



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 1 October 2019

Session 5



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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 1 October 2019

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The first item of business today is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Alastair Cameron, clerk to the south-east Scotland area Quaker meeting.

Alastair Cameron (South East Scotland Area Quaker Meeting): Friends, as clerk of south-east Scotland Quakers, it falls to me to notify our national body of arrests of our members. This year, there have been eight arrests, involving six individuals. Those are some of the Quakers who have been arrested this year throughout the United Kingdom, mostly as part of extinction rebellion, or demonstrating against fracking. There were around 40 more arrests last month at a series of demonstrations against Defence & Security Equipment International's arms fair in London.

The practice of recording arrests in our "Great Book of Suffering" dates back to Quakers' earliest days in the 17th century. In those days, Quakers could be fined just for holding unauthorised worship in their homes.

Quakers are no longer persecuted, but some of us feel driven to do things that lead to arrest. Our book of guidance has something to say about this. We are told:

"Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes."

We hear plenty of voices saying, "If you're so worried about the climate, why not focus on China or the US, where most pollution is happening? Why block traffic on North Bridge when Scotland already has some of the most progressive climate legislation in the world?"

Quakers will continue to do what we have always done: work in the place where we are and in the ways that we can, speaking truth to power. Quakers addressed Charles II directly in 1660, declaring:

"our principle is to seek peace ... seeking the good and welfare and doing that which tends to the peace of all".

Today, that means living out our convictions about the climate crisis, as well as about the causes of war. We feel driven to act. For some, that will mean a change in our diet or our decisions about how we travel. Others will go further, sometimes

getting arrested, and they will do that with the support of the Quaker community.

We commend the work of this Parliament to address the issues, but we are worried. We worry that change is neither going far enough nor coming fast enough, and that good efforts will come under constant pressure from backsliding interests.

In a world turned upside down, the clearest messages are now coming from those who have done least to create this emergency, and who have the greatest stake in seeing it resolved: our children and grandchildren, as they lead the school strikes. We are amazed and heartened as we hear them speak truth to the powerful and, hard though their messages may be, we know that we must listen.

Business Motion

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Our next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-19208, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to today's business and Thursday's business.

Motion moved,

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

(a) Tuesday 1 October 2019—

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

4.45 pm Decision Time

(b) Thursday 3 October 2019—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Justice and the Law Officers

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Ministerial Statement: Scotland's Onshore Unconventional Oil and Gas Policy

followed by Portfolio Questions: Justice and the Law Officers—[Graeme Dey].

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The motion brings forward today's decision time to quarter to 5.

Topical Question Time

14:04

St John's Hospital (Children's Ward)

1. Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will support the paediatric programme board to ensure that the return to a 24/7 service at the children's ward at St John's hospital happens as quickly and safely as possible. (S5T-01814)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): As I know the member will agree, the key factor in the full reinstatement of the service to 24/7 at the children's ward at St John's hospital is patient safety.

Since the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health review in 2016, NHS Lothian has recruited an additional 16 staff but, at the same time—as happens across our national health service—three staff have left to take up posts elsewhere, and a further three are on reduced hours or extended maternity leave. The current staffing means that 32 of the 40 out-of-hours shifts that are needed to reach 24/7 delivery can be covered, so more recruitment is needed. I remain committed to a full 24/7 service and continue to actively support the board's efforts to achieve that.

Angela Constance: West Lothian parents are deeply disappointed, not least because they face yet another winter travelling to Edinburgh with their wee ones at the weekend when they could and should be cared for locally, but they are determined to see the Scottish Government and NHS Lothian deliver on their commitments. Will the cabinet secretary commit to meet parents to say what is now different about the plan that she has outlined and when we can expect to have a 24/7 service at the children's ward?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to the member for that additional question. I absolutely understand the disappointment that is felt by parents in West Lothian. For families with a sick child, having to travel to Edinburgh is an additional worry and an additional burden when they had hoped that this would be the winter when they did not have to undertake that additional journey. Of course I would be very happy to meet the families concerned, and I would be grateful to Ms Constance for any support that she can offer in arranging that.

Angela Constance: I have asked repeatedly about support for and scrutiny of the paediatric programme board in delivering a 24/7 children's ward service. In the light of the challenges that are faced in paediatric in-patient services across the Lothians, does the cabinet secretary agree that,

given that we have a first-class children's ward, providing more services in West Lothian could not only help to anchor a 24/7 service at St John's but benefit the region as a whole?

Jeane Freeman: I very much agree with what the member has just said. She has made the important point that, in St John's, we have a first-class and undoubtedly much-loved children's ward. I am well aware of the population growth in the area that St John's serves and the nature of that growth—there are many families with young children. I fully expect NHS Lothian to consider the Lothian-wide delivery of paediatric services in hospital and in the community, and that means giving active consideration to the design and delivery of services. I have asked the chief medical officer to engage directly with NHS Lothian on that and to look across the entire estate at how, not just for this winter and the coming months but in the longer term, we can make sure that both areas of the estate are actively and properly resourced and used to meet the needs of the populations they serve.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): A number of members have supplementaries.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Following the cabinet secretary's promise in January that a 24/7 service would be reinstated in October, families will indeed be bitterly disappointed that they have been let down yet again. It has not been a good year for NHS Lothian. Can the cabinet secretary guarantee that the paediatric service at St John's will be fully reinstated by the end of 2019?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Ms Lennon for that question. For the record, I say that, when I made my statement in January, I made it very clear that it was not a promise but a commitment, because I am not personally in charge of staff recruitment. Of course, I have asked NHS Lothian to overrecruit to ensure that it can take account of things such as long-term sickness, all of which play a big part in the rota.

At this point, without further detailed discussion with NHS Lothian about other opportunities such as advanced nurse practitioner training, which Ms Lennon will recall is a significant part of what makes a sustainable rota, I know that NHS Lothian has recruited to what it describes as hybrid consultant posts—posts in which consultants work both in Edinburgh and at St John's. There may be more to do there and there may be more to do in the use of existing staff who are prepared to take on additional hours—in a sustainable, long-term way, not in a short-term way—as well as in recruitment.

The chief nursing officer, the chief medical officer and I will look in considerable detail at NHS

Lothian's specific plans in addition to what we already know about what it intends to do, and we will then discuss what more we require it to do. On the basis of that, I will feel more confident about being able to indicate exactly when I think that NHS Lothian will be able to reach full 24/7 provision in the children's ward at St John's.

I restate that my commitment is absolute to getting to a 24/7 provision in the children's ward at St John's and—to take up Ms Constance's point—to maximising the use of St John's for paediatric services.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): When will the cabinet secretary be able to come back to the chamber and give members an update and, more important, give parents an update as to when the service will be available? Will she work with NHS Lothian and her colleagues in the Scottish Government to look at the transport issues that parents face when trying to get back to West Lothian, particularly on a Sunday night, when there is a limited number of public transport options? What provision can be made for parents so that they can visit their children and then be able to get back to their homes?

Jeane Freeman: On the question of transport, my understanding is that NHS Lothian offered additional support to families who had to travel into Edinburgh sick kids hospital and then return home. If that is not the case, I am happy to look at that again or to look at what more NHS Lothian might do and raise that issue directly with it.

On when I will be able to come back to the chamber and update members, that is a difficult question for me to respond to directly. However, I make a commitment to update members at the start of November on the progress that we have made in October.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I hope that the cabinet secretary can see this copy of the *West Lothian Courier*, from February 2012, with the headline, "Staff Crisis in Kids Ward". This shambles has gone on for seven years and it is still not resolved. The cabinet secretary said that the paediatric board met at the end of August and made a decision then that it would not reopen on a 24/7 basis in October. Why has it taken from the end of August until the end of September—a month later—to make that decision public?

Is it just a coincidence that NHS Lothian had to reply to a letter that I sent it about this issue last week? Is that why a Government question was set up for Angela Constance so that the cabinet secretary could give the answer that was given? Is it any wonder that the public have little faith in NHS Lothian or in the cabinet secretary when we see a shambles at St John's and an even greater shambles at the sick kids hospital?

Jeane Freeman: I completely understand Mr Findlay's anger about this matter. However, it is not the case that there was a sudden flurry of Government activity because he wrote a letter.

Neil Findlay: Aye, right!

Jeane Freeman: The programme board made that decision at the end of August but we questioned that decision and looked at it further.

Neil Findlay: It is a stitch-up.

Jeane Freeman: Mr Findlay may be cynical and sceptical about that but it does not alter the facts of the matter. Members would expect me to query—

Neil Findlay: It has been seven years.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Jeane Freeman: Members would expect me to query a board if it tells me that it cannot do something when I have made a commitment that I need it to do that. Of course I went back and queried that, otherwise I would be failing in my responsibilities as a cabinet secretary.

Neil Findlay: You are not meeting your responsibilities.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay, please.

Jeane Freeman: I do not think, Presiding Officer, that it is overly helpful when I am trying to be clear in the chamber for a member to insist on continuing to shout at me. I am trying to make sure that members are kept up to date. I do not know how well Mr Findlay knows Ms Constance but trust me when I say that setting up Ms Constance to do anything is a very unlikely circumstance.

Neil Findlay: She asked a question for the Government.

Jeane Freeman: She asked a question, quite legitimately, as the constituency MSP, just as Mr Findlay has a legitimate locus in the matter. There is no conspiracy or attempt to keep matters from the Parliament—that is not my way and it has not been the case here. More important is that it is not my way to keep information from the families who are directly affected. That is why we have been clear on the issue and why I will take up Ms Constance's offer to meet the families that I met previously to hear from them what they need me to do now.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Given the well-publicised difficulties and challenges facing the sick kids hospital in Edinburgh, will the cabinet secretary outline what support has been given to nearby hospitals that are treating patients who have been diverted from St John's? The cabinet secretary said that the issue of staff leaving their posts has contributed to the delay.

What steps are being taken to ensure that staff wellbeing is prioritised at St John's?

Jeane Freeman: As Ms Johnstone is aware, a number of steps are being taken at the existing sick kids hospital at Sciennes, as the staff and services are continuing there while we ensure that the new site is safe and fit for purpose. That includes additional support to staff as well as matters relating to the building and facilities and so on. In addition, as I said in answer to Ms Constance, we are looking at a Lothian-wide paediatric service that maximises the use of all the resources at the board's disposal. Indeed, when I visited the staff at the sick kids hospital last Monday, I heard from one of the senior paediatric consultants, who wished to ensure that the capacity, resource and quality of service at St John's are maximised.

The offer to staff at St John's in relation to mental health and wellbeing is as I would expect NHS Lothian, and any other board, to provide. However, if Ms Johnstone wishes, I will make a specific inquiry as to whether any additional steps are being taken and advise her of that.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): In January, the cabinet secretary said:

"I will ensure that, month by month, we make the progress that we need to make by October."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2019; c 11.]

What lessons have been learned from the experience, given that, as Neil Findlay outlined, we have had years and years of understaffing problems at St John's that have not been successfully resolved? The cabinet secretary is not able to give a commitment on the timescale today. What will she do to ensure that the issues are fixed? In her answer to the first question, the cabinet secretary mentioned the number of staff moving on. That seems to me to be totally unsurprising—these days, surely we have to expect that and plan additional staff capacity to give the hospital the numbers that the hard-pressed staff who are there already and the patients urgently need.

Jeane Freeman: Ms Boyack is absolutely right that planning a sustainable rota involves fitting in questions that can be anticipated, such as staff leaving, holiday entitlement and sickness absence. However, it is not possible to plan for long-term sickness absence that does not begin that way or for long-term maternity leave that does not begin that way. It is not possible to plan for a situation in which staff have made commitments to a particular service and then decide that they wish to take up opportunities elsewhere. That is entirely reasonable and they are entitled to do it—it may be for personal reasons or because of domestic circumstances.

That is why I have asked and continue to ask NHS Lothian not to recruit to the numbers that it thinks that it actually needs for a 24/7 service but to overrecruit, if sufficient numbers come forward in a recruitment exercise. That is the approach that we are taking. We track the situation month by month and we will continue to do so to meet the commitment that I have made.

“Thematic Inspection of the Scottish Police Authority” (Response)

2. James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the HMICS report into the Scottish Police Authority, including the finding that it has “no clear vision, strategy or plan in place”. (S5T-01821)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): The SPA has developed, and is in the process of implementing, a significant programme of improvement, and the thematic inspection by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland has found evidence of genuine progress on that over the past 18 to 24 months. That includes the appointment of experienced and talented individuals to the SPA’s board and Police Scotland’s leadership team. However, I recognise—as does the SPA—that that improvement journey must continue. The report helpfully highlights key areas of focus for the future, a number of which the SPA has already begun to address.

In June 2017, the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland published their 10-year policing strategy, “Policing 2026: Serving a Changing Scotland”, which set out a long-term plan for building a sustainable, modern and flexible police force. At the start of next year, that strategy will have to be refreshed to take account of the new strategic police priorities that set the overarching framework for policing in Scotland. The Scottish Government consultation on those priorities closes on Friday.

James Kelly: While I was listening to the cabinet secretary’s response, I started to wonder whether he had been reading a different report from the one that I read, because the verdict in that one was damning. It said that there were serious flaws in governance, in that the chair and a number of board members had been acting well outwith their core non-executive roles. There was also said to have been a “lack of rigour” in the SPA’s holding the chief constable to account, and a conflict of interests at its core.

Why there has been a complete failure on the part of the Government to highlight and manage the serious problems that have been detailed in the HMICS report? Will the cabinet secretary set out a clear plan with a timeline for addressing its specific recommendations?

Humza Yousaf: Given the picture that James Kelly has painted of the report, I genuinely question whether he has fully read it himself. In my opening remarks, I said that I recognise that the SPA has improvements to make—having read the HMICS report, I have no doubt about that. For the sake of brevity, I will not read out reams of quotes from it, but I highlight that the inspector said:

“The current SPA Chair and Board members bring a wealth of experience and skills from a range of professional backgrounds that can usefully be brought to bear on the governance of policing.”

Mr Kelly’s substantive point about executive and non-executive powers involves a good and serious question that it is appropriate to ask. That is why, in my immediate response to the HMICS report last week, I said that the Scottish Government has agreed with the SPA to look at its organisational, governance and accountability frameworks. I will keep James Kelly, other members of the Justice Committee and other justice spokespeople up to date on the timescales associated with that review.

James Kelly: In setting the culture and tone of an organisation, leadership rules are important. Bearing in mind his first response, does the cabinet secretary agree that it is unacceptable for the chair and a number of board members to act outwith their non-executive roles? Will he immediately set out a timeline for the review of such roles, to ensure that the chair and board members carry out their work appropriately?

Humza Yousaf: As I have already said, I will give James Kelly details of the review that the SPA has agreed to carry out, which will look at the executive versus the non-executive space. Of course, the SPA board operates within the “On Board” principles. In fairness, I think that every one of us would recognise that the SPA has a unique role in that it performs scrutiny of the chief constable and also looks forensically at the delivery of certain policing functions.

It is also worth my saying that although I take very seriously what James Kelly has requested, and the Government will carry out that review, there is a fine line here. The SPA was created to be a buffer between operational policing and the Government, and it is right that that is so. I am happy to work jointly with the SPA to undertake such a review, but I certainly will not be stepping into a space where James Kelly might accuse me of interfering at the same time as telling me to involve myself. I am sure that he would be the first person to tell me that I was interfering.

Lastly, even the SPA’s harshest critics recognise the tireless hard work that the chair, Susan Deacon—who I am sure is well known to James Kelly—has done in that space. The SPA must and will improve, but it is in a remarkably

better place under her leadership than it had been previously.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): A large part of the controversy surrounding the SPA was to do with meetings being held in private with no chance of public scrutiny. Can the cabinet secretary tell us the SPA's current policy on meetings being held in private?

Humza Yousaf: Again, the member is right to make that point. Previously, there was criticism of the SPA for holding the meetings in private. However, I think that it is absolutely right to say that Susan Deacon, under her leadership, has brought much more openness and transparency to the SPA. In fact, that is recognised in HMICS's report. The inspector says that the SPA

"has made a number of changes and improvements over the last 18—24 months to improve the overall system of governance, including a revised Committee structure, a new Governance Framework, Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation."

The member's specific question about the SPA is a matter to raise directly with it, but I certainly know from my conversations with Susan Deacon that, where the SPA can be open, public and transparent, it will be—with the understanding, which we all have, that some sensitive matters need to be discussed in private.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the passage in the report that says:

"Some local authorities remain concerned that national policy decisions, and their impact locally, are not the subject of effective engagement and consultation and that there is a disconnect between local scrutiny and the SPA Board."

Given that local engagement and maintaining local relationships is a key feature of the SPA, what steps will he take to resolve that very important matter?

Humza Yousaf: The chair of the SPA, the chief constable and I have regular meetings, and we are all committed to that local accountability and to further devolution of policing to local communities. I am sure that the member has heard the chief constable say on many occasions that policing is only done with the consent of the people, so having people involved is hugely important.

I see John Finnie pointing to the report. The issue around governance is highlighted on page 5, where the chief inspector says that the SPA

"has improved its visibility and engagement with local authorities",

but also, crucially—this is the member's point—that it

"has recognised the need to improve its overall approach".

I will, of course, take away what the report says. Some of the recommendations are for Government. Equally, however, most of them are for the SPA. The point about local accountability is an important one that is not lost on any of the triumvirate that are involved in policing.

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): Although most of the recommendations in the report are, as the cabinet secretary said, for the Scottish Police Authority to take forward, will the Scottish Government commit to considering its role in delivery, including providing on-going support to the authority as it addresses the issues? Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is important to recognise the findings in the Justice Committee's post-legislative scrutiny report, which says that more equal access to specialist support and national capacity is a success story and that it has particularly benefited victims of crime such as domestic and sexual abuse?

Humza Yousaf: Yes. Shona Robison makes a hugely important point. Those who represent particular victims of those terrible crimes, particularly rape and sexual offences, while of course calling for further improvement—they are right to do so—have said publicly and on the record that the investigations of those terrible crimes nationally, under Police Scotland, are in a better place compared with the position previously, under the legacy forces.

However, none of that takes away from the fact that the report makes for sobering reading—I do not doubt that. The recommendations that are for the Government will be taken forward, and of course the SPA will reflect on the majority of the recommendations, which are for it. I will continue to keep the Justice Committee updated on our progress.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): This feels like groundhog day. How, more than six years into the existence of the SPA and almost two years into the tenure of Susan Deacon, can there still be fundamental conflicts of interests and so much confusion about who does what and where the boundaries lie?

Humza Yousaf: I think that even Liam McArthur would have to accept that the SPA, as an organisation, has a unique function in statute. Although it is, I stress, still abiding by the "On Board" principles, it has a unique function in relation to scrutiny of the police and its dual role in supporting policing.

I say to Liam McArthur that I listened intently to his speech in the debate about police and fire reform that took place in the chamber a few weeks ago, and I will quote from it directly so that I am not misquoting. He said:

“Susan Deacon, for whom I have the utmost respect, is due considerable credit for many of the reforms that she has introduced since she took over as the chair of the SPA.”—[*Official Report*, 12 September 2019; c 79.]

I think that all of us can recognise—as Liam McArthur clearly has, based on that quote—that Susan Deacon has done an excellent job in driving forward some really impressive change in the SPA.

Liam McArthur’s wider point is around what else has to be done. There are very clear recommendations, as we heard in James Kelly’s question, around the executive and non-executive space. We will do a review of that and other governance issues, and I promise to keep Liam McArthur and the rest of the Justice Committee informed of progress.

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): A recurring theme that has been identified is the limited ability of the SPA board to recognise issues of public interest and to hold Police Scotland to account when it comes to community policing. How will the Scottish Government increase the effectiveness of the SPA board to recognise those issues of community policing, and how will it move the issue forward?

Humza Yousaf: Again, we will look at the recommendations carefully—clearly, the local element is hugely important to all of us. The feedback on local policing is very positive, and that is not just my view. I read with interest a letter in the *Greenock Telegraph* on Monday 12 August from Councillor David Wilson, who is a Conservative councillor, not a Scottish National Party councillor. He said that he can only comment on the quite unanimous feedback from constituents that they feel more secure than they did in the past and often comment on the visibility of our police.

That is a really positive comment from someone who is on the ground—in this case, in Greenock.

I think that we are making positive progress in relation to policing at a local level, but that is not to take away from what HMICS has said and from what Gordon Lindhurst and others have said around the local element. Therefore, we will take forward those recommendations and I will keep members who have an interest in the matter updated on our progress.

Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 (Post-legislative Scrutiny)

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee debate on motion S5M-19160, in the name of Jenny Marra, on post-legislative scrutiny of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010.

14:32

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): On behalf of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the committee’s scrutiny of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 with colleagues from across the chamber, and across parties, this afternoon.

In May 2018, members debated a motion by Alex Neil, who is a member of the committee, calling for post-legislative scrutiny of the 2010 act. After hearing stories from other members of the committee of out-of-control and dangerous dogs throughout Scotland, the committee unanimously agreed that it was important that the effectiveness of the 2010 act be scrutinised.

The committee issued its call for evidence on 3 July 2019 and received 49 responses from local authorities, animal welfare organisations, medical practitioners, representative bodies and members of the public. From the submissions that we received, it quickly became clear that wider dog control issues, primarily those falling under the scope of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, were also of great concern to members of the public.

The committee began its scrutiny by holding three public engagement events, in Airdrie, Dalkeith and Dundee, where members heard shocking stories of people and pets being attacked by out-of-control dogs. Members of the public attending those sessions also shared their frustrations around the subsequent actions of the enforcement bodies, primarily police and local councils.

The committee began its formal oral evidence taking by hearing from parents whose young children had been attacked and seriously injured by dogs. I think that we all felt that it was one of the most powerful committee meetings that we had ever attended. We listened in horror as Claire Booth and Lisa Grady spoke of the dog attacks on their children and the life-changing injuries that they received as a result. We were humbled as Veronica and John Lynch bravely shared with us the events around the tragic incident in which their daughter Kellie, at only 11 years of age, sustained fatal injuries when she was attacked by two

Rottweilers. The summer that that happened, Kellie had been due to start at St John's high school with me. Our year group was much the poorer for her absence.

The committee and I thank those parents for their bravery, and we thank each person who shared their experiences with us. That reinforced to the committee how important it is to have effective dog control legislation in place and the consequences if it is not in place.

We also heard from medical professionals who treat patients who have been injured in dog attacks. Dr Alasdair Corfield, from the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, considers that every dog bite injury is a significant event. Dr Judy Evans, from the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, told us that in every case of a child coming in to see the plastic surgeons with a dog bite injury, there is not just one patient; there will be at least five. There will be parents and, perhaps, grandparents; that all adds to the burden for our national health service.

The Communication Workers Union told us that, since the 2010 act, 2,500 postal workers have been attacked. Local authorities and dog wardens told us of the challenges that they face when they attempt to enforce dog control legislation.

Some of the members of the Communication Workers Union have joined us in the public gallery today. They are posties, some of whom have been savagely attacked by dogs. Since April this year, there have been 129 attacks on Royal Mail employees in Scotland. If there had been 129 assaults on postal workers by people, that would be taken a lot more seriously.

John is in the gallery. He is a postie and he works in Dumfries. A year ago, he was savagely attacked by a dog. His arm was horrifically injured and he has a permanent disfigurement and disability. He is 60. He told me that he had three firsts that day: he had never been in an ambulance, he had never had an operation—that tells us about the burden on the NHS—and, surprisingly enough, he had never been in Glasgow. John is bravely but necessarily back at his work.

That is the scale of the threat that our workers face every day. They have more and more contact with householders, and, as a consequence, dogs, because they deliver an increasing number of parcels, which forces them to go to the door and be welcomed into the house or have a transaction on the doorstep.

The stories and safety of other delivery people, such as Amazon drivers, and of care workers, who spend a lot of time in people's homes, are untold, because those industries are not as well organised

or represented. Make no mistake, however—the threat to them is just as grave.

I turn to the committee's conclusions. We heard the evidence and we concluded that current dog control law in Scotland is not fit for purpose. We thought that that was a national crisis of safety for our children and citizens in general. We recommended that, without delay, the Scottish Government undertake a comprehensive review of all dog control legislation. In its report, the committee also set out recommendations to improve the implementation of the 2010 act in the interim.

I thank the Minister for Community Safety for her response to the committee's report. I welcome her commitment to undertake a review to look at improving the operational effectiveness of the 2010 act, followed by a wider review of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

However, today, I seek assurances that the minister fully understands the gravity and public safety aspects of the situation. When she appeared before the committee, I was not convinced that she demonstrated full understanding of the issues.

In its report, the committee set out a range of issues that should be addressed as part of that wider review. It stated that action needs to be taken now to tackle dog attacks and it identified actions that would allow us to do so.

The committee welcomes the minister's commitment to undertake those two reviews and asks that she provide the Parliament with detailed timescales for those reviews and, crucially, what issues she anticipates that they will include.

The committee asked that a public awareness campaign around the 2010 act be undertaken as a matter of urgency and said that it must include material that is directed at children and parents.

The committee notes the Scottish Government's intention to develop a social media campaign in the next few months. Today, we would like a clearer indication of the timescale for that and how the Government plans to direct the campaign at children.

The committee also seeks a timescale for the Scottish Government to engage with local authorities on more tailored approaches to raising awareness of the 2010 act.

As part of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010, Parliament voted to establish a dog control notice database. That is important because, as the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee has identified across a range of Government policy, there is a grave absence of data and evidence for the Government to base its policy on. Way back in 2010, when Christine

Grahame's bill was passed, Parliament agreed that a database was a sensible way forward. It would allow the Government to keep track of where dogs are, where attacks have happened and whether dogs that have attacked move around the country with families to other local authority areas.

However, to date—nine years later—the Government has failed to enact that provision. The National Dog Warden Association Scotland told the committee that the Scottish Government's failure to set up a database was a big miss. I ask the minister today why she feels the need to consult again on the database, when Parliament already consulted on and debated its merits nine years ago. Why put us through more expense and delay on this? If she could commit today to enact the powers that Parliament has already passed and establish that database, it would give committee members some comfort.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Although I agree entirely with the member's point, does she recall that, in the stage 3 debate on the bill, in April 2010, it was reported that the committee did not support the establishment of a database, although it accepted, in section 8 of the bill, that it was proper to put in a provision, should such a database be required at a later date?

Jenny Marra: Stewart Stevenson raises a valid point, although it still does not answer my question about why, despite Parliament passing that power, nine years later absolutely nothing has been done about it. If the minister could address that when she speaks, I would be very grateful.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the evidence that the committee took on the "one free bite" rule. This will surprise you, Presiding Officer, but our courts have a rule that if a dog's bite permanently injures and disfigures a person, if there was no reasonable apprehension or even a thought that that dog might bite, the dog and the owner effectively get off scot free. The committee considered that to be a real problem and an anomaly in the law. During the committee's consideration of the evidence, I spoke to one person who was absolutely appalled that she had been disfigured and that the owner of the dog had been let off scot free by our courts because of the "one free bite" rule. We took evidence from the Faculty of Advocates and the Crown Office, but if, as part of the wider review of legislation, the minister could review that law, which I think is unreasonable now, that would be very welcome.

The committee is pleased to note that several local authorities are now proactively meeting local police to help to form better working relationships. This may sound like a technical point, but it is crucial. When we took evidence, we found that,

because dog control law is the responsibility of local councils and police, there was a real misunderstanding—especially among the police, I should add—about who was responsible for enacting those powers and taking control of an incident involving a dog. East Dunbartonshire Council in particular has undertaken to discuss all cases with local police officers and agree a suitable course of enforcement action in each instance. We welcome that, but we would encourage it to happen throughout the country.

Prime Minister—[*Laughter.*] I know—that is a promotion. Minister, the committee would also like to see data collection in hospitals soon. A doctor told us that they reckoned that there were 5,000 incidents across Scotland of people going to accident and emergency departments with dog bites, but no hard data on that has been collected by the Government. If we were able to collect that information, using simple recording mechanisms in hospitals and A and E departments, it could show the full extent of the problem.

For workers, for families and especially for children, this is a grave public safety concern. The posties who I met at lunchtime fear a fatality among their colleagues or other home workers. Thirty years on from the death of Dundee schoolgirl Kellie Lynch, we think that there are more dogs—we do not know, because of the lack of data—and that the threat is greater, yet there are not better laws to protect our citizens. We have a unique opportunity now, with the minister's commitment to review these two pieces of legislation and to consult. I hope that Parliament can come to a consensus and seize this opportunity to make our communities safer, especially for our children.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee's 4th Report 2019 (Session 5) *Post-legislative Scrutiny: Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010* (SP Paper 572).

14:45

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): I welcome today's Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee debate on the important issue of the control of dogs, and I am grateful to the committee and the clerking team for preparing a comprehensive report. I also thank those who provided evidence to the committee, in particular the members of families who have been affected by the traumatic and tragic experiences of serious dog attacks.

The Scottish Government responded last month to the recommendations that were directed to us, and I will explain the actions that we are taking to

strengthen the operational effectiveness of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010.

At the outset, I confirm that the Scottish Government is committed to helping to keep communities safe from irresponsible dog owners and their out-of-control dogs. That is why the Scottish Government is progressing two reviews exploring steps to improve the dog control legislative regime. The first review, published last week, looks at practical measures that can be taken to improve the operational effectiveness of the 2010 act. The second review, which will be published next year, will consider the wider dog control legislative area, including whether the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 should be reformed. I will discuss those reviews in more detail shortly.

It is important to reflect the fact that the vast majority of Scotland's estimated 600,000 dog owners are responsible people who take good care of their animals and enjoy the widespread benefits of dog ownership. Owning and caring for a dog brings many benefits. However, owning a dog brings with it certain important responsibilities, including keeping that dog under effective control within our communities. It is unfortunate that a small minority of owners do not control their dogs, as that can put public safety at risk.

In 2013 and 2014, the Scottish Government consulted on measures to better promote responsible dog ownership in Scotland. In 2015, we announced our intention to make microchipping of all dogs compulsory, allowing authorities to identify a dog's owner. That came into force from April 2016. In May 2016, the Scottish Government issued a protocol detailing the responsibilities of various bodies in dealing with irresponsible dog ownership. As the committee found in its evidence, that protocol has been welcomed as clarifying the responsibilities of various enforcement agencies.

Evidence is crucial in understanding the extent of issues relating to out-of-control dogs. As the report found, there is a lack of comprehensive data on the full extent of the problem of out-of-control dogs. There is also a lack of such data showing how the problems that are associated with out-of-control dogs have changed over time. The data that is held relates to dog owners who have had formal action taken against them through the justice system or by local authorities. It is noteworthy that the number of prosecutions under the 1991 act of dog owners who allowed their dogs to be dangerously out of control dropped by one third between 2012-13 and 2017-18.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The Communications Workers Union is concerned that police and prosecutors deny that a "one free bite" rule exists. What is the minister's position on that?

Ash Denham: I believe that what the member is referring to involves the term "reasonable apprehension", which Jenny Marra described.

I have seen the letter from the Communications Workers Union on behalf of postal workers, and I would be happy to meet representatives to discuss their concerns face to face. I am sure that they would be willing to take up that offer.

In 2017-18, the number of cases of out-of-control dogs—that is, cases in which a dog control notice was issued under the 2010 act—was at its highest level since the DCN regime was introduced in 2011.

However, as the committee acknowledged in its report, there is a lack of regular data that shows the effect of out-of-control dogs—that is, the number of injuries associated with dog bites and dog attacks. Such information is important if we are to understand the extent of problems associated with irresponsible dog ownership and how such problems have changed over time.

We have some information from individual NHS boards, in response to freedom of information requests on injuries caused by dogs, but that is far from the full picture. I absolutely acknowledge that, within the very real constraints in relation to placing new recording burdens on the NHS, we need to consider whether more regular data in the area can be routinely collected.

Jenny Marra: I completely appreciate what the minister said about placing new recording burdens on doctors. However, if we introduce a simple tick-box for a dog attack, we will gain a much better understanding of the issue. We might then be able to prevent future attacks, so that people do not end up in A and E in the first place.

Ash Denham: Yes, and that is absolutely why I will see whether it is possible to record such information.

Without that information, it will be difficult to build up a set of data that enables us to understand the full extent of the problems that are associated with out-of-control dogs. That understanding is essential if we are to develop evidence-based policy and an operational enforcement response to irresponsible dog owners and the problems that their dogs create.

The committee received evidence on the role and practice of independent enforcement agencies. Members should be aware that a key consideration is whether it is the legal framework or the way in which the framework is used by agencies that requires improvement. Although the report rightly raised a number of issues to do with the legal framework, a critical issue is how independent enforcement agencies such as Police Scotland and local authorities use their powers.

I am afraid that the committee found that there is wide variation in local authorities' approaches to using the powers in the 2010 act. Some local authorities have issued barely any DCNs since the 2010 act came into force. Changes to legislation will make little difference if local authorities do not seek to use their powers.

The committee took evidence from Police Scotland, which acknowledged that, as far as police officers' understanding of their dog control enforcement powers is concerned, there is

"inconsistent knowledge across the country".—[*Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee*, 7 March 2019; c 39.]

Effective and consistent enforcement throughout Scotland is fundamental to addressing issues to do with out-of-control dogs.

The 2010 act brought in a preventative regime. As the committee made clear, changes to the 2010 act in light of the experience of its use could aid local authorities in their enforcement efforts. That is the subject of the first review that I mentioned: the Scottish Government consultation document, "Improving the Operational Effectiveness of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010", which was published last week, focuses on practical improvements that can assist local authorities as they discharge their functions under the 2010 act.

The consultation seeks views on, for example: the need for more powers to be available to local authority authorised officers when dealing with dog owners; the establishment of a national dog control notice database; the seizing of potentially dangerous out-of-control dogs; the sharing of information with people who report out-of-control dogs; new fixed-penalty-notice powers for breaches of dog control notices; the need to raise awareness of local authority dog control powers; and the need to update statutory guidance and the non-statutory protocol that enforcement agencies use. The views that are offered on those practical measures to assist the use of the 2010 act powers will inform the Scottish Government's next steps.

The committee suggested more fundamental changes to the law relating to control of dogs. The Scottish Government will publish a wider review document next year that will look at wider reform to dog control legislation, including the committee's suggestion that we lower the threshold for dog owners' criminal liability for their dogs' behaviour.

The effect of dog attacks can be tragic and I want to explore in next year's review whether, as the committee has recommended, a dog owner should be fully responsible for the actions of their dog if an attack takes place. The way in which the law works is that, when a dog attack occurs, there

requires to be what is called "reasonable apprehension" on the part of the owner that the dog may injure a person. A change so that, for example, reasonable apprehension was no longer part of the way in which the criminal offence worked would be a significant shift in the law. Members will understand that it would need to be carefully assessed to ensure fairness for all, without any unintended consequences.

I will listen carefully to the views that are offered in the debate—I again thank the committee for looking at the issue and the way in which it has done so. However, it is also clear that independent enforcement agencies, such as local authorities and Police Scotland, should respond to the issues that have been raised in the report: awareness among relevant staff of the powers that exist needs to be improved; application of those powers needs to be more consistent; and information sharing between enforcement agencies needs to build on existing best practice.

All those things, coupled with changes to improve the operational effectiveness of the 2010 act, can lead to the preventative regime of dog control helping to reduce the number of dog attacks that take place.

14:56

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of the Conservatives, who will be supporting the motion. As a member of the committee, I thank the clerking team, the Scottish Parliament information centre and, especially, the witnesses who contributed to this very valuable inquiry—I agree and support the convener's remarks about that.

Today's debate on the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 takes into account the impact of the law and the personal experiences of people who have dealt with the law in its current form. With the convener, I attended the evidence session in Dundee, and I can attest to how harrowing it was to hear people recount their experiences, not only for those who were recounting but for those who were listening. I will not repeat the details, but that reinforced my determination that the post-legislative scrutiny process should be relevant and lead to positive action.

Today's debate addresses issues of responsible dog ownership and the committee's recommendations regarding its findings. I agree with the committee's conclusions, which are outlined in the report's executive summary and which merit repeating. Specifically, three points about the committee's beliefs strike me as being particularly significant: the act has had limited effect; the law is not fit for purpose; and the

committee's interim recommendations should be acted upon immediately.

Those points hold significance for a number of reasons. First, the committee considered that, if the 2010 act had been effective in achieving its objective of ensuring that dogs that are out of control are brought and kept under control, there should have been consequential reductions in prosecutions under the United Kingdom Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and in the number of individuals requiring hospital treatment following a dog attack. The minister has mentioned figures, and those that we had from 2017 showed that those reductions had not happened.

Secondly, the belief that the law is not fit for purpose was widely expressed in the committee's evidence sessions. During those sessions, it became clear that concerns about out-of-control and dangerous dogs arose due to not only the ineffectiveness of the 2010 act but weaknesses in all dog control law. The committee has recommended that, when implementing legislation, the Scottish Government should make no distinction between Scottish Government-initiated legislation and members' bills. It found that insufficient resources, such as limited numbers of dog wardens, had negatively impacted on local authorities' ability to implement the 2010 act. It also found that victims of dog attacks should be entitled to know the outcome of the action that has been taken against the owner of the dog by the local authority.

Thirdly, the committee recognised that the purpose of the 2010 act was to provide an important tool to prevent dog attacks from occurring. However, its success was dependent on members of the public being aware of the act and how it could be used. A programme to raise awareness of and address issues to do with data collection, the joint protocol that co-ordinates the efforts of local authorities and emergency services, and resource allocation is long overdue and should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

The committee also recommended that assessments be made of

"the scale of the public health impact of dog bites, and the associated cost implications, to determine if a multi-agency public health approach to tackling dog control issues is required."

Proposals for improved data collection in the form of a national database have already been raised and are strongly supported by the committee. The lack of such a database was identified as one of the key weaknesses in the effectiveness of the 2010 act. The committee recommended that a Scottish dog control notice database, which Scottish ministers have had the power to establish since the act came into force in 2011, be established immediately. Based on the

evidence that was received by the committee, it is clear that such a database, which would contain information on dog control activity, would be a valuable tool in improving the effectiveness of the act. Furthermore, the committee considered that the failure of the Scottish ministers to use the powers that were given to them under the 2010 act to establish that database is unacceptable and must be urgently rectified.

The point about inadequate resource was continually raised, and the committee identified that:

"an insufficient number of dog wardens has negatively impacted on local authorities' ability to implement the 2010 Act and the effectiveness of the Act in reducing the number of out of control dogs."

Subsequently, the committee found that the Scottish Government should obtain the following data from each local authority without delay: the number of authorised officers who have been appointed under section 1(6) of the 2010 act; whether the role is stand alone or has just been added to other roles, which—clearly—would reduce its impact; and the training that has been given to authorised officers.

Issues relating to both a lack of centralised data collection and resource become evident when we assess the role of the joint protocol—which I have mentioned—and the allocation of responsibility between the emergency services and local authorities. It seems to me that, logically, general practitioners, hospitals, local authorities and Police Scotland should be required to regularly record and collect consistent data on reported incidents of out-of-control dogs and related attacks. That would ensure that records of attacks can be collected and checked against any dog control notices and related fixed-penalty notices that have been issued, and that the resources that are available to each local authority can be assessed.

The implementation of that recommendation, without delay, would mean that local authorities would be less

"reliant on victims of attacks and members of the public reporting breaches of DCNs."

It would mean a more streamlined approach to the interpretation of general data protection regulation rules across all local authorities. We heard of that being used as an excuse—that is the polite way of saying it—for not giving out information. It would also mean more consideration of the victim when the

"outcome of the action that has been taken against the owner of the dog by the local authority"

is followed up.

Statements from Glasgow City Council, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association and

the Communication Workers Union support that position. They said in evidence that the implementation of the act is

“very varied across local authority areas with no real consistency in how the function is carried out”,

that the act is

“at present unable to achieve its intended impact on dog control and irresponsible ownership”

and that

“the Legislation needs urgent consolidation, simplification and amendment.”

The evidence clearly demonstrates the need for immediate action regarding legislation on the control of dangerous dogs. Although the Government seems to broadly support the committee’s recommendations, it appears to lack the determination that would lead to urgent and joined-up action to properly reflect the seriousness of the act’s real-life consequences. As the convener mentioned, we can no longer afford to be complacent.

There is widespread enthusiasm among stakeholders for initiatives such as a centralised data collection system, which would decrease confusion over responsibility in the joint protocol that has been established under the act, and the bringing together of all dog control law to provide clarity to the public, local authorities and the police on the handling of out-of-control and dangerous dogs. I urge the Government to directly consider the committee’s recommendations and to move to enact them with all due haste.

15:04

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee for the work that it has undertaken on the issue, which highlights the important role of post-legislative scrutiny. We pass a lot of legislation in the Parliament, and we have a responsibility to ensure that that legislation achieves its purpose. The work that the committee has done with regard to the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 and other issues is very important.

The 2010 act was passed with the best of intentions. The issue is not new; sadly, there have been severe attacks over the years. Jenny Marra spoke about incidents, including, in particular, one in which someone lost their life. The act was introduced to protect the public and bring dangerous dogs under control. From that point of view, in reviewing the legislation and establishing whether it has achieved its purpose, the committee has done important work for the Parliament.

The statistics that underpin the story and the committee’s work clearly show that the problem is much greater now than it was more than 20 years ago, although I absolutely accept that more data is probably collected now than was collected then. In 2005-06, the NHS recorded 363 dog attacks, compared with 2,000 in 2018-19. In Argyll and Clyde alone, there were 1,417 attacks 2018-19, 255 of which involved children, and there were 912 in Lanarkshire and 439 in Ayrshire. It is therefore clear that the problem has grown over that period. The committee came to the conclusion that dog control legislation is not fit for purpose, given the levels of attacks, including some high-profile cases.

Part of the reason why the committee reached that conclusion is that dog owners and the agencies involved—Police Scotland, councils and the NHS—lack awareness of the legislation. The minister touched on that. It is clear that the dog control legislation places quite an onus on councils and, as I said, they lack awareness of what they are supposed to do. I will not go into a big debate on the funding of councils, but it is a fact that councils are facing great funding pressures. Finding resources to adequately manage the legislation has clearly been a challenge for some of them.

The committee found that the law needs to be reformed. I welcome some of the minister’s announcements in relation to a review.

We should listen to the hard evidence from the people and organisations that the committee spoke to. I know that in the gallery are representatives of the Communication Workers Union, which held an event in the Parliament before the debate. The CWU has told us that 250 posties are attacked by dogs every year. That shows that there is a real problem. The CWU has also highlighted a lack of prosecutions of those incidents, with the result that it has had to take its own private prosecutions. It has emphasised its frustration in dealing with local authorities that are not properly managing the issue.

That has been reiterated by the National Dog Warden Association. There is supposed to be one person in each local authority who is responsible for administering issues relating to dog attacks. The association has found that that is not the case in a lot of local authorities and that the approach has been inconsistent and patchy.

The committee has made serious recommendations. A dog control database would help to identify attacks and instances of dogs being out of control. Data and statistics are important in two regards. The first relates to the supply of evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the legislation and of any changes that are made, and the second relates to how data

can demonstrate the extent of the issue. As Bill Bowman said, it is important that the NHS, local authorities and Police Scotland work better together not just in administering the legislation but in collecting the data.

Lack of awareness is clearly a problem across the board. Although a number of members who have spoken in the debate have highlighted that the vast majority of dog owners are responsible dog owners, unfortunately there are instances of people's dogs getting out of control, and the owners might not be aware that that is happening—they might not even be aware of the legislation. I see that happening in my local area. I do quite a lot of running around local parks, and I find that the vast majority of dog owners have their dog on a lead or know that their dog will not be disrupted by a speedy jogger such as me. However, over the summer, dogs have charged up and attacked me because the owner has not been able to keep their dog under control. A lot of work needs to be done to raise awareness.

As parliamentarians, we must remember that we pass legislation in order to help people in our local communities. The 2010 act was passed in order to protect people from being subjected to dog attacks and to ensure that we have proper prevention in place. The committee's inquiry has shown that the legislation is not fit for purpose, so it is important that the review that the minister has instigated and the committee's recommendations are taken forward. We should have proper legislation so that we protect people in the communities that we represent.

15:12

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I welcome the cross-party consensus in the chamber, which there was in 2010, as well.

I congratulate the Radio Clyde network on the tremendous campaigning work that it and its listeners have done to bring the subject to the fore of political attention in Scotland.

There are two things, in particular, that we are all absolutely signed up to. First, there is still a huge problem with dogs that are out of control, that are not well bred or well trained, and that attack people regularly. The problem is too big to ignore. Although there is not adequate quantification of the problem—the committee has made recommendations about how we could sort that out—we all know enough to know that the problem is real, that it affects real people and that, as the convener said, it can lead to fatalities. We have an unacceptable situation, which the Scottish Parliament must deal with effectively.

We must be very clear about what we are talking about. When we began post-legislative

scrutiny of the legislation, our main aim was to review the working of the 2010 act, which is based on civil, rather than criminal, law. However, as the convener outlined, we were given a wider remit and moved on to look at all dog legislation, including the 1991 act, which is based on criminal law.

There are other laws that, so far, have not been mentioned in the debate; some of the relevant legislation goes way back to the 19th century. Clearly, we need a comprehensive and all-embracing review. I would like the outcome of that review to be one codified act that deals with all aspects of dog control, including provisions on prevention and what happens after the fact, and which covers civil and criminal law offences.

If the law is to work, it needs to be simple, well understood and easily referenced by the practitioners of law enforcement. It must also be easy for the public to know and be well informed of their rights. That would be a lot easier if there were one act instead of a multitude.

Stewart Stevenson rose—

Alex Neil: No doubt Stewart is about to tell me about the debate in the 19th century. [*Laughter.*]

Stewart Stevenson: Actually, Stewart will gently suggest that the problem is not dogs. We keep on talking about dogs, but this a human problem. Perhaps the new bill should be called the "Control of Humans Who Own Dogs Bill".

Alex Neil: That would be a very popular measure.

I think that the problem is about dogs and humans. Many of the problems to do with dogs relate to their being ill bred and not trained properly. If we had data, it would probably show that those are the biggest problems.

As with humans, for whatever reason—there is something in the blood, for example—there are sometimes rogue dogs. No matter how well trained or brought up they are, they can still be offensive and cause harm to individuals and, indeed, to other animals. As Emma Harper points out in her proposed member's bill—the proposed protection of livestock (Scotland) bill—the harm that some dogs do to other species is also important and should not be totally ignored.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I noticed that a debate took place this morning on Kaye Adams's BBC Radio Scotland show. Many people made the point that Stewart Stevenson has made, which was that the problem is not necessarily bad dogs, but people who cannot look after them. There seemed to be consensus coming across from the callers that people should need a licence to have a dog. What are Alex Neil's thoughts on that?

Alex Neil: I was going to come on to that matter, but because I have been asked the question, I will comment on it now.

The committee has not been able to study licensing in detail, but we know that there are modern licensing systems. I am not talking about the old United Kingdom licence—which cost 37.5p and was ignored by most people before it was formally abolished—but about a modern licensing system. Two examples of such systems have been cited to the committee. I think that one is in Northern Ireland and the other is in Sweden. Whatever we call it, something along the lines of a licensing system is absolutely required.

There is an important principle that is, I believe, applied in Sweden. There are two key points about a licensing system—which is perhaps not the best description, but I will call it that for the purposes of the debate. By having a licensing system, we would avoid the problem that we have had with the legislation that we have passed, which is the abject lack of enforceability, particularly at local level. We need to avoid that. There is no point in passing legislation if it cannot be properly implemented. Whatever we do, we need to make sure that the legislation that we pass is probably implemented.

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

Alex Neil: In order for that to happen, and to avoid a situation that has already been mentioned in the debate—that is, that when cuts are made it is easy to get rid of dog wardens and so on—the key points for a modern licensing system are that the cost should be sufficiently high and the revenue that is raised from it should be ring fenced to fund a proper dog control and dog warden system, so that we can enforce the legislation.

I have many other ideas—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sure that you have.

Alex Neil: —but I now have to bring my remarks to an end.

15:19

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I greatly welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate, and I concur with many of the things that have been said. I concur, especially, with the comments of Bill Bowman, who opened for the Conservative Party. The party wholeheartedly supports the report's findings and commends the committee for its work on the matter.

I also pay tribute to Alex Neil for raising the issue last year. I think that I am right in saying that

his action in doing so was instrumental in bringing the matter back to the fore in our domestic politics—he called for the post-legislative review that has now come to fruition. I do not want to patronise one of Scotland's most experienced parliamentarians, but I say that his action highlights the value and importance of back-bench members asking searching questions and, where appropriate, raising the profile of an issue so that, collectively, we can take action.

I must confess that I am not yet a dog owner, although I am considering becoming one soon. My practical knowledge is somewhat limited, but I have young children, and I always get a bit nervous when a strange dog walks into the house, for no reason other than the fact that there is vulnerability.

Given that around 470,000—almost half a million—home owners in Scotland, or a fifth of the population, own a dog, it is clear that dogs are highly valued as pets. Although many people care for their dogs as pets, it is important to recognise that there are dogs that are not appropriate as pets, and that there are dogs that are not properly controlled. Like many members, I have been horrified by stories about uncontrolled dogs and the untold damage that they can do to individuals. Many people will have seen the story from a week or so ago of Elayne Stanley from Widnes in Cheshire, who was mauled to death in her own home by two out-of-control dogs. That is a timely and horrific reminder that while dogs might be considered to be man's, or woman's, best friend, they are also animals that we will never fully understand.

The committee's report lays bare the stark reality of the impact that a dog attack can have on the individuals who are affected, and their family and friends, and on other animals that are attacked. One submission that stands out in the report is that of Victim Support Scotland, which notes the case of a young child who survived an attack and required surgery. Perhaps understandably, that person now has a fear of public spaces and a distrust of animals. In the Highlands and Islands, there was an incident in Inverness at the beginning of August in which a six-year-old was left with serious facial injuries after an uncontrolled dog attack inside a house.

Those are stark reminders of why dog ownership carries a degree of personal responsibility on the part of the adults who own dogs, and why particular breeds of dog might not be right for a family environment. Of course, no legislation can completely prevent freak and, often, tragic incidents from occurring, but it is clear that there is something deeply wrong when, according to Dr Alasdair Corfield, in Scotland an estimated 5,000 individuals each year are affected

by dog attacks. In its submission to the committee, the charity Battersea Dogs and Cats Home said:

“There are ... media reports that indicate that dog bites have gone up in some cases by 80% since the Act came into force.”

Those of us who regularly leaflet in our constituencies and regions will be all too familiar with the moment when we put a leaflet through the letterbox and suddenly feel the force of a large dog on the other side of the door. That experience is a common occurrence for postal workers; I note the Communication Workers Union’s evidence that, since 2010, 2,500 postal workers have been attacked by dogs. I know that some of those workers are present in the gallery, and I fully endorse the comments of Jenny Marra in that regard.

I was struck by the point that lack of data hindered the committee in its work, and that that was exacerbated by the failure to establish a database. I hope that the Government will look at that issue. We have some data, which shows that, despite the significant number of attacks, the number of charges under the 1991 act has fallen each year since 2016-17: the number of prosecutions for the most recent year sits at just 82. Therefore, it is clear that there are wide-ranging issues with the 1991 act and the 2010 act.

That is confirmed in the report, which states that “current dog control law is not fit for ... purpose”

and that, if it were fit for purpose,

“there should be a consequential reduction in prosecutions ... and in the numbers of individuals requiring hospital treatment”.

It is clear that there has not been such a reduction.

I was struck by the phrase “a national crisis”, which appears in the report. I know many of the committee members and none of them is prone to hyperbole, so I was incredibly struck by their sense that there is a national crisis. We must take that at face value.

A number of recommendations have been made. I urge the Government to look at them and to take action. The report is wide ranging and is a clear example of why even legislation that has the best intentions still requires on-going scrutiny to measure its efficacy and impact.

The evidence in the report suggests that, with adjustments, the 2010 act can begin to reduce instances of dog attacks and hospital admissions and, as a consequence, reduce prosecutions. It should be “properly implemented”, to use Alex Neil’s phrase. I was struck by his view that we need a comprehensive piece of legislation that covers the criminal and the civil spheres. There is a lot to be said for that.

15:26

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank the convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee for giving me the opportunity to ask questions of the minister when she came before the committee.

Before I comment on the inquiry, which I welcomed as the member who inherited the bill from Alex Neil when he was elevated to better things, I say that although I have huge sympathy for all victims of dog attacks, let us put the blame where the blame lies—with the owners of the dogs.

Press reports, even today, have commented that we are discussing dangerous dogs. Of course, that was not the original focus of the inquiry, because the whole point of the 2010 act is to prevent a dog from becoming dangerous. James Kelly referred to bringing dangerous dogs under control. That is not the point of the 2010 act. Once a dog is dangerous, the 2010 act does not apply. The thrust of the 2010 act is rightly to blame the deed, as I have said—it is the owner, not the breed. Perhaps it is time to ditch the soubriquet “dangerous dogs” and substitute “reckless and feckless owners”.

As the member who navigated the bill through its various stages, I confess—as members can hear—that I am protective of my legislative child. However, I would happily concede its flaws had it been given the chance to prove its worth as Government legislation. That was not the case.

I add, by way of an aside, that the 2010 act applies to private places, so it is relevant to the postman and the care worker—to anybody coming up the garden path, whether they are welcome or uninvited. That is not covered by legislation in England, yet most attacks take place on private land.

The point about publicity was addressed by the committee but not by the Government. How can the public, let alone the professionals, know the law if they do not know about it? The problem with members’ bills to date has been that once the member has steered it through the committee stage and it has been passed into law, that is the end. The legislation does not get any publicity from the Government, yet the Government has the power to give it that. The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee said to me that

“Once a Bill is passed, it becomes the responsibility of the Scottish Government to implement its provisions, including publicity, where appropriate.”

However, I do not know of any member’s bill that has been given publicity post enactment .

In a sense, the 2010 act was not given a fair wind. The funding for dog wardens was not there, the training was not there, and the publicity was not there. If we asked members of the public, "Have you heard of the control of dogs act?", I bet that we would get the answer, "What?" They might just have heard of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; if they have, they probably think that the two acts are one and the same thing.

The 2010 act also applies to a dog attacking other animals, which can create fear and anxiety. That is already covered. The 2010 act has flaws, but I think that if it had been given a fairer chance, those flaws might not have been so great.

We do not have a national database. That is another aspect to consider, because if somebody moves with their dog to another area, their data will be lost. The nature of that data is also important, because sometimes dog wardens do not issue a dog control notice but have a wee word in the owner's ear—a shot across their bows—to say, "Your dog's been reported. We'll watch out now. You have to do these things; if you don't, I'll issue a dog control notice on you, the owner."

The 2010 act means that a person who hands over their dog to somebody else to take care of or to take it out for a walk is still responsible. Just because a person has given that duty to someone else, that does not mean that they no longer have responsibility.

From the start, the issues that I mentioned prevented the success of what I think was reasonably decent legislation. However, we are now moving towards a national database. Like the convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, I do not know why we are consulting and not just getting on with the technicalities, because we know that all dogs are microchipped.

Ash Denham: The 2010 act places a statutory duty on the Government to consult, so we cannot just move ahead and bring in the database. That is why we are doing the consultation.

Christine Grahame: Well, I ask the Government to consult just on the technicalities and not on whether there should be a database.

I am moving on with another bill, which is on responsible dog ownership, because the problems start from the moment somebody acquires a puppy. People might acquire a dog spontaneously and on impulse—they might see it on the internet and buy it on Gumtree—and might not think about all the duties that are involved. In that regard, I want to tackle Alex Rowley's idea of a licence. The trouble with that idea is that, with the licence system in Northern Ireland, there is only 40 per cent uptake. My bill would place duties on

somebody who acquires a puppy or dog and will imply that the person then has a licence. Therefore, if the person breaches their duties in relation to the welfare or behaviour of the dog, they will no longer be entitled to have a dog or will be put on notice about it.

In that way, after a certain date, 100 per cent of people who acquire a puppy or dog—the term used is "acquire" rather than "purchase" in case people try to get round the law by saying that they did not buy the dog—will be deemed to be licensed to have the dog because they have gone through the tests. I know that that is a strange thing to do, and maybe it will not work, but it is worth the effort.

I wish my old bill well, and I hope that the legislation is amended to make it fit for purpose, although it pretty well is already. I hope that, if my new bill is successful, the Government will promote it and it will get the publicity that all members' bills deserve.

15:32

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I came to the debate at the committee as someone who was not a member of the Parliament when the legislation was passed in 2010, and I was not on the committee when it started to consider the issue, so I genuinely had a neutral perspective. My only experience or opinion was framed by the experience that most political activists have had in walking up driveways and putting their hands through letterboxes to deliver leaflets, knowing the risks that lie behind certain doors. For example, a councillor in my area has had a finger bitten off, and I know of several elected members from across the political parties who have had negative interactions with dogs.

I recall, in one of my campaigning experiences, chapping on a door, getting no answer and hearing a dog coming from behind that then bit me square on the leg. The owner came out, picked up the dog and apologised profusely, and then asked me which political party I was from. When I said it was the Labour Party, she put the dog back down and it bit me again. That is probably the sum of my experience with dogs.

The serious point is about the tragic stories that the committee heard from individuals whose children lost their lives or were left with permanent disfigurement, perhaps in the face, due to dog attacks. As a parent, that made me reflect on the risks to my children. In my local park, there is a gated area that is clearly supposed to be only for children and parents and that no dogs should be anywhere near. On one occasion, a stray dog came into the area when the gate was opened by a child and it then jumped on each of the rides and

was right in the children's faces. Luckily, there was no actual attack or bite. However, I could see the impact that the incident had on the children and their parents. Even though there may be no bite or resulting disfiguration, such incidents can cause psychological trauma for a child, perhaps for the rest of their life. The owner of that dog was not in control of it in any way. Most days, right across our country, hundreds of individuals probably have a similar experience. That is my perspective as both a parent and someone who is often out, going round people's doors.

I share the concerns of the CWU's postal workers, who are at the coalface in relation to such challenges. The CWU has reported that, each year, 250 postal workers in Scotland are attacked by dogs. As the committee's convener, Jenny Marra, suggested, if that statistic were 250 attacks on postal workers by human beings, we would surely see much more direct action and intervention on the part of the Parliament and our police authorities.

I think about the impact that such attacks have on our national health service. The statistics show that, in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's area, in the single year between 2018 and 2019, there were 1,417 presentations at A and E with dog-related injuries. Of those, 255 were attacks on children, which is simply unacceptable. There were 912 such presentations in NHS Lanarkshire and 439 in NHS Ayrshire and Arran. At the same time, our local authorities are supposed to be enforcing the relevant legislation. An FOI request made of Glasgow City Council found that it had just one part-time dog warden, who had not issued a single dog control notice in the three years between 2015 and 2018. Clearly, although there is a high risk of attack, enforcement action is not taking place in local communities and local authority areas across the country.

I want to emphasise a point that Christine Grahame made in her speech. There needs to be serious discussion in the Parliament about the difference in treatment between legislation that is introduced by members and legislation that originates from the Government—they are not treated as one and the same. Scotland's Parliament is still, I hope, one of equals. Regardless of the political party of the member who introduces it, if legislation is passed here, it is incumbent on the Government—whatever its political colour—to support it financially, implement it across the country and, crucially, put the public relations message out there. Members of the public need to know that legislation that is designed to protect them exists. The Government of the day cannot just pick and choose what suits it.

Given the lack of local authority funding, the challenge is that the area is seen as one in which it is easy either to make cuts or to withhold investment. I have been struck by the inconsistency in the numbers of wardens in different parts of the country. Further, there is no sharing of data, so when someone who is unable to control a dog moves from one local authority area, the new authority is not told of the risk that that might pose to individuals or families.

I realise that I am running short of time, so I will close my remarks by saying that I agree that the legislation is well meaning. I also feel that there is consensus in Parliament that action needs to be taken and that we need to strengthen and enact legislation properly. It is incumbent on us all—not just the Government, but all members on Opposition benches—to ensure that we have legislation that is fit for purpose and serves the communities that we represent, so that no child or individual is put at risk.

15:38

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee's report on the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010.

Dogs are reputed to be man's best friend and, for most of us, that is the case. They can be companions and friends, and they provide children with a beneficial experience that undoubtedly improves their social responses. Most owners take regular exercise as required by their four-legged friends, so we can claim that they are promoters of good health and wellbeing. To someone who lives alone, a dog is truly a best friend and a life enhancer. The vast majority of dog owners provide a loving and comfortable home for their best friends.

However, those are not the owners or the dogs on which the committee has focused. As is the case all too often, the activity of the few impacts on the many. Of necessity, it is on those cases that the committee has concentrated. There is no doubt in my mind that a dog that is brought into an environment that is stressed and chaotic will itself reflect such an environment and will respond in an unpredictable manner. Dogs are clearly happiest in homes with stable routines and predictable behaviour that is understood.

Another clear factor is that certain types of dog are sometimes kept in inappropriate environments. For example, I am aware of two huskies being homed in a two-bedroom flat. Is that really the best home for those large, active dogs? Surely they will require considerable activity and space that is disproportionate to that which is available in their

home. There are times when prospective owners need to take advice on the best types of dog for the space in which they will be kept.

The committee focused on instances involving dogs that have been identified as a problem. In my constituency of Midlothian North and Musselburgh, there are too many dog attacks. I have constituents who have been maimed and seriously traumatised by dog attacks, and others who have watched their small dogs being ripped apart by aggressive larger dogs. Only recently, four police officers were attacked by dogs and hospitalised.

When we explore the details, we find that there are all too many incidents and, as the committee found, many attacks are not reported. When a family pet acts in a way that is out of character and inflicts injury on a family member, there is a tendency for people not to report the attack. According to a nurse at my local health centre, approximately three serious injuries inflicted by dogs are treated there every week.

One of the biggest obstacles to getting to grips with the problem is that the data is poor, first because of underreporting and secondly because A and E departments do not specifically report such injuries. As far as can be ascertained from the information that we have, there are about 5,000 serious dog attacks on people each year. However, my belief is that that figure is far lower than the reality. Many of the injuries are sustained by children, and for many of them the injuries are life changing, leaving permanent scars that are both physical and mental. The cost to the NHS of treating such injuries, including through on-going plastic surgery, is not quantified, but it must be considerable.

In taking evidence, the committee heard heart-rending stories of the results of such incidents, including from the Communication Workers Union, whose pictures of injured postal workers were both graphic and telling. At that level of injury, the committee report describes the situation as “a national crisis”, and I can only agree with that assessment. We cannot endorse a situation where thousands of our citizens are attacked and maimed every year without urgent action being taken to reduce and eliminate the problem.

To be frank, tackling the problem is not easy. Draconian measures would impact on the vast majority of dog owners who are sensible and responsible. However, the scale of the problem is industrial. Some simple and effective measures that could be taken are suggested in the committee’s report, and I am grateful that the Scottish Government is giving them serious attention.

An obvious concern is that the use of dog control notices has reduced as council resources

have diminished. I believe that the DCN process is flawed. When a DCN is issued, neighbours and complainants might be aware of its issuance, but they are deliberately not made aware of its content. Dog wardens are few and far between, and the chance of a dog warden becoming aware of a breach of the terms of a DCN are slim. Reliance must be placed on those who are most affected. Neighbours should police that and report such breaches, but that will not happen if they do not know the content of the DCN. The committee has great concerns about that, and I believe that action needs to be taken to change the process. After all, when an antisocial behaviour order is issued, neighbours are made aware of the terms. Why does that not happen where a DCN is issued? Self-policing makes sense.

Locally, I have found that the police and the council have a poor understanding of who should deal with which types of dog attack and how they should be reported. Members of the public have been reporting everything to the council, but it has been taking note only of those attacks that fall under its remit. That situation was confirmed by Police Scotland, which accepted that the system is sometimes not joined up. I welcome its undertaking to the committee that it will take action on that shortcoming, and I look forward to a better process in future.

Currently, if an owner has a problem dog for whatever reason, the only ultimate recourse for the council to deal with it is an expensive court case. That severely reduces the number of dogs in the category that are dealt with properly.

It has been suggested that it would be beneficial to reintroduce dog licences. That would mean that councils did not need to have recourse to the courts but could suspend or withdraw an owner’s right to keep a dog. That has many attractions, as the test would be that of a fit-and-proper person, and complaints from neighbours and those who had been attacked would undoubtedly influence the council committee that considered the case, as would input from the police and dog wardens. The approach has the appearance of simplicity and the advantage that decent dog owners would be left in peace and not subjected to more restrictive or onerous regulations. The downside would be the cost of setting up the national database, but I hope that the fee for dog licences would cover that and the administrative costs.

It is clear that a great deal of work needs to be done to ensure the safety of the public and of our family pets. The report by the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, which highlights a problem that needs to be addressed urgently, is a step in the right direction. I commend the report to the Parliament and thank the

committee, its clerks and others for their tenacity in producing it.

15:44

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about the control of dogs in this important debate. Although I am not a member of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, I am really interested in the committee's review of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 and I agree with many of the asks in the report.

I feel that there are several issues that are worth highlighting. I am also seeking to address the issue of the control of dogs with my current proposed protection of livestock (Scotland) bill, for which the public consultation has concluded, and the bill is currently being drafted. I thank Alex Neil for bringing the matter up.

I will focus my remarks on attacks on livestock by out-of-control dogs and the impact that they have on farmers and their families, which is an issue that the committee's report touches on but not in a lot of detail. Almost 3 million acres of our land in Scotland is used for common grazing by livestock and folk have a right to roam. We have 1.8 million cattle and 6.83 million sheep, and we have evidence that shows that sheep are most at risk from attacks by out-of-control dogs. We have 333,000 pigs, 14.11 million poultry, 1,350 horses for agricultural use, about 1,200 alpacas and llamas, and 7,000 farmed deer. That is a lot of beasts to have on our grazing land.

Although the sector is working hard to rear, look after and protect its livestock, the truth is that the current law does not adequately protect the people or the livestock from attacks by out-of-control dogs in the countryside. Indeed, my research shows that, year on year for the past 10 years, the number of livestock attacks has steadily increased. For example, in 2014-15, the number of offences that were recorded in Scotland under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 was 109, whereas in 2017, the number reported had risen to 170. That figure does not include the estimated 50 per cent of incidents that are not even reported or recorded.

In coming up with a solution to address the issue, we must first understand why dog attack numbers are increasing. The reason might be the vast growth over the past five years in the number of dogs being kept as pets across the UK. In 2013, it was estimated that across the UK there were 8 million dogs kept as pets. By 2018, the number had increased by about 500,000, which is the current estimated number of dogs in Scotland. I have two collies myself.

With increasing numbers of people in society owning dogs, there will be households that acquire dogs—whether through purchase or adoption—without having the ability to train and responsibly look after them. That is where we see problems beginning to arise. It has been put to me by many farmers, agricultural organisations and others that the only way to bring about a reduction in livestock attack numbers is to have a fit-for-purpose bill that consolidates current livestock legislation—the 2010 act and the 66-year-old 1953 act—to show the severity of the consequences of dog attacks on livestock, which is not something that anybody can accept in 2019.

Some people, including members in the chamber, have suggested that livestock worrying be part of the Government's consolidated legislation. However, it is my view, and the view of Scotland's agricultural sector, that the issue is so critical that it deserves its own bill—a bill that farmers can get behind, that clearly shows the severity of the consequences that will apply if dogs are allowed to worry livestock, and that can be delivered in a timely manner in this parliamentary session.

The view from Scotland's agricultural community in relation to out-of-control dogs in the countryside is clear: it is expressed in paragraph 88 of the committee's report, as well as in a vast number of the responses to my consultation. The report and those responses note the concerns of various agricultural organisations, including NFU Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates and the National Sheep Association. NFUS said that:

"the number of livestock worrying instances remain far too high".

The organisation does not believe

"that the Act has been effective in reducing the number of out-of-control dogs"

in the countryside. For example, the 2010 act states that dogs must not cause apprehension to other animals. However, recent views and evidence show that that is inadequate and the severity of the offence is diminished, as most incidents have involved physical attack on livestock, as well as psychological trauma, abortion of lambs and damaging distress.

An attack from an out-of-control dog is traumatic for any person, child or parent. As an operating room nurse, I assisted surgeons in repairing damage to tissue. However, it is important to acknowledge that attacks on livestock are also traumatic for farmers. I point to one experience of a farmer in Argyll and Bute. In response to my consultation, he reported that he went to his field and found 14 sheep that had been mauled and mutilated by multiple dogs. That had profound

implications for his mental health and that of his family. It is traumatic for everyone.

I could say more, but I do not have enough time. I welcome the committee's report. I thank all who contributed to it. It is good to have an opportunity to discuss it today. I acknowledge and thank the Scottish partnership against rural crime for its work in raising awareness of the issue of livestock worrying, which included attending all Scotland's agricultural shows this year to deliver outreach education.

Finally, I thank the clerks to the committee and everyone who contributed to the report. I look forward to the Government's response.

15:51

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I join my colleagues in welcoming the insightful work of the committee on the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010. In an effort to present the most necessary and compelling improvements that should be made, the committee's recommendations incorporated expert opinion and personal experience.

I recognise Anas Sarwar's experience on the election trail. Once, I was campaigning in the street with my wife, and I turned to find her holding a Jack Russell that had its teeth through her finger. I am glad to say that I got its owner's vote.

The 2010 act aimed to modernise how legislation works in relation to the control of dogs in Scotland. It aimed to redefine when a dog is "out of control" and to offer a more effective model that is aimed at reducing the risk of dog attacks through more responsible dog ownership. This afternoon, many wise words have been spoken on that subject. We need to remember that the act was intended to supplement provisions in existing legislation, including the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, and not to stand alone.

However, despite the best intentions behind the 2010 act, we heard that injuries related to dog attacks are on the rise. According to the committee's report, that increase can be linked to confusion around enforcement responsibilities and to the lack of centralised data collection and prevention measures.

We cannot ignore the impact that a dog attack has on a person's life. The report lays bare the seriousness of many dog attack cases. Life-changing injuries, with permanent scarring, can limit a person's physical ability and hamper their employment opportunities and mental capacity.

In particular, we have to recognise the special risk to children. Because they are lighter in weight and shorter, children who endure dog attacks are more likely to suffer facial injuries, often with

longer-lasting physical and mental scarring. To read of children who have suffered worsening anxiety and distrust in animals as a result of their experience should be enough to move us to enact the recommendations.

The sobering research has opened wide the gaps in the legislation and shown where needs to offer greater clarity. It is, for example, essential that a database be put in place. We cannot understand the true scale of dog attacks without collecting clear and consistent statistics. As the committee suggested, local authorities, the police and hospitals need to collate data on attacks on humans and animals—in particular, as Emma Harper highlighted, farm animals—and on how the figures relate to the number of dog control notices that are issued. If that recommendation were to be adopted, it would rightly remove the burden that is placed on victims and the public to report breaches of notices. It is troubling that, if a Scottish dog control database had been implemented in 2011, that information could already have been available. Without a functioning database, we cannot see accurately the extent of the problem or where resources need to be directed.

A key objective of the act centred around prevention of dog attacks: it aimed to tackle out-of-control dogs before they reach the stage of dangerous and threatening behaviour. However, with figures from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service showing that there is at least one dog attack every day in Scotland, it is abundantly clear that measures that favour early intervention have not been put in place.

There is also the question of responsibility. Lack of clarity surrounding which roles cover which responsibilities in implementation of the act has limited the act's potential. The Scottish Government has created a joint protocol document in an attempt to address the roles and responsibilities of police and local authorities, but even with that document, there is confusion and inconsistency about when a case should be referred, and to whom.

At the core of the issue, as other members have mentioned, is confusion over which act—the 2010 act or the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991—is to be followed. The Scottish Government needs to ensure that police officers and local authorities are equipped with the right information to deal with dog attacks. That is critical to ensuring that the 2010 act reaches its full potential. For the legislation to be most effective, as was intended, the Scottish Government must push for further awareness on how it is to be enforced. If police officers and local authorities, as enforcers, were to have more training in order that they better understand their responsibilities, they would be

able to promote responsible dog ownership and effective dog control more effectively.

The public, too, would benefit from an awareness campaign that centres on dog control legislation, as has been recommended by the committee. It would be beneficial to have detail on how soon such a campaign could start. It would be especially important in our schools, for the benefit of children. Maybe the minister will tell us about that later. No legislation can be truly successful without public awareness of what it involves.

The seriousness of dog attacks must inform our dog control legislation. Instead of complacency, our communities would benefit from updated, effective and modernised dog control legislation that favours awareness and prevention. For that to be realised, and to keep our communities safe, the committee's recommendations need to be implemented without delay.

15:56

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): This is a really important debate. We can tell by the strength of feeling that is being shown by members how much they care about the issue.

I, too, thank the committee clerking team for putting together the substantial report, which has allowed such an informed debate to take place. I acknowledge how difficult that must have been, given the harrowing evidence that was heard along the way. I also thank the minister for her comprehensive reply. She clearly demonstrated her commitment to considering and acting on the committee's concerns.

I joined the committee not long after the inquiry began, and heard some of the evidence from people who had been attacked and people whose family members had been attacked and killed by dogs. The accounts were harrowing. The impact that dog attacks have on victims, particularly children, can be life changing. We understand the pain that affected families have been through.

The evidence that the committee heard suggests that there is still an unacceptably high number of dog attacks in Scotland. Since the 2010 act came into force, there has not been a reduction in the number of attacks.

We heard harrowing evidence from Veronica Lynch, whose daughter was killed by a Rottweiler in 1989. Veronica reminded us that legislation alone will not stop dog attacks, and that we need a more holistic approach to the issue, involving better education of owners and better training of dogs. Interventions at the earliest stage possible might help to prevent at least some attacks.

As the convener and one or two other members mentioned, the committee also heard from Dave

Joyce, the national health and safety officer for the Communications Workers Union. In his evidence, Mr Joyce described how our postal workers are on the front line when it comes to irresponsible owners of out-of-control dogs. Every year, 250 postmen and women in Scotland are attacked by dogs. Some of those attacks are so serious, physically and mentally, that the victim cannot continue in their job.

Mr Joyce also told us that eight out of every 10 attacks on postal workers take place between the garden gate or entrance and the front door of the house. I had the privilege of being a postman during my student days, and I went back out again not long ago to work on a local run in Kilmarnock. Amazingly, some dog owners do not think to keep their dogs away from the garden when a postman or postwoman, or anybody else, is likely to be calling round. Surely we could help to reduce attacks by communicating with and seeking the help of the public, and letting them know when the post will be delivered. It seems to be such a simple idea to ask owners to take steps to secure their dogs not just for postal workers, of course, but for any visitors coming to their house. People should just think about safety and make sure that their visitors are safe. That seems to be such a simple idea, so I hope that we can take it up and do something.

The issue of "reasonable apprehension", which was mentioned by the minister and others, took the members of the committee by surprise. It was explained to us that, in order for a case to be successfully prosecuted under the 1991 act, it is necessary to prove reasonable apprehension that the dog would bite someone. That is what has led to the perception that a "one free bite" rule exists.

It is fair to say that the committee feels that that test must go—or, at least, that it should not be the first test that is applied. The severity of the attack should be the determinant of what action should follow with regard to the dog and the owner. From memory, I am fairly sure that the minister acknowledged that concern at the committee. From her remarks today, I believe that she has taken that on board.

The evidence that the committee took was not all bad news. We had some helpful evidence from Mr Billy Gilchrist from my local council in East Ayrshire. He described examples of good practice, with the council working closely with Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service on evidence gathering, serving of notices and reporting of breaches of notice. That relationship seems to be working well and provides an excellent level of information sharing, which is resulting in effective use of dog control notices.

As the evidence developed, the discussion in the committee started focusing on what measures we could and should be considering to enable better and stronger implementation of the existing provisions—that is, to prevent attacks and bites rather than dealing with their aftermath. How can we better influence behaviour before attacks happen?

Awareness raising is important: various members have made suggestions of how that could be improved. There is also the issue of resources and further training for dog wardens, to ensure not only that they are aware of the legislation, but that they are able to deal with dangerous dog behaviour. Licensing schemes have been mentioned by a few members. Such a scheme could enable us to capture much of the data that we need to inform the debate and the Government's review, and could help us to deal with people who might wish to obstruct the dog control process.

Hospitals and general practitioners, too, could help us by recording attacks by dogs when injured people present at A and E departments or general practice surgeries. We think that they do not do that at the moment, but they should. The police and local councils could also help us by gathering any information that could help us to tackle the problem.

I am pleased that the committee's conclusion that the current dog control law is not fit for purpose will be taken forward by the Scottish Government, and that a full review of the legislation will be carried out. Prevention is probably where most of the gains will be. However, we need to strengthen the legislation to make it clear to the minority of dog owners who cannot or will not control their dogs that we are willing to act to get the situation under control.

16:03

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

As we have heard from many speakers, the debate on the committee's report on the post-legislative scrutiny of the 2010 act is vital. The Parliament has a duty to ensure that legislation works in regard to its intended purpose and, where it does not, it is appropriate that we attempt to fix it. That is especially important given that the overarching aim of the act that we are discussing was to reduce the number of dog attacks in Scotland.

The intention behind the 2010 act—to attempt to modernise the law on the control of dogs—was well meaning. However, as with many things, it is the implementation that has raised concerns. The enforcement and the understanding of the law as it stands are far too limited. Without change, the law

will not be best used as a mechanism to help prevent attacks.

It is clear that the situation needs to change. The committee report states:

“there is still an unacceptably high prevalence of dog attacks in Scotland and ... numbers have not reduced since the provisions of the 2010 Act came into force. Certain evidence points to an increase in dog attacks. Given the volume of such attacks and that the impact on victims, particularly on children, can be life changing, the Committee considers it to be nothing less than a national crisis.”

That is why we need action to be taken sooner rather than later. The lead the way campaign, which Clyde News is running, has also highlighted figures that show that, every year, thousands of kids in Scotland are attacked and left with life-changing injuries.

In the past eight years, and despite the passing of the 2010 act, there have been only 42 convictions under the current laws. That is why the committee's post-legislative scrutiny of the 2010 act and the recommendations in its report are welcome and necessary.

The 2010 act created an administrative regime that was intended to influence the behaviour of dog owners and people in charge of dogs. Local authorities were given powers to issue dog control notices to the owner or person in charge of a dog that they had failed to keep under control. However, the law led to an increased financial burden on local authorities and their staff, over a period in which council budgets were being slashed. Authorities had no resources available with which to respond to the new legislation. It is clear that the insufficient number of dog wardens has negatively impacted on local authorities' abilities to implement the 2010 act and on the act's effectiveness in reducing the number of out-of-control dogs.

That is not the fault of local authorities; it is the result of the failure to fund local government adequately. What is needed is resources, as is the case in relation to many well-intentioned Scottish Government policies. It is all well and good to have good intentions, but if policies cannot be implemented they are not fit for purpose. If the aim is to deliver legislation that will reduce dog attacks, the Government should reform the law and properly resource enforcement, so that out-of-control and dangerous dogs can be properly dealt with. In its report, the committee said that it

“believes that current dog control law is not fit for its purpose and calls on the Scottish Government to undertake a comprehensive review of all dog control legislation as a matter of urgency.”

Proper resourcing and reviews aside, there are actions that can be taken now. The committee indicated that a key factor that hampers the

effectiveness of the 2010 act is the absence of a Scottish dog control notice database. The Scottish ministers have had the power to establish such a database since the act came into force in 2011, but they have not yet done so.

Why has the database not been set up? The move is supported by the Kennel Club. My esteemed colleague Alex Neil, who secured a members' business debate on dog attacks last year, has said that a national database should have been created a long time ago, to enable us to track dangerous dogs when they move from one area to another.

I hope that, by listening to all the evidence that was provided to the committee during its scrutiny of the 2010 act, we can begin to take the necessary steps to better implement policy on the control of dogs.

We will know whether the steps that we take have been effective only when we see a reduction in the number of attacks. That cannot come soon enough, because, as I am sure all members agree, even one attack is one too many. We need the Government to act.

16:08

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I congratulate the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee on its substantial work in producing its report.

Our having a committee with "Post-legislative Scrutiny" in its title is a welcome move forward. Historically, members on the back benches, the front benches and quite generally have mumped and moaned about a lack of scrutiny of legislation. The report that we debate today sets a pretty high benchmark for what we might see in the future.

I am reminded by this process of how things change, and of how they do not. The post-legislative scrutiny report stands in a very important place. All but one of the members who spoke on the bill at stage 3 have departed this Parliament. Only the member who was in charge of the bill is left: well done to Christine Grahame, who is truly the last person standing. I congratulate her.

When the bill was introduced, it was well intentioned and widely supported, albeit that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, when referring to the power of the database in section 8, showed a marked lack of enthusiasm in his contribution on 22 April 2010.

However, the report has put things in a different place. The intention that there was in 2010 is clearly as important today as it was then; its implementation has been hobbled by our not seeing bits of it picked up. The report shows—in

painful detail—that that lacuna exists. It proffers no real insight into why so little action flowed from three years' hard work by Ms Grahame and others to get the bill over the finishing line and on to the statute book. In the debate at the time, the cabinet secretary said

"We ... have an enabling power"—

he was talking about section 8—but

"we are not persuaded that a database is either needed or wanted—nor is the committee."—[*Official Report*, 22 April 2010; c 25672.]

However, things move on and, despite that being the view in 2010, we must now regard that as unfinished business with regard to what we are talking about today. The eight years since the bill came into force in 2011 have been perhaps too long.

My experience of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee—otherwise known as the DPLR Committee, on which I served for 1,283 days until March 2016—may illustrate some of the ways by which we might better implement the Parliament's acts. A regular feature of the DPLR Committee was to say to the Government that there were errors in secondary legislation—they might be small errors or rather bigger ones—and, frequently, the Government would say that they would remedy those defects at the earliest opportunity. However, in the real world, the earliest opportunity often proved to be elusively distant or even non-existent, so the committee agreed with my suggestion that we should record those commitments and publish a list of them on a regular basis—it was quarterly, if I recall correctly.

That list shone a light into a dusty corner of our legislative process. Suddenly, the amendments that had been promised started to happen. The committee was publishing the list of those that were outstanding, and it was in the Government's interest to see the list shrink rather than continue to grow. Perhaps in relation to legislation, it might be useful if we had a list of all the bits of legislation that have not yet been commenced—on this bill, it has all been commenced, but in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which I was responsible for, there is a section that has not yet been commenced. There is a good and proper reason why that is so, but nonetheless, that was not in the public domain until I discovered it this morning. If we were to take that approach, it might be less likely that those important bits of legislation that we make would simply disappear.

The bill that we are discussing has not been forgotten. It has been amended in three places, twice by the Courts Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 and by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. It has not been forgotten, but it has not been fully implemented.

As have others, I have been engaged by dogs when I would rather that they had not done so. Indeed, throughout the debate, I have been sitting on four fang marks from a leafleting escapade—I cannot exhibit them to members for a rather obvious reason. In the Falkirk West by-election in 2000, I shoved a leaflet through a door in Falkirk, and a dog collected it and my hand as part of the process. I have a scar, here, from six stitches. The householders, Mr and Mrs Reid, kindly let me wash the wound. It turned out that the dog was called Oliver, so I am the only politician to have a scar from being bitten by Oliver Reid.

Finally, there is a question whether the dogs or the humans are out of control. Dog fighting is a big issue in the United States and, once, they routinely destroyed hundreds of dogs that were involved in it. Now, people take those dog-fighting dogs, rehabilitate them—in most cases, successfully—and put them into homes where they have happy lives. If that does not prove that the problem is the owners and not the dogs, I do not know what does.

16:15

James Kelly: It has been an interesting debate. As I said in my initial contribution, the committee, under Jenny Marra's stewardship, has done an excellent job in setting the scene for post-legislative reform around the control of dogs. As Alex Neil pointed out, the inquiry branched out into a much wider review. The various contributions to the debate from around the chamber have showed that there is a lot of interest in the area. The debate has been constructive, with members offering practical solutions in relation not just to legislation but to making the whole system work better to protect people from out-of-control dogs.

As Alex Neil said, there is clearly a real problem not just in terms of the growth in the number of attacks that the statistics show, but in the number of incidents that we see in our local areas and constituencies. As Emma Harper pointed out, part of the reason is perhaps the growth in the number of people who own dogs as pets. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that there is a real issue, and that we have to do our work as parliamentarians properly to address it.

Not only are there issues around young children being severely injured or, sadly, in some instances, losing their lives, as the committee heard about. As Anas Sarwar pointed out, there is also the psychological impact. He gave the example of how a dog can be rolling about a park, and how young children can not just be terrified in that minute but end up suffering psychological trauma as an effect.

Christine Grahame, the member who introduced the 2010 legislation, gave a very interesting overview. The key point that she made is that when a member's bill is passed by the Parliament, it does not have the profile that a Government bill has, and it does not receive the same backing. That has been one of the shortcomings regarding raising awareness of the 2010 act. We would do well to bear that in mind in relation to not just Christine Grahame's legislation, but members' bills in general.

A number of points were made in relation to reviews that could be undertaken. Jenny Marra made the point about one free bite being allowed because of the legal principle relating to reasonable apprehension. That seems unreasonable, and it should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The other thing that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency is the implementation of the dog control database. I listened to the minister's response to Christine Grahame on that and the point that the legislation requires a consultation. The consultation has to be expedited, because if we do not have in place a proper dog control database to collect data and manage potentially out-of-control dogs, we will not even start to get to the heart of the problem.

A number of people touched on local authority funding, including Alex Rowley, who made the reasonable point that, if we are to have proper legislation, local authorities do not just need to administer it—they need the funding to carry it through. Colin Beattie highlighted one of the consequences of their not being able to do that when he said that there had been only 42 prosecutions. Part of the reason for that might be that local authorities have been reluctant to take prosecutions forward because of the cost and other funding pressures.

That led a number of members on to a discussion about licensing. Alex Neil made a strong case for licensing. I do not have a declared position on that, but I was quite open to his point that if there was a licensing scheme that raised revenue, which could fund the proper administration of the control of dogs, that might overcome some of the other issues relating to council cuts and pressures.

I want to make a point about councils' consistency in implementation. We heard an example from Maurice Corry that showed that the implementation is patchy, inconsistent and not effective in his area. However, we heard a good example from East Ayrshire from Willie Coffey. That all needs to be tightened up.

A lot of really good points have been made in the debate. Alex Rowley summed up well the

overall point that if we are going to pass legislation, we need to ensure that it is fit for purpose. The committee has made a number of important recommendations in relation to the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 and practice in the control of dogs in areas that have been brought to members' attention. The minister needs to outline a more speedy plan to take them forward.

16:21

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): As a substitute member of the committee, I took part in the evidence sessions on the legislation and, given the plethora of possible new legislation relating to dog control and welfare, I have followed the debate closely.

The committee's report should herald an urgent change in order to protect people from horrific attacks and dog-related antisocial behaviour. There is nothing funny about dog attacks. The shocking examples that Jenny Marra mentioned are evidence that our communities have all too often been blighted by them. That highlights the failure of current laws to be effective in tackling out-of-control dogs that attack people or other animals.

As Christine Grahame mentioned, the committee discussed how it appeared, worryingly, that because the 2010 act came about from a member's bill, the Government completely took its eye off the ball and made little effort to ensure that the legislation was understood or was working in practice. Alex Neil was right to highlight the Government's complacency surrounding the bill in committee.

I am astonished by the lack of data that has been collected over the eight years since the 2010 act came into force. Without data, it is difficult to assess how effective or otherwise the act has been in reducing the number of out-of-control dogs. Indeed, many out-of-control dogs will never come to the notice of enforcement agencies because of a lack of understanding of the legislation coupled with poor implementation.

However, there is external data that suggests that the act and/or its enforcement are not working as intended. Reports indicate that in some cases, dog bites have gone up by 80 per cent since the 2010 act came into force. Data that the NHS released showed a similar trend, albeit at a less alarming rate. Its figures showed that in 2006, the number of admissions to hospital as a result of dog bites was 115, and that in 2015, that number had risen to 155, which is an increase of 35 per cent.

As a result of the 2010 act, a potentially effective framework has been put in place, for

which many animal welfare charities have publicly commended the Government, and dog control notices, if used correctly, can be proportionate and timely. There is a strong argument that they should be retained, as they are potentially a valuable tool for tackling dog-related antisocial behaviour. However, things need to change. The 2010 act allows for local authority officers to serve DCNs, but it does not allow the police to issue them. In 2011-12 and 2012-13, the police in Scotland dealt with 1,177 and 1,012 incidents relating to dogs respectively. However, only 239 dog control notices were issued by local authorities in period 2011-12 to 2012-13.

Christine Grahame: Was Finlay Carson as surprised as I was that many members of NFU Scotland were unaware of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010? It could be of great use to farmers, but they simply did not know about it.

Finlay Carson: Absolutely—I could not agree more. It was not only farmers who were unaware of the 2010 act—the same was true across all sectors. There was a distinct lack of publicity.

Although the number of dog control notices issued increased to 290 in 2015-16, it is clear that more can and must to be done to support local authorities, particularly in enforcement.

A root-and-branch review of all dog control legislation in order to address the problem would be widely welcomed. As I highlighted when I attended the committee, there is a danger in too much legislation relating to dog welfare and control being lined up to go through Parliament simultaneously. We have heard about Christine Grahame's proposed bill, which is designed to tackle irresponsible dog breeding; Emma Harper's proposed bill, which would tackle livestock worrying; and my colleague Jeremy Balfour's proposed bill, which would give better protection to animals that are sold in pet shops. Those proposed bills are alongside measures to increase sentences for animal cruelty and perhaps future legislation on puppy farming and trafficking and on dog walking.

I stress that in no way do I aim to undermine my fellow members' efforts to bring forward such issues, because I understand the amount of work that goes into a member's bill. However, the current law on dangerous and out-of-control dogs is fragmented between various acts and statutory instruments at devolved and UK levels. Along with other animal welfare organisations, I believe that this is a timely opportunity to consolidate the provisions in the 2010 act with other dog control laws in order to ensure that enforcers and the public are aware of their respective roles and responsibilities. I urge the minister to seriously consider an approach that looks at the consolidation of dog control laws in order to not

only address the fact that the legislation is not fit for purpose, but promote and ensure responsible dog breeding, sales and ownership. As we have heard from Stewart Stevenson and Alex Neil, out-of-control dogs are often a result of out-of-control owners. That is the heart of the problem.

On a positive note, the minister said to me at committee that she thought that the Government should look at taking a one-size-fits-all approach. I hope that that remains her position six months on, so that we get the legislation right for our communities and for people such as Jon Diggle. Local authorities must be supported in increasing the number of wardens and officers, because there simply are not enough of those people on the ground in our rural communities to enforce the 2010 act.

I applaud my fellow members of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee for their recommendations, which show the power of Parliament's committees in pushing for a review of legislation when current laws are not working. I thank Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and others for their briefings. I hope that today's debate is the first step in ensuring that we get dog control laws that will be properly interpreted and enforced and which help to reduce the number of appalling attacks.

16:27

Ash Denham: This has been a constructive debate on the comprehensive report that the committee prepared. Once again, I thank the committee members and the clerking team for their excellent work in preparing the report. I also thank those who took the time to offer their views, which helped to inform the report.

It is right that Parliament takes the time to look back at previous legislation and to assess how it is operating. It is only by doing so that we can learn lessons for the future and help to improve the practical impact that legislation can make. The report that was published and today's debate are testimony to the value of the work that was done by the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, and I thank it for that work.

We have heard about the tragic impact that dog attacks can have, which a number of members across the chamber mentioned. Dog owners must be responsible and keep their dogs under effective control—that much is clear. The way in which our laws work and the way in which laws are enforced are critical.

Last week, I published a review, which seeks views on improving the operational effectiveness of the 2010 act. Local authorities have a key role to play in keeping communities safe through the use of their powers under the 2010 act, but the

laws must be appropriate to help them to do that. The review seeks views on better enforcement measures.

Jenny Marra: I am very conscious of the timescale of the reviews. The Government will be carrying out two reviews, or consultations—one will take place immediately; the other will take place throughout 2020. However, by the end of 2020, we will have only about three or four months left of this parliamentary session. In what timescale does the minister foresee new legislation being introduced? Is it possible that that will happen in this session of Parliament? Will she commit to that timescale today?

Ash Denham: The review that is under way is looking at what we can do in the short term in order to address the enforcement of the 2010 act. The review that we will carry out next year will have a much wider look at the issues, and I cannot commit to what the timescales might be for any changes that might be undertaken following that wider review.

As part of our consultation, we are looking at a new offence of obstructing a local authority officer and new fixed penalty notice powers for breaches of dog control notices. The review also explores how a national dog control notice database could be established to aid enforcement of dog control notices across Scotland. That point was picked up by members across the chamber, including Jenny Marra, and it was suggested that the Government should establish a database and not carry out the consultation. I clarify that the consultation is a statutory requirement—the 2010 act requires the Government to consult before the database can be established.

I will pick up a number of contributions that were made. Alex Neil made a number of points about consolidation of the law, the carrying out of the wider review and licensing. I assure him that I will consider his points very carefully.

Donald Cameron, Liam Kerr and Willie Coffey mentioned the number and severity of attacks on postal workers carrying out their duties. Christine Grahame, the member who introduced the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Bill, reiterated that the intention behind that legislation is for there to be a preventative regime—that is, to stop out-of-control dogs going on to become dangerous dogs. She also made an important point about awareness raising. I had taken note of that point from the committee's report, and I intend to run an awareness-raising campaign starting this year. I will also take on board and give some thought to Jenny Marra's point about making that campaign accessible or directed to children.

Colin Beattie made a compelling point to do with data sharing and said that the contents of dog

control notices should be shared with those who had reported a dog's behaviour. I think that he will be pleased to know that that issue features in the review, because we had taken that important point on board.

Alex Neil: The minister referred to proposed changes that are the responsibility of another department. Will she ensure that the Government takes a joined-up approach and that everybody sings from the same hymn sheet? That will be extremely important for achieving the objectives.

Ash Denham: The member is quite right to make that point, and I will undertake to ensure that we are working in a joined-up fashion across Government to address the issues.

The Government is committed to keeping communities safe from out-of-control dogs. Understanding the extent of the problems associated with irresponsible dog ownership is critical, and all changes to the law must be evidence based, so we are seeking to put in place better recording of data relating to injuries caused by dogs. That information is so important.

Changes would need independent enforcement agencies to use their powers in relation to dog control more consistently and effectively, as a number of members said.

A wider review of dog control law in 2020 through a consultation looking at the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and other associated legislation will help to assess how the overall legislative regime can be improved and whether it should be modernised.

Although legislation certainly has a role to play, how independent enforcement agencies use their powers is fundamental to an effective dog control regime. I am sad to say that the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee's report found a wide variation in how local authorities use their powers under the 2010 act, as a number of speakers said.

New data that the Government has received from local authorities merely highlights that variation in approach. The data, which was provided to the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee last week, shows that some local authorities do not even have one dog warden.

Although it is obviously for local authorities to determine their local priorities, changes to legislation will have little impact if local authorities do not prioritise activity in this area.

One dog attack is one attack too many. I am committed to looking at the legislative framework right across this area to identify what more can be done to keep our communities safe.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liam Kerr to close the debate on behalf of the committee.

16:35

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to be closing the debate on behalf of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee in my capacity as deputy convener, but it is a debate that I wish was not necessary. As the convener did, I put on record my thanks to everyone who provided the committee with evidence as part of its post-legislative scrutiny of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010—and to the clerks, of course. In particular, I thank the people who shared their experiences of dog attacks, especially the parents who bravely recounted the attacks on their children.

Over the past three and a half years, I have listened to some pretty challenging and difficult things in this place, but I can honestly say that the session that the committee had in February 2019, in which various families shared their experiences, was among the most powerful and harrowing testimony that I have ever heard. I reread the *Official Report* of that session before today's debate. It contains a piece of testimony by Veronica Lynch that I could never forget; like Bill Bowman, I am unable to bring myself to repeat it today.

That reminded me that, as Alex Rowley flagged up to us, we are talking about "a national crisis". Donald Cameron brought up the Communication Workers Union's evidence that there were 250 dog attacks on postal workers in Scotland last year, and that 2,500 postal workers have been attacked in Scotland since the 2010 act came into force. As the convener said, there have been 129 such attacks since April, in a period of only six months.

Last year, I joined an Aberdeen postie on his round. He told me that, in one stair that he delivered to, there was a known aggressive and violent dog that charged at the door and tried to attack him each time he delivered. Eventually, the door happened to be ajar and this man, who was doing his job, was brutally attacked, which led to extensive time off work, post-traumatic issues and surgery. The convener was right to flag up the position of care workers and delivery drivers, who, we must remember, are not included in the shocking statistic—129 attacks since April—that I mentioned.

The reality is that people are not aware of the situation—that point was made succinctly and saliently by Christine Grahame. In Alex Neil's members' business debate in May 2018, she made the important point that

"for the 2010 act to be effective, the public have to know that that is the law"

but, as she said,

“The public at large have no idea of the legislation.”—
[*Official Report*, 8 May 2018; c 83.]

Christine Grahame was right to say that the Scottish Government should initiate a public awareness campaign to educate the public about the provisions of the 2010 act. I was pleased to hear about the social media and local authority campaigns, but we must have a clearer timescale, and I hope that the committee receives that by return.

I turn to the issue of what we should inform the public about. During the committee’s oral evidence sessions, we heard that there was a lack of availability of consistent data, as Colin Beattie mentioned. Dr Alasdair Corfield of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine told the committee that his figure of around 5,000 dog bites in Scotland a year was probably an underestimate, on the basis that some victims would not attend accident and emergency, particularly if the bite was not severe. I heard the minister acknowledge that there is a lack of data, but I did not hear her say whether the recording and collection of data would be dealt with urgently, and I hope to hear from her on that in committee very soon.

Public knowledge is one thing, but it is even worse if our local authorities do not have the required knowledge. As Bill Bowman and many others pointed out, the Scottish Government has failed to introduce the Scottish dog control database that was mandated by the 2010 act. Detailed analysis of the statistics that are gathered could increase the effectiveness of future evidence-based policies in this area, and if we had a database of verbal and written warnings that had been issued in respect of out-of-control dogs, that could be used when considering “reasonable apprehension”. Police Scotland told the committee

“It could be a great form of evidence. If we are building a case under the 1991 act, we could use that register to demonstrate proof that a dog has been the subject of a dog control notice or that warning letters have been issued.”—
[*Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee*, 7 March 2019; c 40.]

Sticking with the issue of enforcement, during evidence taking, the committee heard—James Kelly mentioned this—that an insufficient number of local authority officers had been appointed to enforce the 2010 act, and Willie Coffey brought up the fact that the lack of sufficient training could be a barrier to the effectiveness of the act.

The committee noted the evidence from the National Dog Warden Association Scotland that many of the existing dog wardens were struggling with their workload.

As Blue Cross put it in its briefing, it is futile to pass legislation if the requisite resources are not made available to those who are statutorily charged with implementing its provisions. Lack of enforcement also equates to a lack of deterrence.

The committee recognised the importance of having sufficient numbers of suitably trained local authority officers and asked the Scottish Government to collect information on that area to help inform the Government’s review.

Finlay Carson and many others pointed out that the complicated network of legislation means that it is confusing and unclear for enforcers to know which piece of legislation to use, who is responsible for enforcing it and when to apply it. Alex Rowley picked up the committee’s words that the landscape is “not fit for purpose”. I heard the minister say that the police had inconsistent knowledge of the powers and that there is wide variation in local authority use of the powers.

However, I respectfully suggest that that is not really the issue here. If Alex Neil is right that the powers are contained in legislation that dates back to the 19th century, it is no wonder that there is an issue, and it is for Government to address that. The solution proposed by the committee is that

“consolidation of dog control law could improve clarity for the public, local authorities and the police on the handling of out of control and dangerous dogs ... a modern consolidated Act of the Scottish Parliament on dog control law is required.”

I hope that the Government will look very carefully at that proposed solution and ensure that it does not get lost in the “too difficult” pile.

Emma Harper: The 2010 act focuses on control of dogs and out-of-control dogs. Most of the report focuses on dog bites and the impact on postal workers and so on. However, the act has only one line about dogs attacking other animals. Does Liam Kerr agree that we need separate legislation in relation to livestock worrying?

Liam Kerr: I am speaking on behalf of the committee, which certainly found that there is a need to consolidate the legislation. I accept the member’s point—it is important to remember that there are attacks that go far wider than those on people—but the committee’s recommendation is for a consolidated piece of legislation.

On behalf of the committee, I thank everyone who has taken part in the debate. Many solutions have been proposed. The debate has been powerful, moving and timely. However, the process must not end today. I am concerned by the minister’s inability to commit to timescales following the convener’s intervention.

Alex Neil held his members’ business debate in May 2018. It was harrowing and the members who

were in the chamber then all agreed that something needed to be done. Yet, in March this year, he was moved to say:

“there seems to be complacency about the problem and a total lack of leadership on the part of the justice department”

in relation to the problem. He added that the problem of dog attacks is very serious and that the

“Government needs to get a grip of that as a priority”.—*[Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2019; c 28-30.]*

In February, the committee heard chilling, disturbing testimony. I say to those who are watching the debate: please be aware that what follows is highly distressing; vulnerable viewers may wish to mute this bit.

The committee heard that Claire Booth’s son Ryan was six when

“a white English bull terrier came running out of the trees and knocked Ryan to the ground. The dog covered his whole body, and it was followed very quickly by another English bull terrier, which ran right into him, too ... The scene was carnage ... we noticed right away that Ryan’s ear was off the side of his head ... the owner was in the background ... shouting out, ‘Don’t worry—the dogs won’t touch you.’”

Claire told us:

“Ryan ... will have to undergo another three operations to remove cartilage from his sternum, attach it to his ear and rebuild his ear with a skin graft.”

She continued:

“There has been a traumatic effect on his entire childhood: he does not want to go to places where he should be striving to go as a little boy ... our younger children ... now have a huge fear of dogs ... I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and had to go through cognitive behavioural therapy.”—*[Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, 21 February 2019; c 4-6.]*

Today’s debate must trigger action. We must not ignore Ryan Booth, Kellie Lynch, Rhianna Grady, Jon Diggie and all the postal workers we have heard about, and so many others who have been attacked. The time for talking is long past; the time for action is now.

Committee Announcement

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a committee announcement. I call Bob Doris, the convener of the Social Security Committee, to make an announcement on the committee’s inquiry into benefit take-up.

16:44

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): As convener of the Social Security Committee, I am pleased to announce that we have launched an inquiry into benefit take-up. Statistics from Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions estimate that, in 2016-17, only 31 per cent of families without children who were eligible for working tax credit and only 60 per cent of those eligible for pension credit claimed the benefits that they were entitled to.

Because of the difficulties in estimating eligibility, the full number of benefits that go unclaimed is unknown, but we want to explore how take-up rates for the reserved and devolved social security benefits can be improved. The committee will investigate some of the reasons why people do not claim and whether it is to do with stigma associated with benefits, a general lack of awareness around entitlement or the complexity of the application process. We want to investigate what can be done to address the issue, so we will look at previous efforts to promote take-up and investigate, for example, how technology can be used to automate some benefits.

Later this month, the Scottish Government will publish its benefit take-up strategy, which will set out how the Government intends to promote take-up of the new Scottish social security benefits. As entitlement to some of those benefits is linked to being in receipt of a United Kingdom benefit, we will explore what impact that promotion work could have on the take-up of those UK benefits.

To inform our views, we are engaging with stakeholders, organisations and individuals to answer nine key questions, which I will set out. What do we know about how much is unclaimed and why? What are the gaps in knowledge and research and how can those gaps be reduced? How can the administration of benefits be improved to maximise take-up? How can technology be used as far as possible to create a more automated system that uses information that is gathered for other reasons to award benefits automatically, and what would be the advantages and disadvantages of that greater automation? What can we learn from previous campaigns to increase take-up? Are different approaches

required for different benefits and client groups? What kinds of eligibility criteria ensure better take-up? How might the development of Scottish social security impact on the take-up of reserved and devolved benefits? Are there other questions that the stakeholders or MSPs think that we should consider as part of the inquiry?

As well as taking written and oral evidence, the committee wants to hear from people with lived experience of the benefits system. In the run-up to challenge poverty week, which starts next Monday, some members of the committee will visit the Glasgow North West Citizens Advice Bureau to hear from advice workers and their clients about some of the reasons why people do not claim the benefits that they are entitled to.

We look forward to reporting back to the Parliament with our findings and recommendations in the new year.

Thank you, Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to make the announcement.

Decision Time

16:47

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There is just one question this evening. The question is, that motion S5M-19160, in the name of Jenny Marra, on post-legislative scrutiny of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee's 4th Report 2019 (Session 5) *Post-legislative Scrutiny: Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010* (SP Paper 572).

Citizens Advice Services in Scotland (80th Year)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-17933, in the name of Anas Sarwar, on the 80th year of Scotland's citizens advice service. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 2019 marks the 80th year of Scotland's Citizens Advice service; congratulates it for the high-quality advice and advocacy that it has provided over the years, which are the twin aims of the service; understands that, in 2018, it assisted nearly 262,000 clients with almost 766,000 issues and that, along with the advice that it provided, its bureaux also helped people complete over 44,100 official forms, with claims totalling nearly £138 million; acknowledges what it sees as the unique advocacy role that it plays, which aims to ensure that the voices of citizens coming into bureaux across communities are listened to, and acted on, by national policy-makers, and believes that the Citizens Advice service continues to play a valuable role to play in addressing the community and national needs of people in Glasgow and across Scotland.

16:49

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in support of my motion and of the 80th year of Scotland's citizens advice service. The service is a well-known, well-respected and independent one, which, each year, is used by almost 300,000 clients—or, as I prefer to call them, citizens—who trust it to give them advice and champion their rights on issues that matter to them. It wins extra funds for those who have been hit hardest by welfare reform, campaigns for energy suppliers to cut their tariffs and improve their customer service, and holds dodgy payday loan companies to account.

Independent research shows that the work of the Scottish citizens advice service contributes more than £166 million to the common good in Scotland. It works in local communities across the country, helping people to know their rights and get their lives back on track. In these difficult times, crucially, the service is free, which is possible only because it is delivered by the nearly 2,500 volunteers who work in citizens advice bureaux all over Scotland. I am proud that my mum is a former citizens advice bureau volunteer, as is my sister, and I hope that, one day, my kids will also be volunteers for the service.

The average time that is given by each volunteer each week is six hours. If all the service's volunteers were paid the average wage for those six hours, the additional wage bill to CABx across Scotland every year would be £10 million per annum. The fantastic contribution made by volunteers is the lifeblood of citizens advice

work, and I pay tribute to every one of them for the time that they give up to help others who are in need of help, support and advice.

However, the service is seeing increased demand and is coming under increased pressure. That has been building because of a number of factors, such as the increase in demand for financial advice, changes in people's benefits and the catastrophic impact of the introduction of universal credit. Such pressure has been made even worse by the level of sanctions that are being imposed and the introduction of the benefit cap, which has hit 13,000 households in Scotland. The service supports benefit applications at a time when applications for crisis grants from the Scottish welfare fund increased by 11 per cent in 2018-19, as more people in Scotland turned to it due to the cost of living crisis.

There have also been increases both in the number of people who are in in-work poverty and in the use of food banks, with the service reporting that one in four workers is struggling financially. It also provides support to European Union nationals who have applied to the EU settlement scheme. There are increased levels of fuel poverty, and the service is also dealing with the consequences of an increase in the number of scams, with almost half of all Scots reporting that they have been targeted. Further, only last week, the service provided advice to consumers who had been hit by the collapse of Thomas Cook.

Therefore, across a range of areas, Citizens Advice Scotland is dealing with an increase in the number of people who seek support. However, along with other services, it is having to provide advice at a time when finding financial support is difficult. In my area of Glasgow, it is reported that the council is currently considering reducing funding for advice agencies by up to 40 per cent. That would have a devastating impact on advice services and, more importantly, on the people who rely on them. We are seeing that pattern being repeated right across Scotland, as local authorities face significant budget pressures.

I know that members' business debates are supposed to be collegiate—which this one is—but I say to the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work that we must look at the decisions that are made in our two Parliaments. That is regardless of whether those decisions are on welfare reform, on which changes are made at Westminster, or on the funding model for our local authorities, which is decided in this chamber. They all have implications in council chambers across the country and for vital services for the most vulnerable people in our communities, who rely on them.

According to the Scottish Parliament information centre, councils spend more than two thirds of their budgets on services that support and target our poorest and most vulnerable people. Having such focused expenditure means that, when dealing with budget reductions, councils have little option but to make most of their savings on services that are used more by people from lower-income groups.

If councils spend a greater proportion of their money on services that people from more vulnerable backgrounds rely on and they are forced to cut their budgets, they will make cuts in communities where people rely on those services to survive. I urge the minister to reflect on the implications of decisions that the Scottish Government makes and on how they will impact on the citizens advice service now and in the future.

If the citizens advice service did not exist, there would be a huge gap in support services and a desperate need for help and advice that public agencies would not be able to meet. There is nothing else like it at a national level. Citizens Advice Scotland and its volunteers deserve our thanks for the work that they have done in the past 80 years, but they deserve more than just our thanks. They need the support of Government and politicians across all levels and all political parties so that they can continue to provide their support and advice for another 80 years.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have 11 members wishing to speak, so I will be ruthless and keep members to four-minute speeches. You have been warned.

16:56

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I am pleased to have been called to speak in this members' business debate to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Scotland's citizens advice service. I congratulate Anas Sarwar on securing the debate.

Since the first citizens advice bureau was established in Glasgow in 1939, we have seen a significant development of the service, and we currently have an extensive network throughout Scotland, with 59 bureaux that serve individuals the length and breadth of our country. The excellent service that is provided includes high-quality advice that is free, impartial and confidential. For some years now, the biggest part of the case load has concerned benefits and debt issues, but advice is also provided on employment rights, housing and fuel poverty, to name but a few subjects. The citizens advice service has a unique advocacy role and it helps many individuals with their appeals to social security and other tribunals.

It is also worth noting that Citizens Advice Scotland campaigns for social change on the issues that are brought through its doors. In recent years, excellent campaigns have been mounted on funeral poverty and fuel poverty, for example.

One of the most extensive reports in recent times has focused on the introduction of the new universal credit benefit by the Department for Work and Pensions. Indeed, the problems and hardship that individual claimants have experienced have been so severe that Citizens Advice Scotland called for a halt to the roll-out of the benefit so that the serious policy issues could be addressed. It has also called for a reduction in the time that people have to wait for their first payment. That is an example of the vital work that the citizens advice service does.

We need to keep up the pressure on the United Kingdom Government to make changes to universal credit, which is causing such hardship for our citizens. I understand that, in my Cowdenbeath constituency, 583 of the 1,936 contacts over the past year involved problems with universal credit. What a lot that says about the state of Westminster's social security system. The question that must be asked is, "Whither the safety net now?"

In addition to the activities that I have outlined, Citizens Advice Scotland undertakes specialist projects, for example for members of the armed forces in partnership with Poppyscotland and others, and for kinship carers.

A timely specialist project is the EU citizens support scheme that is delivered by Citizens Advice Scotland. It is intended to ensure that EU citizens in Scotland can access any help that they need to apply online to continue to live in the United Kingdom post 30 June 2021. Significant Scottish Government funding has been made available to allow the citizens advice service to operate a national helpline, which is free and impartial, and there is also a solicitor-led helpline for complex cases.

In the Cowdenbeath bureau, an EU settlement support service worker has been in place since April and has dealt with 60-plus cases. I welcome that much-needed service, which underlines in these alarming times the very important message of the Scottish National Party Scottish Government to EU citizens who live in our country that this is their home, they are welcome here and we want them to stay.

I add my congratulations to Citizens Advice Scotland on its 80th anniversary. I thank it for all that it does for individuals across Scotland who need a bit of help, and I commend in particular the 2,370 volunteers across the Citizens Advice

Scotland network, who in the past year alone have contributed over 760,000 hours of their time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Ewing. You have set a wonderful example.

17:00

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I thank Anas Sarwar for securing the debate. I add my congratulations to CAS on its birthday celebrations and thank it for all the work that it has done.

Like the previous two speakers, I put on record my particular thanks to the more than 2,000 volunteers who give up their time to provide such an excellent service. Without those volunteers, CABx would not exist to provide the service that we across the chamber have all come to respect.

One of CAS's great strengths is that it is independent of local government and national Government. As social security is rolled out further in Scotland, CABx will have a really important role to play in the new social security system. I hope that their role will be recognised by both national Government and local government, because we heard about funding in Glasgow being cut, and I expect it is a similar story across the whole of Scotland. CABx can exist and provide that role only if they have the appropriate funding from national and local government. The duty is on all of us, whichever political party we represent, to make sure that that happens.

If the new social security system is to work well in Scotland, there will need to be independent advice for people who are making applications, both at the start of the process and all the way through it. That is why the funding is so important.

We have seen CAS develop lots of new services, which previous speakers have mentioned. The help-to-claim service with regard to universal credit has been a real success. If we look at the number of people who are accessing the service and, most important, the quick response and the independent advice that they get, we can see that it is very encouraging. The service has certainly been very helpful.

The other area that I will highlight is the work that CAB volunteers do at tribunals. Tribunals can often be frightening places and, often, claimants have never been there before. They are unsure about what they are meant to say and how they are meant to act. I know from personal experience, having worked as a member of tribunals, that volunteers often come along with people to support them legally and, as important, emotionally, through the process. CAS is there to represent those people and its dual role of emotional and legal support is almost unique

among the organisations in Scotland that I know of.

I hope that the motion will be well debated, and I hope that all parties will support—not only in words, but with actions—CAS's requirement for funding. I wish my best to CAS for its next 80 years.

17:03

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I, too, thank Anas Sarwar for securing today's debate, which marks the 80th anniversary of Scotland's citizens advice service.

In 1938, with a world war looming, the National Council of Social Service, which was the forerunner of today's National Council of Voluntary Organisations, established a group to investigate how the needs of the civilian population in wartime could be met. The group concluded that

"Citizens Advice Bureaux should be established throughout the country".

Accordingly, on 4 September, the day after Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, more than 200 citizens advice bureaux were established across the UK. Scotland's first bureau opened in Glasgow, to be followed by others throughout Scotland.

During the second world war, more than 60 bureaux, staffed by volunteers, handled enquiries relating to wartime issues including tracing relatives whose homes had been bombed, locating prisoners of war and lost ration books.

Post-war, despite funding being cut by the Ministry of Health, citizens advice bureaux continued with support from charities including the Nuffield Foundation, the Carnegie Trust and The Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

In the 1980s, the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux became independent from the UK-wide Citizens Advice Bureau. The Scottish citizens advice network now comprises 59 bureaux and, with the extra help unit in Glasgow, provides free, independent, confidential, impartial and high-quality advice to clients.

Citizens Advice Scotland serves a dual purpose: it provides free access to quality information and advice for consumers. In 2018 alone, Citizens Advice Scotland dealt with 245,000 clients, helped to complete almost 50,000 benefits and other forms, and concluded 4,700 tribunals and court appeals. Also in 2018, Citizens Advice Scotland helped clients to access £130.7 million of benefits and returns on overpaid bills.

The main areas of assistance that were offered in 2018 related to benefits, debt, employment, housing and legal proceedings. Most people who

use such services are from less-prosperous communities.

Alongside providing high quality advice, Citizens Advice Scotland advocates and campaigns to achieve positive social change across Scotland, and actively engages with decision makers in Government, companies and regulators to achieve change that will benefit consumers. For example, since 2015, Citizens Advice Scotland has campaigned on tackling fuel poverty.

The Scottish Government commissioned Citizens Advice Scotland to produce a report that informed and directly shaped the Scottish Government's "Funeral Costs Plan", which is another tangible example of Citizens Advice Scotland's vital advocacy work.

Its 2019-20 advocacy plan, "Delivering positive change", includes the "For your benefit" campaign, which is designed to empower people to solve their problems. It will raise awareness of the eligibility criteria for social security entitlements, tackle scammers and destigmatise problem debt. Such work ensures that the voices of clients are heard and acted on by local and national policy makers.

In 2018, Scotland's citizens advice bureaux were staffed by more than 3,340 workers, including 2,370 volunteers, who contributed more than 760,000 hours of their time. That voluntary work was valued at almost £11 million. I volunteered in 1986 and 1987. The experience that I gained in dealing with the public proved to be invaluable when I was elected to the City of Glasgow District Council in 1992.

In 2018, Citizens Advice Scotland received annual funding that totalled almost £6.5 million from the Scottish Government and the UK Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Across Scotland, local authorities also support bureaux. Unfortunately, despite the vital work that colleagues have outlined in the debate, my constituents lost the services of North Ayrshire Citizens Advice Service when Labour-run North Ayrshire Council withdrew its core funding, and the last bureau closed in March last year. Given that, in 2018, for every £1 of core advice funding that Citizens Advice Scotland offered, £10 was returned to the community in client gains, that decision was penny wise and pound foolish.

To quote Lord Beveridge from 1948,

"Citizens Advice Bureaux make the world appear to many citizens in distress to contain some element of reason and friendship. The adviser at a citizens advice bureau is only a fellow citizen with time and knowledge and, if he is worthy of his position, with infinite patience."

Today, that remains true.

17:07

Jackie Baillie (Dunbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Anas Sarwar on securing debating time and for giving me the opportunity to praise the fantastic work that citizens advice bureaux have done for the past 80 years in my constituency and across Scotland. Having been, in the late 1990s, the local authority officer who introduced the first citizens advice bureau in East Dunbartonshire, I have a soft spot for citizens advice bureaux.

Citizens advice bureaux are fantastic institutions that have helped hundreds of thousands of Scots over the years. Their dedicated staff and more than 2,000 Scottish volunteers offer free impartial advice to members of the public who are in uncertain financial situations. Perhaps they need advice on how best to raise a family on a low income, or what to do when they are affected by scams.

However, their work goes wider than advice on social security. If people need consumer advice or advocacy on anything from water to energy, they can go to the citizens advice bureau. No problem is too small or complicated for bureaux to handle, and they always try their best to help clients.

Over the years, Citizens Advice Scotland and its local bureaux have run campaigns that have raised awareness among members of the public on important issues that directly affect them. For example, Citizens Advice Scotland recently launched a campaign on scam awareness, which helped to equip people with the skills that they need to spot scams, to tackle the stigma that surrounds scams and to promote the importance of reporting when people suspect that they are being scammed. With almost 40 per cent of over-65s being victims of over-the-phone scams, that campaign made hundreds of constituents in my area, many of whom are elderly, feel safer and more prepared.

There are more than 70 hard-working CAB volunteers in my constituency who help residents in West Dunbartonshire and in Argyll and Bute. Anyone who knows my constituency knows that that is a huge geographical area to cover. There are offices dotted all over the constituency to make it as convenient as possible for local residents to seek out advice when they need it. The lengths that the hundreds of CAB volunteers and 33 staff in West Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute go to to ensure that my constituents have easily accessible advice is highly commendable, so I take this opportunity to thank them publicly for the fantastic work that they do, day in and day out. The selfless support that the volunteers provide in my area adds up to more than 20,000 hours being donated annually to offer advice to local residents. The monetary value of

their donated time is more than £350,000 a year. It is important that that is recognised by funders, so I entirely associate myself with the remarks that were made by Anas Sarwar.

Between January and June 2019 alone, West Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau helped with more than 6,000 inquiries covering a range of issues including debt advice, taxation queries and issues arising from the roll-out of universal credit. That is a huge number of inquiries to deal with. The fact that so many people feel comfortable going to CABx for advice and support is testament to the trusted service that they provide.

CABx do not just offer advice: they get life-changing results for their clients. In 2018-19, the West Dunbartonshire bureau helped more than 4,800 clients to gain £2.8 million and the Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau helped 1,100 clients to gain more than £700,000 in money owed. That is a huge amount of money that will greatly improve the lives of thousands of my constituents.

CABx help people on low incomes, but it is important to recognise that they also help people from every social class. Everybody uses CABx as trusted sources of advice and information.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: And there you must conclude.

Jackie Baillie: It is truly—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. I am sorry. You must conclude there.

Jackie Baillie: It is truly an all-citizens service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are an old hand. You should know better.

Jackie Baillie: I am experienced, not old, Presiding Officer.

17:12

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I am very glad to be able to wish Scotland's citizens advice service a very happy 80th birthday. I thank Anas Sarwar for providing Parliament with an opportunity to do that, and to highlight the incredible work that is done by citizens advice bureaux and their volunteers across Scotland.

As we have heard, citizens advice bureaux assist people in a host of issues, but a major part of their work focuses on social security, on which I would like to focus mainly this evening. Across Scotland, there is more than £1 billion-worth of unclaimed social security payments. On this, the international day of older persons, it is important to note that, according to information from the Scottish Parliament information centre, £190 million of pension credit goes unclaimed every

year, as does £200 million of child tax credit, £224 million of working tax credit and £260 million of housing benefit. That is not even the whole picture. It is a huge task to get all the money where it needs to go and where it is desperately needed. The citizens advice service plays an important role in that.

The money talk team is a Scottish Government-funded project that delivers money advice, so that people do not pay more for essential goods and services than they need to, and so that they get all their social security entitlements. The most recent data shows that the money talk team has helped a total of 3,198 people to become better off by more than £6 million in total—an average household benefit of £1,850. That was done in just nine months and shows that comprehensive welfare rights advice makes a real difference to people.

I also commend the citizens advice service on its new "Check my council tax" tool, which allows people to find out whether they are eligible for a reduction or an exemption. That is really important, because Scottish Government figures show that 80,000 fewer households are receiving council tax reductions than received council tax benefits under the previous scheme.

When people apply for support, it is not always straightforward. In my experience of helping constituents, citizens advice bureaux are always there to offer expert advice and support. I do not think that there is a member in the chamber who would claim that the social security system is as easy as it should be to navigate. Last year, CAS assisted people to complete 40,000 social security forms and in 4,700 tribunals, with 88 per cent of cases being won or upheld. It is doing really important work, so we must ensure that we fund it properly.

As well as helping people when they need it most, CAS also plays a hugely important role in improving policy. Assisting so many people with social security means that CAS has a great deal of insight into how the devolved social security system can improve on what we have inherited from the UK Government.

For example, the citizens alert system, which allows bureaux to submit to CAS case notes demonstrating the impact of policies and services that they feel are failing to meet client needs, provides clear evidence to policy makers about where things are going wrong, which means that we do not have to keep repeating the same mistakes.

The Scottish Green Party's successful push to ban unnecessary disability benefits amendments was based in part on a survey of CAS clients and advisers, the results of which showed that the highest priority for the Scottish social security

system should be to reduce unnecessary assessments by making the best use of existing evidence. That is in just one area of CAS's work.

On transport, too, CAS has been highlighting how much more we need to do to ensure that everyone in Scotland has access to good-quality bus services.

Parliament owes a huge debt of gratitude to citizens advice services across the country. On behalf of the Scottish Greens, I thank CAS for all that it does for us.

17:16

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am delighted to take part in the debate, and I thank Anas Sarwar for securing it. Although I will focus on the work of the Shetland Islands Citizens Advice Bureau, I want to begin by saying that, in general terms, I am speaking on behalf of all my Liberal Democrat colleagues, who have asked me to say that they are all great supporters of the bureaux in their areas.

Others have spoken about the great work that is done by the Scottish CAB network. It is a service that we could not do without and, every day, it helps people avoid debt, poverty and homelessness.

I want to give members some idea of the work that is undertaken by the bureau in Shetland, which has been open since 1992. As well as providing a service in its main office in Lerwick, the bureau also offers regular outreach advice sessions in the north isles of Unst, Yell and Whalsay, as well as in Hillswick, Brae, Walls, Bixter, Scalloway and Levenwick.

The Shetland bureau is run by Karen Eunson and her excellent team. Last year, they saw more than 1,700 clients and gave nearly 6,500 pieces of advice. In the course of that work, they helped those clients gain a total of £1.7 million in compensation, unclaimed benefits, withheld wages and so on. That is not only a terrific result for those families, many of whom will have been really struggling, it is also a significant boost to our local economy, as that money will remain in the local economy, where it will have been spent on essentials in local shops and businesses.

Like other bureaux across the country, the top item that the Shetland CAB deals with is social security. However, in our case, that is followed by utilities. Fuel poverty and fuel provision are particularly big issues for the communities in Shetland. We have a wet and windy climate, with wind chill being a major issue, and old housing stock that is not very energy efficient.

Like many bureaux, Shetland CAB has specialist energy advisers who help people who

are worried about high energy costs. Those advisers can help people make sense of their energy bills, check whether they are on the correct tariff and support them to switch supplier to save money. If someone has a problem with their bills, the bureau can negotiate with the energy company and help to put a manageable payment plan in place. It can also advise whether someone is eligible for support to improve the energy efficiency of their home, and they can arrange home visits from a specialist adviser who can help people plan how to cut their carbon emissions, possibly by accessing the financial support that is available to help them switch to renewables. That specialist energy advice is, of course, just one of the services that Shetland's CAB offers, and it is offered by other CABs across the country too.

For 14 years before I came to the Scottish Parliament, I was the caseworker for the member of Parliament for Orkney and Shetland, and I worked with staff and volunteers at the Shetland bureau over that time. We referred cases to each other, such as complex immigration cases in which the MP's intervention would be of assistance or cases involving benefits appeals, which the bureau was best placed to assist with. When dealing with social security casework, I have often suggested to constituents that they should contact the Shetland bureau to ask for a welfare benefits check so that they can ensure that they are receiving all the benefits to which they are entitled.

I join members in wishing a happy birthday to the citizens advice network across Scotland and thanking all the staff and volunteers—especially in Shetland's CAB—for the valuable and respected service that they provide. Like me, I am sure that the people of Shetland wish CAS many more years to come.

17:19

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am pleased to take part in this important debate and I thank Anas Sarwar for bringing it to the Parliament.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the citizens advice network in Scotland, and I welcome the opportunity to praise the great work that is done by the 59 citizens advice bureaux that serve communities across Scotland. From its inception in Glasgow in 1939, during world war 2, to the present day, Citizens Advice Scotland has been a beacon of hope for the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society. It has been a continuous and positive voice for social change, while offering free, confidential and impartial advice to anyone who needs it.

I cannot stress enough the importance of the service that CAS provides and the difference that it has made to so many lives. Everyone, regardless of their background or income, should have access to justice, and citizens advice bureaux provide an avenue of hope for many. The service's impact over the decades cannot be overstated.

In 2018-19 alone, CABx advised more than 275,000 clients, issued more than 730,000 pieces of advice and put £131 million back into people's pockets. They helped Scottish clients to complete almost 40,000 benefit forms and won or upheld 88 per cent of the 4,500 tribunal and court actions in which they were involved.

The figures reflect a fraction of the great work that CABx have done over the years, but they serve as evidence of the great work that the service does. Of course, none of that would be possible without the amazing staff and volunteers who ensure that bureaux up and down the country are open and ready to help anyone who comes through the door.

I take this opportunity to highlight the efforts of bureau staff and volunteers in my constituency, Strathkelvin and Bearsden. I am a former board member for East Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau, which is based just a few streets from my constituency office. The CAB does phenomenal work in the community. I have heard at first hand from constituents who sought advice from the CAB just how caring and dedicated the team is and how passionate it is about social welfare. I think that all members have had the same experience in their areas.

Anas Sarwar articulated the horrendous impact that benefit cuts and welfare changes are having, which shows why CABx are so vital. I agree with him that adequate funding for bureaux is essential and must be prioritised during budget decisions, to secure the service and its vital role in society.

I highlight what the Scottish Government has done to support the work of CABx in recent years. For example, the Scottish Government-funded money talk team project delivers money advice to low-income families and aims to ensure that such families receive all the benefits and grants to which they are entitled. In just nine months, the project has helped more than 3,100 people, bringing in an average household benefit of £1,850. That is money that the families would not otherwise have seen.

I draw attention to Citizens Advice Scotland's EU citizens support scheme. Annabelle Ewing mentioned the scheme, which is a new specialist helpline service for EU citizens who are resident in Scotland. The aim of the scheme is to help citizens and families apply to continue living here. I

held several EU surgeries in my constituency, along with the CAB, and I am indebted to the CAB for its help in assisting people to apply for settled status.

I reiterate that the work that CAS has done over 80 years is monumental. The service has changed lives. It is a damning indictment of the state of social welfare in this country that so many people rely on the service. Nevertheless, the service is essential and I thank everyone who is involved in helping people in need.

I congratulate Citizens Advice Scotland on its 80th anniversary and I hope that the Scottish Government can continue to work in tandem with CAS for the next 80 years and beyond, to ensure equality and access to justice for all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Due to the number of members who want to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Anas Sarwar to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

17:24

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I thank Anas Sarwar for bringing the debate to the Parliament. It is a great opportunity to highlight the fantastic work of citizens advice bureaux in Scotland and to raise awareness of the high-quality services that CABx provide.

It goes without saying that citizens advice bureaux are an invaluable service to many. The first CAB opened in 1939 in Glasgow—it is now in its 80th year, which is impressive indeed for any organisation. Its ability to adapt with the times and evolve to fit peoples' changing needs is reflected in the journey that it has been on since world war two. Whereas during the war, as we have heard, it dealt with inquiries that related to wartime issues, such as tracing relatives whose homes had been bombed and lost ration books, it now offers advice to clients on anything from debt to benefits, employment rights and fuel poverty.

Most important is that its advice is free, independent, impartial and confidential, and the organisation's extensive network, with bureaux up and down the country, makes that advice accessible by anyone, which is a huge feat. To get a sense of how many people use the service, in 2018-19 the network advised more 270,000 clients and issued more than 730,000 pieces of advice. Its self-help website, advice for Scotland, received nearly 4 million page views in the same year.

Since I became an MSP, I have visited the citizens advice service in Maryhill to see first-hand the quality of the service that it provides. I was struck by the passion of the staff as well as their knowledge on such a wide range of topics. Many might not realise that volunteers still account for the majority of people who work in bureaux. In 2018-19, more than 2,300 volunteers contributed more than 760,000 hours of their time to supporting those in need. I put on record my personal thanks to all the volunteers as well as the staff who work hard to provide CAB services, which really do make a difference to the lives of the people who use them.

As well as the advice that it provides to individual clients, the citizens advice service has a number of national projects. The armed services advice project for example, provides information and support to current and former members of the armed forces community. The independent patient advice and support service provides free, confidential support to patients and their families in their dealings with the national health service, and pension wise is an impartial service that provides guidance on pension options and how each could affect tax and benefits. Those are incredibly specialist services that will no doubt be extremely helpful for the people whom they target. Citizens advice recognises that there are times in a person's life when they may be more vulnerable and need tailored support.

Significantly, citizens advice also carries out its own research, policy work and campaigns on key issues. This summer, it launched its scams awareness programme to prevent consumers from the financial loss that causes distress and misery for so many. Over the next six months, it plans to run campaigns on employment rights, energy and personal debt.

I again thank Anas Sarwar for highlighting CAS's excellent work. It is an organisation that so many know and appreciate and, for many, it is a first port of call when they are in need of vital support. As shown by the breadth of its work and its many great campaigns, the citizens advice service will no doubt be around for 80 years to come.

17:25

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Anas Sarwar for securing the debate. Everybody has highlighted the importance of CAS to our constituents, day in and day out, in providing services and support that are not available elsewhere and which can have a huge impact on people's lives. Whether the service prevents homelessness or provides support and advice on energy bills or access to debt advice, it can be

absolutely critical to helping people overcome huge challenges in their lives.

We all live in an increasingly digital world, and we must acknowledge that, for far too many people, that is, in itself, a huge barrier to deal with. The forms can be complicated to fill in and can run to multiple pages. As many colleagues have said, in relation to social security or benefits, the advice from a local CAB can make the difference between a constituent getting support—support that they are entitled to—or being left in debt and destitution. The issue is not just the fact that the forms are digital; it is also their complexity and the failings of the universal credit system.

What is crucial is that CAB advice is freely available. I agree very strongly with Anas Sarwar's point in his opening remarks about the importance of keeping it local.

CAB offices are open and available—people can sit down and talk through the issue that is challenging them, which could be something extremely stressful. It can often be a long time before somebody seeks advice, so that one-to-one support, and specialist, free knowledge, is crucial.

I join others in thanking the staff at local CAB offices, who deserve our thanks for ensuring continuity of service under the pressures that they face, and for their passion and commitment to the service. I also thank the volunteers, because, without their help, it simply would not be possible to provide that range of experience and expertise across the country. I know from talking to volunteers how rewarding they find the experience. It is challenging and it can be emotional, but it is rewarding and they are putting something back into society. For many of those volunteers, it can also be a stepping stone to entering paid employment or further education.

Tonight, we are debating a huge resource that is provided by people. It is a resource that we, as MSPs, directly benefit from. For one of the first cases that I dealt with when I came back as an MSP, I went to the local CAB office to seek support on welfare advice. This is all about giving people the right to access the knowledge and information that they need.

Every £1 of funding to cover core advice services generates £10 that is returned to the wider community, which is of financial benefit to our constituents. As colleagues have said, that work is invaluable and needs to be continued.

I hope that, in his closing speech, the minister will say how the Scottish Government intends to support CAS's advocacy, support and advice work going forward. Given the huge financial pressures that have been highlighted, it is absolutely crucial that the citizens advice service in Scotland gets

the support not just of MSPs, but of our Government.

17:31

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank Anas Sarwar. Today, we have the opportunity to recognise the important role of Citizens Advice Scotland, prompted by the fact that 2019 marks 80 years of the organisation's outstanding work.

In the contributions of my fellow MSPs, we have heard how the citizens advice service has helped people across Scotland, and my constituency of Glasgow Anniesland is no exception. I have seen first hand the free advice and hands-on-help that are provided by the citizens advice service. Often, that assistance is provided to people who have otherwise limited support. The stability that is provided by the reliability of the citizens advice service acts as an anchor to people during difficult periods and times of uncertainty and financial pressure.

Drumchapel Citizens Advice Bureau, which is based in my constituency, provides invaluable assistance to many people. Earlier this summer, I worked with that citizens advice charity to help advertise its help-to-claim service throughout the constituency, and to raise awareness of the practical support that it provides to help people access universal credit. Through the service, citizens advice staff show people how to set up an email address, open a bank account and take other steps, overcoming what would otherwise be barriers to support.

The citizens advice service plays a role in bringing about moments of equity, by which I mean the creation of a level playing field, whereby those who are born into disadvantage are given more support than others. That goes some way towards reducing disadvantage and creating the space for equal opportunity.

An illustration that is easily found online shows the difference between equity and equality. The illustration shows three people who are watching a sport, but a fence is in the way, blocking the view. There is a tall man who can see over the fence, so he can watch the game; there is a man of medium height who, when standing on his tiptoes, can just about see over the fence; and there is a short man, who cannot see the game at all. An act of equality would give each of the three men a box of the same size to stand on. With the box, the tall man can still see over the fence and the man of medium height can see perfectly well, but the short man still cannot see the game at all. An act of equity, however, would not give a box to the tall man; instead, it would give the man of medium height one box and the short man two boxes. Both the man of medium height and the short man can

now see the game just as well as the tall man. Equity gives the most support to the person with the most disadvantage. Offering support to those who are in poverty by giving them free financial advice is an act of equity. By providing assistance with things that are crucial to participating in society—such as setting up a bank account—Citizens Advice Scotland is enacting equity.

Over the past year, CAS has helped clients across Scotland to be £131 million better off. It has assisted with more than 4,700 tribunals and court cases, and more than 88 per cent of those cases have been upheld or won. Those examples evidence how the organisation promotes equity across Scotland. I thank CAS, its staff and all the volunteers for their dedicated work throughout Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sure that we all followed the boxes.

17:35

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I, too, thank Anas Sarwar for securing the debate, and I congratulate Citizens Advice Scotland on its 80 years of service.

In Fife, we have Citizens Advice and Rights Fife, which is, incidentally, marking its 22nd anniversary today. I congratulate it on that. In 2018-19, the Fife bureau dealt with more than 14,000 clients and gave advice more than 51,000 times. We can see how much those resources are used. More than £11.5 million in financial gain has been achieved for individuals who have sought information, advice and representation across Fife, and Fife volunteers gave 2,400 hours of their time. Some 1,300 multiple debt cases were handled in Fife, and 700 clients were assisted to appeal unfair benefit decisions. That is just a snapshot of the work that the Fife service does, which, in turn, is just a snapshot of what is done throughout the country.

Simply living their daily lives continues to be a challenge for people across the country. Many are faced with monetary woes, health issues, unemployment, low wages, housing difficulties, transport difficulties and relationship issues. The advice services that are provided in our country can help people with many of those issues. Social security, debt, employment and housing are the most common issues that have been raised in recent years.

Only last year, CAS published a report that showed that demand for advice on rent arrears had increased by more than 40 per cent in five years. We should not be surprised by that, given the level of poverty in Scotland, which is on the increase right across the country. I welcome the fact that politicians from all parties are here to say

good things about CAS—and well they should, given that it is our politicians' decisions that have driven more people into poverty and difficulties across Scotland. The failed austerity of the Tory party has created poverty on a scale that we have not seen before, and there are cuts to local government budgets. Kenny Gibson tried to single out North Ayrshire Council because it is Labour, but we should remember that every council across Scotland has been looking at its budget. I know that many councils have considered whether cuts can be made to citizens advice services, because they have to cut every part of their budget.

The warm words today are welcome, but we need more than warm words; we need resources and funding to go into citizens advice bureaux. We need to recognise the Scottish Government support, but we also need to recognise that its decisions to cut council budgets will have a detrimental impact on the very poorest in our society. We need to stop that, bring an end to failed Tory austerity and start to tackle poverty and inequality in Scotland.

17:38

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): I wish you well, Presiding Officer, because I thought that you were remarkably brave in describing Jackie Baillie as “an old hand”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I describe myself as an even older hand, if that gives comfort to Ms Baillie.

Jamie Hepburn: I will resist the temptation of linking that to Alison Johnstone's mentioning that today is the international day of older persons, because I could run myself into some trouble.

I thank Anas Sarwar for bringing forward the debate and all members who have contributed to it. It is important that we are given the occasion to recognise the 80th anniversary of the network of citizens advice bureaux in Scotland.

Members across the chamber have mentioned their individual bureaux. That gives me the opportunity to remark on Citizens Advice and Rights Fife's 22nd anniversary, which Alex Rowley mentioned. I give it my sincere congratulations on reaching that anniversary.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): On that note, is the minister aware that this week, Moray citizens advice bureau will celebrate its 40th anniversary? Will he pay tribute to all the volunteers and staff who have, over the past four decades, helped so many people, including 2,200 clients in the past year alone?

Jamie Hepburn: Lest I get a raft of people coming forward with anniversaries, let me say that

I was not aware of that anniversary, but I am now, so I pass on my congratulations to the network in Moray.

I do not often get the opportunity to talk about my constituency in my ministerial role, so I also thank the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Citizens Advice Bureau for the work that it does under the astute leadership of Stewart McMahon.

The origins of the network of citizens advice bureaux were laid out by a number of members. Kenny Gibson and Annie Wells talked about bureaux coming together through the experience of the second world war. Of course, through that prism, they very much focused on the wartime experience, but there are similarities with today. The majority of the bureaux that emerged over the course of the second world war—60 were established in Scotland, as we heard—were staffed by volunteers, which is also the case today. Therefore, I join Anas Sarwar, who was the first member to speak in the debate, in thanking each and every individual who gives their time to volunteering and supporting others through the bureaux. I have always been struck by the enthusiasm of the volunteer network when I have been able to engage with bureaux not just in my area, but across the country. I concur with Sarah Boyack that it is clear that volunteers draw a lot back for themselves through their volunteering. Their commitment is essential.

The service has been established for 80 years, but we know that life can still be tough for many individuals, particularly given the Brexit uncertainty for EU nationals and the continuing UK Government welfare reforms. Bill Kidd put it well when he described the citizens advice service as an anchor for people in difficult circumstances. The service has been that anchor for 80 years, and it continues to be so today.

The network is very important to the Government. We view the service very much as a partner, and that is demonstrated in a variety of ways. Through our work to establish a Scottish social security system, we have the opportunity to put dignity, fairness and respect back into social security. Rona Mackay, Anas Sarwar and Annabelle Ewing—with whom I served on the Welfare Reform Committee in the previous parliamentary session—all spoke, as others did, about the pernicious changes that are taking place through the UK Government's welfare reform agenda. That is why we have invested £1.46 million for welfare reform mitigation into the CAB network, and it is why we have used Citizens Advice Scotland as an important partner in the development of our own service.

I assure Jeremy Balfour that CAS has been, and will continue to be, an important partner in the social security system that we set up through

Social Security Scotland. CAS will continue to provide us with feedback from its practical experience in working with and supporting its client base—or citizens, as Anas Sarwar rightly described them. Alison Johnstone can be assured that, by continuing to provide feedback, CAS will continue to play a strong role in holding us to account for the service that we provide.

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Scotland's citizens advice service. I particularly thank the service for its fantastic support for our armed forces veterans throughout Scotland. Will the minister ensure that any new funding model that he comes up with takes into consideration the needs of Scotland's armed forces veterans?

Jamie Hepburn: I am pleased to say to Maurice Corry that we always consider how better to support our veterans, and that will continue to be the case in relation to any advice services that we support, be that through Citizens Advice Scotland and its network, or, indeed, through any other mechanism.

I want to mention briefly the money talk team project, which Rona Mackay and Alison Johnstone spoke about. We are funding that to the tune of £3.3 million over two years. We have worked closely in partnership with Citizens Advice Scotland to create the service, which is making a tremendous difference. I will not rehearse all the figures again, because others, including Rona Mackay, have already set them out, but I highlight that on average, a person on benefits gets a return of £1,880 by engaging with that process. To use the term that Jackie Baillie rightly used, those are "life-changing results".

Annabelle Ewing cited the Cowdenbeath CAB. I am pleased to hear about that very good local example of the work that we are doing to support EU nationals. Time does not allow me to say too much more about that.

I want to mention one final area of work—very briefly, Presiding Officer. I know that I am now up against it, time-wise, although I took a couple of interventions, which I hope will be borne in mind.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I had noted that. There is no need to remind me of my duties, minister.

Jamie Hepburn: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I appreciate your support and assistance, as ever.

I will finish on the subject of consumer advocacy, an area in which Citizens Advice Scotland has played and continues to play a vital role. We provide significant resource for it to play that role—this year, we provided more than £1.4 million for it. We introduced the Consumer

Scotland Bill in June. CAS, along with other bodies that interact with consumers, will continue to play that role and funnel the evidence and the information that it has to consumer Scotland, once it is established, so that it can get on with its important tasks.

I am very grateful to Anas Sarwar for having had the opportunity to debate the 80th anniversary of the CAB network across Scotland. The bureaux have done fantastic work for the past 80 years, and I know that they will continue to do that for another 80 years and more.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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

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