. UK-wide measures, such as building a national living wage, have had a truly national impact, but the reach of many initiatives that have been heralded in the chamber are often slow to develop.

For example, foundation apprenticeships begin with a poor level of choice for pupils in many parts

of Scotland outside the central belt. Today, there are still shortcomings, and some frameworks are simply unavailable in certain regions. More than ever, improving skills is an essential step towards solving our productivity challenge, raising incomes and building a strong economy for future generations in Scotland.

There have been some insightful, and some less-insightful, speeches today, and I am sorry that I will not have time to cover all of them. Dean Lockhart spoke about how, if Scottish growth had even kept pace with that of the rest of the UK over the past 12 years, our economy would be £7 billion larger. He highlighted that, although 43 per cent of businesses in our competitor countries embed digital in their operations, only a staggering 9 per cent of Scottish businesses do so. He laid out why we are proposing an institute of technology and e-commerce, which would have the aim of supporting between 2,000 and 3,000 businesses every year—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please sit down, Mr Halcro Johnston. You are not at fault. I give the usual Presiding Officer's warning that is given at this time: members strolling into the chamber and saying hello to their pals is not on. I want to hear the closing speeches and members who have been present during the debate want to hear them. Wait until 5 o'clock. Thank you.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I was just going to get louder and louder, Presiding Officer.

The new institute would have the aim of supporting between 2,000 and 3,000 businesses every year to access new markets by moving their business on to a dedicated e-commerce platform.

Gordon Lindhurst highlighted the need to boost productivity. He acknowledged that, despite the number of hours that Scottish workers are working being the highest that it has been since 1998, there has been no progression up the productivity league tables. Liz Smith spoke about the immense potential for Scotland to lead the world in many different sectors, but she also highlighted the challenges that we face. She and Gordon Lindhurst both referred to the recent IPPR Scotland survey, which warns that by 2030, we risk being short of 410,000 skilled workers. The Open University estimates that that skills gap will cost Scottish organisations £350 million every year.

At a time when we need young people to engage in more vocational courses, when we want to promote that crucial and rewarding route, and when we should be looking to create a parity of esteem between educational and vocational paths, it is disappointing that the Scottish Government has failed to properly support Newlands Junior College. Liz Smith is quite right that initiatives such

as Jim McColl's must be a crucial part of our skills offering in the future and must engage in particular with those who are currently disengaged from our schools.

Economic policy is about facing the future and seizing opportunities, rather than being overwhelmed by new challenges. In Scotland, we have many strengths, but we must not ignore our weaknesses. In every generation since the industrial revolution, the speed of economic change has accelerated. More than ever, it seems that the Scottish Government is simply failing to keep pace.

As Rhoda Grant suggested, it is not just about the economy. Many of the privileges that we enjoy as a society depend on our economic success. We can look starkly at recent forecasts from the Scottish Fiscal Commission about the impact that weak growth in income tax revenues will have on Scottish budgets.

For many years, the devolution settlement almost completely sheltered Scottish Administrations from the impact of their economic decisions. That time has passed and we now have an immediate and real need for investment in our economy. The stark truth is that, if the Government does not get it right, the Government will not be able to do or provide the things that it currently does. Trying to squeeze the same out of our devolved revenue powers will require more and more pain.

That is why we need a workforce that has the skills to participate in current and emergent sectors. That is why we need the support in place to ensure that workers can retrain when required, whatever the stage of their working career. That is why Scotland needs a Scottish Conservative Government that is willing and able to take on the opportunities of the future, and to build an economy that works for all of Scotland.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Before the first vote, I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Humza Yousaf is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Pauline McNeill will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S5M-17503.2, in the name of Humza Yousaf, which seeks to amend motion S5M-17503, in the name of Liam Kerr, on whole-life custody sentences, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

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

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 70, Against 28, Abstentions 18.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in Pauline McNeill's name therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S5M-17503, in the name of Liam Kerr, on whole-life custody sentences, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 88, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that the courts' powers to deal with the most serious offenders have been strengthened by the introduction of orders for lifelong restriction in 2006 and the reforms to clarify the calculation of the punishment part of discretionary life sentences in the Criminal Cases (Punishment and Review) (Scotland) Act 2012; acknowledges that the Parliament will give appropriate consideration to any further proposals to enhance the courts' sentencing power, but notes that Scotland's judges can already impose a punishment part of a life sentence that extends beyond the likely remainder of a prisoner's life in appropriate cases.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-17504.3, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, which seeks to amend motion S5M-17504, in the name of Dean Lockhart, on realising Scotland's potential, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

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

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 51, Abstentions 6.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-17504.4, in the name of Richard Leonard, which seeks to amend motion S5M-17505, in the name of Dean Lockhart, on realising Scotland's potential, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)

Against

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

Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 51, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-17504, in the name of Dean Lockhart, on realising Scotland's potential, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

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

Against

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

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 59, Against 51, Abstentions 6.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament notes that the National Performance Framework's purpose is to create a sustainable and inclusive economy that increases the wellbeing of people living in Scotland, with outcomes aligned to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals; recognises that Scotland's GVA per head is the third highest in the UK behind only London and the south east of England; recognises that productivity growth in Scotland has been 0.9% per year since 2007, compared with 0.2% per year for the UK; acknowledges that unemployment in Scotland is the lowest on record at 3.2%, which is lower than the UK rate of 3.8%, but, in recognition of the need to make sure that Scotland's labour market works for all, supports efforts to make Scotland a Fair Work Nation as set out in the Fair Work Action Plan; welcomes that the Scottish Government is on track to meet its target of 30,000 modern apprenticeship starts per year by the end of the current parliamentary session; notes that the Scottish Fiscal Commission has downgraded its growth forecast as a result of continued Brexit uncertainty, and considers that Scotland's sustainable economic future is best served as an independent member of the EU.

Dementia (Alzheimer Scotland Report)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-17177, in the name of Richard Lyle, on the Alzheimer Scotland report "Delivering Fair Dementia Care For People With Advanced Dementia". The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament welcomes the Alzheimer Scotland report, *Delivering Fair Dementia Care for People with Advanced Dementia*; believes this to be an important contribution to the understanding of advanced dementia and the care needed by people in the Uddingston and Bellshill constituency and across Scotland who are living with the condition; is concerned that the report finds that, too often, they are not able to access the healthcare that they need, and acknowledges the view that they should receive the expert health care services that they need, on an equal basis with other progressive terminal conditions, which should be provided free at the point of use.

17:08

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): As convener of the cross-party group on dementia, it gives me great pleasure to facilitate the debate. I thank each and every member who signed the motion and those who will speak tonight.

I highlight the work of the cross-party group, which is doing an admirable job in advancing the debate—some members of the group are in the public gallery. Since its formation, the cross-party group has expanded the number of its contributors, pooling from a wide range of stakeholders including organisations and individuals. Particularly welcome is the committed contribution from the growing number of people with dementia and their carers, such as those from the Scottish dementia working group.

I commend and underline the courage of the people who have participated in our discussions despite the difficult and deeply personal nature of the contributions. We set aside time for personal stories, to which I listen intently. The group has been, and continues to be, the most helpful resource in aiding the Scottish Government to understand the needs of sufferers and their carers and families, and I thank the officials from the Scottish Government who attend our meetings.

I also congratulate Alzheimer Scotland on its excellent report, "Delivering Fair Dementia Care For People With Advanced Dementia", which provides an accurate analysis of the current situation in Scotland. It is right that people in the early stages of dementia are supported to live as well and as independently as possible, with a

focus on social and family support and on community connections.

More and more people with dementia are living longer and are therefore reaching the advanced stages of the illness. Advanced dementia is characterised by increasing, complex and rapidly changing needs. As the Alzheimer Scotland report sets out, we need to understand that dementia is a set of symptoms that are caused by an underlying illness. The most common cause is Alzheimer's disease, but vascular dementia is also quite common, and there are more than 100 other dementia-causing diseases.

As the Alzheimer Scotland report shows, Scotland has made great strides in improving dementia care in recent times—most notably, since improving dementia care was made a priority by this Government in 2007. The progress has been forged by hard work and effective contributions at every level—the contributions of practitioners and policy makers have been pivotal.

However, there are people with advanced dementia who are not receiving the care that they need, which means that their families and even their committed care staff are struggling to support them appropriately. That is because the current system does not recognise advanced dementia as a health condition. Dementia should not be considered as a side effect of ageing, but as the degenerative disease that it is. We must try to seriously address that issue. Happily, reports such as Alzheimer Scotland's "Fair Dementia Care" are now bringing together all the evidence, which informs us that dementia is a degenerative disease.

How can we respond to that fact? People with advanced dementia need to have the medical nature of their condition recognised and to be provided with the health and nursing care that they need. The harsh reality that we face is that the current situation creates inequality for thousands of people who are living with the advanced stages of the illness. They might not receive the care that they need, despite the fact that they would get such care if they had a recognised health condition. That means that not only are their needs not being met, but they are being charged under the banner of social care for any care that they get. Compared with people who have other progressive terminal conditions, people with dementia face a disproportionate financial burden.

As they are currently structured, such social care charges are confusing to service users. There is a lack of transparency, information on the charges is often not readily accessible on council websites, and the charges vary wildly from local authority to local authority. The lack of consistency and transparency in the financial assessment process is a major concern. Most people who seek

information do not understand how the process works, how the charges that they are asked to pay are calculated, or why, unlike with other progressive conditions, they are subject to charges for the care that they need. I hope that the Scottish Government's forthcoming adult social care review will address those issues, and I am sure that it will.

Many people will be wondering about the cost implications of achieving this most necessary social progress, but it seems pivotal to remind members that this important issue cannot, and should not, be discussed only in terms of pounds and pence. Behind simple considerations of the costings are the more than 90,000 people who live with dementia in Scotland, who, along with their carers, also need consideration.

For example, we must think of Elaine. Elaine's mum, Pat, has been in the advanced stages of dementia since 2015. Her mum had been going to a day care centre and a nursing home for respite breaks, but such inconsistent changes to Pat's environment were causing more harm than good by disrupting her mood and making her care even more difficult for Elaine at home. In the end, Pat had to move into a residential home and was there for 10 months, at her own cost. In that 10-month period, she had to visit accident and emergency departments 11 times because her care home could not meet her health needs. On her last visit to hospital, she was admitted for three weeks due to a fractured skull, but she still had to cover the cost of her place at the care home during that time, despite the fact that NHS Scotland was meeting her health and residential needs. Elaine says:

"If my mum had access to the free healthcare on the same basis as those with other progressive illnesses, she would've had a better quality of life which would have saved the numerous crisis interventions which were not only costly in the stress placed on her and her family, but financially to her and to the health and social care system. The emotional impact of being a carer and watching someone you love deteriorate is hard enough without the added worries of how they are going to pay for care."

After hearing Elaine's story—one of many like it in our country—it is clear that, as a nation, we need to stand up to address this important issue now and to ensure that all stakeholders understand its importance and the need for rapid action.

The time is no longer ripe for examining possible solutions, as the solutions have already been highlighted by the Alzheimer Scotland report. Now is the time to act and we owe it to our fellow citizens to provide a fair system that gives them the same care and security as sufferers of other illnesses, thus helping to improve the quality of their daily lives. As the motion states, people with advanced dementia should receive the health care

services that they need, free at the point of use, as would be the case with any other health condition. Our health and social care services should recognise that the needs of people with advanced dementia are health care needs and put in place services and structures that enable those needs to be met.

Dementia, and advanced dementia in particular, will be a major challenge for our country in the coming years. As I pointed out earlier, the debate concerns many women and men who, thanks to the recommendations of the Alzheimer Scotland report, would see their living conditions improve.

It should be remembered that the right to a dignified life is a fundamental right for the elderly, which is the demographic most affected by dementia and advanced dementia. Article 25 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states:

"The Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life."

We must recognise the vital and imminent nature of the issue and do everything possible to meet the expectations of those who are directly or indirectly affected by it.

17:17

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I congratulate Richard Lyle on securing the debate on his motion. I welcome the Alzheimer Scotland report, which is very helpful and lays out where we are and where we should be going.

When I was a local councillor in Edinburgh, I had the privilege of being a director of the Corstorphine Dementia Project and I saw the effects that early dementia had on individuals and families. Richard Lyle helpfully pointed out the definition of advanced dementia, which many people have. In many ways, one of the encouraging things is that people are now living longer with the condition, thanks to medical science, better care and a better understanding of the condition. Although people are living longer, that brings greater pressure—not necessarily on the person who has this horrible condition, but on their family, friends and others who are supporting them.

Richard Lyle pointed out the crux of the issue that the Parliament and our society need to consider when someone has advanced dementia: the care that is required and the cost of that care. I was interested to learn that the report calls not for social care charging to be abolished, but instead for equality. That is the crux of the problem.

As a former councillor, I believe that local authorities should be able to make their own

decisions. However, if we read the report and look at what is happening across the 32 local authorities, there is no equality—instead there is difference in both the type of care provided and its cost. We need to have a grown-up debate about the extent to which we should set national standards and guidelines and the extent to which we should allow local authorities to make local decisions. That will be a difficult question to answer. Surely, in a country that covers a large geographical area but has a fairly small population, we need consistency. Whether I live in Orkney, Shetland, Dumfries or Edinburgh, the type of care that I get and its cost should be consistent.

As Richard Lyle said, there is a lack of transparency on web pages about what people need to do and what services are available. It must be possible to make information easily accessible to families when someone gets to the point at which they need care. We need to look at all those issues, and we need to do so quickly. I look forward to seeing what the Scottish Government proposes later this year. A balance must be struck between what is set by national Government and what is left to the 32 local authorities.

As we continue to design our social security system, we need to ensure that people with advanced dementia are not left behind in relation to people with other conditions, particularly in the context of the attendance allowance and the personal independence payment.

I congratulate Richard Lyle again and look forward to the rest of the debate.

17:21

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Richard Lyle on securing today's debate and on his years of work as convener of the cross-party group on dementia, which has considered how we support people in Scotland who are impacted by advanced dementia. Both of my grandmothers died after suffering from dementia, and my mother has Alzheimer's and has been in a care home for the past five years, so I have a personal interest.

I thank Age Scotland for its briefing and I thank Alzheimer Scotland for its excellent briefing and for establishing the fair dementia care commission, whose report forms the substance of Richard Lyle's motion. The commission's purpose was to establish how advanced dementia is defined and recognised in practice, to estimate how many people in Scotland are living with the condition, and to examine how advanced dementia care is financed. That is immensely important work, given that more than 90,000 people in Scotland are living with dementia, a

condition that is often rooted in progressive illnesses, such as Alzheimer's disease, which have no effective treatment and no cure.

The effects of dementia on the individual and their loved ones and carers are profound. Carers live daily with the physical, emotional and financial burden that the illness brings.

Advanced dementia is a frequently used term that is rarely consistently defined. To ensure that people with the condition get support, it is imperative that we recognise and respond to the healthcare needs that arise during the advanced stage. The fair dementia care commission proposes a concrete definition:

"Advanced dementia is associated with the later stages of illness when the complexity and severity of dementia-related changes in the brain lead to recognisable symptoms associated with dependency and an escalation of health care needs and risks."

That is a robust definition, which should be incorporated into policy and practice. The commission goes on to say that healthcare needs and risks include

"neuropsychiatric symptoms, disorientation, communication problems, multiple functional impairments, immobility, incontinence and weight loss."

Because advanced dementia has not been consistently defined, it is difficult to estimate how many people in Scotland live with the condition. It is possible that 35 per cent of people with dementia who are resident in care homes and about 7 per cent of older people who receive non-residential social care have advanced dementia.

The figures illustrate just how many people are affected by the inequalities in dementia care that the commission highlighted. The commission said in its report:

"People with advanced dementia do not have equal access"

to healthcare, compared with people who are in the advanced stages of other illnesses. That is largely because advanced dementia is met with a social care response, which means that people with the condition are disproportionately subject to social care charges, despite their needs being largely health and nursing care related, as Richard Lyle said.

The approach is costing people with advanced dementia an estimated £50.9 million a year in social care charges. The situation is compounded by the variation in charges across local authorities and a social care system that can be complex to navigate.

The commission makes key recommendations in its report, to enable society more adequately and fairly to meet the needs of sufferers and accord them dignity. It is significant that it asks the

Scottish Government to recognise that people with advanced dementia have not just social but healthcare needs, which should be met with health and nursing care that is free at the point of delivery.

I understand that Scottish ministers are examining the report and are keen to meet the commission to discuss its recommendations. I trust that the Scottish Government will respond fully to the concerns and questions that are raised by the report, with a view to implementing the recommendations. As the chair of the fair dementia care commission, Henry McLeish, highlighted:

“Scotland is internationally recognised as having some of the most progressive dementia policy.”

Indeed, Scotland is home to ground-breaking research in developing treatments to slow down dementia and improve the quality of life of people who are living with it.

We cannot afford to stand still in tackling this great medical and social challenge. Thankfully, work is well under way right here in Scotland. Just yesterday, we heard the excellent news that Alzheimer’s Research UK has awarded £160,000 to the UK dementia research institute at the University of Edinburgh to fund its investigation into the treatment of nerve damage caused by Alzheimer’s. We must ensure that the progress made in understanding advanced dementia and its symptoms is reflected in our policies and practices. Once again, I thank Alzheimer Scotland and Richard Lyle for pressing the Scottish Government to do just that.

17:25

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Like colleagues, I congratulate Richard Lyle on securing this important debate and on the work that he leads on in the cross-party group on dementia. I looked on the Parliament’s website, and a long list of individuals and organisations are involved—well done to them all. I thank Alzheimer Scotland for its report, which we are debating tonight. The report gives us a much-needed and valuable insight. I also thank Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland for its briefing.

There are more than 90,000 people living with dementia in Scotland, and the number is rising. There will be few families whose lives remain untouched by the disease. We have just heard about Kenneth Gibson’s family experience, and I know that the debate will be important to many people in my Central Scotland region who are living with dementia or caring for a loved one with the disease.

There has been fantastic work in recent years on living well with dementia. That is welcome and

positive for people who have been diagnosed recently with the disease. With the right support, people with dementia can live well for months and years in their community and with their loved ones. However, when the disease becomes advanced and increasingly complex care needs develop, it is important that people are given the care and support that they need. Sadly, as we know from the Alzheimer Scotland report, that is not happening for people with advanced dementia.

It is simply unacceptable that people in Scotland are not getting the healthcare that they need, particularly for this terminal disease. Access to healthcare is not something that people living with dementia—or their families—should have to fight for. Everyone should have equal access to healthcare, free at the point of need. That is why Labour established the national health service more than 70 years ago. I agree with colleagues that the Scottish Government must do everything that it can to ensure that people always receive the specialist care that they need.

I know from my work as a councillor, when I held surgeries in Lanarkshire Carers Centre in Hamilton, and from working with organisations, that friends and families care for their loved ones for as long as possible, but with a progressive terminal disease such as dementia, there usually comes the difficult point when more support is needed from social care services. The impact of that decision for carers should not be underestimated; it can be truly heartbreaking for carers and families.

Social care can provide additional support or round-the-clock care when required, and that gives families lots of comfort, but it is not right that social care is being used when healthcare should be. Aside from the negative impact on health, it also means that people with dementia face a disproportionate financial burden compared to people with similar conditions. It is telling that one of the most common issues Alzheimer Scotland is asked about is the cost of care. As Richard Lyle described, social care charging policies can be confusing and lack transparency, and they vary across the country. That is understandably worrying and frustrating for families.

As we know, social care is quite a fragile and complex sector. There is a big role for the third sector and local authorities, but we find that they are surviving on short-term and often decreasing funding models. Social care needs a robust, long-term plan with real investment for a service that is increasingly needed across Scotland by our ageing population.

I thank Richard Lyle again for securing the debate. I believe that we all agree that urgent action must be taken in response to the findings in Alzheimer Scotland’s report. Seventy years on

from the establishment of the NHS, it is unacceptable that one of the most vulnerable groups in our society is missing out on the healthcare that it needs. Scottish Labour believes that there should be equal access to healthcare, free at the point of need. That especially applies to those with long-term terminal conditions.

17:29

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I join other members in congratulating Richard Lyle on securing the debate and setting the scene very well indeed. I add my thanks to Alzheimer Scotland for its detailed report, which, as others have suggested, shines a much-needed light on the issue of advanced dementia, helps with our understanding of the condition and, importantly, exposes where there are gaps in the treatment and care that are available to those who are affected by this horrendous condition.

As people are living longer, the numbers of people with dementia and advanced dementia are on the increase. The research that is being undertaken to improve our understanding of what can be done to reduce the risks, to slow down the progression of the condition and to find a cure is to be welcomed, as is the fact that Scotland is leading the way.

However, for now, we need to do more to ensure that appropriate care and support are available at the appropriate time. As Alzheimer Scotland points out in its briefing,

“it is right that people in the early stages of dementia are supported to live as well and independently as possible, with a focus on social and family supports, and community connections.”

As other members have done in their constituencies, I have seen that at first hand in Orkney, where the dementia hub that is hosted by Age Scotland Orkney offers a wide range of activities and therapies, as well as the chance to have a cuppa and a chat. It enables people to share experiences, companionship and, of course, gossip. Not just people with dementia but, equally importantly, their family and their carers get a tremendous amount out of the hub experience.

Dementia friendly Orkney runs a variety of events, including the dementia cafe and its famous singing group. As I know to my cost, the group is great fun, with the emphasis being on companionship. It has a song sheet that is a veritable back catalogue of numbers that participants cannot help but belt out lustily.

To mark dementia awareness week, shops and businesses in Orkney will be going purple, as will the iconic St Magnus cathedral. A busy week of events will take place, from dementia-friendly film screenings to singing, and from cream teas to

purple planting. On Saturday, there will be a game of walking rugby. Gillian Skuse and Steph Stanger from Age Scotland Orkney are highly persuasive individuals, so in defiance of doctor's orders, I will be putting on the boots. It remains to be seen whether I will be in any fit shape to take to the dance floor at the golden ball dinner at the Orkney rugby club later that evening. All of that shows the fun side of dementia awareness week, which will help to raise funds as well as awareness.

However, there is a serious message, too. As Alzheimer Scotland's report highlights, too many people with advanced dementia are not receiving the care that they need, despite the best efforts of their families and carer staff. A lack of clarity or consistency on social care charges means that people with advanced dementia often shoulder an unfair financial burden, as others have said.

The McLeish report called for local authorities to accept and recognise that people with advanced dementia should have equality of access to free healthcare on a par with people who are living with other progressive and terminal illnesses. That is not an unreasonable ask, and I hope that the minister agrees and that the Parliament can commit to making that happen.

I again thank Richard Lyle for allowing Parliament to have the debate.

17:33

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind): I congratulate Richard Lyle on securing the debate.

The issue that we are debating is one that has long been of interest to me. My late grandmother had dementia up until her passing in 2011. As my mother cared for her for a large part of that time, I have seen at first hand the work that goes into supporting an individual who has dementia, or advanced dementia, which, as I think most people would have accepted, latterly my grandmother had.

Alzheimer Scotland's report is timely and necessary. It rightly calls for a definition to be provided of advanced dementia. If we accept that dementia is a progressive—or, as some would say, a regressive—condition that advances throughout its course, there will come a point at which the individual's healthcare needs will become more complicated and will require different interventions. That requires a definition to be in place in order to support the health and social care services that wrap around the individual to be able to identify the point at which care needs to be provided.

One of the difficulties and challenges that have been faced—I think that Alzheimer Scotland recognises this—is the lack of research that has

been on advanced dementia. For example, a Cochrane review in 2016, which was set up

“To assess the effect of palliative care interventions in advanced dementia and to report on the range of outcome measures used”

could find only two studies to include in the review, both of which were from the United States of America. They covered 189 people. The report noted that six further studies were on-going at the time of the review, but stated that there was

“insufficient evidence to assess the effect of palliative care interventions in advanced dementia.”

Therefore, there is a need to collect appropriate evidence in order to ensure that there is data to inform decision making and care.

It is also worth noting that, unlike any of the other diseases that are among the top 10 causes of death in the United Kingdom, there is no recognised cure for dementia or a recognised official treatment that is provided to slow its progression. If dementia is detected early, that is not a sign that the individual can be cured or that the dementia can be removed. It will be there, and it will advance throughout the rest of the individual's life.

Consistency and charging merit consideration. A tension always arises between the need to respect the ability of local authorities and local decision makers to make decisions according to their local priorities and the need for us to ensure that people in neighbouring local authority areas are not treated wildly differently. We have to face that tension. Although it is possible that we do not have to move to a uniform model, given the variations between rural and urban communities, perhaps parameters need to be set in order to ensure that people have an understanding of the charges that they are likely to face.

Consistency also applies in other ways. I remember raising the concerns of a constituent of mine—Jeanette Maitland—back in 2012. Her late husband had been seen by 106 different carers in the space of a year as part of his social care package. Such an approach will have an extraordinary impact on an individual with dementia, who will often require, and indeed thrive on, familiarity and an understanding with the person who provides their care. That level of turnover of carers, with an inconsistency in the approach of carers, can only be harmful to the individual.

Charging is absolutely an important issue when we talk about consistency, but there are other areas of consistency that merit consideration as well.

17:38

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Like other members, I thank Richard Lyle for bringing an important issue to be debated. I, too, want to highlight the work of Alzheimer Scotland and record my thanks to it. I did not plan to speak in the debate, so I appreciate your indulgence, Presiding Officer.

I want to come to the issue from a slightly different angle. A couple of members have mentioned the difficulty that exists with national strategies, local authorities and local decision makers. The national strategy that the Scottish Government has brought forward is really good, but in order for it to work, it needs to be implemented at the local level.

One of the reasons that compelled me to speak is a local issue that I have been involved in, which relates to East Stewart Gardens in Coatbridge. A service is currently provided there for dementia patients—but not for much longer. The decision was recently made to close that service. There was no consultation with patients, families, staff or politicians. The impact assessment that was provided after I had written to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport—the Minister for Mental Health might be aware of that—was not very detailed, to put it very politely.

I do not think that the board will move on the issue, but I wrote to the cabinet secretary to make her aware of it. I do not expect the decision to be overturned, but it is important that the integration joint board in Lanarkshire knows that such decisions for that patient group cannot be taken so lightly in the future.

To give testament to that, I held a public meeting that was well attended and highly charged. A lot of patients and their family members turned up, and they were extraordinarily upset and angry—to say the least—about the way that the situation had been handled. There had been no consultation and they felt that they had been treated as an afterthought in the process. To people who do not know the place names, I apologise for the localism of the example, but the notion that the patients would just be moved to Coathill hospital in Coatbridge was a bit of a red herring to get them through a decision. The patients did not want to go there and it was not a like-for-like service, which is something that I have been taking up on behalf of my constituents.

One thing that came to me during that meeting, and through speaking to Richard Lyle and others about it since, is that that patient group seems to have been treated differently from others at that local level. That has been highlighted in the report that we are debating today. I wondered whether other patient groups would have been treated like

that, with so little consultation, and, if not, what the reason was for that. I was surprised. I thought that something must have happened and that somewhere down the line I would be told that there had been a massive consultation. I thought that I must have missed something, but that does not seem to have been the case.

In another case, some families came to me about an issue with supported accommodation that underwent major changes through the local authority. That was at James Dempsey Court, which is also in Coatbridge. A lot of the families who came to me were really concerned. When I spoke to the council about it, I discovered there was a difference in that situation, because the council had, indeed, undertaken a detailed piece of work on the change. However, it became clear that the council and patients' families had two opposing views on it. Both were probably technically correct, but there is a question about where things got mixed up and how we can make sure that we explain such decisions better to that patient group. As Richard Lyle and others have said, it is clearly going to become more of an issue.

To conclude, Presiding Officer, I thank you again for letting me speak in the debate, and I thank Richard Lyle, Alzheimer Scotland and everybody on the cross-party group for the work that they are doing. We all need to work together at various levels of government to make sure that we get this right.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The last of the open debate contributions is from Maurice Corry.

17:42

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Richard Lyle on bringing this important debate to the chamber, and I welcome Alzheimer Scotland's report, which has given us bold and worthwhile recommendations on which to act.

For loved ones and their families, a diagnosis of dementia, as with many other illnesses, can open the door to a host of worries and burdens. It spells the beginning of the difficult journey of a progressively worsening disease, and it takes individuals and their families where they do not want to go. I know from my time as chairman of Argyll and Bute integration joint board how difficult it is for them, so I congratulate Alzheimer Scotland on its centres and its use of art, music and singing, which are all most helpful in the lives of those people.

I have previously, in the chamber, touched on some of the consequences of the challenges that dementia brings. Financial scammers often capitalise on the vulnerability of people who are

living with dementia. As I have said, initiatives that are sponsored by groups such as the Life Changes Trust raise awareness of simple solutions—telephone call blockers, for example—that can make the world of difference to people who are living with dementia.

The focus of today's debate is how we respond to dementia when it reaches an advanced stage. It is at that point that sufferers are in critical need of reliable and helpful practices that will guide them along the right path of care. Every response should be founded on an accurate definition of symptoms, as the Alzheimer Scotland report suggests. Memory loss is, perhaps, its most significant symptom, but over time the condition sadly extends into greater and more serious health setbacks, including Pick's disease. My brother-in-law, who was an armed services veteran, had it, and he received the most fantastic care at the Erskine care home during his latter days.

With advanced dementia comes a range of complex health issues and health needs layered one upon another. The demon of dementia is of a continuously changing and deteriorating nature, and the needs of a sufferer and their families change as they learn to grapple with the disease and its increasing challenges. That has not been translated into Government policy and practices, and the report seeks to change that.

It is right that dementia sufferers be encouraged to live as independently as possible, with help from their families and carers, but advanced dementia must be recognised as being more challenging and as deserving of clear policies and care that is free at the point of use.

The experience of living with advanced dementia does not look the same for every person, but it should be universally accepted that at the last stage of the illness the need goes far beyond social care—as has been highlighted already by previous speakers. A health problem must be met with the right solution—healthcare. In the past it was assumed that the health risks and worsening forgetfulness were down to the ageing process. Thankfully, with much greater awareness, we have come a long way from that mindset.

We have seen an increase in funding for Scottish researchers to find possible new ways of treating the condition, but we still see a gaping hole in Scotland's policies when it comes to the advanced stage of the illness.

At the heart of the problem is the marked difference between dementia and other terminal and progressive illnesses, in terms of how they are viewed and the care that patients receive. While other illnesses, such as cancer, are quite rightly met with high standards of free healthcare and

end-of-life treatment, for dementia those come at a considerable cost, and varying guidelines are in place. That is despite the facts that there is not a single treatment that can either cure or slow the deterioration of dementia, and that many other major illnesses are associated with it.

The estimated scope of the costs of social care for families with a dementia sufferer points to that inequality: every year, people with advanced dementia who live in care homes have to pay £49 million for the social care that they receive in response to their illnesses. The large sum speaks for itself and lays bare the burden and complexity of decision making that those people face. The approach to advanced dementia care needs to be redirected towards a transparent and specific model of care that is free from financial worry.

Life can be challenging enough for people who live with dementia. They neither need nor deserve the added complexities and burdens of the cost of social care. Their quality of life should not be hampered by confusing and varying procedures that do not recognise their health problem for what it is. They require expert healthcare services that are provided on a free and equal basis.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Clare Haughey to wind up the debate for around 7 minutes.

17:47

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): I add my thanks to Richard Lyle for lodging the motion for debate, and I thank all the members who have made valuable contributions.

I welcome Alzheimer Scotland's "Delivering Fair Dementia Care For People With Advanced Dementia" report, and I agree with the motion that the report is "an important contribution" to the public debate on how we improve dementia care and services and in particular to our "understanding of advanced dementia".

I also agree with the proposition in the report and the motion that it is crucial that people at all stages of the illness, including advanced dementia, have the right to equal access to the high-quality expert care and health services that they need, "on an equal basis" with other progressive conditions. That right is regardless of whether they are at home, in residential care, specialist NHS care or in acute settings, and, of course, I agree with the report and the motion that the healthcare interventions should at all times be "free at the point of use."

The Government has welcomed the "Fair Dementia Care" report. We are giving careful consideration to its recommendations and are engaging with Alzheimer Scotland, the Convention

of Scottish Local Authorities and others on those. Many of the recommendations in the report are being considered as part of our work to change and improve adult social care support in Scotland.

As a mental health nurse with over 30 years of experience, I have seen many changes in how we deliver services. My first job as a staff nurse was in a long-term care of the elderly ward. Most of those patients suffered from some form of dementia, but most of them would now be cared for in their own homes with social care support and others in residential or nursing home settings—more homely settings that are closer to their own communities, family and friends.

Things have moved on greatly in that time and we know that the demand for social care support is growing due, in part, to our ageing population. Therefore, it is important that we have a social care system that fits today's needs, that is well placed for developments and demands to come and, crucially, that focuses on the people who use the support, rather than the processes that deliver it. That is why we are working with people who use social care support—carers, COSLA and a wide range of partners from across the sector—to develop a national programme to support local reform of adult social care support.

Emerging priorities from the evidence include a shared agreement on the purpose of social care support; equity of experiences across Scotland; transparency of systems, processes and decisions; raising awareness of social care support and its value for individuals and for Scotland; and valuing and supporting the workforce.

The "Fair Dementia Care" report makes a series of recommendations on social care support charging, including consistency of charging. As part of the reform programme, we will also explore the cost of care and how it is paid for. We will develop a process for working collectively to consider alternative models for funding social care that will support Scotland's people into the future. Our models must enable investment at both ends of the scale—in intensive care and support needs and in lower needs care and preventative support.

The programme is identifying some of the key areas for reform so that we can make smart and sustainable changes to ensure that our social care support is fit for the future. Delivering high-quality health and social care for people living with dementia at all stages of the illness and in all settings is a high priority for this Government and the foundation of our three national dementia strategies since 2010. Over this time, we have received international praise for our approach to dementia policy in Scotland, including our world-leading national approach to post-diagnostic support.

The fair dementia care report is concerned in particular with access to healthcare for people with dementia who are in care homes. I agree that it is important that an individual's access to high-quality dementia care should not depend on where they reside. I highlight the major Care Inspectorate report of 2017, which focused on 145 care homes. It found good progress in particular in the provision and quality of person-centred care and personalised care plans.

Our 2017 to 2020 national dementia strategy continues to focus on key areas such as post-diagnostic support and integrated home care, with an additional focus on the advanced stages of the illness, including palliative and end-of-life care.

We are continuing to help to educate and train the workforce on the complexities of dementia care, including in its advanced stages. We also continue to take national action in support of people with dementia in acute care. We are working with Alzheimer Scotland and NHS boards to support the Alzheimer Scotland dementia nurse consultants programme. Those nurse consultants have been hugely important in driving strategic local change in acute dementia care. A report on the programme has just been published. It sets out the achievements of the nurse consultants over 2015 to 2018 in key areas such as helping to embed and lead expertise in dementia care and developing staff expertise. The range of actions led by the nurse consultants includes improved person-centred care, improved responses to stress and distress in acute care and improved linkages to other care settings and the community.

Liam McArthur: I welcome everything the minister has said about developments. However, one of the concerns that was raised is that there is a lack of clarity and perhaps consistency in the charging regimes that are operated by local authorities across the country. What work is being done—alongside COSLA, perhaps—to try to create a greater degree of clarity and consistency?

Clare Haughey: Liam McArthur is absolutely right—the report highlights that point and he also highlighted it in his speech.

The adult social care reform programme is looking at a range of areas to promote greater consistency and clarity, to ensure that those who need the care and support understand what the system can provide and the costs that that may entail.

I was pleased to confirm yesterday that the Scottish Government will continue its funding support for the nurse consultants in this financial year. The successful integration of health and social care support is crucial for people with dementia, to ensure that more people with the illness can stay at home or in a homely

environment for longer; to avoid unnecessary admissions to hospital; and to ensure that they are discharged when they are ready to leave hospital.

I was also pleased to announce yesterday, at Alzheimer Scotland's conference, that we will be funding and working with Inverclyde health and social care partnership to test how we deliver high-quality, integrated dementia care at scale. In addition, we are taking a range of actions to support this agenda, including extending free personal care for everyone under 65—including for people with dementia, of course—and implementing the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and the living wage.

I thank members for their contributions in what has been a measured and thoughtful debate. I welcome the contributions from across the political spectrum, which I hope are an indication of the cross-party consensus that we can have on helping to improve the lives of people with dementia and supporting their families.

Meeting closed at 17:55.

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