



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 4 December 2019**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 4 December 2019

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

#### Deposit Return Scheme

1. **Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to introduce a deposit return scheme for drinks containers. (S5O-03849)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham):** We continue to make progress on implementing our ambitious deposit return scheme as part of our response to the global climate emergency. We want a scheme that is high performing from day 1, and we are working with industry to understand and test the timeline for implementation. We will also take account of feedback received by the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, which continues to consider the draft legislation to establish the scheme. Our agreed go-live date will be included in the final version of the regulations, which will be laid before Parliament in the new year.

**Murdo Fraser:** There is a great deal of support for the principle of a deposit return scheme, but there are also serious concerns in the packaging and supply sectors that having a scheme in Scotland that is distinct from a scheme elsewhere in the United Kingdom will add cost and cause difficulty in the supply chain. Why is the Scottish Government not considering delaying its scheme in order to ensure that the scheme that is introduced in Scotland is similar to the scheme that is introduced elsewhere in the UK, given that the UK Government has indicated that it intends to introduce such a scheme?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** The UK Government has said that it intends to introduce such a scheme, and I am very pleased that the Tory manifesto mentions a scheme that would include glass. However, there are no timescales for that scheme; the Scottish Government is much further forward in its arrangements. Given those circumstances, and the fact that this is a fully devolved area of policy, it is entirely reasonable for the Scottish Government to continue its work.

I hope that the work that we are doing will help to inform the UK Government's progress towards introducing an effective deposit return scheme for the whole of the UK.

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary has mentioned the implementation advisory group many times in committee. Will she expand on the group's involvement and whether retailers will have input to the group to assist in implementation of the scheme?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** The implementation advisory group was set up to work closely with Government officials on the operational aspects of the proposed scheme. It already includes representatives of all sectors that will have ultimate responsibility for day-to-day operation of the deposit return scheme. The group has created a number of working groups that are exploring practical features of the scheme, such as the operation of return points and a potential level for the handling fee to be paid to retailers. The group is working very closely with Zero Waste Scotland on several of those detailed aspects, which, at the end of the day, will best be brought into being by the sector itself.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** Question 2 was not lodged.

#### Oil and Gas Industry (Emissions)

3. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to Oil & Gas UK's "Environment Report 2018", which highlights a commitment to "playing its part in building a sustainable industry that is progressively lowering its emission intensity". (S5O-03851)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham):** I welcome the industry's commitment to lowering the industry's offshore emissions. We are committed to achieving a net zero emissions economy and managing that fairly.

North Sea production is highly regulated, with some of the most advanced, and comparatively least polluting, production methods in the world. Maintaining domestic oil and gas production can lead to lower net global emissions.

We are supportive of the sector's plans to decarbonise oil and gas production and we want to engage the industry in embracing and leading deployment of technologies such as floating offshore wind power, hydrogen production and carbon capture, utilisation and storage.

**Liam Kerr:** Statistics that were published by the Government in September 2019 state that, last year, 82 per cent of all UK oil and gas was

produced in Scotland and that production increased by 4.6 per cent. Scotland employs 39 per cent of the oil and gas industry in the UK and the north-east is a focal point for that activity. Will the cabinet secretary rule out supporting any proposals for a windfall tax that would risk 26,000 jobs in Aberdeen alone and potentially reverse the good work on emissions that she mentioned?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** Frankly, I am not sure that it is within my remit to talk about any tax in that regard, and I am sure that proposals for taxes are being looked at very carefully across the board. As Liam Kerr knows, there is no devolved ability for us to do any such thing in Scotland—yet. So, at the moment, his question is somewhat premature.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** Following on from the Offshore Europe conference in September, when the oil and gas industry set out its road map to a more sustainable future, will the cabinet secretary tell us whether—and how—the Scottish Government might be able to advise, monitor and assess the progress of the industry as it shifts towards net zero?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** We have a constant dialogue with the industry, which is clearly a key industry in Scotland. We want to ensure that it is able to continue to operate as effectively as possible while reducing its emissions from production.

As Liam Kerr knows, there are two aspects to oil and gas: the consumption side and the production side. On the production side, industries are working very hard to get their carbon emissions down as quickly as possible. They are focused on working towards net zero in terms of production, and we will continue to work directly with them on that. That is important, because it is a key industry. There are a number of aspects of the industry that, for Scotland, go beyond what the member asked about. As she is aware, when we talk about oil and gas in Scotland, there is an issue of just transition. We have to handle the whole industry very carefully. The dialogue is constant.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** That measure of carbon intensity tells us nothing at all about the actual impact of the fossil fuel industry and the materials that it extracts from the ground. Given that we are in a climate emergency, when we are talking about carbon extraction we need a response that is more robust than the thin greenwash of talking about net zero.

Does the cabinet secretary recognise that more than 5 per cent of the world's gross domestic product is spent on fossil fuel subsidies? When will the Scottish Government recognise that we need to redirect that vast flow of money into the

transition that is needed, instead of keeping business as usual for the lethal fossil fuel industry?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I do not think that there is anything going on that might be regarded as “business as usual”.

The industry is working very hard to reduce its emissions. We are very aware that there will be a continued role for oil and gas, until we are able to move consumption away from fossil fuels completely. Any suggestion that one can switch away from that consumption before we are able to make the handover misunderstands the massive disruption that would take place and the likelihood of importation from other countries, whose industries are not decarbonising in the way that North Sea oil and gas are.

It is a complex issue, which we continue to address as carefully as possible, but if Patrick Harvie has seen the evidence at the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee from Chris Stark and David Joffe from the Committee on Climate Change, he will understand that it is far more complicated than he makes out.

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that by ring fencing the current tax revenues from oil and gas and investing in a just transition, we can support long-term investments to tackle the climate crisis and deliver benefits to communities and our environment?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** Most of us in this chamber accept that the oil and gas sector is a key component of our economy and remains integral to a sustainable, secure and inclusive energy transition. The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that the North Sea will generate further revenues of £8.5 billion over the next five years. Ring fencing those revenues into a net zero fund would indeed unlock significant additional investment into efforts to decarbonise the economy and would also help to deliver a just transition for areas such as Aberdeen and the north-east that currently rely heavily on the oil and gas sector for employment.

#### **Animal Welfare Legislation**

**4. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with stakeholders, including the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, regarding reforming its animal welfare legislation. (S5O-03852)

**The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon):** The Scottish Government holds regular meetings with stakeholders on a range of animal welfare issues. That continuous engagement and discussion has

helped to inform our current bill on animal welfare and wildlife.

**Mike Rumbles:** We all know that, unlike domestic or wild animals, the welfare of farm animals is the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, because there are commercial considerations. Surely, the welfare of all animals should be our concern, regardless of commercial considerations. Is it not time for the welfare of all animals to be taken together into one Government portfolio? Does the minister agree that the welfare of every animal is of equal importance?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I do not know whether that is the proper question for the minister, really—

**Mike Rumbles:** Why is it not a—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No—I am just asking the minister what she wants to do.

**Mairi Gougeon:** I am quite happy to answer the question. I deal with all issues relating to animal health and welfare regardless of whether the animals are domestic animals, farmed animals or wild animals. I take that responsibility absolutely seriously.

If the member wants to write to me to seek further information on the point that he is asking about, I would be happy to respond to him.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** The minister will be as bitterly disappointed as I am that the special constables pilot in the Cairngorms has failed to detect any wildlife crime whatsoever over the past two years. Does the minister agree that now is the right time to match the Scottish SPCA's existing powers in relation to domestic animals with new powers in relation to wild animals, so that it can get on with the job of properly detecting the disgusting wildlife crime that we see in Scotland?

**Mairi Gougeon:** It is only fair to say that we had to undertake that pilot in order to see whether that system would work. I know that a review is currently under way in relation to that.

On the point about the Scottish SPCA, I have not had that conversation with the organisation, and the issue has not been raised with me at all. Therefore, we have not considered including it in the legislation that we have brought forward.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Given what the minister has just said, can she advise what progress is being made on the establishment of the animal welfare commission?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I am happy to update the chamber on that. On 24 September, we announced that Professor Cathy Dwyer had been appointed as the chair of the new Scottish animal

welfare commission. I am delighted that she accepted that role, given her wealth of experience.

With the chair appointed, recruitment of members to serve on the commission is well under way. I fully anticipate that the commission will be up and running early in the new year.

### Puppy Trafficking

**5. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what information it has regarding levels of puppy trafficking through the port of Cairnryan and how much revenue has been recovered by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs from this. (S5O-03853)

**The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon):** The extent of puppy trafficking through Cairnryan is difficult to accurately determine, given that it is a hidden and illegal activity. However, the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals advises that 60 puppies have been seized this year by its special investigations unit. Those seizures are attributed to operation Delphin, a multi-agency task force that was set up to target the illegal puppy trade.

The Scottish Government does not hold information on the revenue that is recovered by HMRC from individuals who are involved in the illegal trafficking of puppies, but we know that it takes an active interest in that area, and we continue to work with it and other enforcement bodies through the puppy trade working group.

**Emma Harper:** I understand that puppy trafficking through the port of Cairnryan is on the rise, with many seizures of puppies and large amounts of cash. Given that HMRC will not currently release information on how much cash is seized, can the minister outline how a fair share of that money might come to Scotland?

**Mairi Gougeon:** As I understand it, HMRC's primary interest is in the recovery of unpaid tax from those who are operating as unlicensed puppy dealers. I am not aware of it seizing large amounts of cash linked to puppy trafficking at Cairnryan. However, I will be happy to engage with it on the issue through the puppy trade working group.

In Scotland, cash can be seized either as a production in a predicate criminal case, as an available asset in confiscation proceedings or, under part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, as part of a civil recovery investigation. If, in due course, the cash is included as part of a confiscation order or is forfeited by the court, it will be remitted to the Scottish consolidated fund.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 has been withdrawn.

### Environment Improvement Schemes (Support)

**7. Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that schemes to help improve the environment are given long-term certainty over their future. (S5O-03855)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham):** Obviously, many of our environmental schemes are supported and funded by the European Union, such as LIFE, the common agricultural policy and structural funds. I am deeply concerned about the loss of EU funding in relation to the delivery of environmental outcomes.

I have continually pressed the United Kingdom Government to provide clarity on future funding arrangements. In the absence of that clarity, the Scottish Government has published its own consultation on the replacement for the EU structural funds, to give stakeholders the opportunity to bring their experience and expertise to the development of any successor arrangements.

**Keith Brown:** Given what she said, does the cabinet secretary agree that there is a contrast between the actions of her Government and those of the UK Government? For too long, the UK Government has been limited by an embarrassing lack of ambition, not least in its recently published manifesto commitments, which will do nothing to tackle rising global temperatures, which were described by a recent United Nations climate report as “devastating”. Does the cabinet secretary also agree that there is no more time to waste, and that Westminster must follow Scotland’s lead and get its act together on green energy?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** In its approach to addressing climate change, Scotland is, in fact, leading the way—not just in the UK, but globally. We continue to press the UK Government on its failure to match its rhetoric with practical actions around renewable energy to support our climate response and match our net zero emissions ambition—some of that goes back to the earlier discussion that we had about moving away from oil and gas. It is disappointing that, in its manifesto, the UK Government has failed to do that. Nonetheless, we are clear that we will continue to lead for the UK on this crucial issue of our times, and allow other parties to trail in our wake.

### Environmental Governance

**8. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Trailing in her wake, to ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the

recommendations in the Scottish Environment LINK report, “Environmental Governance: effective approaches for Scotland post-Brexit”. (S5O-03856)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham):** The best way to continue to protect our environment is, of course, to remain in the European Union in the first place. However, I am taking forward the development of new arrangements in a careful and systematic way, based on our best assessment of likely gaps. In October, I announced plans for an interim panel to provide for assurance in that area, should the United Kingdom leave with no deal in place. The report that was published by SE LINK is a valuable contribution to the development of longer-term arrangements. I am considering the recommendations in that report alongside the results of the Government’s own consultation, which was held earlier this year.

**Jenny Marra:** The cabinet secretary has acknowledged the concerns about the impact of Brexit on environmental protections. Given that it is a devolved matter, it should be possible, with sensible planning and forethought, to mitigate the worst aspects of Brexit in that area. The report makes it clear that, ideally, new governance structures would include an independent parliamentary commissioner and a dedicated environment court. As neither of those will be put in place quickly, will the cabinet secretary tell us whether she is planning to create those bodies and, if so, what work is under way to bring them into being?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** As I indicated in my initial answer, we are looking very carefully at the long-term arrangements that would be required. For example, the establishment of an environmental court goes far beyond our immediate concerns about immediate mitigation of the impact of Brexit, which is why we have had to divert some of our resources to the business of setting up an interim arrangement, should we be out in short order. There would need to be some degree of very careful thought, as well as further consultation, before we could go as far as implementing some of the proposals in the Scottish Environment LINK report, which would require primary legislation. As such, those are things that we need to look at in the longer term. However, those matters are currently very much under discussion and consideration, and we are not, at the moment, ruling anything out. At the moment, we have an interim panel that is ready to go—literally overnight, should that be necessary.

**Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary share my concern at the Tories’ plan to create an office for



environmental protection with an apparently UK-wide remit over devolved matters such as climate change?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** Although the UK Government's proposals for an office for environmental protection fell with its Environment Bill when Parliament was dissolved, the Tories have committed in their manifesto to establish such an office, the remit of which—at no notice—was expanded to include issues to do with climate change.

At the moment, the extent of the powers that the UK Government seeks to draw into that is unclear. The Scottish Government will not accept any attempt to pull devolved powers over climate change, air quality or water quality into the remit of that office. However, we need the UK Government to step up to the plate and act on the matters that it is responsible for to help Scotland to reach net zero by 2045, which the UK Committee on Climate Change was clear will be necessary if we are to achieve our targets.

## Rural Economy

### Plant Passporting

1. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making with plant passporting. (S5O-03857)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing):** The plant passporting regime will change on 14 December as Scotland keeps pace with the European Union by bringing into force the EU's smarter rules for safer food legislative package. The biggest change, which will be in the timber sector, will involve new procedures for the movement of conifer timber with bark. It is vital that implementation is proportionate and agreed with the sector. Following conversations that I had with ministers at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs earlier this year, the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments have been working closely with the sector to ensure that a new system is in place by the deadline.

**Colin Beattie:** What would the consequences be for Scottish businesses if the application deadline was missed? What can the Scottish Government do to support Scottish businesses to meet the deadline on 14 December?

**Fergus Ewing:** The sector fears that the consequences of missing the deadline and failing to provide a solution could be very serious indeed. It is difficult to quantify, but we are talking about potentially very large costs. That is why I have been pressing the UK for some considerable time to agree a new system to deal with the issue. It

was unfortunate that a technical meeting that had been planned for stakeholders to attend on 25 November was unilaterally cancelled by the UK Government. I intervened at that point to ask why, since purdah did not appear to be applicable. I am pleased to say that—probably as a result—the meeting has been reinstated for 5 December, which is tomorrow. However, that leaves little time to put in place a system by the deadline, as Mr Beattie knows. Therefore, there has to be a period of grace to allow the industry to implement the new arrangements. Otherwise, the consequences for the sector could be very serious indeed, at a time when the sawmill sector is experiencing considerable pressure.

### Food and Drink Industry (Support)

2. **Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the support it is providing to the food and drink industry. (S5O-03858)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing):** We continue to work with farmers, food producers and industry bodies to drive forward "Ambition 2030: Industry Strategy for Growth", which is the food and drink strategy. Our programme for government sets out a range of new measures to support the sector, building on work that is already on-going. Direct investment and support to the food and drink sector in Scotland from the public sector across a range of areas including skills, education, research, industry development, standards and capital investment equates to approximately £100 million per annum.

**Adam Tomkins:** I understand that one measure that is shortly to be introduced will restrict retailers' promotional activity for and marketing of so-called discretionary foods, including confectionery, sweet biscuits and cakes. At least one retailer has raised concerns with me about the implications of those restrictions for the Scottish Government's stated ambitions for growth in the food and drink sector. What assurances can the cabinet secretary provide to Scottish businesses that are likely to be impacted by such measures?

**Fergus Ewing:** As the member should know, those matters are not within my portfolio. They fall within the portfolio of the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing, Mr FitzPatrick. He and I work closely on those matters, and I know that he is aware of the concerns that industry may have in relation to any such measures. Part of my task is to ensure that we continue to work collaboratively prior to consideration of whether any such measure should be taken forward.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns about the details that emerged from Department for

International Trade documents that suggest that the Tories are prepared to ditch Scotland's valuable protected geographical indications, which I have been highlighting since 2016, and that, even in the very early stages, the US is pressing for United Kingdom autonomy from European Union food and health standards?

**Fergus Ewing:** Those are extremely important matters. The PGIs for Scotch beef, Scotch lamb and Scotch whisky are vital to the promotion of high-quality Scottish produce, and they cement a premium on such products, which helps the profitability and success of the sectors.

Over the past two years, Ms Cunningham, Ms Gougeon and I have repeatedly made representations on such matters to Mr Gove and others in the United Kingdom Government. Even now, after a couple of years' work and after constant representations have been made about the importance of such matters, we have not made any progress on the detail. Sadly, the UK Government is fixated on Brexit.

We are also now worried that a trade deal with the USA might further compromise the standards of our agricultural produce. Such a proposal would be utterly unacceptable to the Scottish Government.

### Farmed Animals (Welfare)

3. **Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure the welfare of farmed animals. (S5O-03859)

**The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon):** Keepers must meet animals' welfare needs under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. The Scottish Government introduced the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill to amend the 2006 act by increasing available penalties for cruelty offences and introducing a new procedure to allow animals, including farmed animals, that are taken into possession by enforcement authorities to be sold on or rehomed swiftly without the need for a court order.

We are replacing the codes of practice on the welfare of livestock with guidance that encourages best practice above the minimum legislative requirements, and we are committed to introducing compulsory closed-circuit television into Scottish abattoirs.

**Ruth Maguire:** Earlier this year, the Scottish Government committed to ensuring mandatory CCTV recording in all areas of slaughterhouses where live animals are present, in order to aid those who enforce animal legislation. Will the minister give an update on that work?

**Mairi Gougeon:** The member is, of course, right about our commitment in this year's programme for government. At present, the welfare of animals at slaughter is ensured by staff from Food Standards Scotland. More than 99 per cent of animals that are slaughtered in Scotland are monitored by some configuration of CCTV coverage.

This year's programme for government commits the Scottish Government to introducing secondary legislation to make the CCTV recording of slaughter compulsory in Scottish slaughterhouses, and to supporting the industry in introducing CCTV before it becomes compulsory.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 has been withdrawn.

### Fisheries (Gear Conflict)

5. **Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it will take to reduce gear conflict in Scotland's fisheries. (S5O-03861)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing):** The Scottish Government works closely with industry to facilitate better interaction among everyone who uses Scotland's marine environment, including fishers. Our network of regional inshore fisheries groups, which take a collaborative and stakeholder-focused approach to improving the management of our inshore fisheries, are exploring solutions to improve sector harmony and thus reduce the risk of gear conflict.

That work builds on the recommendations from the gear conflict task force, including those on temporal and spatial separation methods and improvements to visibility and identification of static gear, which we will legislate for in due course.

**Alison Johnstone:** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the work of the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation, which tells us:

"The removal of the three-mile limit has proven to be an unmitigated environmental and economic disaster of epic proportions."

I appreciate the cabinet secretary's response but, given that 85 per cent of gear conflict takes place within 3 miles of land, will he advise on when he expects a conclusion to the work that is taking place?

**Fergus Ewing:** I am aware of the importance of the work of members of the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation, as I am aware of the importance of the work that is carried out by all fishers across all sectors.

It is important to avoid any misrepresentation of the position. Gear conflict is not occurring during the majority of fishing trips and occasions; such instances are relatively isolated and not as widespread as Alison Johnstone's question might suggest. We do not think that setting arbitrary limits is the way to proceed.

Spatial management and other methods of management are very helpful and appropriate. The regional inshore fisheries groups have been very successful, in particular the north-east group, which has engaged with industry representatives to explore solutions that will improve sector harmony. In addition, the programme to equip the scallop dredge sector with remote electronic monitoring systems will provide one of the most significant steps toward resolution of the differing interests between fisheries sectors. We are working hard across the board on a number of matters in that area, and we are happy to continue to work with all stakeholders and MSPs.

**Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):** The cabinet secretary must, surely, realise that there is also gear conflict between European Union boats and Scottish boats—especially around Shetland—and that the only practical way to reduce that gear conflict is to come out of the EU and the common fisheries policy and take back control of our waters.

**Fergus Ewing:** No. I do not agree. I noticed today in *The Press and Journal* that a leading member of the fishing community has said that that is precisely what would be against the interests of the Scottish fishing sector. Mr Chapman should go and read his newspaper, where he will see that fishermen are turning away from Brexit and from the glib and overexaggerated promises that have bored us for far too long.

Moreover, our fishermen are concerned about equivalence: measures that are imposed on them must also be applied to all other fishing vessels from across all nations. That is a factual matter, but we do not hear very much about factual matters from the Scottish Conservatives. *[Interruption.]*

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I understand that use of GPS for fishing vessels for conflict resolution, compliance and research is already committed to by the Scottish Government. However, does the Scottish Government intend to create a clear definition of "fishing vessel", which could include exemptions for very small vessels, such as rowing boats that carry a few creels? That would be helpful to Scottish Labour in making its decision about support for all vessels.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am sorry, but the Conservatives' audible displeasure at my previous answer has meant that I did not hear the first part

of Ms Beamish's question. I am, therefore, not exactly sure what exemption she seeks, but I assure her that I will be very happy to read her question and give her a full answer in writing. I will extend that courtesy and consider her question sympathetically.

### Fisheries Negotiations

**6. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy's offer to lead the end-year fisheries negotiations in Brussels has been accepted by the United Kingdom Government. (S5O-03862)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing):** I wrote to the secretary of state on 22 November to extend my offer for Scotland to lead the upcoming fisheries negotiations with me as lead minister, working on behalf of the whole of the UK. I am still waiting for a response. However, I hope that my suggested approach is considered as it was intended—as my striving to take a constructive approach that will give welcome certainty and clarity, in these uncertain times, for the UK Government. I believe that accepting my offer would reap the greatest benefits possible for the whole of the UK.

**Angus MacDonald:** It is disappointing that the cabinet secretary has not received a reply. It seems to me and, I am sure, to every fair-minded person in Parliament, that by allowing Scotland to lead the negotiations on behalf of the UK, full preparations could be made away from the post-election turmoil in London. The UK Government has already made it clear that access to Scottish waters will be on the table in future trade talks with the European Union before the crucial annual EU negotiations take place. We know that the UK will have to abide by common fisheries policy rules during the transition period. If Scotland has to leave the EU with the UK on 31 January, how quickly, does the cabinet secretary think, will the great betrayal of Scottish fishing begin?

**Fergus Ewing:** I think that we all share and harbour concerns that the UK Government's promises over the past three years have been glib, boastful and lacking in substance. I say that not least because the withdrawal agreement and the associated documents contain no agreement whatsoever on fishing. It was too difficult for the UK Government to do that; it would not have got the deal that it had boasted it could get. That was too hard, so the documents that are on the table, which are being presented as a panacea for all the ills of Scottish fishing, are simply an agreement to kick the can down the road—an agreement to seek agreement later. The agreement is not worth the paper that it is written on. There is no contract, no certainty, no clarity, no future and no hope. I

suspect that the betrayal will begin shortly after voting has finished.

### **Community Asset Transfer Scheme (Application Refusals)**

**7. Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many applications from rural areas to the community asset transfer scheme have been refused following an appeal in the last three years. (S5O-03863)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing):** Since Forestry and Land Scotland opened the community asset transfer scheme in January 2017, 15 requests in total have been received, all of them from rural areas. Of those requests, 11 have been approved, three are awaiting a decision and one has been refused. By 31 March this year, a total of 73 asset transfer requests had been approved by relevant authorities across Scotland.

**Michelle Ballantyne:** Recently, a community asset transfer application that was submitted by the Ettrick and Yarrow Community Development Company, for transfer of Gamescleuch forest and the Ettrick marshes, was refused on appeal, despite the fact that an independent panel report that had been commissioned by Scottish ministers following the appeal recommended that the transfer take place. That must be the one refusal to which the cabinet secretary referred in his first answer.

What justification is required for the cabinet secretary to choose not to act on the recommendations of an independent panel, following a community asset transfer appeal?

**Fergus Ewing:** I start by gently correcting Michelle Ballantyne. That decision was taken by my colleague, Aileen Campbell; it fell within her portfolio and was not my decision to make. However, I will, being generous in answering a question that should really be directed to another cabinet secretary, respond to the question.

The independent panel brought to the issue a wide-ranging understanding of land ownership and the responsibility that it entails. Scottish ministers took its recommendations into account alongside other available information, and although the request was refused, ministers acknowledged the development company's aspiration to improve the community. That is why ministers have asked Professor Russel Griggs OBE, who is the chair of the south of Scotland economic partnership, to work with the community and with Forestry and Land Scotland to help to identify alternative options, with support from the community ownership support service.

### **Farming (Support for Environmental Sustainability)**

**8. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that farmers are supported to operate in an environmentally sustainable way. (S5O-03864)

**The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon):** Environmental sustainability is a key concern for the Scottish Government, and we continue to support our farmers and crofters through direct payments and the Scottish rural development programme.

We have taken an ambitious approach through actions and schemes such as greening, agri-environment and climate initiatives and the Farm Advisory Service. In addition, we have supported and continue to support initiatives including our flagship Farming for a Better Climate initiative and industry-led programmes, such as the Quality Meat Scotland and Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board monitor farm network, in order to support and promote environmental sustainability.

**Brian Whittle:** Does the minister agree that the current broad-brush condemnation of red-meat production does not recognise the vast difference between Scotland's predominantly grass-fed red-meat production system and the intensive feed systems that are used in much of the Americas and Asia, and that we should be supporting our farmers in their continued drive for more sustainable and environmentally friendly food production?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Absolutely. I could not agree more. I believe that Brian Whittle is referring to a programme that aired last week in which there was little, if any, mention—just some throwaway references—of how we farm in the UK. It did no justice whatever to our food production methods, and it did not draw clear enough parallels to highlight how the systems are so intrinsically different.

How we farm in Scotland is completely different to systems in other parts of the world, and we have among the highest animal health and welfare standards. We need to shout about that and spread the message that what we do here, and what we produce, is the best anywhere in the world.

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** Does the minister share my concern that if the Tories win the UK election and we are forced to Brexit, our current high environmental standards, which protect plant and tree health and animal welfare, will be driven down and abandoned in a race to the bottom in order to win dodgy trade deals?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I share that concern, especially in the light of my previous answer, in which I talked about our having some of the best animal health and welfare standards in the world. We are absolutely committed to maintaining those standards, which is why the Scottish Government is adamant that future trade deals cannot undercut the high agricultural and environmental standards that we proudly uphold in Scotland.

Sustainability and inclusion have to lie at the core of our future trade policy, so we must take a robust approach to monitoring those considerations at all stages of the negotiation and implementation processes.

## Achieving a Fairer Scotland

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-20110, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on achieving a fairer Scotland. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. I call the minister to open the debate and move the motion—cabinet secretary, that is; I am demoting you.

14:41

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell):** Presiding Officer, thank you—Deputy Presiding Officer, I should say. [*Laughter.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** At least your mistake was going in the right direction.

**Aileen Campbell:** It is the season of good will, but that will probably be where the good will begins and ends today.

The debate provides an opportunity to focus on our aims to achieve a fairer and more equal Scotland. In 2016, we published our fairer Scotland action plan, which outlined 50 actions for this parliamentary session that were built on five high-level ambitions to achieve a fairer Scotland by 2030.

I am proud that our third-year progress report, which was published this week, shows that all 50 actions are in progress, with 19 completed and 11 forming continuous programmes of work. Our report also sets out the progress that we have made against each of the recommendations of the independent adviser on poverty and inequality, Naomi Eisenstadt. Those recommendations have been very much embedded in our actions to build a fairer Scotland.

Although we have delivered progress and continue to work hard within the powers that we have to create that fairer Scotland, we act against a backdrop of over a million Scots—including almost one in four children—living in poverty and an increasing reliance on crisis support such as food banks.

The Scottish Government estimates that United Kingdom Government spending on welfare and social security in Scotland will reduce by up to £3.7 billion by 2020-21. At the same time, the Scottish budget has been cut in real terms by around £2 billion. It is no wonder, then, that the Trades Union Congress said recently that this has been

“a decade of failed austerity”.

We know that poverty levels are set to rise. The Resolution Foundation is the latest organisation to point to the rising tide. It says that, if another Conservative Government is returned, child poverty is at risk of reaching a record 60-year high, because the Conservatives will continue with the decade of welfare cuts that have led to the hardship, desperation and poverty that we have all seen in our constituencies.

What do the Conservatives offer in their manifesto to help families who are experiencing such hardship? Not much. Despite the words of the United Nations rapporteur, who said that Tory welfare cuts were inflicting “great misery”, there are only two mentions of poverty in the manifesto, which are in a single sentence:

“we will continue our efforts ... to reduce poverty, including child poverty.”

The lack of mention of poverty is not surprising, given that the Home Secretary, Priti Patel, deflected the blame for rising poverty, despite the Conservatives having been in power for a decade, by saying:

“It’s not the Government, though, is it?”

However, the rise in poverty is down to the UK Government and its actions. The benefit freeze, the local housing allowance freeze, the benefit cap, the shocking two-child cap and rape clause, the diabolical universal credit roll-out and other changes are having a drastic impact on families throughout the country.

On top of that, we face the uncertainty of Brexit. Independent analysis has predicted that leaving the European Union will result in the economy shrinking, which will threaten jobs, incomes and Government revenues. Recent Scottish Government analysis predicts that, in a no-deal situation, 130,000 Scots could be pushed into poverty.

This Government will not sit back and spectate on poverty. Instead, we will continue to work hard to protect the people of Scotland and tackle poverty and inequality. That work was recognised by the UN special rapporteur, who said in a recent lecture that, compared with England, Scotland is

“on a very different trajectory when it comes to the social protection of its population.”

There is a chasm between the approaches that have been taken over the past decade by the Scottish Government and by the UK Government. Levels of child poverty, after housing costs, are 6 percentage points lower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, which is down to our unique approach to housing, our investment in social housing stock and our ensuring quality, affordability and sustainability in our social rented housing.

I am proud of our achievement in delivering more than 87,000 affordable homes since 2007, nearly 60,000 of which were for social rent, including more than 12,000 council homes. Our spend per head on the affordable housing supply programme is three times higher than the UK Government spend per head on its affordable homes programme. In the four years to 2018, we delivered 50 per cent more affordable housing units per head of population than in England, and 75 per cent more per head of population than in Wales.

Beyond that, we are taking strong action to end homelessness, and our action to eradicate fuel poverty is underpinned by ambitious statutory targets.

We are helping families to access the advice and support that they need. We know that many people around the country do not claim the full benefits that they are entitled to and that they pay over the odds for electricity and gas. Our new money talk team service is helping to combat that and, since its launch in November last year, it has helped more than 5,000 households to be better off by a total of more than £10 million, at an average of just under £2,000 per household. Our benefit uptake strategy for devolved benefits will ensure that people receive the devolved benefits to which they are entitled.

Our investment in early learning and childcare will reach nearly £1 billion by 2021-22, benefiting around 80,000 households and providing greater support for families. We are almost doubling the funded provision for all three and four-year-olds, plus eligible two-year-olds, to 1,140 hours by August 2020. That universal offer, plus targeted provision, has the potential to be truly transformative for children and their parents. For children, the expansion will provide a high-quality learning environment, which will help to prepare them for school, support their development and narrow the attainment gap. For parents, it will save families £4,500 a year, on average, as well as help parents to return to work or increase their working hours.

We are exercising our full influence to make workplaces fairer, too. Scotland already has the highest levels in the UK of individuals who are paid the real living wage or above—more than 83 per cent of employees—and the lowest number of zero-hour contracts.

However, our ambition does not simply extend to exceeding the standards that are set in the rest of the country. That is why we have committed to building a living wage nation and, by 2021, lifting an additional 25,000 individuals on to the real living wage of £9.30 an hour through employer accreditation. We have set out ambitious action in our fair work action plan and have revised the

Scottish business pledge to focus on the key issues that need to be addressed.

We are going further. Through our tackling child poverty delivery plan, we have committed £22 million for new parental employment support. That investment will support parents in work to increase their earnings and progress in their careers. It will build strong links with early learning and childcare by enabling parents to take advantage of the new jobs that the expansion is creating, as well as to take advantage of the funded hours of childcare.

Our new employability services are helping more people to access employment. Fair start Scotland, the cornerstone of our new approach, is voluntary and, since launching in April 2018, it has supported more than 16,000 people and helped more than 4,000 into work. However, that is only part of the story. Fair start Scotland's first annual report showed that, in a survey of more than 1,000 people who had used the service, 92 per cent felt that they were treated with dignity and respect.

Dignity and respect are the guiding principles for the action that the Government takes. They are at the very heart of our newest public service, Social Security Scotland, which runs a system that is there to support people at the times that they need it, providing not a handout but an investment in the most important resource that our country has—our people.

For the important early years, our best start grant helps families to buy the essentials for their new child when the child is born and at key stages in their wee one's life.

Our carers allowance supplement, which is worth an additional £452 to carers this year, goes some way to recognising the invaluable work of the thousands of carers in Scotland.

We have also pledged significant new investment of £180 million a year through our Scottish child payment, which will be fully rolled out by 2022, with early payments for under-sixes starting to be paid before next Christmas. The pace at which we are delivering that new benefit is unprecedented. The Child Poverty Action Group called the payment "game-changing" in our fight against poverty, given that it will shift the curve and lift 30,000 children out of poverty when it is fully rolled out. Importantly, the families of the 410,000 children who are set to benefit from it will also be protected against being pulled into the trap of poverty.

I have offered a glimpse of the actions that we are taking and the powers that we are using to make our country fairer. Although national action is important, our local partners have a strong role to play, too. The first local child poverty action reports demonstrate how much good work is happening across the country in linking

programmes and delivering the front-line services that folk access. The Poverty and Inequality Commission welcomed that activity and has recently shared its views on how that can be built on in future years. Together with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, NHS Health Scotland, the Improvement Service and others, we will continue to support local areas to maximise their impact and support our collective action.

At birth, every child in Scotland is eligible to receive the baby box. That is an important symbol of the equality that we want for every person in Scotland throughout their life. We know, however, that a fairer Scotland will not be achieved without action and we are committed to making that happen. After all, children only get one shot at childhood, and it is important that we make sure that we get it right.

Earlier this year, we estimated that, in 2018-19, we invested more than £1.4 billion in support directed at low-income households across Scotland. However, that included more than £100 million to mitigate the worst impacts of UK Government welfare reforms. Through our spending review, we are focusing on child poverty and wellbeing as the lens that must guide our investment decisions to make Scotland a fairer place.

The actions of this Government stand in stark contrast to those of the Conservative Government at Westminster. It really is a tale of two Governments. While we mop up the mess and mitigate the callous and punitive acts of the UK Government, we are not content to sit back and accept poverty as inevitable. With the powers that we have, we are being bold and ambitious to create a fairer Scotland. On housing, childcare and employment and through the Scottish child payment, we are using our powers to build a better, fairer Scotland where food banks have been relegated to the past and child poverty has been truly eradicated. I look forward to the debate ahead.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the *Fairer Scotland Action Plan, Shifting the Curve and the Life Chances of Young People in Scotland, Progress Report 2019*; notes the steps being taken towards achieving a fairer and more prosperous Scotland, including the commitment to introduce the Scottish Child Payment, which is a brand new benefit to tackle child poverty head on; further notes the 2018 annual report on Welfare Reform's estimate that UK Government social security spending will reduce by up to £3.7 billion in Scotland by 2020-21, and acknowledges the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights 2019 report, which stated that the UK Government's austerity cuts and welfare reforms are a key driver of serious hardship, increased food bank use and homelessness.

14:52

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** When I first read the title of the debate last week, I was genuinely excited by the thought that we might have a constructive discussion about where we want to go on this issue and where we actually are, because we all want to live in a fairer Scotland.

However, what we see in the Scottish Government's motion and the other parties' amendments is a papering over of the current position in this country and of the failings of the party that has been in power here for more than a decade. We all acknowledge that progress has been made in some areas, but it is slow and patchy. When we look at the reality on the ground, we see that many people are still missing out because of the Scottish Government's lack of action. Let me give a few examples.

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Jeremy Balfour:** I would prefer to develop my point for a moment.

Let me start with education, which we all agree is the key to enabling young people, and especially those who live in poverty, to move out of challenging situations and have fresh opportunities. However, only yesterday, we heard again how the Scottish Government's education policy is failing all our children. In maths, our children's achievements are behind those of their counterparts in England and Northern Ireland—and in science they are notably so. In reading, they are also behind their English counterparts.

In today's papers, Professor Lindsay Paterson gives a damning reflection on where we are with our education policy and why so many young people in Scotland are failing, and yet the Scottish Government simply will not listen to experts, parents or teachers on what we should be doing instead.

I will give way to Ms Ewing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Balfour, I will let you talk about education in this debate to a degree, but you do not mention it in your amendment. Keep to your amendment and keep to attacking what is in the *Business Bulletin*.

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** I am grateful to Jeremy Balfour for giving way. He might want to read the programme for international student assessment—PISA—statistics again, because what he said was not an accurate reflection.

However, he started off on the central issue of the poverty that we see in 21st-century Scotland, which forms part of the subject of this debate.

Given that around 85 per cent by value of social security spend is still controlled from Westminster, the situation is an indictment of successive Westminster Governments, rather than the fault of the Scottish Government. As he said, the Scottish National Party Government has been in power since 2007. Let us look at the decades upon decades of systematic neglect of Scotland by Westminster.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is plenty of time in hand, so you will get your time back, Mr Balfour.

**Jeremy Balfour:** That is a classic example of what the SNP Government and its back benchers do. They look at the statistics on education and then ignore them. They say that experts, parents and teachers are wrong and that they know best.

I developed the theme of education because it is key to moving people out of poverty. Mr Swinney dropped the proposed education bill. The First Minister said that we should judge her Government on its education record. In the past 10 years, it has failed dismally. Until we get movement with regard to that, the Government will continue to fail. My colleague Alison Harris will talk about what is happening with children at a younger age.

Given that education is a failure, let us look at employability and disability. The Government has failed on that as well. Yesterday evening, we had a members' business debate in which we had lots of warm words from the minister. However, let us look at what the statistics say. In Scotland, 45.4 per cent of people who are disabled are in employment. The figure in England is 51 per cent. That is a substantial gap in respect of people who are disabled and looking for employment in Scotland. There has been a lack of vision and policies from this Government to take those with disabilities out of poverty, give them fresh opportunities and allow them to develop. We are letting down individuals in our society who want to work but are not getting the opportunities to do so.

I was interested to hear the cabinet secretary talk about benefits. She was brave to do that. This Scottish Government's record is, "Give us the power and then we will hand it back to the Department for Work and Pensions quicker than you can say any word in the English language." It does not want the powers that it has been given; it is handing them back. The previous cabinet secretary, Jeane Freeman, made a commitment in the chamber—and on numerous occasions in the Social Security Committee—that all the powers would be fully up and running before the 2021 election. Now we hear from the current cabinet secretary that that will not be the case—another broken promise from the Government.



**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):**

Next year, accountability and the powers for social security will come to this Parliament. The timetable has been laid out for a safe and secure transition. That is understood by stakeholders. The changes that we have made allow us to deliver the Scottish child payment. Is Jeremy Balfour saying that we should not deliver that? We are determined to have a safe and secure transition. What would he change? What would he move or speed up?

**Jeremy Balfour:** The first thing that I would change is that I would not make promises that I could not keep. Secondly, I say with due respect to the cabinet secretary that I hear a different message from stakeholders. I hear concern and uncertainty, because they do not know what will come down the road from this Government. They do not know what they are getting, because it will not tell us what the regulations are. If this Government genuinely wanted—[*Interruption.*] Do you want to intervene, cabinet secretary?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, please do not have a dialogue across the chamber—please ask to make an intervention through the chair, as is the procedure. The member should not have to ask you to intervene.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I am grateful to Jeremy Balfour for taking a second intervention.

The stakeholders are working with us to develop the regulations, which will be further developed by the commission. There is a process for this: it will come to the committee for consideration and the timetable has been laid out. Scaremongering around what is happening in social security does not do the Conservative Party any good, because it absolutely lacks credibility. The stakeholders know that, and I am afraid that the Conservatives are digging more of a hole for themselves today, rather than working with us to get what everyone wants—a successful benefits system. I ask again: what is it that they would change? I am hearing absolutely nothing in the timetable that they would change.

**Jeremy Balfour:** As a party, we would have delivered all the benefits by 2021, as the SNP promised—in fact, it promised that it could do it all in 18 months, which it has simply failed to do.

**Aileen Campbell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jeremy Balfour:** I need to make some progress.

Many people who want to establish what their benefits are face a lack of certainty. This Government simply wants to tax people more. We have seen taxes going up. The UK Government has raised personal allowances to £12,500—we

are lifting thousands of Scots out of poverty in that way. We have a UK Government that does not just talk but actually does things and makes radical changes in people's lives. I would argue that that is the key difference between the Scottish Government's motion and the amendment in my name. Let us be absolutely clear that we will not make changes by simply talking; what we need is action from this Government to help the most vulnerable in our society.

I move amendment S5M-20110.1, to leave out from "2018 annual report" to end and insert:

"concern of a number of early learning and childcare practitioners and stakeholders over the roll-out of 1,140 hours of childcare, while acknowledging the need for flexibility within the service so that parents have the most adaptable means for returning to work or study; acknowledges the importance of the safe transfer of disability benefits and the need for the Scottish Government to prioritise their transfer with no further delays; welcomes action by the UK Government to empower workers through an increase to the living wage, personal allowance rate and a decreasing disability unemployment rate, and supports the UK Government's target to have 4.5 million disabled people in employment by 2027."

15:02

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** Anyone who is out knocking on doors in this general election—and that is probably all of us, although not today—cannot have failed to notice the striking gap between the haves and have-nots; it has certainly struck me. That can vary from community to community and from street to street, but it is clear to me that we have a very long way to go in creating a fairer Scotland, and until we can say that we have significantly closed the gap. Over the past year, according to Shelter, one child in Scotland has been made homeless every 37 minutes. That is 14,000 children in total. Statistics such as that show how far we have to go to achieve the goal of a fairer Scotland.

I believe that the Scottish Government must lead ambitiously, and our amendment calls for it to be more ambitious in its aims. The fairer Scotland progress report shows that, in too many areas, it has not gone far enough. It is important to note that this cannot be done without the involvement of partners, including people in the third sector, and even the Opposition parties playing a constructive role where we can.

However, like the cabinet secretary, I must acknowledge—this has been said many times—that the 2019 report by the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights clearly stated that the UK Government's austerity cuts and welfare reforms have been a key driver of serious hardship, increased food bank use and homelessness. I say to the Tories that I do not

think that we can have an all-round constructive approach until their party at least acknowledges the role that universal credit and welfare reforms have played in creating hardship in Scotland.

Creating a fairer Scotland is about more than just tackling poverty and improving incomes. It is also about tackling the lack of opportunity and the fact that some people do not get the same chances as others or the right help when they need it. Poorer people tend not to move in the same networks as wealthier people.

Creating fairness is wide ranging and includes climate change, fairness for future generations and the urgent need to be inclusive to ensure that people on low incomes are not left behind as we make changes towards a low-carbon future. That is a discussion that we will need to have in depth at another time.

I am also struck by the number of young people with disadvantage in their lives these days. Other MSPs cannot have failed to notice that. We have discussed young carers, and many young people suffer ill health. I chair the cross-party group that addresses Crohn's and colitis and I am staggered that Scotland is presiding over a rising number of young people who are ill, including those who are suffering mental ill health. We must equip our schools and colleges with the resources to help those young people who falter to get back on course with their lives when they may have lost out in school.

Naomi Eisenstadt, whom I think is the best appointment that the Scottish Government has made to date, is eloquent on that subject. She points out that we need to value non-academic routes more and says:

"in most areas a significant proportion of young people will not be aiming for a degree on leaving school. These young people should get comparable care and attention to their futures that is regularly devoted to more academic young people."

We have all said that, but more focus needs to be put on it.

A fairer Scotland is one that welcomes refugees, and one that sets the bar for a real living wage among Government and Government contractors. There must be fair pay and fair employment rights. We know of precarious employment among young people and the stories of those who do not have any rights in their employment. That is why we will support the devolution of employment rights. We believe that there is a better chance of protecting young people from precarious employment and zero-hours contracts, giving them protection at work, if we have those powers closer to home. I recognise that we must also work with trade unions in a fairer Scotland.

In January, the Poverty and Inequality Commission reported that one of the most worrying trends is the increase in the number of households with a disabled person who are living in poverty; Jeremy Balfour is right about that. While it was only a 1 per cent increase, that represents 40,000 people, which is an important figure to bear in mind. It is a huge topic to address in a short speech and there are other things that I want to focus on.

Last year, KPMG reported that the proportion of jobs paying less than the living wage was 19 per cent. I acknowledge what the cabinet secretary said about Scotland's figures, but that figure represents 435,000 people. The Poverty and Inequality Commission says that the Government's target is not ambitious enough and it is looking for a push in the hospitality sector, which has the highest proportion of people earning less than the living wage.

In October, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported:

"Poverty in Scotland is rising, from an already unacceptably high level. ... Almost one in five people in Scotland live in poverty, and for children the situation is worse, with one in four in poverty."

That looks set to get even worse as we face the prospect of Brexit. A lot depends on the outcome of the general election—I will say no more.

One of the issues that compromises the Scottish Government's attempt to tackle poverty to some degree is the uptake of the new top-up benefits. We welcome the Scottish child payment but the full roll-out will not come until 2022, although I acknowledge that roll-out will start in 2020. I also acknowledge the best start grant and the carers allowance supplement, which has an extremely positive effect. The Government must be commended for the way in which that has been rolled out by the new social security agency.

However, the question is how we can ensure that uptake is as high as possible; that issue has been addressed by Shirley-Anne Somerville on many occasions. We need to examine in serious depth how benefits could be automated to relieve the problem of poor uptake, although I know how difficult that is. Perhaps the conversion of the Scottish child payment from a top-up to a stand-alone benefit might allow more scope for it to be automated. I put that out for consideration. The Poverty and Inequality Commission says that the Government should make more use of new powers to create new benefits rather than supplementing current ones, so that seems to be its view, too.

Housing costs continue to push people into poverty. In Scotland, the number of working-age adults in the poorest one fifth of the population

who spend more than one third of their income on housing has risen over the past 20 years. The number of families living in the private rented sector has risen and for many people that is not a choice—it is their only option. Recent statistics indicate that the average cost of renting in the private sector has risen in 15 out of 18 Scottish local authority areas. That is addressed by the Living Rent union, which warns that the situation will only get worse. We need action to curb high rents, and I hope to talk on another day about my bill to curb high rents. Serious effort must be made to get rents down in the private rented sector or we will not be able to tackle child poverty.

If I had more time, I would mention the gender pay gap, as well as helping vulnerable customers in the energy market, who are not getting a great deal of the rights that they deserve. My colleagues Sarah Boyack and Claudia Beamish will address those issues.

It is important that we do not underestimate the scale of the task in creating a fairer Scotland. We believe that the Government needs to be more ambitious. We will support the Greens' amendment; we will not support the Conservatives' amendment. I hope that the Government will support our amendment; in the event that it does not, we will support the Government's motion in good faith.

I move amendment S5M-20110.3 to insert at end:

“; regrets the rise in poverty in Scotland and believes that more ambition is required across government to tackle inequality and improve people's quality of life; calls on the Scottish Government to address the barriers to benefit uptake and reduce housing costs; agrees that universal credit, the two-child cap and pernicious UK welfare reforms must be scrapped, and believes that tackling the climate emergency must be done in a fair way, recognising the growing inequalities and insecurities facing people across Scotland.”

15:10

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** The motion rightly notes that, by 2020, around £3.7 billion of social security spending will be cut from Scotland as a result of UK welfare reforms. The international day of disabled persons took place yesterday, so it is timely and important to highlight how hard those cuts have hit disabled people. Colleagues have raised that important issue.

A report by the disability benefits consortium that was released this year shows that disabled people have lost benefit payments of around £1,200 on average each year. For a household with one disabled adult and one disabled child, the average loss is over £4,300. No wonder that the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and the UN Committee on the Rights

of Persons with Disabilities have raised concerns about the impact of welfare reforms on the fundamental rights of disabled people.

Disabled people are forced to travel huge distances to undertake wholly unnecessary benefits assessments that are overturned on appeal more than two thirds of the time; in some cases, they are not able to, or are no longer able to, work because their Motability vehicles have been taken away from them. That is the legacy that the Scottish Government inherits as it takes on responsibility for some disability benefits.

To build a fairer Scotland, we have a lot to combat and we need to radically use the powers that we now have, as small as those powers are and as frustrated as some of us might be about that. The significant change of direction in the use of assessments, in line with the legal requirements that were instituted by the Greens, is potentially a sea change. It should mean that we get more accurate decisions on benefit assessment, which would avoid putting people through assessments that often simply recreate evidence that was already there. We also need to look at the levels of support that we offer and at how broad the eligibility criteria are.

The current disability benefit for older people—attendance allowance—does not offer support for mobility, despite that being available for young people, and I am concerned that the Scottish Government plans to replicate that unfairness. The 20m rule was a cynical attempt to reduce spending at the expense of people's needs, and it must end. I welcome the Scottish Government's openness to ending that rule, and I hope that that will result in more disabled people getting the support that they need.

As will many others, those changes will require a significant reinvestment in social security, and that investment will need to be funded to a significant extent by higher taxes. That is why it is so important that we continue to make our tax system more progressive, raising funds from those who can afford to pay a bit more.

Income tax is fairer in Scotland as a result of the budget changes that were won by Greens, so we now need to rise to the challenge on local taxation that was laid down by Naomi Eisenstadt in “Shifting the Curve: A Report to the First Minister”. In that report, which was written almost four years ago, Professor Eisenstadt said that we had reached

“a central moment of political decision, an opportunity to introduce a much more progressive system, one that will have important implications, particularly for working households at or just above the poverty line”

and yet the council tax is still with us. It is still outdated. Most households are still paying the

wrong amount and it still restricts the ability of local authorities to better fund public services, to reduce poverty and to build fairer communities.

That is why I lodged an amendment to today's motion that underlines the importance of the cross-party talks on council tax reform, which I hope will result in the replacement of council tax with a progressive alternative that is urgently needed. Like rebuilding our social security system, introducing a fairer system of local taxation is a huge challenge, which I do not underestimate. However, the Parliament must rise to that challenge if we are to build a fairer Scotland.

My amendment mentions the need to review the Scottish welfare fund to ensure that it is able to support those who have been impacted by welfare reforms and other people who need urgent help with their income or to live independent lives. The welfare fund offers vital support to people who are suffering income crises, which are often brought on by the welfare reforms. I pay tribute to the local government officials across the country who help people in very difficult circumstances. Some 95 per cent of crisis grants are processed within the target time of two working days. That figure has improved over the lifetime of the fund, which reflects the dedication and hard work of those who process welfare fund applications. Now that the fund has been operating for a good few years, at a time of seemingly never-ending welfare reform, this is an appropriate moment to review the fund to ensure that it is able to help everyone who needs it.

The underspends that marked the early years of the programme are now largely a thing of the past in most areas, and the majority of local authorities spend around their full Scottish Government allocation, or indeed overspend it and provide additional funding themselves.

This year, a Menu for Change report showed that some local authorities do not always advertise their welfare fund or its availability, because they are concerned that they will have more applications than they are able to handle. If that is the case, it is clear that we need to urgently review the level of support that the Government is providing. For those reasons, I would appreciate the support of members across the chamber for my amendment.

I wish to address the motion's focus on rising food bank use. We should be deeply concerned that the Trussell Trust has warned that the use of food banks in Scotland is at an all-time high, with 210,605 food parcels having been issued over the past year, a third of them to children. It is important to remember that food bank statistics do not reveal the true depth of the problem. About a third of food banks are not included in the most commonly used Trussell Trust statistics, and many

people who are struggling to pay for food do not always use food banks.

I am over my time, so I will close for now and address more issues in my summing-up speech.

I move amendment S5M-20110.2, to insert at end:

“; calls for a review of the Scottish Welfare Fund to ensure that it can support those hardest hit by welfare reform; notes that the original report, *Shifting the Curve*, recommended that the Scottish Government should be ‘bold on local tax reform’, and believes it is imperative that ongoing cross-party talks on council tax reform result in a progressive local tax that will enable local authorities to better fund local services and promote fairness.”

15:17

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I am grateful to the Government for lodging the motion for debate today. As always, there is much common ground between our parties on this issue. Liberal Democrats, as do other parties that are represented in the chamber, have a vision for building a brighter future that is free from discrimination and intolerance—a United Kingdom that is more equal and fair, and a United Kingdom where we all have the same opportunities, regardless of where we come from or the circumstances of our birth.

I will start by giving the Scottish Government some credit. Flicking through the latest progress report, I see that there is a fair amount of purple in its pages. I note that 19 of the 50 actions are marked as having been completed: I congratulate the Government on that. I am glad to see some positive changes among those actions, including the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 and refugee families who are settling here getting quick access to assistance. However, much of what has been completed represents the low-hanging fruit, so we now need to reach much higher and to increase the scope of our ambition.

I will take a few minutes to cover the items that are currently “in progress” for delivery by the Administration. Included among those that are marked “in progress” is the reaching 100 per cent—R100—programme, which is due to be completed by 2021, although I am slightly concerned because we are starting to hear noises from the Government that suggest that we might need to move that date. I would like to hear some reassurance in the cabinet secretary's summing-up speech about the date by which R100 should be completed.

Reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 is also in progress. My party has called for that for years, but I am concerned that its reform might have been kicked into the long grass. The timetable to deliver that during the current session

is now very challenging. There is no guarantee that it will happen, despite all MSPs having stood for election on manifestos that support that. I am concerned that every day that we do not debate the matter in Parliament it is being debated in wider society and is the subject of hyperbole and misinformation.

Also marked as “in progress” is the commitment to put an additional graduate in every nursery in more deprived areas “by 2018”. That target was missed by a huge margin in August last year, by when it was due to have been met. Only half—234—of the 435 extra staff were in place on time, and even today they are still not all in post. I cannot understand why that is not marked in red in the progress report—perhaps the cabinet secretary could illuminate Parliament on that.

That brings me on neatly to funded childcare. Liberal Democrats succeeded in persuading the Scottish Government to expand free childcare, so we are grateful to it for the steps that it has taken. We made the case time and again that that is one of the most effective ways to close the attainment gap between rich children and poor children. Our parties are in agreement on that point—on the social leveller that nurseries represent.

However, as we have heard, roll-out has encountered problems. For example, uptake for two-year-olds is nowhere close to where we want it to be. Some providers are struggling to get by, at a time when business should be good.

Liberal Democrats want to take the expansion much further: we want free high-quality childcare for every child aged two to four, for 35 hours a week, 48 weeks a year. Working parents will get free childcare from when their child is 9 months old. That would close the gap between the end of paid parental leave and the start of free childcare provision. It would also begin to help to close the gender pay gap. We all know people—the vast majority of whom are women—who, in the face of astronomical childcare fees, have opted to stay at home rather than to return to work, or who go back to work for much-diminished time, and often miss out on opportunities for career progression.

A Liberal Democrat UK Government would give the Scottish Government the funding to match that commitment, which is the most ambitious in the UK. Making that a UK-wide shared endeavour would help to promote take-up and train enough staff.

There is no avoiding the fact that the current constitutional chaos hangs over everything good that we want to do in Scotland. Independence and Brexit would both mean less money to invest in children’s education and in transforming mental health services. We are fighting to stop Brexit, and to get a £50 billion remain bonus to tackle

inequality and invest in public services. We want to prevent independence and, thus, avoid a decade of SNP-inflicted austerity, which is what the SNP’s own growth commission has forecast and which has, overnight, been confirmed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Implementing the SNP’s general election manifesto in an independent Scotland would lead to even more cuts than are in the Conservative plans for UK spending.

Meanwhile, the head of the Scottish civil service has warned the First Minister that her referendum planning means a “deprioritisation” of domestic policy. Our education and mental health services simply cannot afford further abstraction of Government time. Just yesterday, we saw Scotland slip further down the international rankings in science and in maths, having recorded its worst-ever results. Last week, we saw the worst child mental health waits ever recorded. The Government has denied that there is even a crisis. I want that to be the Government’s number 1 priority, because those services are the cornerstones of our vision for a brighter future.

I got into politics to make our country fairer. It is so much easier to do that without the constitutional stranglehold that is being applied to this country by both of those constitutional issues.

I turn briefly to the amendments. I cannot support Jeremy Balfour’s Conservative amendment, because of what it would remove from the motion. Since 2015, the UK Government has made brutal and unnecessary ideologically driven cuts to welfare. The Tories single-handedly undermined universal credit by removing billions of pounds from the system.

On Labour’s amendment, we absolutely agree that universal credit is not working and is driving people to food banks, plunging them into cycles of arrears and leaving them destitute. Labour supported the introduction of universal credit, as did many poverty campaigners at the time. It desperately needs reform, but scrapping it altogether is impractical, especially given that Labour cannot tell us what it would replace it with. That would mean huge amounts of money being spent on yet more administration. I want that money to be spent on supporting people and on reforming universal credit in order to inject dignity and respect into the system.

On the Green Party’s amendment, I am persuaded by Alison Johnstone’s argument about the review of the social welfare fund, so we will support it.

I will close, because I have run out of time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** We move to the open debate, with

speeches of six minutes. I have some time in hand and can allow extra time for interventions.

15:24

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** I am pleased to speak in this important Scottish Government debate on achieving a fairer Scotland. As the MSP for the Cowdenbeath constituency, I say at the outset that it is absolutely unacceptable that children in my constituency are growing up in poverty, losing out on opportunities and do not have the life chances that other children take for granted. That shames me, and it should shame every single member of this Parliament—but shame is not enough: we must identify the structural issues that are at play and sort them out.

It could not be clearer that the key issue that faces people in my constituency, and people right across Scotland, is the lack of power to make a generational difference to people who are in poverty, because without power we cannot deliver the changes that we need, and without power we lack the tools that we need to fix the scandal of poverty in energy-rich Scotland. Of course, the power that I am talking about is the power of a normal independent country: the power to control all of our resources, the power to decide how our resources are spent, and the power to determine our own priorities, based on the needs of our people.

That also includes the power to have the Government that we actually vote for. For far too long, Scotland has been in an invidious position in that regard. Aside from any other considerations, that, in and of itself, evidences the stark fact that the union is simply not working. The appalling statistics that have been mentioned are a sad indictment of life under the union, with successive Tory and Labour Governments failing the people of Scotland and failing generations of children in Scotland.

Of course, that has in recent years been exacerbated by Tory austerity and welfare cuts, which have left families across Scotland struggling to pay their bills and feed their children. We know from analysis that was published last year that UK Government cuts will result in some £3.7 billion being cut from the social security spending in Scotland by 2021. We know, too, that the benefit cap is affecting more than 3,000 households, which are losing on average more than £3,000 a year. We know that 8,500 Scottish families have already seen their income being cut due to the universal credit two-child limit, and we know that about 5,600 couples in Scotland could lose up to £7,000 a year by 2023-24 as a result of the Tories' changes to personal credit, news of which was slipped out by way of a written ministerial

statement. What cowardice. Of course, we have also seen the hardship that has been caused by the flawed roll-out of universal credit, which has resulted in significant increases in recourse to food banks.

This is the Britain of the poorhouse. The situation is so bad that the UN special rapporteur reported that UK Government welfare cuts are

“punitive, mean-spirited and often callous”.

As the cabinet secretary said in her opening remarks, the rapporteur went on to say that the cuts are unnecessarily inflicting “great misery.”

However, in what is, indeed,

“a tale of two Governments”,

we in Scotland have seen the SNP Scottish Government taking strong and decisive action in the face of such cuts, by using the powers that we have to help to tackle poverty and income inequality, and to build a fairer and more prosperous Scotland. For example, as we have heard, there is the Scottish child payment, which is worth £10 a week per child. The first payments will be paid out for under-six-year-olds by Christmas 2020, on an accelerated timescale. I congratulate the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People for ensuring that that will happen. At its heart, the payment is designed to shift the curve of poverty fundamentally, and has been described by the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland as a

“game changer for child poverty in Scotland.”

I entirely agree with that description.

Just imagine if the Scottish Government had 100 per cent of the powers over the social security spend, rather than just 15 per cent, which I regret is the case at the moment—a situation that Labour and the Tories supported during the work of the Smith commission.

Another example of decisive action from the Scottish Government is the difference that the best start grant is making to families in Scotland. Furthermore, we can point to free school meals for children in primaries 1 to 3, which Labour voted against; to help with school uniforms; to the carers supplement, which Pauline McNeill referred to; and to free prescriptions. Those are all examples of the Scottish Government doing what it can with the powers that it has.

However, here's the rub: at the same time as we see that much-needed investment by the Scottish Government to support low-income households, we also see some £100 million having to be spent every year on mitigating the worst impacts of UK Government's welfare policy. That is money that, therefore, cannot be spent elsewhere. Indeed, as the UN special rapporteur concluded,

“mitigation comes at a price, and it is not sustainable.”

Westminster rule has come at a very high price for Scotland, and it is “not sustainable”. What kind of country wants to spend £200 billion on nuclear submarine replacement when we see so many people struggling to get by? What kind of country has, under successive Labour and Tory Westminster Governments, seen disabled people being treated so shabbily, with individuals having consistently to go through a long and arduous appeal process to get the benefits to which they are entitled in the first place? And what kind of country is content to preside over generations of children losing out on equitable chances in life?

Scotland has been too long in this condition. The Westminster system is failing Scotland, and the only way to secure real social justice in our country, and to unlock the potential of current and future generations, is to be a normal independent country.

15:30

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the progress report on the fairer Scotland action plan and I am happy to be speaking today, having spoken in the plan’s introductory debate back in October 2016. In that debate, I said that there is “no magic bullet” for achieving an instant reduction in poverty, and that remains true. It is important that we look at the overall picture, and that all the portfolios in Government work together as a whole.

The fairer Scotland action plan was built on that approach, with its five key aims covering a variety of policy areas. Number 3 of those five aims was about early years, education and health, and I will focus my contribution on the pledges that the action plan made around early years.

All of us in the chamber agree on the impact that education can have on a child’s life. It provides a clear route for each child to reach their full potential. Many view education as the most important factor in tackling poverty—and I can see why. Pledge 29 of the fairer Scotland action plan was to increase the number of hours of funded childcare entitlement from 600 to 1,140 by 2020. That pledge covered all three and four-year-olds as well as the two-year-olds who are in the greatest need. I know that all parties fully support that commitment, and we all hope that it succeeds. However, it is worth discussing the more concerning developments around that pledge, particularly with regard to how they affect children who need the most help in achieving the best start to their lives.

A problem that has surfaced across the whole country is the number of eligible two-year-olds who actually take up the provision. The Scottish

Government set a target to double uptake for two-year-olds, and although I acknowledge that progress has been made on that front, it is nonetheless estimated that 40 per cent of eligible two-year-olds will not be using their entitlement by April 2021. As studies have shown, the option of childcare at that early stage has a greater effect on children from the most deprived backgrounds, so we should strive to increase that uptake further.

Getting the right start in life is invaluable. It helps you throughout your life and it forms the basis for success, and we want to give every child the chance to succeed. Although I acknowledge the potential of the Scottish child payment to help achieve that, it must—as I outlined earlier—be combined with consistency across Government portfolios.

It is important to highlight another issue with the childcare pledge. In 2016, the fairer Scotland action plan made reference to the creation of new jobs as a result of the pledge. Over the years, we have heard several estimates of the number of extra staff that are required to fulfil the pledge, and the most recent revision has reduced the figure to around 8,500 new staff. One reason why the figure has been revised down is that local authorities are recruiting staff who are already in the industry and who currently work for private, voluntary and independent sector nurseries. A recent survey by the National Day Nurseries Association confirmed that those staff are transferring to work in public sector nurseries and stated that nine in 10 PVI sector providers have lost staff in the past year.

Council nurseries are able to offer higher-salary packages for the same roles, due to a difference in the funding rates that are allocated to the PVI and public sectors. I have spoken before about the inequality in treatment, but today’s debate is not about that. It is about achieving a fairer Scotland. That staff drain is already affecting the sector, and I believe that it will have an impact on pursuit of the goal of a fairer Scotland.

It is always worth remembering that the need for childcare does not just start when a child turns two or three. Nurseries in the PVI sector offer an unparalleled flexible service for parents who wish to use childcare outside of typical work or school hours, or who have children under the age of two.

As I noted in the introductory debate on the action plan, paid work is a crucial step on the road to leaving poverty behind, which is a defining goal of the action plan. Young parents in particular face increased financial pressures, which can create barriers to moving out of poverty. Many mothers of young children want to continue their studies or enter work, but many of those jobs operate outside the usual 9-to-5 day.

The flexibility offered by the PVI sector enables those parents to enter employment sooner and more confidently than if they used council settings. However, there is a problem. The roll-out of the 1,140 hours has focused so heavily on building and expanding council nurseries that it has led to the drain in staff from the PVI sector. With the loss of trained and experienced staff, service quality at PVI sector nurseries is at risk and many will struggle to keep their services open. That has been witnessed in the nurseries that have closed or been sold in the past year.

In trying to make a fairer Scotland, an unintended consequence of the early years pledge has been the loss of vital services for those most in need. The action plan's definition of a fairer Scotland mentions

"genuine equality of opportunity, stronger life chances and support for all those who need it".

**Aileen Campbell:** Will the member give way?

**Alison Harris:** I am about to finish.

As we look ahead to the remaining years of the action plan and the future beyond that, I hope that we can all acknowledge the barriers to delivering those outcomes so that we can tackle them before it is too late.

15:37

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** The words

"punitive, mean-spirited and often callous"

are damning, to say the least, as is a reference to "unnecessarily" inflicting "great misery". Those are not my words, but the words of the UN special rapporteur, in his report on the UK Government's welfare cuts.

The Tories come to the chamber day in and day out, week in and week out, and month in and month out, calling for more money to be invested in a range of policy areas, despite their budget proposals last year, which would have cut £500 million of expenditure. The proposed tax cuts for the richest would have made the less well-off even worse off. That is an example of how the Tories do not want a fairer Scotland for everyone.

Another example is the comments of Michelle Ballantyne, the Tories' welfare spokesperson, who said:

"There is no such thing as a bedroom tax".—[*Official Report, Social Security Committee*, 21 February 2019; c 24.]

She also said that the rape clause is "fair", because

"people on benefits cannot have as many children as they like".—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2018; c 52.]

I do not understand how the Tories can think that their approach delivers a fairer Scotland. It could be argued that they are writing off many children and people who are on benefits at an early stage. I do not know whether any of the Tories who are in the chamber at the moment support Michelle Ballantyne's comments. I would be happy to give way if any of them wanted to make an intervention. I see that there are only two, and that they do not want to.

I became involved in politics because I want my community and country to be better and fairer. I grew up in Port Glasgow and saw the devastating effects of the Tory Government's policies on my community. Thousands left—they had to get on their bike, as Tebbit declared at the time—and there was an increase in alcohol and drugs misuse, which still afflicts my community today.

Annabelle Ewing spoke about the root cause. The root cause of many of the challenges that my constituency faces today started under previous Tory Governments. Those challenges have not been overturned in a few years by the Scottish Parliament with its limited powers, but the SNP Government is taking action, as the cabinet secretary set out in her opening remarks. However, while the majority of tax and spend policies and welfare powers remain at Westminster, Scotland will be at the mercy of those in charge there.

I was the first MSP to raise the issue of food banks in this chamber, and I will always support them. When we are presented with the evidence about how universal credit is affecting people, it ill behoves any Tory politician to defend a policy that is pushing more and more people into poverty and desperation. There will also be other effects on people's physical and mental health.

The Trussell Trust highlights that, on average, there has been a 52 per cent increase in food bank referrals when universal credit has gone live. In the past year alone, there has been a 23 per cent increase in emergency food parcel handouts. How is that making Scotland fairer? It is not. When constituents come to my office looking for assistance to get food not to thrive but to survive, that clearly highlights a failure in the UK Government's social policy.

From 3 September 2012 to 30 September 2019, Inverclyde Foodbank recorded the following statistics: there were 19,220 referrals, involving 24,996 adults and 8,630 children—that is 33,626 people. If the Tories think that that is fair, that says a lot about the world in which they live and about how out of touch the Scottish and UK Tories are. With the likes of Johnson, Jacob Rees Mogg—who has disappeared from the election campaign—and Priti Patel wanting to continue in Government after next week, the dystopian



nightmare that thousands of people face, in my Inverclyde constituency and across Scotland and the rest of the UK, will only get worse if the Tories are successful. The annual report on welfare reforms estimates that the UK Government's social security spending in Scotland will be slashed by up to £3.7 billion by 2020-21, which indicates that more of the same poverty and desperation will continue. How will that make Scotland fairer?

Without the actions of the Scottish Government, the situation in my constituency in this year alone would have been so much worse. If Ferguson Marine had not been taken over, 300-plus jobs would have gone, which would have resulted in those people going on the dole and 300 more families being adversely affected.

Earlier this year, Texas Instruments announced that it was closing its Inverclyde plant. However, thanks to the actions of the Scottish Government and the task force that was set up, Diodes Inc took over the plant. If that solution had not been found, more than 300 highly paid and highly skilled jobs in my community would have been lost. That would have meant more people getting on their bike to go somewhere else and, potentially, more people signing on. There would also have been implications for other public policy areas, such as health.

The Scottish Government is delivering to make Scotland fairer. There is still more to do—there will always be more to do—but the draconian policies of a Westminster elite with absolutely no consideration for the working class will only exacerbate the lack of fairness in my constituency and across Scotland.

15:43

**Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** For many years, with the impact of the UK Government's actions and policy directions, poverty levels and inequalities in Scotland have increased dramatically. The publication of the "Fairer Scotland Action Plan" is a welcome and comprehensive addition to the debate on how we can collectively improve our situation, with the action plan detailing the actions that are necessary for us to do so.

The foreword to the report by Marie-Therese Martin and Susan McMahon, who are poverty truth commissioners, encapsulates the malaise and hopelessness that existed prior to the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the wide-ranging conversations that were engendered throughout Scottish society as part of the referendum campaign. The feeling at the time is perfectly illustrated by the words:

"Previously we never thought to question our situation—to look at it, to talk about it, to ask ... what could make it better. It was like we were always waiting for the government or someone else to make a change."

Since then, work undertaken by the Scottish Government and its partners from all sections of Scottish society has changed attitudes dramatically, and—despite limited powers—the Scottish Parliament has made striking improvements to UK welfare arrangements by funding mitigation measures for such things as the bedroom tax.

In the financial year 2018-19, the Scottish Government invested £1.4 billion in supporting low-income households, of which more than £2 million from the pupil equity fund was allocated to every school in my constituency as part of the drive to eliminate the educational attainment gap that currently exists—I very much welcome and appreciate that. The eradication of poverty has to be the highest priority for the Scottish Parliament, because all other aspects of inequality in our communities flow from that source. Poverty and all the other inequalities sleep in the same bed.

It is of particular concern that the UK Government's austerity agenda and its draconian welfare policies have pushed thousands of additional families into poverty in Scotland—with the future of many more families at risk. It is well known that children who grow up in poverty face reduced educational attainment, poorer health and a shorter life expectancy.

The action plan, which was first published in 2016, contains 50 actions that are designed to tackle poverty, reduce inequality and build a fairer and more inclusive Scotland. Significant advances have already been made, and the introduction of the Scottish child payment of £10 per child per week by 2022 will prove to be a game changer and will be of enormous assistance to families who are living in poverty—women, in particular, will benefit from distributing it within their households. Another game changer for hard-pressed families will be the extension of free early learning and childcare from 600 hours to 1,140 hours each year for every three and four-year-old and for eligible two-year-olds, which will start in August 2020. The actions in the fairer Scotland action plan cover an incredibly wide range of issues—from low incomes to housing, education, health, social security, justice, human rights, employability and discrimination. It is a truly comprehensive plan.

Professor Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, who has been mentioned, described Scotland's plans as "ambitious", and said that they include

"a promising social security system",

putting Scotland

“on a very different trajectory than England when it comes to the social protection of its population.”

That is some plaudit from a well-respected individual of world note.

With plans such as those and the full powers of an independent country, we would be able to eradicate what has been the scourge of Scotland for decades. We will remove poverty and inequality. I support the debate and the motion.

15:49

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the chance to discuss our vision for a fairer Scotland. I recognise that a number of positive developments have been taken forward in the current session by the Scottish Government and the Parliament when we have worked together to deliver on our aims. However, despite our successes, we have—as other members have said—much, much further to go.

The Conservative Government’s approach to welfare policy has been cruel and castigatory, and the Scottish people have not always been sheltered from its many effects by the Scottish Government, despite the levers at its disposal that would enable it, for example, to take better action to address fuel poverty.

The Government’s progress report is wide ranging and I recognise that there have been successes, but there are also challenges ahead. I have time to touch on only a few areas, but I echo my Labour colleagues’ commitment that a Labour Government would take a much more ambitious approach to the redistribution of wealth and power to create an equitable Scotland.

It is absolutely right that the Scottish Labour amendment refers to “tackling the climate emergency” as part of the vision for a fairer Scotland. I am disappointed that fair action on climate change has been omitted from both the original 2016 action plan and this year’s progress report. After all, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2019 sets us on a path to net zero emissions that involves a far steeper trajectory than the Government has faced so far in its decade in power, and I do not think—despite the rhetoric—that the scale and opportunity of that approach have quite been appreciated yet.

Documents such as the one that is before us today should have a recognition of the climate emergency, and Scotland’s response, at their core. The shift in our economy and society needs management, strategy and guidance from those who work in the affected industries and have the relevant expertise, alongside Government. It also requires a statutory just transition commission with the freedom to work independently of

Governments into the future and to look to the long term.

The climate crisis ties us all to a common fate, but it is the disadvantaged, globally and in Scotland, who will shoulder the burden. I will not stop pushing the Scottish Government until it starts to think proactively about the need for a just transition commission, rather than looking only at the next two years. Let us shape our future and see the necessity of change as an opportunity for the radical transformation of our society and economy for the better, leading to a fairer, more democratic and equal Scotland that is underpinned by radical tax policies and action by a UK Labour Government following—I hope—its election next week.

The Scottish Government’s ambitions in the action plan are welcome, but in almost every area the plan could go further. I stress the possibility of multibenefits as a result of Government taking holistic action across portfolios—something that all parties find challenging but which should be more effectively led by the Scottish Government. Taking on the poverty premium would mean a better quality of life for many, and it would help many out of fuel poverty. A home is a right guaranteed by the United Nations, and—certainly in Scotland—that should mean a warm home.

A more holistic approach is needed. Local authorities are suffering from a lack of capacity to fulfil their responsibilities, yet at the same time they are being given more to do. That signifies the much broader problem that our councils face: deep cuts alongside less control over how they spend their funding. Councils and their service users, working alongside the third sector, are crying out for more progressive alternatives.

The current situation translates into transport poverty, too. The modal shift to public transport and active travel is a significant issue, and there is stark evidence of the links between socially deprived communities and poor air quality. I urge the cabinet secretary to work across portfolios to ensure that more work is done to look at the Scottish index of multiple deprivation data and to explore the links, as recommended in the document “Cleaner Air for Scotland Strategy—An Independent Review: Final Report to the Scottish Government”. Action 14 in the original action plan includes the ambition to make support for rural areas fairer, which is important to many of my constituents in South Scotland. I am surprised to see that rural poverty is barely mentioned in the progress report, so I would welcome some further comment on it from the minister in closing today.

I also highlight a further concern with the SIMD. Its organisation into data zones of between 500 and 1,000 residents potentially disperses deprivation throughout a relatively large area. Can

the cabinet secretary comment on whether that methodology could obscure pockets of real deprivation among those who are living in more geographically isolated areas? Would she consider the possibility of a review?

**Aileen Campbell:** We always take on board ideas from other political parties, and we are happy to engage on that. We take rural poverty very seriously. We also hold and engage in a number of poverty truth commission events, which reflect the nature of, and differences in, poverty for people in communities across the country.

As for working across portfolios, Shirley-Anne Somerville and I have certainly done so to deliver the Scottish child payment. My portfolio also provides the resources to Derek Mackay and his portfolio to enhance our ability to make better use of the childcare roll-out and to ensure that there is an employability link-up, as well. If there are more things that we can do, we are keen to look into them.

I hope that that gives reassurance that we are committed to tackling rural poverty and to working across portfolios, because no single portfolio is going to provide the solution to child poverty.

**Claudia Beamish:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that explanation.

Finally, I support the aims of improving chances for women and girls in the fairer Scotland action plan, and I would welcome an update on the efforts that are being made to encourage women to enter and re-enter careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and to close the gaps in those sectors.

I also welcome the recognition of flexible working, which can have a huge, positive impact on women and on unpaid carers in the workplace—the majority of whom are, of course, also women. They need understanding employers, not just in order to meet their caring responsibilities, but to find time for respite, which, to be frank, could have better support from the Scottish Government.

It seems that the success of the action plan rests on there being a huge step change in ambition and more joined-up government. More than 1 million people in Scotland live in poverty. Poverty and child poverty in Scotland are rising. Business as usual will not cut it for those people in hardship.

I also ask the Scottish Government to let the climate emergency give it the push that it needs to address that issue as well, and transform our economy and society so that they work for the many as well as the few, as we move towards net zero emissions.

15:56

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I will focus on two areas of the debate: making Scotland fairer for children who are living in poverty and wider issues around benefit take-up. In doing so, I will offer praise for the powerful and effective actions of the Scottish Government; however, I will also point to where it could perhaps go further. I think that that is the right thing to do during the debate, although I recognise that the Government can go only so far as the resources and powers that are held by this Parliament permit.

I am in no doubt about the game changer that the Scottish Government's Scottish child payment will be. What do I base that on? Not just the testimony of those who are living in poverty in my constituency of Maryhill and Springburn, but the direct experiences that the Scottish Government has sought to garner from right across Scotland.

During challenge poverty week, in October, I attended an event that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland hosted, to consider the Scottish child payment. The attendees included people from groups that work with families who are experiencing poverty; more important, people with direct experience of poverty were in the room. I was in no doubt about how supportive those people are.

The Scottish child payment will put an additional £10 per week per child into the hands of low-income families. It will help 410,000 children, in a quarter of a million households. The payment will dramatically assist all families and it will lift 30,000 children out of poverty, which is significant.

I pay tribute to the families and campaigners who were part of the give me five campaign, which asked for £5 per child per week. The Scottish Government listened and will deliver a tenner per child per week for low-income households. I say well done to campaigners, including the doughty terriers who are living in poverty and have been at the forefront of the campaign, and well done to the Scottish Government for not only delivering on that ask but surpassing it.

I want to consider how we can go further. I should set that in context by putting on record that there are constraints in that regard, given that there will have been a £3.7 billion cut to the welfare budget in Scotland by 2021 and a £2 billion real-terms cut to Scotland's budget by the same time.

What additional asks are there? It is acknowledged, and statistics show, that children are most likely to be in poverty in families where there are under-6s in the household. There was talk of a premium, or another top-up, for such

families. I know that that money simply does not exist right now—the Scottish Government has made a huge £180 million commitment—but we should not lose sight of that ask.

I spoke to families who talked about the additional costs of having teenagers in their households, particularly during the summer holidays. I pay tribute to the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council for their work on holiday hunger. There is the idea of actioning a payment of the school clothing grant—we have data on that on the record—just before the summer holidays to assist with the extra costs. Again, we know that there is no magic money tree, but those are real asks for things that we could roll out in the future. I am under no illusions about the challenges around that, but those people made those asks, and it is important that I put them on the record.

**Gil Paterson:** Bob Doris started by telling members about the volume of the austerity cuts. What could we do with that money if it was not cut by the UK Government?

**Bob Doris:** I will answer that in another way. The £180 million commitment to tackling child poverty is a unilateral decision by the Scottish Government. That is not happening anywhere else in the UK, but if the rest of the UK decided to follow suit, that would probably mean a £2 billion-plus commitment to tackling child poverty. As the money supply for Scotland, or how we get our own money back, is dependent on spending elsewhere in the UK, if the next UK Government made such a commitment, a Barnett consequential payment of approximately £180 million would come to Scotland. Just think what we could do with that.

I absolutely agree with Gil Paterson's underlying point about why we should have to depend on spending decisions in London to dictate how much money we have to tackle child poverty in Scotland.

I want to talk about benefits uptake. Action 19 in the fairer Scotland action plan talks about helping

“people claim the benefits they are entitled to”

and action 48 talks about helping

“older people claim the financial support they are entitled to.”

I will provide two statistics about that, which are that around 40 per cent of UK pensioners—130,000 people in Scotland—do not claim the pension credit to which they are entitled, and only 31 per cent of working families without children claim the tax credits to which they are entitled. The Scottish Government is restricted in its abilities to address that and drive up uptake. That is because of the fiscal framework. If the Scottish Government had a targeted campaign to drive up pension credit and working tax credit uptake, the money

could be clawed back by the UK Exchequer. That is disgusting. It is an appalling situation.

Action 17 in the fairer Scotland action plan says:

“We will make social security fairer where we can.”

With universal credit reserved to Westminster; the rape clause; the benefits freeze; the withdrawal of pension credit from mixed-age couples; personal independence payments and disability living allowance, which are soon coming to Scotland; and the claw-back of cash, if we help out with that situation, the only way to fulfil action 17 is to have every single social security power here in Scotland. In fact, we will only deliver action 17 of the fairer Scotland action plan if we have Scottish independence.

16:03

**Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP):** In 2018-19, the Scottish Government invested more than £1.4 billion in supporting low-income households. Measures include free school meals, the pupil equity fund, delivering affordable homes, supporting people with council tax and the new social security measures. There is also a commitment to introduce the Scottish child payment, which is a benefit that is designed to tackle child poverty head on.

That investment should be welcomed by all parties in the chamber. We must also recognise that we are spending more than £100 million simply to mitigate the Tory Government's assault on the welfare state, which is why we need all aspects of welfare to be devolved to this Parliament.

The motion notes:

“the 2018 annual report on Welfare Reform's estimate that UK Government social security spending will reduce by up to £3.7 billion in Scotland by 2020-21”.

We need to think of how many people that will push into poverty, destitution or extreme hardship, and there could be worse to come. Those of you who watched the STV election debate last night will have seen Jackson Carlaw's arrogant dismissal of questions about the Resolution Foundation's analysis of the Tory manifesto. That analysis shows that child poverty is set to continue to rise under the Tory social security plans, reaching a 60-year high of 34 per cent, a figure that Jackson Carlaw appeared not to be aware of, or perhaps he just did not care about it. Either way, it was not a good look.

We need only to look at the Tory bedroom tax to see the harrowing effects on some of the most vulnerable people in society. A report commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions found that 78 per cent of people affected by the bedroom tax regularly run out of money by

the end of the week or the month. It also revealed that only a third of people affected who applied for emergency support to pay the rent received any help, and that one in four of those affected cut back on spending on things like heating and electricity bills, while 44 per cent had to reduce spending on food. That is simply unacceptable in a modern, wealthy society.

In Dundee alone, between April and September this year, an astonishing 4,735 discretionary housing payments were made to those on low incomes. As we know, the Scottish Government's DHP scheme is an extra payment to help with housing costs, including those arising from cuts to the local housing allowance and covering in full the impact of the bedroom tax. The total award value spent in Dundee city in that period was almost £2.5 million, with an average award value of £520, and I know that it has been a lifeline for many of my constituents.

The Government's best start grant and best start foods scheme are also helping those in need. Studies have shown that the best start grant package is putting more money in the pockets of low-income families than the DWP system it replaced. Those grants are making a huge difference to my constituents, with almost 2,500 payments being made in Dundee. The vast majority—76 per cent—of the 3,265 applications processed from Dundee city were approved by Social Security Scotland.

Across Scotland, between December 2018 and September 2019, £17.8 million of best start grant and best start foods payments were made to support people. Those payments are making a big difference to families across Scotland who are being pushed to the brink by continued Tory welfare cuts.

This Government has been striving to mitigate the worst effects of the Tories' austerity agenda. The best start grant and best start foods payments sit in stark contrast to the two-child cap, the benefits freeze, and the disastrous universal credit roll-out which was recklessly imposed by the Tories in government. This Government, in contrast, has sent a strong message about the kind of country that we can be. We can create a social security system that works to protect people, rather than treating those on low incomes with the hostility and suspicion that they have been subjected to under the Tories.

The Scottish welfare fund is an example of how we are working hard to achieve a fairer society that is built on compassion and kindness. New figures show that in the past financial year the fund made 1,385 payments to people in Dundee. A total of 440 community care grants and 945 crisis grants were awarded between April and

June 2019 to people needing essentials such as food, heating costs and household items.

Looking to the future, I recently had the privilege of being asked to chair the new social justice and fairness commission, which will involve people such as our esteemed former chief medical officer, Harry Burns, who knows a huge amount about the work that will be needed to tackle health inequalities. The commission will work to show how, with full powers, Scotland could tackle poverty and create a fairer society and a more socially just country. The commission intends to outline its vision for a fairer Scotland—one that can be truly achieved only by its becoming an independent country with wellbeing and compassion at its heart. Presiding Officer, what a different and inspiring perspective that would be for the people of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The last contribution to the open debate is from Bill Kidd.

16:09

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** I begin by acknowledging the tremendous work that Aileen Campbell, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government and my very old friend, has done in leading the way in building a more equitable Scotland. I apologise for using that expression. As everyone here knows, I am too young to have any old friends.

I applaud the vision and ambition for a Scotland in which child poverty is no more, and where people from all backgrounds experience equality of opportunity. There has been a strong commitment from Aileen Campbell and her colleagues, and that commitment has had results: we already have a significantly reduced number of children who are living in poverty.

Looking forward, as has been mentioned it is anticipated that the new Scottish child payment will lift about 30,000 more children out of poverty. Families with children under the age of six will be able to claim that new benefit by Christmas 2020. The Child Poverty Action Group, which is independent of the Scottish Government, described the payment as a "game changer" in tackling inequality.

That and many other measures that have been effected by the Scottish Government make me excited about Scotland's future. The changes let us see the outline of a Scotland where the ambition to end child poverty and, consequently, to break the cycle of poverty will be achieved.

Although discussion of that vision is uplifting, many people still face poverty daily. Since universal credit was introduced, food bank use has increased: following the introduction of universal

credit, I am sad to say that five busy food banks are now operating in my constituency. The Scottish Government has already spent £100 million on trying to mitigate the impact of the UK Government's welfare policies.

In economics, there is the well-known analogy of the rising tide of wealth. The analogy depicts a harbour in which, as the tide of wealth comes in, all boats rise. That picture means to illustrate that the wealthier a country becomes—or the wealthier individuals become—the better the economy as a whole, which therefore benefits society as a whole.

That myth has been proved to be untrue and harmful, but so many people still believe it, and we still hear it in the rhetoric of people, parties and ideologies, who argue not only that it is fine for the rich to get richer, but that that is better for us all. The growth of the UK's economy, accompanied by the growth in food banks, evidences how untrue that myth is. It also affirms what Joseph Stiglitz, who is a former chief economist of the World Bank, said in his book, "The Price of Inequality", which exposes the economic truths of why trickle-down economics does not work in practice. Instead, when the rich get richer, the economy and the rest of the population suffer, as a result.

Yesterday, on 3 December, the Equality Trust released a study on distribution of wealth in the UK. Its findings highlight how untrue the myth of the rising tide is. The study found that the UK's six richest people control as much wealth as the poorest 13 million people. To provide context, I point out that recent data shows that more than 14 million people are living in recognised poverty.

That is why tax is important. Tax is not only about funding public services; fundamentally, it is about redistributing wealth. Wealth is not the only thing to be inherited: poverty, too, is inherited. That is why tackling child poverty is so important. If we look at the issues at hand—people having enough to feed their children and to heat their homes—there must be common ground for us all in the desire to fight child poverty.

People, regardless of where or to whom they are born, have inherent value. As soon as we understand that, we will start to prioritise public spending differently. However, that understanding of people's worth jars with the reality that so many families and children face today.

If we look face-on at the findings of the aforementioned Professor Alston, the UN rapporteur, and if we are honest about the poverty that millions of people experience, we will be better placed to effect substantial change with relevant policies. I welcome the initiatives of the fairer Scotland action plan, which seek to create that change, and I commend the people who are

working on its deployment for their ongoing dedicated work.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** We move to the closing speeches. I call Alison Johnstone, to be followed by Sarah Boyack.

16:14

**Alison Johnstone:** The debate has been very interesting. The fairer Scotland progress report covers a huge range of policy areas. We have heard from several colleagues about Professor Alston's comments, which are well documented and are, unsurprisingly, often cited in the chamber.

In closing on behalf of the Scottish Green Party, I will refer to the work of Professor Morag Treanor, who is a member of the Poverty and Inequality Commission. She attended a summit on women and austerity that I hosted in Parliament a couple of years ago. In her presentation, she highlighted that poor families pay 10 times more for a washing machine—something that we all use daily and weekly—than we might pay, simply because those families cannot, at moments of extreme crisis, get hold of the £250 that they need. When we looked at the matter in 2017, a washing machine was available from one retailer for £160, but families still could not get hold of that amount of money. It might as well have been thousands of pounds.

We looked at the case of a person who was going to end up paying £2,399 for a washing machine. Such people are penalised because of their inability to access what, to us, is a small amount of money. They are penalised because of inability to access mainstream credit or to set up a direct debit. There is even a case of a person in Dundee having paid £3,000 for a washing machine. I will not name the retailers, but if we go online, we can find that some apply annual percentage interest rates of 70 per cent.

I highlight that situation because it fundamentally underlines the importance of income to poverty. In Parliament, we speak of fuel poverty, food poverty and period poverty—but they all come down to the fact that some people do not, at the end of the day, have enough cash in their pockets to pay for the things that they need when they need them.

That also underlines why food banks are not the solution. People going to food banks in an emergency—which is something that I had thought we would never see in this affluent country—cannot become normalised, because that will not help people when they need other things, such as a washing machine. That is why I have focused on that issue to start with.

It has been an interesting debate. It is right that the Government highlights the negative impact of

the Tories' desire for the hardest of Brexits. It will negatively impact on people in Scotland—it will impact on our ability to provide high-quality jobs and to collaborate on research across the EU, and it could push 130,000 Scots into poverty.

My starting point today is the importance of income maximisation schemes to tackling poverty. We know that, where successful schemes exist—the healthier, wealthier children project, for example—they have ensured that thousands of pounds have found their way to the families on low incomes who most need access to that cash.

There has also been discussion, notably from Alison Harris and Alex Cole-Hamilton, of the importance of childcare in efforts to address poverty and the gender pay gap. In that regard, the flexibility that we need is not yet in place. I represent Lothian, but I have had correspondence from people across Scotland about the fact that they cannot access the childcare hours that they need in order to make work possible for them.

There has been some discussion, too, of the introduction of the real living wage. We really need that to become the norm, so any steps that the Scottish Government can take on it must be taken. It is key to have the real living wage at the heart of criteria for contracts being awarded and so on.

NHS Health Scotland produced a report entitled “Comparing the impact of interventions to improve health and reduce health inequalities”. It concluded that

“The most effective income-based policies for reducing health inequalities are likely to be those that disproportionately increase incomes for those with the lowest incomes.”

The child payment is hugely welcome, of course, but I ask the Government again to do everything that it can to ensure that it reaches all the eligible families, because there are still issues around take-up where provision is not universal. We know that when families are entitled to free school meals, take-up increases when it is universal. I am aware of situations in which there is no privacy around children being given free school meals. We have to make sure that no one in a class is aware that their friend receives free school meals as an entitlement.

On the radio this morning, Larry Flanagan of the Educational Institute of Scotland was clear about the impact of austerity in our classrooms. He spoke of cases that we have all heard about: teachers who have a toaster in their room and are providing breakfast and assisting with toothbrushing—things that were not previously expected of them and that, frankly, should not be required of them.

Jeremy Balfour suggested that people should not make promises that they cannot keep. I remind

him that the Tories told us that no one would be worse off under universal credit. Sadly, that is not the case. Not only that, but universal credit has been proved to be entirely dysfunctional in terms of delivery, with a torturous five-week wait and the abomination of the rape clause, which was referred to as “double support” by Esther McVey.

So much harm has been done by UK welfare reform, so Parliament must do everything that it can to address the inequality that faces so many people in Scotland. I joined the “Scotland FORward” campaign for a devolved Parliament, before I joined the Scottish Green Party, so I find it hugely frustrating that we have to mitigate policies that have been made at Westminster. Philip Alston, the UN rapporteur, also commented on that; he found it entirely inappropriate, to put it mildly.

I realise that I am running out of time. The Scottish Greens will be pleased to support the Labour amendment, but we will not support the Conservative amendment because of what it would delete from the Government motion, which we will also support.

16:21

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** This debate has been a great chance for us to look at what has been achieved and what more needs to be done to deliver a fairer Scotland. As Pauline McNeill said in her opening speech, which has been repeated by colleagues across the parties, we must not forget the reality of inequality and poverty in our own communities: 14,000 more children became homeless in the past year alone, so much more needs to be done.

We need to look at the detail in the report that was published yesterday. As several people have said, let us look at the checklist of what is being done, which is not yet enough. What has the Scottish Government learned from its gender pay ratios? How does it propose to ensure both flexibility and stability for workers? Why has the returners project, which was intended to bring experienced women back into the workforce after a career break and was due to launch in 2016, been delayed?

Given that the Government says that it has already met its target to reduce youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021, what will happen next? How will the Government ensure that that figure is not only maintained but reduced further? Without a UK Labour Government, we will not see the big increases in the Scottish budget that we urgently need—the £10 billion a year that would come to us. Finally, in terms of detailed questions, let us look at the commitment on the Young Scot transport card. It is now a smart card,

but it does not give free transport for young people up to the age of 25. The targets need to be tough and they need to be pursued properly.

Last week, we debated violence against women, and I and others highlighted the fact that it is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. While we are still in the 16 days of action against violence against women, it is good to hear speakers from different parties talking about the centrality of eradicating inequality for women by tackling the quality of part-time and flexible jobs and making them available and attractive to everyone.

I ask colleagues to look at the work being done by Timewise to produce an updated flexible jobs index for Scotland in 2020. That will give us a new benchmark of the ratio of quality jobs open to flexible or part-time working and it will let us look at whether employers are building flexible working into the hire process. That is the opposite of the gig economy and insecure work—something tangible that will improve women's lives.

As the cabinet secretary and others in the chamber have mentioned, far too many children in Scotland are living in poverty. Strikingly, the number who are living in families where one parent is in work is rising. That cannot be right. Steps such as committing to the rights contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are positive and, as outlined by the UN special rapporteur, make a real difference for children living in poverty. However, what is key is to ensure that those measures are not just good rhetoric but are upheld, implemented and acceptable.

We cannot support the Tory amendment because it deletes the reference to the UN special rapporteur's report. How can we ignore the austerity and the £3.7 billion of welfare cuts that are hitting families across Scotland?

Social security cuts, such as the despicable two-child cap, leave families and children to struggle. We welcome the introduction of the Scottish child payment but worry about the 58,000 six-year-olds who will lose out on the Scottish child payment when they turn seven. The payment for all children has not yet been introduced.

Inequality from birth is becoming more and more difficult to overcome. For example, the attainment gap in education between the wealthiest and poorest children is stagnant, with a gap between the two groups equivalent to three years' worth of education. As many members have commented, we need a future workforce that is skilled in STEM to help us to tackle the climate emergency. However, the figures that were released today show an attainment gap in science of 98 points between the richest students and the poorest. Yesterday's PISA results are deeply disappointing.

Our amendment calls for—and Scottish Labour believes in—a joined-up approach to tackling the climate emergency. The need for that approach was acknowledged by the cabinet secretary and it has to run across everything so that, by 2030, we have not just achieved our climate target, but dealt with the growing inequalities and insecurities that people face across Scotland through a lack of jobs and investment.

We need low-carbon community infrastructure now, to deliver on fuel poverty and deliver community benefits and warm homes for everyone. The transition to net zero by 2045 has to be guided by a just transition commission that is statutory, independent of Government and long term, so that the right voices are heard and no one is left behind.

The debate has enabled people to dig into the detail and look at the bigger principles. If the aims of the fairer Scotland action plan are commendable, its impact is critical. Pauline McNeill said that we have to ensure that we do not see an increase in poverty despite the progress that has been made. That must cut right across Government. We would not be doing our jobs as parliamentarians if we did not hold the Scottish Government to account. Although there has been progress, poverty in Scotland has increased. Scottish Labour would take a very different approach—a more ambitious one—from both the Scottish Government and the UK Government, to initiate not just a shift in wealth but a shift in power, in order to bring about long-term change for the many, not the few.

At decision time, we will support the Green amendment alongside ours, as both of them add to the Scottish Government's motion. We are critical, but we are prepared to be constructive and to work together. Many members have commented that the UK Tory welfare policies are pushing people into poverty, and we will absolutely not support the Tory amendment today.

16:27

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)**  
**(Con):** I am pleased to be closing for the Scottish Conservatives in this important debate.

As many members already know, before I became a member of the Scottish Parliament, I spent almost two decades working alongside people who have disabilities and learning difficulties. That work opened my eyes to the constant struggle that many of those people endure in their everyday lives. Indeed, my past experience was recognised when I was asked to open the Perth and Kinross conference on making where we live better.



Having a home, a job and hobbies gives people the opportunity of having a lifestyle, and individuals who have disabilities require that. As a result of my work, I fully understand the importance of discussing and raising awareness of the discrimination that people who live with a disability still face, despite the action plan having been in place for approximately three years.

The fairer Scotland action plan was launched in 2016, and it had five key ambitions for 2030. Three years on, however, there is still much work to be done. We have to acknowledge that there has been some progress, but poverty, the disability employment gap and the disability pay gap still exist.

As I have said previously, 26 per cent of disabled people in Scotland are likely to have no qualifications compared to 10 per cent of non-disabled people—that must change. We need to increase the opportunities for disabled people to enter the workplace and we need to support them to ensure that they can achieve their goals. They have goals and ambitions, and that is quite right, but only about 50 per cent of disabled people of working age are working, compared to approximately 80 per cent of non-disabled people of the same stage. Employment rates vary greatly according to the type of impairment that a person might have.

**Annabelle Ewing:** The member is focusing on the position of disabled people, and rightly so. However, in the light of the fact that the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concluded in 2016 that austerity policies and the pursuit of welfare reforms amounted to a systematic breach of disabled people's human rights, is the member not embarrassed by his Tory party's record?

**Alexander Stewart:** Annabelle Ewing makes an important point, and I acknowledge that there are some difficulties, but I firmly believe that the UK Government is tackling the matter and is attempting to ensure that individuals get the opportunity and respect that they deserve.

People with mental health conditions have considerable difficulty ensuring that they get employment. The employment level among them is sitting at about 21 per cent, and the employment rate for people with learning disabilities is hovering at around 26 per cent.

The fact is that, after housing costs have been taken into account, 20 per cent of Scotland's population, or 1.03 million, have been living in relative poverty between—

**Aileen Campbell:** Will the member give way?

**Alexander Stewart:** I want to make some more progress.

There are more economically inactive people in Scotland. The rate for those between the ages of 16 and 64 is about 22 per cent, and that is far too high. In addition, we have heard today about the Scottish Government's figures, according to which a quarter of Scottish children are living in relative poverty. We have heard that the UK Government and the Scottish Government have put actions in place to support those individuals. I pay tribute to those who have done work in that regard to date. There is still much to be done, however, especially when it comes to employment. If we can get people into employment, that will take them out of the situation of poverty in which they may find themselves.

The cabinet secretary spoke about the progress that has been made, referring to what the Scottish Government has done, and she and others have criticised the Westminster Government for what it has achieved to date. As I have said already, the Westminster Government has done more to ensure that more people are in work. That is the best way to ensure that living standards grow. Benefits are there as a net—

**Stuart McMillan:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alexander Stewart:** No—I want to make some progress.

Benefits are there as a safety net.

**Stuart McMillan:** A safety net?

**Alexander Stewart:** The safety net is there, and it works for many individuals. We have a strong economy, and that is what is required to ensure that people get the opportunity to work.

Members have spoken about respect.

**Stuart McMillan:** Will the member take an intervention on that point about the safety net?

**Alexander Stewart:** No—I wish to make progress.

Members have spoken about respect, and I believe that that word is and should be used. Action groups should be in place to ensure that we look after families.

Jeremy Balfour talked about the failings that have taken place in the education system under more than a decade of SNP Government. Education policy is failing a generation through lost opportunities. However, if people get the right education and the right involvement, they will get into employment.

Pauline McNeill talked about homelessness statistics and the need to go further to ensure that poverty is tackled in that respect. Young people who are suffering illness or poor mental health

need to be treated better. We have already seen some of the statistics that cover that.

Alison Johnstone talked about the assessment process and the need to progress the approach that is taken in that regard, and she mentioned local government supporting welfare funds.

Alex Cole-Hamilton talked about the targets that have not yet been met. Although 19 out of 50 actions are in progress, there is still a lot of work to do. The Scottish Government needs to meet the targets to ensure that it is not letting people down.

Alison Harris talked about the need to ensure that education represents the proper path and the best start in life. Giving a child the chance to succeed brings them the opportunity that they require.

We in the Scottish Conservatives are fully committed to making Scotland a fairer place for everyone in society, regardless of their gender, disability, race, sexuality, age or religion. We obviously agree that opportunities must be available in order for people to be able to fulfil their potential and become active members of society. The Scottish Conservatives and the UK Conservative Government have worked tirelessly to ensure that the United Kingdom is a fairer place for people to live and work.

I support the amendment in Jeremy Balfour's name.

16:34

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** We have heard in the debate about the action that the Scottish Government is taking to tackle poverty and to make Scotland a fairer, more equal society.

We have also heard about the scope of the challenge that we face. Brexit is still looming on the horizon, and we have lived with a decade of UK Government cuts to welfare. That stands against a backdrop of social security spending in Scotland being cut by an estimated £3.7 billion by 2021.

Last year, we invested £1.4 billion in supporting low-income households. That included over £100 million to mitigate UK Government welfare cuts.

Since the Scottish welfare fund was established in 2013, nearly £210 million has been paid out, to almost 350,000 households. Those are households in crisis, accessing emergency funding to help with the costs of essentials.

In addition, the Scottish Government has been mitigating the bedroom tax in full, using discretionary housing payments, since 2014-15. We remain committed to doing so until the tax can

be abolished at source through universal credit. We are reliant on the Department for Work and Pensions to deliver that. For the current financial year, we are allocating £53 million for bedroom tax mitigation, supporting around 70,000 households.

That we even have to invest that money each year was described by the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, as "outrageous" and "unsustainable". I am not surprised that Professor Alston is regularly quoted in debates, given the strength of the evidence that he saw, and the strength of the comments that he made based on that evidence.

Professor Alston also made it clear in his report, which was published in May this year, that the UK Government's austerity cuts and welfare reforms, such as universal credit in its current form, the two-child limit and abhorrent rape clause, the benefit cap, the benefit freeze, and the sanctions regime, have been pushing more and more people into serious hardship, food bank use and rent arrears. I say to Alexander Stewart that I am sorry, but it is not working for people the length and breadth of the country.

Although many social security and employment levers remain reserved to the UK Government, the Scottish Government will use all the powers that it currently has to work towards achieving a fairer and more equal society, with opportunities for everyone to fulfil their potential.

In Scotland, we have taken a completely different approach in our devolved services—treating people with dignity, fairness and respect. We rightly recognise our expenditure as an investment in the people of Scotland. To see that principle in practice, we need only look at the establishment of Social Security Scotland. We believe that social security should be there to support people to get the financial support they are entitled to, when they are entitled to it.

I have talked before about hearing directly from people who fear the DWP brown envelope coming through their door. The Tories should be ashamed of that and of the barriers that they have put in the way of people, the rhetoric that they have pushed, the poverty and hardship that they have created and the damage that that is having across our society.

I have heard that employment helps people out of poverty, and I heard it again today. I totally agree with that principle, but we do not hear the whole of what is going on with people in employment—low-paid jobs, jobs in which it is difficult for people to get the hours that they require and jobs that do not pay sufficiently. We do not hear from the Tories about fair employment. Decent hours with fair pay are needed. That is why the Tories should also be ashamed about the

research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that highlights that, across the UK, in-work poverty has been rising faster than employment, driven almost entirely by poverty among working-age parents.

This year, we will make payments of around £350 million through our seven new benefits, with more on the way. Members have already heard from Aileen Campbell, at the beginning of the debate, about the benefits of the best start grant, the carers allowance supplement and, of course, the game-changing Scottish child payment, which we are working hard to deliver by the end of next year.

Many of the contributions from members today have focused on the impact that poverty is having on their communities. Social security is not the only way to tackle it, but it is one way to get money directly into the pockets of people who need it.

**Claudia Beamish:** I very much hope that, in the short time that is left, the cabinet secretary will comment on the failure of the Scottish Government to recognise the climate emergency in the action plan and the update to it.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I was just about to talk about the consensual and constructive tone that was taken by Labour today and to say why we are willing to support the Labour amendment.

I recognise the absolute importance of the climate emergency, as does the Scottish Government, which is clear from the discussions that we have had in the chamber—not necessarily today, given how much we have squeezed into this debate, but certainly on other occasions, when Roseanna Cunningham and others have spoken.

Pauline McNeill talked about the uptake of benefits. I appreciate her personal determination to ensure that we do all that we can to automate those benefit payments whenever possible. She mentioned the concept of a stand-alone benefit rather than a top-up benefit for the Scottish child payment. That simply cannot be done in the time that we have available. If we were to do that, we would not be able to deliver the payment scheme in the timeframe that we are looking at, which is by Christmas next year. However, I am as keen as she is on the concept of automation, which is why we are trying to find ways to link the information that is involved in the Scottish child payment with that which is involved in the best start grant payment. That is one example of an area where automation would be helpful, and I know that she has mentioned others in the past.

Sarah Boyack spoke about the fact that many of the welfare cuts directly impact on women. She spoke passionately about the inequality of women, and I absolutely concur with her remarks about the importance of recognising that.

In relation to the Scottish child payment, Sarah Boyack also spoke about children who will turn six. We are delivering the payment early for under-six-year-olds, who will receive the payment by Christmas 2020. We simply cannot continue to pay benefits when children reach the age of six, because we simply do not have the necessary data from the DWP. We are asking the DWP to give us that information and to bring forward the timetable for us getting it. However, it is simply not possible for us to pay a benefit to people if we do not have the data that we need to ensure that their eligibility is checked. I assure Sarah Boyack and others that we are considering that seriously, but the issue comes down to the data that is available.

Alex Cole-Hamilton and others spoke about the importance of early years and childcare. The Scottish Government is determined to ensure that those two-year-olds who are eligible for places take them up. Additional work is being done to ensure that that happens, and we are seeing an increase in the number of two-year-olds who are registered for funded places. Authorities are determined to work as hard as possible with their partners to prepare for August 2020 in every way that they can. Obviously, we recognise the absolutely integral role that private providers will play in that.

We agree with what Alison Johnstone said about the importance of income maximisation. That is why the Scottish Government is funding Citizens Advice Scotland to run its money talks teams and is backing the new Carnegie UK Trust's loan fund, which delivers affordable lending. Alison Johnstone is absolutely right to say that we need to consider the ability for someone to access funding at a time of crisis. I absolutely agree with her about the importance of the take-up of the Scottish child payment. There is no point in any of us putting in work to deliver a benefit if those who are entitled to it do not know about it and are not encouraged and supported to apply for it.

Many in the chamber will have seen Channel 4's "Dispatches" programme on Monday night, which featured children who are affected by poverty. Given some of the contributions from the Conservative members today, I assume that they did not see it, so I suggest that they catch up with it. It was, quite simply, heartbreaking to watch young people talk about the impact of poverty on their daily lives, on their education, on their health and on their mental wellbeing.

We are clear-eyed about the scale of the challenge that we face. Tackling poverty and improving the lives of anyone in Scotland who needs help requires ambition and determination, and this Government has the plans and actions to put that into practice.

Professor Philip Alston said that the “spirit” of the welfare state is “alive and humming” in Scotland, while it is on the wane in the rest of the UK. That is absolutely right, and it could wane even further if we face more years of Tory austerity and welfare cuts. Professor Alston is absolutely right to talk about the fact that it is

“not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster rolled into one”,

and the fact that poverty is leading to “tragic consequences.” Scotland has had enough of those consequences, which we did not vote for and do not agree with but which are imposed on us anyway. We have done so much with the limited powers that we have, and we could do so much more if this Parliament had the full powers to create a fairer Scotland.

## Business Motions

16:45

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-20119, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 10 December 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Queen Elizabeth University Hospital

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Performance in Scottish education – the PISA 2018 Results and Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level 2018/19 Statistics

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Reaffirming Scotland’s Support for Human Rights Defenders

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members’ Business

Wednesday 11 December 2019

1.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Justice and the Law Officers; Government Business and Constitutional Relations; Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

*followed by* General Questions

*followed by* First Minister’s Questions

3.05 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 17 December 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Debate: UEFA European Championships (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business  
 Wednesday 18 December 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Education and Skills;  
 Health and Sport;  
 Communities and Local Government

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Female Genital  
 Mutilation (Protection and Guidance)  
 (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business  
 Thursday 19 December 2019

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

1.45 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.45 pm Stage 3 Debate: Referendums  
 (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 9 December 2019, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-20120, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the stage 1 timetable of a bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 1 May 2020.—[*Graeme Dey*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:46

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S5M-20121 and S5M-20122, on the designation of a lead committee, and motions S5M-20123 and S5M-20124, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the review to be carried out under section 50 of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016 be referred to the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that the Environment (EU Exit) (Scotland) (Amendment etc.) (No. 2) Regulations 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

**The Presiding Officer:** I am minded to accept a motion without notice to bring forward decision time to now.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 11.2.4 of Standing Orders, Decision Time on Wednesday 4 December be brought forward to 4.46 pm.—[*Graeme Dey*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

16:46

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The first question is, that amendment S5M-20110.1, in the name of Jeremy Balfour, which seeks to amend motion S5M-20110, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on achieving a fairer Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 18, Against 74, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-20110.3, in the name of Pauline McNeill, which seeks to amend motion S5M-20110, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on achieving a fairer Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

#### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 70, Against 21, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-20110.2, in the name of Alison Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S5M-20110, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on achieving a fairer Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)

Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 23, Against 69, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-20110, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on achieving a fairer Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members: No.**

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)



Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

#### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 70, Against 22, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the *Fairer Scotland Action Plan, Shifting the Curve and the Life Chances of Young People in Scotland, Progress Report 2019*; notes the steps being taken towards achieving a fairer and more prosperous Scotland, including the commitment to introduce the Scottish Child Payment, which is a brand new benefit to tackle child poverty head on; further notes the 2018 annual report on Welfare Reform's estimate that UK Government social security spending will reduce by up to £3.7 billion in Scotland by 2020-21; acknowledges the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights 2019 report, which stated that the UK Government's austerity cuts and welfare reforms are a key driver of serious hardship, increased food bank use and homelessness; regrets the rise in poverty in Scotland and believes that more ambition is required across government to tackle inequality and improve people's quality of life; calls on the Scottish Government to address the barriers to benefit uptake and reduce housing costs; agrees that universal credit, the two-child cap and pernicious UK welfare reforms must be scrapped, and believes that tackling the climate emergency must be done in a fair way, recognising the growing inequalities and insecurities facing people across Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motions S5M-20121 to S5M-20124, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

#### *Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in

consideration of the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the review to be carried out under section 50 of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016 be referred to the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that the Environment (EU Exit) (Scotland) (Amendment etc.) (No. 2) Regulations 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

## Delivery Charges

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-20029, in the name of Gail Ross, on unfair delivery charges. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the increase in internet shopping and e-commerce that allows customers to order goods online for delivery to their own homes or businesses; acknowledges the ongoing campaigns that highlight the number of retailers and couriers that continue to apply very significant parcel delivery surcharges to many Scottish postcode areas, particularly in the north of the country, despite others offering free delivery or only modest surcharges; believes that the picture across the country is inconsistent and confusing; understands that many retailers continue to advertise free UK mainland delivery yet exclude parts of mainland Scotland from this definition, while others simply refuse to deliver to parts of the country; believes that discriminatory parcel delivery surcharges result in an additional cost to customers in Scotland, which has been estimated by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPiCe) to be over £40 million annually compared with elsewhere in the UK, and acknowledges the calls for all relevant authorities to further address this issue as a matter of priority to ensure fair delivery charges.

16:53

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I thank everyone who signed my motion and those who intend to speak in the debate—their support is appreciated.

Almost two years ago to the very day, we debated the issue of unfair delivery charges in a debate that was led by Richard Lochhead, whom I thank for running the campaign from the start with input from other members and our constituents. Many of our constituents have come to us in frustration and with what are, quite frankly, crazy stories about over-the-top delivery charges. In that debate, there was consensus from all parties, and everyone who spoke gave at least one account, if not more, of people and businesses being charged more because of their postcodes.

In Richard Lochhead's speech in that debate, he stated that he thought that it would be a "turning point". He insisted that,

"To end rip-off delivery charges, we need common standards by which all retailers and couriers must abide",

and he urged the minister to

"take up the cudgels on behalf of customers and the people of Scotland, take the case to the retailers and couriers, lobby his UK counterparts and use the Scottish Parliament's new powers over consumer advocacy and advice to tackle this issue."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 2017; c 92.]

However, unfortunately, we find ourselves debating the issue again. In fact, we are now in an even worse position. A recent report shows that the cost to people in Scotland of additional delivery charges is now £40 million—it has gone up 11 per cent since we previously debated the issue.

Parcel delivery is an ever-growing sector, and the geography of the land—particularly in the Highlands and Islands—means that issues can, and often do, arise.

I asked members of the public to get in touch with me with personal accounts of difficulties that they have encountered in that respect, and I thank everyone who responded. Here are some examples. A sofa that cost £299, with a delivery charge of £600 to postcode IV25, was not delivered, with the reason given being a failure to find a courier. Someone tried to get a box of gifts weighing 5kg delivered to postcode KW1, but the delivery charge was £11.30 going north and only £4.80 going south, with no reason given. Free delivery was advertised for orders over £29 but, when someone placed an order for delivery to postcode IV2, the postage on the final payment screen was £11.98, with the reason given that the person lived in Scotland. The delivery charge to postcode DD9 for a futon costing £269 was £189, with the reason given that the person lived outside mainland England. It cost £78 to deliver bathroom furniture to Alness, but it was free to deliver it to North Ayrshire. Someone paid for a cooker and was then reimbursed because there was no shipping to the Highlands and Islands, despite there having been no notification of that when the person bought it.

I have seen screenshots of people's arguments with companies about next-day delivery. People are guaranteed next-day delivery then, when it does not happen, there is no apology and just a flippant, "Well, we could never do next-day delivery to your postcode anyway." I have seen a copy of a message from Amazon that blamed the Scottish Government, and there are many more such examples. I am sure that many other members will add to the ever-growing list of people who have been let down by there being no next-day delivery, no cheap option or simply no delivery to their area.

It is not as though we do not already have UK law and policies that online retailers must abide by. The Consumer Rights Act 2015 states that terms must be

"brought to the consumer's attention in such a way that an average customer would be aware".

The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 prohibit traders from being involved in "misleading omissions"—in other

words, omitting or withholding material information. The Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013 state that information should be provided before a contract is made, including

“all additional delivery charges and any other costs”.

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Richard Lochhead):** I congratulate the member on securing this important debate. Does she agree that it is absurd that in places such as Moray the delivery trucks pass homes and businesses to which they charge a delivery cost and surcharge in order to reach homes and businesses to which they deliver free? That reinforces the case for the UK Government to, at long last, take the issue seriously, regulate and live up to its responsibilities.

**Gail Ross:** I do not disagree with anything that Richard Lochhead has said.

There is now a website—[consumeradvice.scot](http://consumeradvice.scot)—that people can use to report companies that break the rules. It is also working with Highland Council, Trading Standards Scotland and the Scottish Government to challenge hidden and increased delivery costs. I encourage anyone who is watching to feed back their experiences of excessive delivery charges, so that companies can be held to account.

Trading Standards Scotland and local authorities have been doing some great work, as has Citizens Advice Scotland, which I thank for all the work that it has done in the area for many years, and for the comprehensive briefing that it sent to us. It recommends that the public and private sectors should explore solutions together; that businesses should take the lead in reducing surcharges and put pressure on other businesses to do likewise; that Ofcom should continue to use its powers to seek agreements between retailers and delivery companies; that the Scottish Government should continue to implement its fairer delivery for all action plan, which could include a data hub so that people can compare and contrast delivery charges; and that consumers and businesses should be aware of their rights.

It is correct to say that many people north of the central belt are subject to unfair delivery surcharges, misleading next-day delivery claims and, in some cases, no delivery at all. Christmas is a busy time for online sales, and it brings the issue into focus for many people.

As the online market grows and people depend more and more on delivery companies, all Governments and organisations must do everything possible to stop this discrimination, make the system more transparent and user friendly, ensure that consumers know their rights

and clamp down on the companies that refuse to follow consumer law.

17:00

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** I thank my colleague Gail Ross for bringing the issue of delivery charges before us in Parliament today.

For too long, there have been huge disparities in what constituents in the area that I represent have had to pay. Two years ago, we had a similar debate when Richard Lochhead started his campaign to end unfair delivery charges. At that time, I mentioned that Turriff Business Association had told me repeatedly that unfair delivery charges were a major challenge for it—in fact, it was its single biggest issue. That remains the case. Turriff is only 40 miles from Aberdeen, yet the town is classed as Highlands and Islands by many companies that think that being in the Highlands and Islands is an excuse to charge more, despite their websites stating that they have standard delivery charges to the UK. Last time I checked, Aberdeenshire and the Highlands and Islands were still in the UK.

A business in Turriff told me that some UK companies expect a minimum spend of £250 for what is advertised as a free delivery—if the spend is less than that, charges will go through the roof. Even worse, some will refuse to deliver at all unless a minimum of £250 is spent.

In the 2018 debate, I put forward a challenge to retailers: when they award delivery contracts, they must ensure that they will not disadvantage their customers by choosing a carrier that charges more for delivery to “the north”. Having that approach would be in the retailers’ interests, because the reputational damage will not be to the unseen carriers; it will be to the retailers. However, two years on, constituents tell me that unfairness in delivery charges by retailers continues. I used Facebook to ask people to get in touch with me, and I will relay some of what they told me.

Glenys and Phil Neville said that they often had to have materials to renovate their house in Hatton delivered to their son in Newmachar, because Hatton—just 20 miles away—incurred a huge delivery surcharge, or that they had to change from suppliers that would not deliver to the area at all.

Ahead of this debate, Richard Pelling from just outside Oldmeldrum wrote to me about plant and bulb deliveries. He said:

“FedEx zoning is very bad for most of Scotland and certainly for your constituents away from the A90 road corridor to Peterhead. Any delivery address near the A947 or A96 is very often £30 extra. I think the blame lies with the delivery companies and not the actual suppliers, but I

now have a policy of not doing business with companies that opt to use delivery services that unfairly impose an extra financial burden on us just because of where we live.”

Heather Thomas in New Deer got in touch to complain that The Range—which has a very large store in Aberdeen city—classes the AB53 postcode as remote and slaps a £19.95 surcharge on orders to that postcode.

Pamela Adam, who regularly orders items for Ellon parish church’s kirk centre, often gets items delivered to her home in Aberdeen city because Ellon, which is only 15 miles north of Aberdeen, often has £30 surcharges slapped on to delivery because it is classed as being in the Highlands and Islands—no it’s nae.

I am glad that Gail Ross has brought this issue to the chamber again and I thank her very much. I hope that we do not have to have this debate again in another two years. We need to keep the pressure on and get delivery equity for all our constituents. I urge the many people who got in touch with me to report unfair delivery charges to [consumeradvice.scot](http://consumeradvice.scot).

17:04

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands)**

**(Con):** I thank Gail Ross for bringing to the chamber another debate on delivery charges, following the inaugural debate on the same issue back in 2017, which was led by Richard Lochhead. I took part in that debate and in Richard Lochhead’s campaign event in the garden lobby.

Delivery charges are yet another of the many problems that the Highlands and Islands face, and they are continuing to have an impact on local residents and businesses alike. That is especially true as we approach Christmas, which is one of the busiest delivery times of the year, so the debate is timely.

Back when we first debated the issue, I praised the work of my colleague Douglas Ross, who, as the member of Parliament for Moray, led calls for the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster to hold an inquiry into the issue. I am pleased to say that an inquiry duly took place, in 2018. There is involvement from members across the political spectrum, and there is genuine and sincere cross-party support with regard to the sorry plight of the residents and businesses who are affected.

I will read some extracts from the transcript—

**Gail Ross:** Can Donald Cameron explain why, despite the noble efforts of the MP for Moray, the charges have increased by 11 per cent—up to £40 million—since the last time we debated the issue?

**Donald Cameron:** I cannot explain the exact reasons for the increase, but I can say that the Scottish Affairs Committee, led by Pete Wishart,

took a lot of evidence during its inquiry, including from the major retailers. Some of those retailers have, it must be said, been working to eliminate unfair and discriminatory surcharges. The committee heard from the head of home delivery for Argos, who said that the company believes that it has

“made important steps in improving over the last five years ... with no delivery surcharge across the Highlands and Islands.”

It heard from Amazon’s director of public policy, who said that, under the company’s business model,

“Marketplaces that have a contract with us undertake that they will deliver the same service to every location in the UK.”

The committee also heard from representatives of other major online selling platforms, who said that they try to ensure that their sellers do not apply additional charges.

Some retailers are improving their act, but many others are not. In addition, of course, that is just one section of the market. It is clear from the stories that I receive in my mailbag, and from those that we have heard from members tonight, that there is an on-going problem.

According to the Office for National Statistics, the most recent figures show that rural areas across the UK accounted for one in six online purchases in the UK in 2017 but that customers in those areas pay, on average, 30 per cent more for delivery than those who live elsewhere in the UK. According to figures from the Scottish Parliament information centre, 510,000 Scots were impacted by delivery surcharges in rural areas, with the total amount charged rising from £36.3 million in 2017 to £38 million today. Those are staggering statistics.

I have received several emails from constituents in island communities about some of the charges that they have had to endure. One person said that they wanted to buy some plastic hose connectors that cost just £4.99 but the company that was selling the connectors insisted on applying a £15 delivery charge because the package had to go to the island of Bute.

An island business in my region told me that one of its suppliers had to pass on significant costs, with post and packaging being used as the excuse. The same business told me that it is cheaper for someone who lives on a Scottish island to send a package weighing 30kg to Austria or Switzerland than it is for them to receive a package weighing 10kg from within the UK. That cannot be right.

With that in mind, I welcome the recent efforts that have been made through various initiatives.

We have heard about [www.consumeradvice.scot](http://www.consumeradvice.scot), which has provided a new online tool. There is also [www.deliverylaw.uk](http://www.deliverylaw.uk), which Highland Council's trading standards team helped to develop. Those tools are incredibly useful in helping people to avoid punitive—and, in some cases, illegal—charges. It would be interesting to hear from the minister what the Government can do to raise awareness of those initiatives.

There is a clear recognition that there is much more to do. I commend Gail Ross for keeping the issue in the public eye and raising its profile.

17:09

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** As we approach the festive season, I congratulate Gail Ross on bringing to the chamber this evening's appropriate debate on unfair delivery charges, and I congratulate her on the quality of her speech. I also acknowledge the sterling work that Richard Lochhead has carried out on this front for many years. Of course, Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer—yes, the one with the very shiny nose—never had to face the grossly unfair delivery charges across Scotland, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, when he was delivering parcels to children.

It seems to me that the more that things change, the more they stay the same. In the early 2000s, as the MP for Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber, I started to campaign for fair parcel delivery charges after being contacted by constituents and businesses. That took me to the Highland wildlife park in Kincaig, where local media took a picture of me holding up a huge parcel and being eyed up by the even larger bison that was lurking in the background. The park had contacted me because of the excess charges that it was getting at the time. Bison aside, people still have a lot of beef about the issue, and the campaign has run and run over the years, with no real solution.

When people have a choice of companies to order from, many choose to give their custom to those that do not charge rip-off prices. However, as is well known in this chamber, many people—especially those who live on our islands and in the remote rural areas of the mainland—simply do not have that choice.

Nearly two decades later, I still have a mailbag full of letters from unhappy constituents who see no Christmas spirit in rip-off suppliers. However, one of the great achievements of this Parliament has been the introduction of the air discount scheme, which was led by Donald Dewar and was brought in to tackle sky-high flight charges for island and rural dwellers. Europe approved the scheme as aid of a social character. Do we not

need new political decision making to protect our vulnerable consumers?

I welcome the new online tool from Advice Direct Scotland to tackle unfair delivery charges, which other members have mentioned. Back when the post office started the penny post, there was the very important principle of the universal service obligation. In other words, irrespective of where in the UK one lived, the penny post was the same price. Do we not need a uniform service obligation for parcel post as well, to cut out the unfair charges that we face in the Highlands and Islands and beyond?

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** I agree with pretty much everything that the member says. Will he also agree that, notwithstanding his point about the obligations of the Royal Mail, a lot of the problems would be solved if the major delivery companies simply agreed to use the Royal Mail in the first place?

**David Stewart:** I agree with the member.

What about the concept of island proofing? It is our island and super-rural mainland residents, who tend to have some of the lowest incomes and highest vulnerability, who get charged the most. Is there a wider issue about excessive delivery charges being a breach of the European convention on human rights?

Members will be aware of the excellent debate on the subject in Westminster Hall on 2 July, in which Jamie Stone MP quoted Charles Macfarlane, from Lairg, who had given written evidence to a House of Commons committee. Mr Macfarlane had written:

“click ‘Buy’ on a product on the web, put in a Highland postcode, and at a guess about 75% of the time a significant delivery surcharge will be applied, very often even when the product was advertised as ‘free UK delivery’ ... Then, to add injury to insult, the overcharged service from such couriers is slow and unreliable—often two or three times slower than sending it by second class post”.

I again congratulate Gail Ross on securing tonight's debate. The most important Christmas present that we can give to ripped-off consumers is an end to unfair delivery charges that would bring a blush to the cheeks of an Icelandic snowman.

17:13

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I thank Gail Ross for securing this important debate. I know that this is not the first time that the issue has been debated in Parliament, but it is the first time that I have had the opportunity to contribute to a debate that has been going on for far too long in island and rural areas.

The Scottish Parliament information centre has revealed that Shetlanders are being charged a staggering £1.27 million more in parcel delivery charges than they would be charged in the rest of the UK. That is an eye-watering sum, given that the population of Shetland is 23,000. As SPICe highlighted, the figure is likely to increase as we do more of our shopping online. My constituents are rightly fed up of being charged over the odds, simply because of where we live and work.

We all like to shop locally whenever we can. Lerwick was recently voted the second most beautiful high street in Scotland, and we know that visitors like small independent local shops. It is important to support small independent businesses, which face serious competition from online retailers, but shopping locally is simply not possible for some people. For people who are elderly or living with a disability, delivery right to the door is an important part of their being able to live independently.

For some people in Shetland, the cost of living is already up to 60 per cent higher than the UK average, so it can be cheaper and more convenient to shop online—that is, if they can get a reliable broadband connection. However, that is another issue for another day. It is often the case that the goods are simply not available to buy in rural communities.

Other members have noted that it is not just individuals who are hit with charges: small businesses in Shetland need to get their products delivered to the isles, too. When businesses pay over the odds for delivery, they pass on the costs to their customers who, when faced with higher prices, turn to online retailers. That is a lose-lose situation for rural economies.

I accept that there are additional costs associated with delivery to the northern isles, but companies and couriers must not get away with excessive charges. A business owner told me this week about an unreasonable surcharge that was more than the cost of the original order. Another constituent contacted me to say that he had been charged double for delivery of marine equipment to Shetland. He also told me that there would be a different story if he was to return the goods, even though the distance would be the same: the delivery charge for sending the goods south is not the same as it is for bringing them north. That tells me that mainland retailers and couriers are not treating us fairly.

I am also aware of companies that continue to let customers pay for next-day delivery to Shetland. Next-day delivery to Shetland is almost impossible, so that is misleading consumers.

So how do we tackle discriminatory delivery charges? We need the Scottish and UK

Governments to work closely together to guarantee fairness and transparency for consumers. Progress has been too slow, thus far. We should encourage businesses to consider using Royal Mail services more, instead of using couriers that overcharge.

In the meantime, I encourage anybody who has been charged over the odds to contact their elected representatives, who can take up the case on their behalf.

17:17

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I am grateful to my colleague Gail Ross for bringing the issue to the chamber again, and I thank Citizens Advice Scotland for all the work that it has done on it.

I spoke in Richard Lochhead's debate on the matter in 2017 and, despite sustained pressure that resulted in some progress from the Scottish Government—rather than from the UK Government, which has responsibility for postal and consumer affairs—there is still a need to discuss the topic four years on, which is unacceptable.

The Scottish Parliament information centre has estimated that, in the past year, the additional cost to Scotland of parcel delivery surcharges was £40,139,000, which is an increase of 11 per cent since 2017. Of that £40 million, £331,000 was borne by Cunninghame North constituents on the isles of Arran and Cumbrae, which is a lot of money to be lost for islands that have a combined population of fewer than 6,000 people.

Bizarrely, being charged extra for deliveries means that it can be cheaper for my constituents in Arran to have their parcel delivered to a collection point in Ardrossan and buy a return ferry ticket to collect it than to have it delivered to their home. The same can be said for my Cumbrae constituents, who have to travel to Largs to collect their parcels. That can hardly be called a delivery.

I first wrote to the UK Government about the issue in 2011. I lodged a motion a few months after that, entitled "Time for a 21st Century Revamp of the Parcel Delivery Service", which highlighted the fact that rural and island areas are worst affected by our outdated and unjust delivery structures, with many customers facing high surcharges and refusals to deliver by operators. Eight years later, we are in the same boat.

Some people might be tempted by offers of free delivery during this time of giving, but more than 20 per cent of Scots live in areas where parcel surcharges are applied. Ironically, it is people who live in rural and island areas who are most likely to rely on online orders, given the shortage of

shopping options and their distance from high streets.

I hope that most of us shop locally where possible, rather than online, thereby helping to sustain local businesses, jobs and communities, but people who live on islands might not have much choice, especially if they live on an island such as Cumbrae, which has a population of only 1,100. What about the people who are unable to undertake a journey to the mainland every time they need something other than basic items? Why should they, in effect, be penalised for online shopping?

The situation is neither practical nor sustainable, especially for island and rural businesses that require frequent deliveries, or for people with limited mobility. One Arran constituent recently faced a £10 delivery surcharge on a folding walking stick that cost just £12.

Since the postal service was fully liberalised by the Labour Government in 2006, the market has been flooded with firms offering low-cost delivery alternatives. Sometimes that low cost is at the expense of good service, and is certainly too often at the expense of fairly priced services.

Delivery surcharges affect not only individuals; I am also concerned about how they impact on businesses and consumers across Scotland. Citizens Advice Scotland says that 23 per cent of those who ordered online were asked to pay an additional delivery surcharge due to their location, which makes it more expensive and difficult to run a business on an island, and serves only to exacerbate problems.

During my five years as convener of the cross-party group on postal services, we raised the issue time and again with the UK Government. Despite Donald Cameron's heroic efforts—he is the only Tory who has even bothered to show up tonight—I do not think that the UK Government is particularly interested in solving the problem, given the fact that I have, as I said, been chasing it for more than eight years.

I sincerely hope that the high-profile campaign that is being led by Richard Lochhead and others will make a difference, and that the issue will be resolved soon. The Westminster debate on the issue that was mentioned by David Stewart was actually led by Patricia Gibson MP—the matter is being led by the SNP here and in the House of Commons.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government is implementing its fair delivery plan. I support the action that it has taken with the limited powers that it has on raising awareness among retailers of the statement of principles. It is developing a pledge that retailers can sign up to and is exploring how the principles can be more usefully applied to

parcel couriers. However, a universal service obligation for parcels—as we have for postal services—would be an excellent way to resolve the matter.

17:21

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** First, I apologise to the Presiding Officer and to Gail Ross for being late for the debate due to being detained on the phone by a constituent.

There was a time when part of my island constituency had a Paisley postcode. Strange as that might seem, it was for the logical enough reason that the mail plane came from Glasgow airport. We are proud that the Western Isles now has a postcode of its own, but we groan whenever we order something online only to be told that that very postcode makes us liable for extra delivery charges. Sometimes we are even told that the company refuses to deliver at all. I have had the ironic experience of being told that a company will only deliver to the UK.

There is a long tradition in the islands of shopping by catalogue, and more recently online. As others have pointed out there are many good shops in the islands, but in many places shopping options are very limited. In any case, shopping online is expected to account for more than half of all purchases nationally within the next 10 years. Extra delivery charges are, therefore, a social injustice. In the islands, often the very people who are most dependent on shopping in that way are those who cannot afford to make an expedition by car and ferry to use the shops in Inverness or Glasgow, or who do not have a car at all.

While people might—up to a point—accept that problem for very large items, they are unable to do so for smaller items that, as other members have pointed out, could just as easily have been put in the Royal Mail. Of course, sending a Royal Mail parcel to Berneray costs no more than sending one to Bishopbriggs. The heart of the matter seems to be that some national companies that have exclusive contracts with private couriers consequently refuse to use Royal Mail. I understand that, in some cases, companies have even refused to deliver to Perth because they claim that it is remote. Living where I do, I have a very high standard for remoteness, which Perth certainly does not meet. My constituency alone accounts for £1.5 million of the £40 million-worth of extra delivery charges that Scottish customers faced this year. Indeed, the Highlands and Islands accounted for £28 million of that figure.

Of course, frustratingly, the power to regulate mail services is currently reserved to the UK Parliament, which, it must be said, has shown very little interest in addressing such issues. Despite

those limits on its powers, the Scottish Government last year launched its “Fairer Deliveries for All: An Action Plan”. I hope that that will develop an interactive data hub to measure the fairness of delivery pricing, improve transparency, celebrate best practice by delivery companies and make it easier for consumers to know and exercise their rights.

The Scottish Government continues—as do many members of this Parliament—to press the UK Government to use its powers to further strengthen consumer protection to ensure fair and transparent delivery charges. However, consumers in northern, rural and island Scotland are asked to pay on average more than 30 per cent more for deliveries than customers elsewhere in the country. That cannot be justified. I hope that the companies involved will now stop trying to do that.

If we want people to live in the Highlands and Islands in the future, we must deal with some of the things that make life difficult, and the issue of delivery charges is one of them.

17:25

**The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn):** I join other members in thanking Gail Ross for lodging the motion for debate. In common with many members in this Parliament, she has worked on the issue for many years. I thank all members for their contributions.

The research that was published by SPICe, to which Gail Ross’s motion refers, is yet more evidence of the problem of unfair delivery charges and the impact on too many communities across our country. That is exemplified by the fact that, in the past year, those charges have increased to £40 million from £38 million the year before. As Gail Ross mentioned, that is an increase of 11 per cent from £36.3 million in 2017, when the figures were first compiled. It is important that we work together to highlight the issues and challenge them. I welcome the efforts of all MSPs who do so on behalf of their constituents.

The Government is similarly committed to doing what we can to eliminate delivery charges in order to protect consumers and, as Beatrice Wishart was right to point out, small businesses.

As members did in their speeches, I acknowledge the work that many organisations such as Trading Standards Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland, Ofcom, the Advertising Standards Authority and the consumer protection partnership are doing in this area. One example of that work is the Delivery Law UK website, which was launched in June 2018 and is hosted by Highland Council’s trading standards department. The website is a one-stop shop that brings

together support for consumers and businesses who are seeking advice about misleading delivery charge advertising. Many members mentioned [www.consumeradvice.scot](http://www.consumeradvice.scot), which is also a fantastic resource. The Scottish Government contributes funding towards that.

We heard from members about the impact that the problem has on their constituents. Gail Ross listed many examples. Gillian Martin spoke of the problems that her constituents in Turriff have experienced, despite their close proximity to a major urban centre in the shape of Aberdeen. Donald Cameron cited an example on Bute, where the cost to the consumer was quadrupled. Beatrice Wishart spoke similarly of products being doubled in cost to the consumer by virtue of those delivery charges. Those are clear examples of that disproportionate charging. David Stewart spoke about the impact on vulnerable consumers. Kenneth Gibson and Alasdair Allan spoke clearly, powerfully and tellingly about the impact on those who live in island communities, who are not able to travel as readily and rely on deliveries. Alasdair Allan was right to remind us that this is not a new phenomenon, based on the impact of online retail, but a long-standing reality for island communities.

**Richard Lochhead:** I thank the minister for all his efforts on the issue. The debate, understandably, is focused on the impact on consumers, but does he recognise that delivery charges are also an issue for small businesses, which are increasingly reliant on e-commerce? Windswept Brewing, which is a brewery in my constituency, was recently quoted £4.35 by one major courier for outward-bound deliveries of its products to elsewhere in the UK; when it revealed its IV postcode, that price increased to £18.50, which is a surcharge that equates to four times the original estimate. The issue is having a big impact on small businesses that want to deliver elsewhere in the UK, and not just on customers who receive goods.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I absolutely recognise that. There is also a wider consequential impact, because it reduces the ability of businesses to deploy the resource that they have in other areas, such as to sustain and grow employment opportunities. It has that negative impact as well.

Given that Richard Lochhead has intervened, I place on the record my sincere thanks to him for all the work that he has undertaken on the matter. He has driven the agenda in the Scottish Parliament and we all owe him a debt of gratitude for the activity that he has undertaken. As he will know because he invited me, I have visited his constituency to see at a practical level the impact on his constituents, and I will be very willing to return to see that again as necessary.



All the examples that were cited in the debate show the need to act. In that regard, the Government recognises that long-term solutions are needed to reduce the many occasions on which unacceptable charges are being imposed. That is why we developed the action plan that has been mentioned. It commits to a wide range of actions that should benefit consumers, online retailers and parcel delivery companies. We are committed to publishing an annual review that sets out the progress that has been made on each action, and a full update will be published early next year.

The action plan includes concrete actions such as the development of an interactive data hub and parcel deliveries map. Together, the tools will allow consumers and regulators to identify unscrupulous retailers or practices so that they can be better informed.

We will pursue every step that we can take, but it is important that we make it clear that the real power to regulate these matters does not lie in this place but continues to lie with the UK Parliament and the UK Government. During the Westminster Hall debate on delivery charges that took place in July, which David Stewart and Kenny Gibson mentioned, the UK Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility, Kelly Tolhurst, recognised the work that the Scottish Government is doing in the area—that was nice of her, and I thank her for doing so—but, unfortunately, she said that she is not willing to regulate the parcel delivery market.

Following that debate, I wrote to the UK minister on 8 August, encouraging her to rethink that policy on non-regulation. Unfortunately, when I spoke to her in September, she set out that there is no change to the UK Government position. That is unacceptable. Donald Cameron, in response to Gail Ross, could not explain the 11 per cent increase in delivery charges in two years. I say to him and others that I believe that the UK Government's unwillingness to better regulate the market is a clear contributor to the issue. There is no lack of willingness to act on the Scottish Government's part, but the real power still lies in the hands of the UK Government.

We will continue to act. With our action plan and using the consumer advocacy powers that we have to create consumer Scotland, we will continue to put pressure on the UK Government to deliver much-needed fairness in cases where the charging regime discriminates against consumers and our communities in Scotland. We owe it to those individuals and the small businesses that are impacted by the problem to do all that we can, and they can be assured, as can members, that this Government will continue to act and to push the UK Government to do more.

*Meeting closed at 17:33.*



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