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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 18 February 2021

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

Portfolio Question Time

Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Good afternoon, and welcome to this virtual meeting of the Scottish Parliament. The first item of business is portfolio questions. I ask members who wish to ask a supplementary question to put an R in the chat function, but only during the question, and not in advance.

Railways (Hydrogen-powered Trains)

1. **Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to the future use of hydrogen-powered trains on the Edinburgh-Dundee-Aberdeen main line. (S5O-05017)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Our “Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan” envisages an electrified railway between Edinburgh and Aberdeen. However, the optimum programme to achieve that remains under analysis, and a range of traction options—electric, battery and hydrogen fuel cell—are under consideration to expedite replacement of our diesel trains.

Through our hydrogen accelerator initiative at the University of St Andrews, we are building capability. The initiative’s zero-emissions train project at Bo’ness, which is managed by world-leading hydrogen technology company Arcola Energy, seeks to address the issues that are associated with creating then enabling a hydrogen fuel cell train to operate on the network later this year.

Tom Mason: The first hydrogen trains are due to be displayed at COP26—the 26th conference of the parties—later this year, to demonstrate the future of sustainable rail travel. My concern is that the main line to Aberdeen is due to be electrified by 2035. In addition, electrification gantries are visually unattractive and expensive and, in any event, half the energy is lost in transmission. It is possible that hydrogen trains could be introduced on the line, which would reduce the costs of electrification and could happen much sooner. We could face a situation in which electrification is

finished, only for the line to face more long-term disruption in order to introduce hydrogen technology. Can the cabinet secretary set out whether the improvements can be undertaken concurrently, or should my constituents think of hydrogen trains as something that they might see in 25 years or more?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thought that, by now, I did not need to say that supplementary questions should be short, as should answers, if possible. Mr Mason—you are a naughty person.

Michael Matheson: We are looking at a range of traction options. The only note of caution that I sound about the use of hydrogen fuel cell trains is that their ability to operate on long-distance networks at high speed is significantly less, and the technology is still developing. Scotland is one of the leading countries in progressing use of hydrogen in rail services, which is why we have the project at Bo’ness.

However, the member can be assured that hydrogen is one of the areas that we are looking at. If it is viewed as being the most appropriate traction type for improving services to Aberdeen, that will be the approach that will be taken. However, that analysis is still being carried out, and electrification and battery electric trains are also being considered.

Roads (Bad Weather)

3. **Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that major road routes are kept open during bad weather. (S5O-05019)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Although we know that severe weather will cause disruption, the Government has taken a wide range of steps to improve our resilience to the challenges of winter, to mitigate its impacts and to recover our transport networks and businesses and get daily life back to normal as quickly as possible. That has been done in partnership with public, private and third sector partners, and has included new investment, development and innovation, all learning the lessons from recent winters. Plans are in place to cover the three concurrent risks for this winter: Covid-19, European Union exit and winter preparedness.

Richard Lyle: During the past week, Scotland has faced severe snowfalls in some parts of the country. I thank all the staff who have worked to keep the country moving. What part have local councils played in ensuring that there has been minimal disruption to the roads network?

Michael Matheson: While Scotland’s 32 local authorities are responsible for all winter service

operations within their own jurisdictions, roads authorities often work in partnership. Following early forecasts of the severe weather that we have experienced in recent weeks, winter partners at the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, along with Transport Scotland, have been holding extraordinary winter maintenance meetings to discuss preparations and to offer mutual aid, where appropriate. They have also been looking at salt supplies and maintenance of public access to our vaccination centres.

That goes to show the vital role that our local councils play in making sure that we minimise disruption to our roads during periods of adverse weather. I echo Richard Lyle's thanks to all the roads crews, who have worked extremely hard in what have been very severe conditions over a prolonged period.

Borderlands Growth Deal (Funding and Priorities)

4. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the funding progress and priorities for the Borderlands Growth Deal. (S50-05020)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government's significant investment in the Borderlands Growth Deal, which will amount to up to £85 million over 10 years, will support a range of projects that will drive economic growth across the area. The projects that are supported will focus on themes such as improving the quality of place, boosting tourism, delivering business infrastructure, driving innovation, improving connectivity and creating the skills that are needed by industry.

We hope to sign the full deal in the next few weeks, and we are working with local authority partners and the United Kingdom Government towards that milestone.

Emma Harper: Concerns have been raised by local authority members in the north of England that the £65 million of funding from the UK Government is not new money but is money that is being moved from other Government portfolios. We know that the Scottish Government has committed £20 million more than the UK Government to the deal. Can the cabinet secretary provide an assurance that all the money that the Scottish Government has pledged for the borderlands, including for the Stranraer waterfront, is new money, and can he comment on whether the UK Government is truly committed to the project?

Michael Matheson: We are fully committed to the Borderlands Growth Deal, in support of which we have pledged £85 million overall. All that funding is additional spend in the region that comes from my portfolio; it has not been taken from any other portfolio area.

I am aware of the concerns that Emma Harper mentioned, but I note that in the press release that it issued back in 2019, when it announced its support for the deal, the UK Government confirmed that the £65 million that had been allocated for the Scottish element of the deal was new money. I fully expect that commitment to remain in place and to be honoured.

The specific projects that will be supported as part of the Scottish aspect of the Borderlands Growth Deal cover a range of areas, a number of which I mentioned in my earlier response. I hope that we will be in a position to move on from signing heads of terms to the final deal in the weeks ahead. The £16 million that we have earmarked for supporting redevelopment of Stranraer marina is within the overall proposal at the moment, and I hope that the local authority will develop the full business case for that, to ensure that it can be included in the final deal and that the Scottish Government's investment of £16 million can be used to deliver the redevelopment project.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Having been involved in the first borderlands initiative almost eight years ago, I welcome the fact that the deal will be signed in the next few weeks. Given the importance of the projects that have been brought together—thanks to the hard work of councils in South Scotland and the north of England—will the cabinet secretary consider providing early funding if any of the projects can be accelerated? Will he actively encourage the addition of new projects to the deal or, indeed, a borderlands 2 deal? We need to step up our investment if we are to kick-start the South Scotland economy following the pandemic.

Michael Matheson: The borderlands partners are working hard to finalise the business cases that they need to bring together for signing the full deal. I recognise that we need to invest in the borderlands in order to deliver the inclusive economic growth that all of us, including Colin Smyth, are looking for.

The Scottish Government has committed to investing £20 million in the fund, in addition to what has been provided by the UK Government, in order to take forward a range of projects that will make a real difference to local communities, whether through building capacity for the economy, or improving tourism or transport infrastructure. All that will play an important part in the success of the deal.

The funding that we can provide is dependent on the work that is done by local authorities in developing the business case for each project. We are working hard with them to ensure that that is progressed.

Rail Services (Renfrewshire South)

5. **Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting rail services in the Renfrewshire South constituency. (S5O-05021)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government has provided unprecedented financial support to maintain essential rail services throughout the pandemic. To secure a strong and green future, we are investing in rail electrification on the route between Glasgow and Barrhead, which will accommodate quieter and more environmentally friendly electric trains, increase the capacity of services and improve the resilience of the network.

Accessibility works at Johnstone station are due to commence later this year. Plans for electrification of the route between Busby junction and Barrhead are being developed. Network Rail's initial estimate is that that will cost between £25 million and £35 million, but we continue to engage with Network Rail to find efficiencies in the programme.

Tom Arthur: I express my gratitude to those who work on our railways in Renfrewshire South and across Scotland.

In his answer to an earlier question, the cabinet secretary touched on the multifaceted benefits of Scotland decarbonising its railways. Will he expand on those benefits, particularly those relating to the project to electrify the line from Barrhead to Glasgow?

Michael Matheson: A number of significant benefits are gained from the electrification of our rail network. It provides quieter and faster trains, in terms of traction type, and it allows us to increase capacity on important lines, including the one from Tom Arthur's constituency into the central belt. Electrification can play an important part in improving our overall delivery of rail services. Alongside that, it will support us in decarbonising our rail network, because electric trains are more environmentally friendly.

Electrification will provide significant benefits for Tom Arthur's constituents, including increased capacity and faster and quieter trains. It will deliver a better overall service for passengers.

New Railway Infrastructure

6. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it gives to the development of new railway infrastructure. (S5O-05022)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): We have invested heavily in rail infrastructure and services, having spent more than £8 billion since 2007. We have provided significant investment of some £4.85 billion for the five-year period between 2019 and 2024. As part of our investment, the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that the railways meet future growth needs for passengers and freight. An example of that is our commitment to deliver the new railway at Levenmouth, providing new fully accessible stations at Leven and Cameron Bridge.

David Torrance: In Levenmouth, a leadership group of community councillors, Levenmouth rail campaign representatives and residents has been established and is playing a key role in deciding how the £10 million that is being supplied by the Scottish Government and Fife Council for the Levenmouth blueprint is spent. Does the cabinet secretary agree that such groups, which are part of the wider programme of consultation with communities, are vital to ensuring that local community funding is of maximum benefit to local people?

Michael Matheson: I agree with my colleague on this matter. When we announced that we were reconnecting Levenmouth to the rail network, we set out that we would provide £5 million to support associated works and make sure that the maximum economic benefit could be gained from the reconnection. Fife Council has matched that, which means that £10 million is being provided, which will support the wider benefits that are associated with reconnecting Levenmouth to the rail network.

The Levenmouth reconnection work is being taken forward by a task force that is being led by Fife Council and which has on it a range of local stakeholders. Once the line has been reconnected, the task force will have an important part to play in maximising the local and regional benefits that will come from this significant investment in the area and the improvement in its transport connectivity.

Ferries Plan

7. **Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its latest ferries plan. (S5O-05023)

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): The islands connectivity plan will replace the ferries plan by the end of 2022. It will be developed in the context of the recently published national transport strategy and our national islands plan, both of which align with the Scottish Government's purpose and national outcomes. The plan will link to the emerging strategic transport projects review, and it will have regard to aviation, ferries and fixed links, as well as connecting and onward travel. It will include a long-term programme of investment in vessels and ports, which will be developed with the support of the £580 million of ferries investment over the next five years that was announced in the Scottish Government's infrastructure and investment plan.

Dr Allan: Will the Scottish Government give any more consideration to the idea that it might be more cost effective to replace some existing ferry routes with fixed links such as causeways, bridges or tunnels?

Paul Wheelhouse: Consideration will be given to replacing ferry routes with other forms of connectivity and connection, such as fixed links. That will be taken forward through the work under the strategic transport projects review which, as I indicated in my initial answer, will feed into the islands connectivity plan, which we will seek to implement by the end of 2022. I can engage with the member if he has specific proposals, but that is the structure and process that we will undertake.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): How many new ferries does the minister think are needed in Scotland in the next five years and next 10 years?

Paul Wheelhouse: That is obviously a very important question, which follows on from the inquiry work of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee. We are already undertaking an analysis of the future pipeline of ferries, and there is a timescale for immediate projects such as the work that is under way on the Islay vessels and the discussions that are taking place with communities affected by the Gourrock to Dunoon and Kilcreggan routes on the replacement vessels for them. We have a small vessel replacement programme under development, with a further eight vessels that are likely to be developed. There is a programme to decarbonise vessels and switch them to alternative propulsion systems.

Rather than give a long answer now, I can provide further details to Mr Simpson about the work that is under way, which is a core part of the islands connectivity plan and the vessel replacement and deployment plan.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the minister for that encouraging update.

The minister will be aware of the pressing and urgent need for the replacement of the ageing internal ferry fleet in Orkney. Can he confirm that that will be laid out in the plan? Does he share the view of some of his colleagues, who have suggested that the lack of progress so far on that issue is due to "a lack of vision" from the current and previous leadership of Orkney Islands Council?

Paul Wheelhouse: I would not want to comment on the leadership of Orkney Islands Council. Obviously, I have a good relationship with Councillor Stockan and his team, who have been working very closely with Transport Scotland to outline their investment needs. I had a very productive discussion recently with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Kate Forbes, and the leaders of Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council on funding for internal ferry services. I assure Mr McArthur that we are very much aware of the need for investment in those areas, particularly in Orkney, where there is a substantial backlog of investment, as he may recall. However, we are actively taking forward those matters, and I do not want to prejudge the outcome of those discussions, although I can say that they have been very constructive so far.

Railways (Public Ownership)

8. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to take Scotland's railways back into public ownership. (S50-05024)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Our view remains that an integrated, public sector-controlled railway that is fully accountable to the Scottish ministers and Parliament will best serve Scotland. Repeated calls for United Kingdom ministers to give Scotland the powers that are needed to secure the best future for Scotland's railway and to remove the absurdities and anomalies of the current system have so far been denied. While we await the findings of the delayed UK rail review, we are considering all options available to us for the future operation of ScotRail services after the current contract, which is expected to end in March 2022.

Neil Findlay: The Abellio franchise has been an expensive disaster. The Labour Government in Wales has taken the railway there back into public ownership to protect essential services. Why has the Scottish Government not done that here?

Michael Matheson: My understanding of what has happened in Wales is that it has moved to an

operator of last resort due to financial difficulties with the franchise agreement that was in place with the rail provider. I am also aware that Wales has some private sector involvement in its rail infrastructure. I am not in favour of that, because I prefer the rail infrastructure to remain in public sector control.

The critical element is what the best way is to deliver better passenger services. In my view, that is through a public sector-controlled railway. That is in respect of not just the rolling-stock element but the infrastructure element, and it is about better integrating those elements. We are giving significant consideration to that area for the future design of a publicly controlled rail network in Scotland in respect of not just the infrastructure element but the rolling-stock element.

Justice and the Law Officers

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Again, I ask for short questions and succinct answers. If members want to ask a supplementary question, they should put R in the chat function while the relevant question is being asked, please, and not before. I hope that that is clear.

Jury Trials (Mid Scotland and Fife)

1. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in resuming jury trials in Mid Scotland and Fife. (S5O-05025)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): That, of course, is an operational matter for the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, but I understand that, within the sheriffdom of Tayside, Central and Fife, which covers the area in question, jury trials have resumed in the courts in Dundee, Perth, Falkirk and Kirkcaldy. Solemn business from other courts in the sheriffdom—namely, those in Alloa, Forfar, Dunfermline and Stirling—is being transferred to those four courts, and the SCTS anticipates that normal sheriff and jury trial capacity will be resumed across Scotland by the end of this month.

Claire Baker: The importance of resuming jury trials has been made clear by Victim Support Scotland, which has reported a significant rise in the number of people who are seeking support. I was going to ask about business in Dunfermline, but I understand that that comes under the business that is being restarted.

With a predicted backlog of some 2,000 cases expected by March and the majority of summary trials currently on hold, what further steps could the Scottish Government take to ensure that the backlog is reduced and timescales are shortened?

Humza Yousaf: That is a hugely important question. The impact of the suspension of trials during the first wave of the pandemic and now, after the Lord President's most recent announcement, is significant. Claire Baker might know from the Scottish budget statement at the end of January that the Government has committed £50 million to the recover, renew and transform project, which will go directly into ensuring that we make a dent in the trials backlog. I can assure her that the criminal justice board is looking at how best to spend that £50 million so that we can reduce the impact of that increasing backlog.

Virtual Prison Visits

2. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many virtual prison visits have taken place since 29 June 2020. (S5O-05026)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): We all recognise the value and importance of family contact and the impact of the necessary restrictions that the Scottish Prison Service has had to put in place on those in custody and their families. It has been challenging for all involved. Throughout the pandemic, the SPS and the Scottish Government have been working on ways to support those in custody and their families to maintain contact. Virtual visits are a key part of that.

To answer Mary Fee's question directly, by 7 February 2021, more than 29,500 virtual prison visits had taken place.

Mary Fee: With restrictions on travel and on prison visits, digital visits will have been a lifeline for many, as they support both the welfare and mental health of prisoners. In light of the fact that more than 1,200 prisoners are currently self-isolating, what support is being given to prison activities, including digital visits? Can the cabinet secretary assure me that digital prison visits will continue after the pandemic? If so, will they be as available as they are currently, or will they be scaled back?

Humza Yousaf: There are a few questions in there, and I will attempt to answer them. First, I put on record Mary Fee's long-standing interest in and championing of the rights of families that have a member who is, unfortunately, incarcerated in prison.

Virtual visits have been a lifeline, as Mary Fee rightly describes them, for many people in our care. To answer the final question directly, it is absolutely our desire in the Scottish Government to ensure that virtual visits can continue after the pandemic because of the success of their roll-out and the impact that they have had.

On the current situation, in which a number of prisoners are self-isolating—predominantly in HMP Kilmarnock, HMP Addiewell and HMP Dumfries—some virtual visits had to be suspended on public health grounds. I give an assurance to Mary Fee that mobile phones and in-cell telephony are still available to enable family contact. The SPS is looking at what more can be done to ensure that there is contact between those who are in prison and their families outside.

Covid-19 (Support for Court Services)

3. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting court services during the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-05027)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): We have been supporting the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service in a number of different ways during the pandemic. We have progressed emergency legislation to allow business to operate virtually and remotely, and we have provided £15 million to strengthen court technology and establish the United Kingdom's first remote jury centres, which enabled the safe resumption of jury trials.

Last week, I met the criminal justice board to discuss a range of our next steps. Next month, I will hold a round-table event with members of the Justice Committee and other stakeholders to discuss options to address the current caseload. They include, as I have already said to Claire Baker, maximising the opportunities that are presented by the additional £50 million for trials that was announced in the budget statement.

Finlay Carson: The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service has announced further restrictions on court activity until the end of March, which is yet another blow to victims, who will now have to wait longer in their quest for justice. Why has the Scottish National Party Government not given courts, such as the one in Dumfries in my constituency, the appropriate resources to become Covid safe for business and allow more victims to gain justice?

Humza Yousaf: First and foremost, I recognise the impact that any suspension of courts can have on victims. However, the decision is not one for the Scottish Government to take—it is rightly taken independently by the Lord President. We have increased funding for victims organisations.

I know that Finlay Carson has a long-standing interest in the court in Dumfries. The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service has confirmed that, when it comes to the plans for potentially increasing court capacity and using that £50 million, Dumfries will be part of the considerations.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Has any research been done into victims and complainants becoming disillusioned with the justice system because of late postponements? Has the Scottish Government looked at whether they are refusing to interact with the justice system or looking for recourse in other ways? That would be a real issue for the justice system and it could undermine public confidence.

Humza Yousaf: I meet representatives of victim support organisations regularly, and they express concern about any challenges and difficulties that victims can face if there are delays in trials coming to court.

I am happy to write to Rhoda Grant about the remote jury centre model. We and the SCTS are looking at evaluating that model and the impact that it can have on all those involved, including victims, the accused and witnesses. Rhoda Grant raises an important point and I assure her that I will continue my engagement with victim support organisations on the matter.

Covid-19 (Young People at Risk of Offending)

4. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is working with Police Scotland to engage with young people who are at risk of offending during the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-05028)

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): We work closely with Police Scotland to deliver the successful whole-system approach to preventing offending by young people. Police Scotland has confirmed its commitment to incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law and to keeping the care review promise. It is also contributing to the development of a refreshed national youth justice action plan, and will ensure that its own approach reflects those commitments.

Police Scotland's engagement with young people is an operational matter for the chief constable. Police Scotland has been clear throughout the current pandemic that it will continue to operate under the principle of policing by consent and will follow the 4 Es approach of engage, explain, encourage and only then enforce to protect public health.

I appreciate the hard work of the police throughout the pandemic and the professionalism they have shown.

Maureen Watt: I thank the minister for her answer, and I associate myself with her thanks to the police.

Torry, in my constituency, has recently seen an upsurge in small-scale youth vandalism. Prior to

Covid and its restrictions, Police Scotland, along with partners such as streetsport Scotland, was able to nip those problems in the bud with diversionary activities. What actions are available at the moment to deal with such unnecessary vandalism?

Ash Denham: I appreciate that the current restrictions are putting a strain on the delivery of face-to-face diversionary activities provided by local partners. We also appreciate that boredom and a lack of activity are among the biggest issues affecting young people at the moment. A variety of creative initiatives has been developed by local authorities and key partners to keep in touch with young people and ensure that they have access to activities. I am grateful to those who continue to provide such support during this difficult time.

Budget (Community Safety)

5. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how additional funding announced in its draft budget will be used to keep communities safe. (S5O-05029)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): The 2021-22 justice portfolio budget will be more than £3 billion. It includes a £60 million increase for the Scottish Police Authority that will eliminate the police budget deficit and allow Police Scotland to deliver a sustainable budget position, while protecting the police workforce. We continue to be grateful to police officers and staff who put themselves in harm's way to protect the public and keep communities safe, particularly during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

James Dornan: I note that David Crichton, the interim chair of the Scottish Police Authority, said that the budget represented a strong vote of confidence in the authority and Police Scotland, and that it particularly recognises the outstanding performance of the police service in protecting the country's safety and wellbeing during the pandemic. What further actions is the Scottish Government taking to keep crime at its second lowest level since 1974?

Humza Yousaf: David Crichton was absolutely right in characterising that as a huge vote of confidence in the work that Police Scotland is doing. Both the staff and the police officers have done an incredible job in keeping us safe during the pandemic. We will continue to invest in the Scottish violence reduction unit, which has been recognised worldwide for the good work that it has done—the navigators programme, the mentors on violence prevention and the no knives, better lives programme.

Additional funding will be used to expand those programmes and to enable further support within our communities, schools and hospitals to prevent

or tackle violence and knife crime. We will continue to support our national and local community safety partners to share resources and provide services to inform and reassure the public, giving them trusted and consistent information and advice on how to keep themselves and their communities safe from crime. We have provided annual grant funding to neighbourhood watch and Crimestoppers since 2014 to help support the prevention and reporting of crime.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In the draft budget, the Scottish National Party intends to cut the capital budget for victims and witnesses support by £2 million while increasing the total budget for offender services by £2.3 million. Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that prioritising offenders at the expense of victims is surely the wrong way around and that victims will not feel safe or supported with that increasingly soft-touch approach to justice?

Humza Yousaf: I could not disagree more with that characterisation from Liam Kerr. Capital costs would have been for one-off projects, of course, but that binary approach of spending on offenders versus spending on victims is the wrong way to look at things. When we invest in offenders, that is with the hope and intention of ensuring that they do not go on to reoffend. If they do not reoffend, there are fewer victims of crime and everybody in society wins. Instead of looking at the issue through a paradigm of hard justice versus soft justice, I urge my colleague Liam Kerr to do what the Scottish Government does, which is to follow the evidence that will lead to a smart justice approach.

Police Officer Numbers (North-east Scotland)

6. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans there are to increase the number of divisional police officers in the north-east. (S5O-05030)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): I start by reiterating my appreciation for the hard work of the police and the professionalism that they have shown, particularly in the north-east, but right across Scotland, in keeping us safe during the pandemic. We currently have 17,234 police officers in Scotland, which is significantly above the level we inherited in 2007.

Following the recent publication of Police Scotland's strategic workforce plan, the chief constable has made it clear that, given the continued response to Covid-19 and with Glasgow hosting the 26th conference of the parties—COP26—later this year, he does not believe that police officer numbers should be reduced at this time. I will not rehearse what I have just said about

the budget, which, of course, eliminates Police Scotland's structural deficit.

Also, although the operational deployment of police officers is a matter for the chief constable, I note that Police Scotland data shows that, on a like-for-like basis, there are now 40 more police officers in the north-east police division than there were in September 2013.

Alexander Burnett: Since 2013, Aberdeenshire has seen violent crime triple while five police stations have closed, including Kemnay in my constituency. Just a few days ago, Kemnay and District Rifle Club had its buildings burned to the ground in a deliberate fire. With fewer police officers and fewer police stations, is the justice secretary going to do anything to protect rural communities?

Humza Yousaf: Again, I disagree with Alexander Burnett's characterisation. I am sorry to hear of the incident that he referred to, but crime has fallen under the Scottish National Party Government. In fact, it is at one of its lowest levels in four decades. We continue to invest in the police at record levels and to ensure that the number of police officers is significantly above the level that we inherited in 2007. There are 32 officers per 10,000 population in Scotland, which compares with around 22 officers per 10,000 population in England and Wales. Scotland is a safer place under this SNP-led Scottish Government. All the statistics from the past decade bear that out. If there are particular issues that Alexander Burnett feels need to be addressed, he should take those up operationally with the local divisional commander.

HMP Inverness

7. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the new HMP Inverness will be completed. (S5O-05031)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): A site has been purchased on the east side of Inverness; early procurement activity is under way; the tendering process is due to commence later this spring; and we expect that enabling construction work will start this autumn. Our new infrastructure investment plan for Scotland, "A National Mission with Local Impact: Infrastructure Investment Plan for Scotland 2021-22 to 2025-26", which we published on 4 February, sets out the operational date for HMP Highland, which is estimated as February 2024.

Edward Mountain: In 2011, the prison was due to cost £52 million; in 2016, the cost had gone up to £66 million; and in 2021, it has risen to £110 million. The cabinet secretary promised the delivery of the prison before the last election and

promised it again in 2018, and it sounds like he is promising it now. What promise can he give—that can be believed—that it will be completed by 2024?

Humza Yousaf: Edward Mountain has done his best to cast doubt on the building of a new prison for Inverness but, despite his somewhat deliberate mischief, the naysayer has been proven wrong once again. I am delighted that the Scottish Government has confirmed our intention to fund and build HMP Highland, and its inclusion in the Scottish Government's infrastructure investment plan is testament to our commitment.

I plead with Mr Mountain to take a more constructive approach—as, for example, the MSP for Inverness and Nairn, Fergus Ewing, has done. He has engaged constructively with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service, and in doing so he has made a persuasive case for HMP Highland's inclusion in the infrastructure investment plan. I am pleased to see that progress is being made in replacing HMP Inverness. That progress will not only continue, but will be funded by this SNP-led Scottish Government.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): What is the Scottish Government's assessment of HMP Dumfries, which is Scotland's oldest functional prison site?

Humza Yousaf: As the member may be aware, there is a current outbreak of Covid-19 in HMP Dumfries. To give her some confidence, I assure her that I am in regular contact with the SPS's interim chief executive, Teresa Medhurst, in relation to the outbreaks in HMP Dumfries, HMP Kilmarnock and HMP Addiewell.

We are keeping a close eye on what more needs to be done in HMP Dumfries to ensure that the outbreak does not spread any further. I am confident that we have in place the appropriate health guidance to ensure that we can manage that outbreak, but if Emma Harper would like any further detailed information on the situation at HMP Dumfries, I can ensure that the SPS makes itself available to her.

Victims of Crime (Remote and Rural Communities)

8. Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):

To ask the Scottish Government how it supports victims of crime in remote and rural communities. (S5O-05032)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): We are providing £18.7 million in 2020-21 to support victims of crime. We have also invested £12 million to tackle violence against women and girls, and provided an additional £5.75 million in-year in recognition of the impact of the on-going restrictions on those who are

experiencing domestic abuse. That includes funding for organisations that provide front-line practical, emotional and financial support to victims and survivors across Scotland, including in remote and rural communities. Support can be accessed by telephone, live web chat or, when Covid restrictions allow, very much in person.

Beatrice Wishart: I declare an interest, as I am a board member of Shetland Women's Aid.

People on the islands are getting a poor deal on legal aid assistance. I am told that legal aid does not cover the cost of travel to the islands. Domestic abuse survivors are forced to look to the mainland for legal aid solicitors because they cannot access that service locally. Other constituents tell me that they have given up important civil appeal opportunities because of those barriers to legal access. What will the cabinet secretary do to address that geographical inequality?

Humza Yousaf: I confirm to Beatrice Wishart that I will take a closer look at that issue. She may be aware that the Minister for Community Safety has previously said that we intend, pending the election, to introduce a legal aid bill. Those important issues, and many others, can be consulted on in our consideration of such a bill.

However, if we can do something in the more immediate term, I am happy to look at that. If Beatrice Wishart would allow me to do so, I will take a closer look at the issue and make sure that we respond to her in greater detail.

Rachael Hamilton (Etrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): With rural areas often forgotten by the Scottish National Party, and fewer police officers now in the Borders, research shows that one in four people are not reporting a rural crime of which they were a victim. What efforts is the Scottish Government making to work with rural communities to ensure that crime is reported, and to address the reasons why the perception of police performance has declined?

Humza Yousaf: I disagree with Rachael Hamilton's characterisation that police performance has somehow declined. Quite the opposite: we should be thanking our police officers for the incredible work that they and police staff have done throughout the pandemic to keep Scotland safe. Scotland has one of its lowest crime rates in the past 40 years. Not only that, there have been significant reductions in violent crime over the past decade, as well as reductions in many other categories of crime. That is replicated right across Scotland.

Of course, divisional numbers and local, sub-divisional numbers of police officers are important. Rachael Hamilton should recognise that national resources can also make a huge impact at a local

level. For example, national funding and resource put into major investigations can have an impact on local divisions, too. If Rachael Hamilton has particular operational issues that she wishes to raise with her local divisional commander, she should do so.

Constitution, Europe and External Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As we move to the final portfolio, I remind members that questions 5 and 7 have been grouped together, and I will take any supplementaries to those questions once both of them have been answered. I also remind members that, when they want to ask a supplementary, they should put an R in the chat function when the question is being answered and not before—which is just confusing.

Brexit (Impact on European Union Workers)

1. **Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact Brexit has had on workers coming to Scotland from the EU. (S5O-05033)

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): Given the extraordinary circumstances of the global pandemic, the full impact of Brexit on Scotland's workforce is currently unclear. Ultimately, however, having fewer EU workers will damage public services, labour markets and communities.

The expert advisory group on migration and population estimates that a net migration reduction of between 30 and 50 per cent by 2040 would mean a decline of up to 5 per cent in our working-age population. Overall, we estimate that immigration changes could result in a reduction in gross domestic product of around £5 billion.

The United Kingdom Government's immigration policy disregards sectors that are relied upon during the pandemic, including our valued social care workers. To date, the UK Government has refused to engage with the Scottish Government on those crucial issues. I urge it to see sense and to do so urgently.

Gail Ross: I thank the minister for that answer, deeply worrying as it is. I am getting reports locally of falling numbers of people working in hotels and other tourism businesses. If we are going to ask people to holiday in Scotland again this summer, what can be done to ensure that our tourism sector has enough staff to cope, given that a high percentage of them came from continental Europe?

Jenny Gilruth: Gail Ross raises a really important point. I do not want to prejudge where we will be come the summer, but I know where we

were last year, and many of us of course chose to holiday at home in Scotland. That will only be possible with a sustainable tourism industry, so we will work hard to support communities such as Caithness, Sutherland and Ross to ensure that the infrastructure is there for visitors when the sector is deemed safe to reopen.

The Scottish Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses throughout the pandemic, but the end of freedom of movement in the middle of a global pandemic has created unnecessary uncertainty, which could have been avoided. Gaining further powers over our immigration system would give the Scottish Government the ability to further mitigate those issues in the interests of the people of Scotland.

Post-Brexit International Relations

2. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will develop its international relations in the post-Brexit era. (S5O-05034)

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union has undoubtedly posed challenges to Scotland's ability to engage closely with international partners. Despite that, the Scottish Government stands firm in its outward-looking approach to international relations. We continue to work, from Scotland and through our network of eight international offices, to strengthen our international relationships and to increase trade and investment, with an overarching objective of sustainable economic growth in Scotland.

Willie Coffey: It is important that we continue to develop our strong business, economic and cultural links post-Brexit and that we do not allow Scotland's ambitions to be thwarted by the actions of others. Can the minister provide any further details on how we can maintain and enhance those connections, for example through the digital single market, the Erasmus exchange programme and support for international artists in Europe and internationally?

Jenny Gilruth: We will continue to build international links through our international network, with partners such as Scottish Development International and Scottish Enterprise. As Willie Coffey touched on, cultural and education exchanges are also important to Scotland's international role, which is why we are continuing to explore options following the UK Government's decision to end our participation in the Erasmus programme.

The Scottish Government is working with stakeholders and others to explore how we can further support and enable cross-border work and

collaboration in our culture and creative sectors. We continue to call on the UK Government to seek extensive reciprocal mobility arrangements with the EU for those sectors.

Trade Deals (Countries Linked to Genocide)

3. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government regarding trade deals with countries linked to genocide. (S5O-05035)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): The Scottish Government condemns human rights abuses wherever they occur. We published "Scotland's Vision for Trade" this past month, which sets clear principles that underpin how we trade, including the promotion of good governance, the rule of law and human rights internationally. We have made clear to the UK Government that any future trade agreements must respect those principles.

John Mason: I seek reassurance that the minister would do anything that he can to support those principles in any contact that the Scottish Government has with other countries, either through the UK or directly—considering, for example, the performance of China against the Uighur minority and that of Burma, now Myanmar, against the Rohingya, which have both been deplorable and decried worldwide.

Graeme Dey: It was extremely disappointing that the UK Government objected to an amendment to the Trade Bill that the House of Lords tabled, which would have allowed trade agreements to be revoked where the High Court judged one of the signatories to be a state that had committed genocide.

That was a missed opportunity to place a marker in legislation to establish that our trading relationship should reflect our national values and be based on ethical and principled decisions, not just financial ones. The Scottish Government will continue to raise human rights issues wherever and whenever that is appropriate.

European Union Funding Streams (Replacement)

4. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding long-term replacements for European Union funding streams. (S5O-05036)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): The UK Government has failed to engage with us in a meaningful way across a number of EU programmes, including fisheries, structural funds and competitive programmes such as Erasmus+.

We have been clear and consistent in our position that we expect full replacement of EU funds to ensure no detriments to Scotland's finances, and we expect the UK Government to fully respect the devolution settlement in any such future arrangements.

Scotland's uncertain outlook on the replacement of EU programme funding continues, and provisions in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 and the decision to reduce the spending review to a single year only exacerbate it.

Colin Smyth: One of the most important EU funding streams for Scotland's rural and coastal communities has been the LEADER programme. The current programme is ending and, sadly, there are no proposals for long-term support for the types of innovative community projects that LEADER has supported in the past three decades. Does the Scottish Government support a long-term replacement for LEADER, and how could that goal be achieved, now that those EU funding streams are coming to an end?

Michael Russell: The member is right to be concerned about LEADER, which, although it has had its critics, has been influential in rural Scotland—as he and I know. It is vital that there are such programmes, but the UK Government is simply not bringing them forward in any detail or at all. A consultation is taking place on funding, but it is not clear what will happen as a result of it.

Considerable misleading information is also being put out. The UK Government said yesterday, in response to a remark that I made about the Erasmus scheme, that it had

“worked very closely with devolved administrations ... to prepare an alternative programme, in the event the UK chose not to participate in Erasmus.”

That is simply not true. The reality of the situation is that not only has the UK Government deployed its replacement, the Turing scheme, via the Internal Market Act 2020, which removes all devolved competency and all involvement in the design or implementation of the replacement schemes, but it has set—and this should worry the member about LEADER—a budget that is far lower than that which the Erasmus scheme presently experiences; in addition, it has refused to release its assessment of why it will not take part in the programme.

That all bodes very ill for those in my constituency, and those who are represented by Mr Smyth and others, who are reliant on the LEADER scheme, because they do not have any friends in such matters in the UK Government.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It has been suggested that the Department for Work and Pensions will be involved in the distribution of some of the funds that will replace the EU

structural funds. That seems a bit surprising, given its lack of expertise in that area. What are the cabinet secretary's thoughts on that issue?

Michael Russell: It is not only surprising, but wrong. The reality is that the Scottish Government, which has been involved in the distribution of social funding money, should be involved in, for example, the shared prosperity fund, and we have made proposals on that. However, ideologically, the UK Government is hidebound on the matter. The UK Government dislikes devolution and dealing with the devolved Administrations, and it wants to pretend that all the money comes from it. However, it does not even know what that money will look like, let alone how much it will be.

Independence Referendum (Draft Bill)

5. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to publish the draft bill for an independence referendum announced in its programme for government for 2020-21. (S5O-05037)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): As we set out in the programme for government, we will publish a draft bill for an independence referendum before the end of this parliamentary session. That is still our intention, and I will update the Parliament on that in due course. I believe that there are five weeks still to go.

Jamie Greene: Given that the Scottish Parliament will dissolve, likely in five weeks' time, and in the light of the on-going Covid pandemic, I will ask the cabinet secretary a simple question. I have made it multiple choice, if that is helpful. In the limited time that is available to the Parliament, should we debate: A, a draft bill on independence; B, Scotland's drug death crisis; or C, the overdue Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report into Scottish education, the immediate release of which the Parliament voted for yesterday?

Michael Russell: The Parliament should debate the future of Scotland and how we make Scotland a better country. Scotland will become a better country if it is free to make its own decisions. If it follows the United Kingdom Government into the dangerous cul-de-sac of Brexit, it can only become a worse country. I would have thought that Jamie Greene would have realised that, and would want to argue in the interests of his constituents. Clearly, he does not—he wishes only to argue in the interests of the UK Government.

Jamie Greene: Was the answer A, B or C? Sorry, I missed that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You had your answer. There is no second go at it, I am afraid.

Independence Referendum (Resourcing)

7. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the financial and personnel resources required to conduct a second independence referendum. (S5O-05039)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): On 18 March 2020, I wrote to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to confirm that the Scottish Government has paused work to prepare for an independence referendum in order to focus on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Aside from the publication of a draft bill for an independence referendum for introduction during the next parliamentary term, which will require a minimal amount of civil service resources and time, that continues to be the Scottish Government's position, and all other work is currently paused.

We are clear that an independence referendum should only take place once the Covid-19 pandemic is over. If there is majority support for an independence referendum in the next parliamentary term, we will return to the issue when it is appropriate to do so.

Brian Whittle: Let me help the cabinet secretary out. The total cost of the independence referendum in 2014 was in excess of £16 million. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance is at pains to stress the financial pressures that the Scottish Government is under as it responds to the pandemic, with the First Minister making it clear that we have a long way to go before the pandemic is behind us. Given those facts, does the cabinet secretary seriously expect Scots to agree that a rerun of a once-in-a-generation referendum before the end of the year is a better and more urgent use of public funds than restoring and rebuilding the economy and our public services?

Michael Russell: I made that clear in my earlier answer. Clearly, Mr Whittle was not listening, so I will repeat it. An independence referendum should only take place once the Covid-19 pandemic is over. I ask Mr Whittle to reflect for a moment—although self-reflection is not a talent that he has—that the cost of Brexit is hundreds of billions of pounds. To be lectured by a Conservative on the cost of democracy is something that even I find hard to swallow.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): It has been reported that Downing Street is looking to hire up to 50 taxpayer-funded advisers for its anti-independence campaign unit. I suggest that that is quite an allocation of financial and personnel resources. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that looks like a panicked attempt by the UK Government to gear up for a referendum

and suggests that the Tories may finally be coming to the realisation that standing in the way of democracy is unsustainable?

Michael Russell: It makes me reflect on the two questions that we have just had, which appear to have been desperate attempts to deflect attention not only from those sorts of facts but from, for example, the fact that, last night, someone who has never been elected, as far as I know, even to the presidency of a bowling club—David Frost, who is now a peer—became a minister in the Cabinet. That is utterly undemocratic.

I suggest that Mr Whittle and Mr Greene go and consider what democracy is, then come back and ask a question. Until they do, they are not in a position either to ask a question or to get an answer other than that.

Legislative Consent

6. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what action it can take to prevent legislation in devolved areas being passed that is contrary to a resolution on a legislative consent motion by the Scottish Parliament. (S5O-05038)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): The only answer to that question is to say that Scotland must become independent, because an independent Parliament would not be subject to such restrictions.

We will of course always try to explore every option under devolution but, in practice, devolution is based on the doctrine of the unlimited sovereignty of Westminster, which means that it claims the right to legislate on whatever it wants, including devolved areas and, if it so wishes, the abolition of this Parliament. The Supreme Court has confirmed that the statutory protection of the Sewel convention in the Scotland Act 2016 is toothless. That undermines a key recommendation of the Smith commission, and provides in the end no protection from a Westminster Government that is determined, as the current United Kingdom Government is, to flout constitutional norms.

Recent events, from the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to the outrage that is the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, have demonstrated that the UK Government is not only able but willing to ignore the views of this Parliament and to constrain and reduce our power unilaterally and without consent. The only answer to that is independence.

Patrick Harvie: Since the beginning of devolution, the courts have had the ability to strike down legislation from the Scottish Parliament if it strays beyond legislative competence, and I suspect that voters who endorsed that devolution

settlement never imagined that a UK Government would be so willing to routinely pass major legislation in devolved areas.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that legislation that has been passed by the UK Parliament in that way—against the consent decisions of the Scottish Parliament—is fundamentally illegitimate, and does he agree that anyone who seeks to suggest that a solution other than independence can exist must, as a minimum, agree that courts should have the power to strike down legislation of the UK Parliament that is passed in devolved areas without the consent of the devolved legislature?

Michael Russell: Not only do I agree with the member; I find his contention utterly unremarkable. Anybody who believes in democracy would regard it to be true. It is therefore extraordinary that there is a body of people elected to the Scottish Parliament who do not accept that principle. I find that astonishing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. That concludes questions on the constitution, Europe and external affairs. We are a little ahead of time, but the next item is follow-on business and so I will hand over to my colleague for that.

Citizens Assembly of Scotland (Report)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Good afternoon. The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, on “Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens’ Assembly of Scotland”. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Michael Russell to speak to and move the motion. You have around 12 minutes, please.

15:04

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): I am pleased to open the debate, and will do so with the words of one of the members of the Citizens Assembly of Scotland, which was a place where more than 100 Scots were listening, learning and deliberating about the type of country that Scotland should be. In the introduction to the assembly report that we are welcoming today, that assembly member said:

“We want people to know that politics doesn’t have to be about the politicians, it is about us as citizens of Scotland. Recent years have seen us lose confidence and trust in politics and we wanted to hear the facts, the honest reality, the truth of how Scotland is governed and the difficult choices that we face, to help us think about the future, how to plan ahead and achieve good outcomes with a positive mind set.”

Good outcomes with a positive mindset—that is what we should all wish to achieve.

Therefore, I start by offering my thanks to the member who made those remarks and all members of the assembly for their outstanding work. I also thank Kate Wimpres, the assembly convener, who took on the sole convening role early on, and who has been sensitive, strong and very successful in it.

I also thank the secretariat under Ian Davidson; Ian has been key to the project from the first moment when we started to discuss it in Government, and was with me in Ireland when we learned so much on our original scoping visit back in May 2019. I am grateful to him.

What the assembly has achieved in the difficult circumstances of the past year far exceeds the original expectations that many of us had, despite there having been some reservations in parts of the chamber. When I spoke at the opening event of the citizens assembly at Edinburgh castle in October 2019, I was inspired by the enthusiasm and commitment that were already being shown, as assembly members embarked on their collective journey. We could not know, of course,

how tested they would be by what lay ahead, nor could we know how timely and relevant their final recommendations would become.

Last month, I and some of my Cabinet colleagues met members of the assembly to receive the report in written and visual formats, to hear about their experiences and to listen to their priorities for action. I know that others who are taking part in the debate were able to do the same at an event earlier this week.

I gave a commitment at the opening event that the Scottish Government would consider very seriously the recommendations of the assembly when they were made, and Parliament was clear that it wanted to discuss them, too. We are honouring that commitment today, but it has to be said that we are doing so only in part, given the inevitable delay that has been caused by Covid and the inescapable fact that there is simply not enough time before the election to give the report and its ambitious recommendations the full and detailed consideration that they deserve.

So, I propose that Parliament, while strongly welcoming the report that is in front of us, commends the report to the Scottish Government and Parliament, and does so not neutrally, but with a strong recommendation that our successors take forward this important work.

For my part, I expect that my party will make a manifesto commitment to consider the recommendations that have been made by the assembly and, if re-elected to Government, to publish a comprehensive response to the report. I hope that colleagues in other parties will make similar pledges.

However, we must recognise that not all the recommendations are within the competence of the Scottish Parliament. I intend after the debate to share the report of the assembly with the United Kingdom Government, because it is important that it, too, hears the voice of that representative group of the Scottish population.

It is also clear that the report and its recommendations are only the start of a long-term project that envisages a transformative change to Scottish politics, in which engagement with Government and the practice of decision making is a given. That will result in better deliberation, consideration, accessibility, inclusivity and, ultimately, governance.

I hope that we can all welcome the opportunity to embrace such changes, even if we do not agree with every detail of the report, or if we come from a different political or philosophical perspective when considering the underlying messages. The fact is that the report challenges us all—no matter our political or philosophical perspective—and some of it is particularly challenging to those of us

who have been active full-time politicians for many years. Here, again, is the voice of a member of the assembly, which should strike home:

“We want people to know that politics doesn’t have to be about the politicians, it is about us as citizens of Scotland. Recent years have seen us lose confidence and trust in politics and we wanted to hear the facts ... how to plan ahead and achieve good outcomes with a positive mind set.”

That voice is made even more real in some of the recommendations. No one could disagree with the desire that the Scottish Government and Parliament should be

“leading with integrity, honesty, humility and transparency in a self-sufficient and innovative way”,

nor that society should

“ensure that honesty, transparency and integrity of politicians, the existing standards of behaviour should be promoted and strengthened if required, to increase accountability of those elected for their actions within Government.”

However, it follows—and this becomes harder for many—that we must also accept that

“in order to overcome the challenges in relation to the lack of public trust in politicians the Scottish Government and Parliament should: ... appoint a non-political independent review body to do a forensic investigation to deliver:

- a more accountable parliament with acceptable standards of behaviour
- responsibility for delivery on commitments
- faster public access to information on what is happening
- acknowledgement of all those who supported society during Covid-19”

The logic of the report, like that logic, is compelling, and we need not just to acknowledge it but to accept and build on it.

Scotland will shortly enter a general election. Multiparty democratic elections, hard-fought arguments, honest disagreements over significant issues, passionately held beliefs being placed before the public for consideration, and peaceful transfer—or, in my case, I hope, maintenance—of Government are still necessary to a healthy parliamentary democracy and functioning political nation.

However, elections can also bring out the worst in us, and what is on display can drive our fellow citizens away from the democratic process. It discourages engagement with the arguments and issues and makes politics just for the politicians or, as that wonderful American description puts it, merely

“show business for ugly people”.

Therefore, the conclusions of the citizens assembly are very timely in reminding us of our responsibility to the democratic process. Yes—we

should conduct ourselves with commitment and belief, but we should also do so with respect for one another and for the voters who are watching us, and we should do it in an inclusive, not exclusive, way.

The citizens assembly learned from international best practice and had a lot of help from academics and others. It operated with the principles of independence, transparency, inclusion, access, balance, cumulative learning and open-mindedness at its core. In committing their time and energy to the process, assembly members were willing to put aside preconceptions and to learn about big subjects. One member commented:

“I was taken with how everyone seemed to suspend their judgements, and took the chance to understand, even accept the others more, despite the to-be-expected disagreements on certain topics. This requires compassion, patience, and a good heart”.

We all need to learn from that, too.

The citizens assembly consisted of ordinary people from across Scotland, who were broadly representative of the adult population of the country in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic class, educational qualifications, ethnic group, geography and political attitudes. All of them were prepared to give up time to listen and learn.

In the end, through that process of deliberative democracy, they found common ground and agreement. They sought consensus above all; it is impressive that the 10 vision statements that were agreed by the assembly each met the threshold of being supported by 90 per cent of members. Of the 60 recommendations, 58 were strongly supported, which means that more than 75 per cent of members agreed, and the remaining two recommendations gained a simple majority.

What a helpful and hopeful example that is. It proves that, with the right approach, it is possible for a diverse group to find and articulate a shared vision for the future. That shared vision need not be bland. It can be—and, in this report, it is—radical, wide-ranging, ambitious and, again, challenging for politicians in society. For example, the citizens assembly wants Scotland to

“ethically invest in our society by ensuring everyone has a central bank account provided at birth for every citizen”

and that the account should be

“contributed to on a regular basis throughout a citizen’s lifetime by means of a Universal Basic Income”.

The assembly wants Scotland to

“develop a plan for investment in business in Scotland to secure jobs in the wake of COVID-19”

that concentrates on

“small and medium size businesses needing support rather than multinationals.”

The assembly wants to ensure that all national health service staff

“receive higher wages and enhanced employment packages”;

to

“undertake a root and branch review of public services in order to prioritise good mental health care and holistic wellbeing”;

and to

“undertake a full review of the criminal justice system to improve outcomes for communities, offenders and victims.”

Those are just a few examples of the wide-ranging scope of the recommendations, which all tackle important and serious issues. They will not be universally agreed across the chamber today, or perhaps on any day, but they demand our attention and serious consideration.

The very existence of the work of the citizens assembly demands a further response. To put it simply, what is next? Where is our democratic engagement going? How can we deepen, broaden and enrich our society by doing more of that work? In other words, what place does the assembly have in the overall system of policy making, alongside Parliament and its committees, stakeholders and wider civic Scotland? How can we embed a different way of doing things in our modern Scottish democracy? That would and should be the ultimate tribute to the work of those who have done so much in the past year.

I hope the report and the process of considering it will live up to what the members of the assembly expect, and that it will do justice to what they have learned. As another member put it:

“I think before there might have been some kind of bubble over politics, that nobody is able to get in and ask questions, and shake them up! And I think we’re able to do that here. And I feel quite privileged and excited—and energised!—to say: I want to do that.”

That was echoed by other members of the assembly, who said that

“Too often discussions are about what other people should do for me, but they should be about what I can do and what I can contribute. This is not just about the government, we should all be working together as one nation. The onus is on us—everyone.”

Today, the onus is on members here to take the work forward so that everyone can benefit.

I thank each and every member of the assembly for what they have started. I look forward to the outcomes of their work being built upon and, as a result, transforming the nation in the continual shared process of improvement and democracy.

When the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999, it was intended that it should do politics differently. As we have all found, that is not an easy thing to do. I hope that we have, by and large, been true to that ambition. Inevitably, it is a job that is never finished. Now we are challenged to do more, to go further and to keep listening and learning. We must do so.

As the next formal step, I will not only move the motion, but will accept all three amendments from the Conservative, Labour and Green parties.

I move,

That the Parliament notes *Doing Politics Differently - the Report of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland*; extends its thanks to the members of the Assembly for their hard work, efforts, commitment and collaborative approach, especially given the inevitable difficulties caused for the Assembly by the COVID-19 pandemic, and commends the report for further consideration by Members in the next session of the Parliament, informed by a full response from the incoming Scottish administration.

15:16

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

The report of the Citizens Assembly of Scotland is a welcome and important contribution to political dialogue in Scotland. I, too, thank the 105 members across Scotland, the secretariat and everyone else involved in the assembly for all their hard work and commitment, for their collaborative approach in preparing the report, and especially for working in the Covid pandemic and for giving up their weekends and evenings in the process. I also want to thank the cabinet secretary for his constructive engagement ahead of the debate.

It is not just here in Scotland that citizens assemblies are being used increasingly to hear what the public think about how politics should be done differently. The citizens assembly model is gaining in popularity and use, with the UK Government holding an assembly on climate change last year and another on social care in 2018. We have seen several examples in other countries, such as Ireland, Canada and Belgium.

It will come as no surprise that different parties in the Parliament have different views on the 60 detailed recommendations that are set out in the report. That point is made by the Conservative amendment: when the next Parliament looks at the report in detail, different parties might have different views on the recommendations. It is for the next Parliament to consider the policy implications of the recommendations and how the policy objectives as set out in the report might be realised.

For the purpose of today's debate, I want to comment on the important themes emerging from the report and the work of the assembly as well as some general observations about how the Scottish

Parliament and the Scottish Government should conduct their business and affairs.

First, one of the most striking observations throughout the report is concern about the lack of public trust in politics and the need for better public access to information, including increasing transparency on how decisions are made, better accountability from the Scottish Government and, in general, a higher level of interaction between politicians and the Scottish public. There are several issues that I want to touch on in relation to those common themes, because they are reflected in recommendations 9, 10, 11 and 12 of the report.

Recommendation 9 refers to that lack of public trust in politicians and calls on the Scottish Government and Parliament to deliver

"a more accountable parliament with acceptable standards of behaviour"

and

"faster public access to information on what is happening"

Recommendation 10 calls for more accountability and for the Scottish Government and Parliament to be held accountable when goals are not met. Recommendation 11 touches on the theme of good-quality, honest information being shared with the public, including

"an annual presentation of major commitments and policies",

and calls for all information to be

"presented simply and without jargon."

Finally, recommendation 12 recognises the challenges in relation to the public having information that is "accurate", "reliable" and "verifiable".

Those are not party-political points; they are about good government and doing politics differently, and they go to the heart of how the Parliament and the Scottish Government should conduct their affairs. As the largest Opposition party in the Parliament, we have worked hard to promote those issues. We have constantly campaigned for more transparency. We have raised concerns about how freedom of information in Scotland works, how parliamentary questions are answered and how information can be made more accessible to the public.

We do not need to look far to find examples of how we can easily achieve better transparency and accountability. For example, the Scottish budget, the process for which is on-going at the moment, runs to almost 300 pages, and even expert organisations such as the Fraser of Allander institute have long called for the budget process and the documentation to be simplified. That is just one example, although it is important, of how we could deal with the concerns that the

citizens assembly has raised about the need to have less jargon and better public access to information.

On the theme of Government accountability, there have been a number of recent examples of the Parliament calling for increased transparency from the Scottish Government, including calls for the release of legal advice on the Scottish Government's handling of complaints, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on Scottish education and further details on malicious prosecutions. Again, those are not party-political points; they are about good government and increasing transparency. When the next Scottish Parliament considers the details of the report, I very much hope that many of those fundamental concerns about transparency and accountability will be taken on board by the incoming Scottish Government.

The second common theme that I want to touch on is that the vast majority of the recommendations in the report, including many of the most important ones, fall in areas in which the Parliament and the Scottish Government already have powers. For example, recommendation 29 recognises the need to invest in industries to make Scotland "a global leader" in innovation and to build on Scotland's "extensive natural resources". Recommendation 33 calls for more funding and more resource for mental health services, including child and adolescent mental health services. Another recommendation calls for an increase in the availability of social housing. Recommendation 35, which is important, calls for "more apprenticeships" and better employment opportunities at the end of training. Recommendation 41, which the cabinet secretary touched on, is about supporting small local businesses to recover from Covid-19 while helping them to prepare for a green recovery and encouraging them to adopt "green values" as part of that.

The key point is that, whether or not we agree with the detail of the recommendations, they relate to powers that reside with the Scottish Parliament and which can make a difference. That emphasises the point that we have been making over the past number of years. The Parliament is one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world, and more attention should be focused on how we use the existing powers to make the changes that are highlighted in the report and in the feedback that we get from constituents in the areas that we represent.

I once again thank all the participants in the assembly. The report raises a number of important points and questions about how politics is done in Scotland, how we can do things differently and how we can build up more trust and accountability.

I emphasise that those are not party-political points. They are fundamental to achieving a better democracy in Scotland, so it will be important for the next Parliament to take a closer look at the recommendations to see how they can be implemented. As the assembly's convener, Kate Wimpres, has said,

"This is not a box ticked, or a full stop, but a beginning, opening up a new chapter in our democracy with citizens at its heart."

I move amendment S5M-24165.1, to insert at end:

" , while recognising that different political parties will take a different view on the recommendations of the report."

15:24

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): "Doing Politics Differently" is the headline of the report, and I think that we must all ask ourselves whether we are serious about doing politics differently. If we are, how we conduct ourselves not just in this afternoon's debate, which I hope will be a very positive and pleasant debate, but in other debates and our wider public discourse must be fundamental to doing politics differently, as the report suggests.

As the cabinet secretary and Mr Lockhart have done, I thank all those people who have been involved in pulling together the citizens assembly, including the members of the assembly, its chair, the civil service team behind it and everyone else who, logistically, helped it to get to where it needed to get to. I thank them for all their amazing service. What the report shows us is that, when we give people the chance, they put forward ambitious, radical proposals to create a fairer and more equal Scotland. They also look at what we can unite behind, rather than what we can divide on. I think that many of the policies that have come from the work of the assembly mirror what I know are ambitions of my political party, and I know that many of them are ambitions of other political parties, too.

Producing the report was a huge commitment on the part of the people involved, and I offer a genuine thank you to them for what they have achieved. The test now will be whether our politics, our Parliament and our Government can rise to the challenge that the citizens assembly has set us with regard to our civic engagement and our political involvement.

The report makes bold proposals, and it is safe to say that some of those proposals are not matched by the outcomes that our Parliament and our Government have achieved. I want us all to commit, as the cabinet secretary has done, to pursuing the assembly's recommendations. However, we should pursue not just their wording

but the delivery of the principles and ideas that they embody. That is why, as our amendment suggests, a key part of the process should be a mechanism for regular reporting to Parliament on how the Government is actioning the recommendations and what progress is being made on them so that the report does not get put on a shelf and forgotten about but continues to be a relevant piece of work.

There have been lots of talking shops and working groups. In Scotland—especially in our Parliament—we love talking shops and working groups, but the citizens assembly cannot be one of them. If we are to be true to all those who made the commitment to get involved in it, the process must be about outcomes. We are talking about how we can build a better country, overcome the challenges that Scotland will face in the 21st century, particularly after Brexit, and make informed choices about the kind of future that we want to have, so let us rise to that challenge. The assembly operated on the principles of independence, transparency, inclusion, access, balance, cumulative learning and open-mindedness, which are all principles that we as parliamentarians can take to heart.

I turn to the assembly's vision and its ideas. It wants to stop green jobs moving abroad. It also has ideas about affordable housing and how we should invest in our housing market; how we can address the chronic long-term underfunding in the NHS; how we can confront the pandemic and life after the pandemic; and how we can create fair work and build a fairer economy in our country. Those are all ideas that I think we should engage with.

There are also some fundamental principles in the assembly's report to do with how we conduct our politics that I think we need to confront. We need to ask how we can have a politics of integrity, honesty, humility and transparency, and how we can be innovative in how we make our decisions. We must be true to that. We cannot just say that we agree with it; we must live and breathe it. We must ensure that public authorities have a duty to share valid, accurate, reliable and verifiable information that is accessible to all. It sometimes feels as though we are going backwards in that respect. We must go forwards on that.

As a Parliament and a Government, we should communicate with people in a respectful, honest and open way that is based on fact. On accountability, again, it sometimes feels as though we are going backwards. We must move forwards.

The assembly believes that we must be leaders in innovation, and that there should be an obligation to invest in people to create jobs, confidence, development and growth. That must

be a fundamental principle that we think about when we come through Covid. We also need to think about how we properly resource our health and social care services and put communities' health and wellbeing at the heart of the process. That is another fundamental value that has emerged from the work of the assembly, which we must get behind.

The report talks about how we improve living standards and opportunities for all by investing in training, support and our employment market. That is crucial. It talks about putting the need to challenge poverty at the heart of our politics. We need to identify the barriers that prevent people from accessing decent employment, education and housing. That is also a key issue.

The report talks about how we use our tax base properly and about how we make our tax base and our spend on it more transparent. The report includes big ideas about how we minimise tax avoidance and incentivise companies to adopt green values, and about how we tax the big economic winners from Covid appropriately in order to help our economy.

The report talks about education and growth opportunities, and it says that we should look at physical health as well as mental health, which is a crucial part of our NHS restart programme. Again, the report includes great ideas about that.

I was particularly struck by the comments in the vision statement and the recommendations about our apprenticeship schemes and vocational skills. There is a huge gap between our ambitions for our apprenticeship schemes and how we encourage people from more diverse backgrounds to take up those schemes and then pay them properly, so that we incentivise people to make a better future for themselves.

There is a lot of discussion in the report about what our devolution settlement should look like. There is a grown-up, mature and unifying conversation to be had about how we put the report at the heart of our politics. We should put the ethics and principles behind the report at the heart of our politics and change how we behave with one another. We should put ideas at the heart of our politics and think about how we build a recovery from Covid that works for everyone.

I say a sincere thank you to all those who were involved in the citizens assembly for the amazing work that they have done. I thank them for sharing their ideas, and I hope that they hold our feet to the fire—those of the Government and those of all politicians from all political parties, including my own—so that we can deliver on those principles and create a better politics and a fundamentally better country.

I move amendment S5M-24165.3, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the bold and ambitious recommendations put forward to tackle inequality in Scotland, including capping private sector rents, making energy efficiency measures more affordable and investing in green infrastructure, and calls on the Scottish Government to give an annual statement to the Parliament on what action has been taken in response to the work of the Assembly.”

15:32

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Politics is not supposed to be a spectator sport; it is supposed to be about broadening participation and bringing more perspectives to bear in our political life. That is hugely important.

One or two of the opening speakers have spoken about the level of trust in politics at the moment, about the need for us all to recognise that trust is not at the level at which it should be and about finding new ways of restoring public trust and a feeling of accountability in politics. For me, that comes down to the idea that too many people feel that politics is something that is being done to them rather than something that we, as a society, are doing together.

Voting, campaigning, electioneering, volunteering, joining political parties and questioning and challenging elected representatives are all fantastic ways of getting involved in politics, but they are not for everyone. There will always be some people—perhaps many people—who are, quite reasonably, too busy living their own lives to get involved in the political process in those active ways, so it is important to introduce new measures and ideas about deliberative democracy and to invite people to participate through random selection in order to broaden participation in politics and ensure that a wider range of voices is heard in our democratic system. Such steps are not an alternative to, or instead of, political parties, elected Parliaments and the formal politics that we are used to; they are a different strand to our political process.

There are different strengths and weaknesses of such an approach. Some people criticise and challenge the idea of citizens assemblies on the basis that, once an individual is randomly selected, they might not feel accountable to the wider public. A person might not have been chosen on the basis of any expertise and, because their participation in the assembly might be short lived, they might not build up that expertise through the experience.

I am not sure whether those are strong criticisms, but it is fair to air them. However, there are weaknesses in our formal parliamentary process, too, and, if we are honest, all of us in political parties recognise that sometimes we

cherry-pick the arguments, listen to the people we have already decided to trust and listen less to those we have decided not to trust. As we group together in political parties, we do not always listen with an open mind to ideas that come from outwith our own parties. A citizens assembly is a way of ensuring that ideas are thought about in a deliberative way, in which people without a party political axe to grind consider the evidence, hear from the experts and express a thoughtful view. That is what has happened in this case.

Not long after I was elected to my first session of the Scottish Parliament—session 2—we had a presentation about work that was happening in Canada, where a citizens assembly was looking at voting systems. Voting systems are an ideal example of a question that is not easily resolved by party politicians, because party politicians all have a vested interest. There are different ideas about what is important in a voting system. Is it about strong Government? Is it about a local elected member link? Is it about fair proportionality? Whatever system is arrived at will have to strike a balance between those priorities. A citizens assembly is a really useful way of cutting through the party political vested interests that are too often heard.

A few years later, we heard about the work that was happening on the constitutional revisions in Ireland and about very long-standing, difficult issues such as the legislation on abortion, which were difficult to resolve in the parliamentary process because of the continued strong influence of organised religion. That influence was perhaps stronger on the parliamentary process than on the population as a whole, so a randomly selected citizens assembly was again able to cut through some of that in a way that the parliamentary process could not.

I very much welcome the work that is being done by the Citizens Assembly of Scotland. Like others, I thank everyone who participated in its work, whether as a selected member or as one of the people who helped to facilitate its work. Obviously, I welcome some of its recommendations with particular enthusiasm, such as the call for strong leadership on climate and sustainability.

I will finish by reflecting on one question that perhaps I still have doubts over. Perhaps the remit of our citizens assembly—simply to look at what could make Scotland a better country—was too broad. Perhaps, if we have more deliberative democracy in Scotland, we will learn in time that having a citizens assembly ask specific questions might be more likely to result in more tangible proposals coming to the public realm for debate. I mean that not as a criticism of the people who

took part, but as a suggestion that the broad remit could bear some questions.

I move amendment S5M-24165.2, to insert after “pandemic”:

“; welcomes the desire shown by the Assembly for Scotland to be a leader in environmental policy and in particular its recognition that climate change is increasing the risk of further pandemics”.

15:38

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Like other members, I add my thanks to the participants in the citizens assembly—the people whose names came out of the hat to serve on it, the people who organised the meetings, the experts who provided evidence and the secretariat and stewarding team who made it all happen.

People gave up a huge amount of time to work together, listen and learn. The report is a testimony to the efforts that were made and the clear impact of the work on those who took part. We should remember that they were strangers—people who had never met before—yet, within a short while, they were working together.

On the recommendations, I found it reassuring that, when 100 people sit in a room together and consider the evidence, they come up with a package of proposals that reads in many places very much like an extract from a Liberal Democrat policy document. Like the cabinet secretary, I hope and expect that the proposals will influence what emerges in my party’s manifesto ahead of May on mental health, homelessness, the climate emergency, the living wage for all, a basic income, health care hubs, mental health officers in every school and investment in renewables.

I thank the assembly members for drawing up that list, and I congratulate them on doing in a year what it has taken my party colleagues a decade or more to do. We all know how difficult it is to start with a blank sheet of paper, so it was an impressive and thorough process that the assembly members undertook to start with that, to consider and reconsider, to prioritise and to finalise.

My colleagues and I were disappointed that the assembly was brought into being by ministers announcing it as part of a package of measures to smooth the journey to independence. That was not the aim or intention of the people who were involved in the assembly.

Despite those misgivings, I very much welcome the way in which the cabinet secretary chose to describe the work and achievements of the citizens assembly in his opening remarks. There was nothing in what he said with which I would or could disagree, and I think that the motion and all

three amendments are worthy of support and perhaps reflect the sort of approach that members of the citizens assembly would expect us to take.

As others have observed, the recommendations challenge us. The demands for greater openness from the Scottish Government—whatever its political complexion—are unequivocal. There is a growing recognition of the need for that in Government but also in the Parliament.

On freedom of information, it is clear that greater openness is required. I do not want to make this a party political point, but we seem to have reached a juncture at which a renewed, refreshed and revitalised commitment to freedom of information is badly required. Yesterday, we debated education and again heard concerns about delays and ministerial involvement in the publication of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s independent report on Scottish education.

Looking further ahead, beyond whatever commitment each party makes to taking forward some or all of the recommendations in the report, I wonder whether there is a continued role for a citizens assembly in realising those ambitions. When a citizens assembly was established in Ireland, it was, as Patrick Harvie said, given the task of sorting out legislation on abortion. That worked well for examining evidence, building consensus and making a recommendation. As Patrick Harvie observed, it lifted the issue out of the entrenched position of party politics and vested interests.

However, with the time-bound work of our Citizens Assembly of Scotland, there was an inevitable limit on what could be done in a year—particularly the year just gone. For example, there is no recommendation on social care, even though that affects hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland and has dominated our deliberations in the Parliament during the pandemic.

I hope that the learning from the citizens assembly can be used to enable similar exercises to help to solve problems that we face. A climate emergency assembly is currently at work, and members of that assembly are getting to grips with some of the big questions about how we can fundamentally change our way of life. I hope that it will come forward with ideas and solutions to those big, complex and profoundly important issues. Having witnessed some of its deliberations to date, I am confident that it will.

Assemblies do not need to cover 100 things, but it is good for public life and good for the future of our country that we can draw on the committed and thorough work of a group of citizens working in an assembly to add to the work of our

democratically chosen Parliament for the benefit of us all.

I again thank all those who were involved in preparing a very thorough report—particularly the assembly members, who have shown what can be achieved when people come together with the aim of sharing ideas and identifying ways forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate, and we have some time in hand. Although speeches should be six minutes, a bit of leeway is available, including for anyone who is listening in and wishes to press their button in order to say something on the subject.

15:44

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): I am sorry, Presiding Officer; I was caught slightly unawares there. My apologies for that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is all right.

Shona Robison: I should have paid more attention to where I was in the speaking order.

I thank the members of the assembly and all those involved throughout the process for the time, effort and dedication that they have given in producing such a thought-provoking, comprehensive and wide-ranging report.

Simply from an academic point of view, it is fair to say that a citizens assembly changes on a fundamental level how our democracy works, by adding another level of representation. Although I take the point that, in other countries, citizens assemblies might have more power and so in effect act as a second chamber, here the journey has only just begun. Today we can decide where to take it next.

The title of the report alone—“Doing Politics Differently”—gives us an idea of the overall vision of the assembly and, by extension, the people of Scotland. It is a vision of politicians and Government coming together with common purpose, shaping policy and practice to reflect a shared vision of the kind of future Scotland that we want to see.

On a personal note, I am also struck by many of the similarities in that vision with the emerging themes of the work of the Social Justice and Fairness Commission, which I chair and which has also been continuing its work during the Covid restrictions. We will publish our report in due course, and I hope that it will add to the debate about the kind of future Scotland we want to see.

I welcome and support the recommendations in today’s motion. If it is agreed to—and I certainly welcome the level of consensus so far in the debate—that will ensure that members in the next parliamentary session and the next Government

are committed to a detailed consideration of and response to the substance and recommendations in the report. I absolutely accept what the cabinet secretary, Michael Russell, said about timing, which unfortunately does not allow for a response to the report in the remainder of this session. However, it will get us off to a very good start in the next session of Parliament in terms of how we go about our business.

I also agree with some of the comments on the breadth of the remit that the assembly was given on this, the first, occasion. In future, if we hone in on issues, we could focus the work of the assembly on thorny issues in a way that could perhaps allow it to rise above our party-political debates on some of those contentious matters. The role of the assembly could be very pertinent and helpful in that respect.

We saw a collaborative approach among the assembly members, although their views undoubtedly differed at times. The assembly brought together more than 100 Scottish citizens, who were approached to join on a random basis in order to create an assembly that was broadly representative of the wider Scottish population, in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, political attitudes and geography.

In the spirit of that collaborative approach, I urge all members to support today’s motion—first, in recognition of the assembly members’ commitment and, secondly, on the understanding that supporting today’s motion is the next step along the road, and not its destination.

I understand that the devil will be in the detail with regards to where we go next and that opinions may differ on how to plan and navigate the journey. I understand some members’ initial reluctance with regard to the assembly and the argument that it would become a vehicle to drive forward one party’s aims over another. However, having heard the contributions today and read the report, I think that those initial fears have been allayed. From the sound of it, that certainly seems to be the case.

I turn to what shape the scrutiny of and response to the report could look like. I would like to put forward a proposal that leans heavily on a model that was used in response to the climate change plan.

I think that we all recognise that our response to the climate emergency that we face depends on dealing with it holistically, across all sectors of society, instead of in isolation. That need for a holistic approach in Parliament’s inquiry into the climate change plan has helped to establish a model that I believe could act as a useful template for scrutinising and responding to the assembly’s report. That approach would allay any concerns

over who is in the driving seat, do justice to the effort of the assembly and live up to the report's title, "Doing Politics Differently".

For the climate change plan, Parliament has tasked four committees with scrutinising effectiveness, ambition and actions across all sectors of the plan. Each committee has been asked to look into the parts of the plan that relate to their remit, with the four committees due to report to Parliament next month.

Similarly, doing politics differently does not fit neatly under one subject heading. It spans, criss-crosses and seeks to inform various areas of our lives, what is important to us, what our aspirations and hopes are, and the kind of Scotland that we want to build in the future. Therefore, if the approach that we have taken to how we respond to the climate emergency is seen as successful, I would encourage the Parliament and the Government to consider a similar approach to our response to the assembly's work.

We owe it to the assembly, the people of Scotland and future generations to continue a journey that we have only just set off on, and to grasp the opportunity to empower our citizens assembly by listening and doing politics differently. I look forward to hearing the rest of the speeches this afternoon.

15:51

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I join other members in welcoming the work of those who participated in the work of the citizens assembly and in thanking them for their efforts during what has been an especially difficult period. Promoting engagement beyond the walls of Parliament is an important and necessary part of our democracy, and one in which we should all continue to be innovative.

An essential driving force behind the assembly has been the experts, advisers and support staff who have worked with it during these past months. We should also acknowledge their contribution.

With an election on the horizon, it is worth considering how voters can work with and represent their views to their Scottish Parliament more often than once every five years. Despite an uptick in 2016, the turnout for Holyrood elections has hovered at around the 50 per cent mark for some time. We should all acknowledge that that is disappointing. There is a vital need for the deliberations that take place and the decisions that are made on behalf of the people to have legitimacy, and for the people to feel that their voices have been heard and that they are engaged with and consulted. To do so might challenge and complicate the work of Parliament at times, but it also improves it.

Citizens assemblies can be part of that approach, but they will be far from the whole. The use of such assemblies clearly has strengths, but they can go only so far. We should continue to look for other avenues to connect with and build on—not just rest on—the work of the assembly.

That brings me to this year's parliamentary elections, which, like the assembly, are taking place against an unprecedented backdrop. Campaigning will be heavily restricted and we must acknowledge that there is real uncertainty about how turnout will look in a May poll. Campaigns from political parties to encourage postal voting have been more prominent than those from the electoral authorities, and that is concerning. We must ensure that engagement and participation are front and centre of what we do, that elections to the Parliament can be run successfully and that messages can get out to voters.

I was not wholly optimistic about the assembly from the outset. Although we have seen citizens engagement work well in other countries, the citizens assembly was sadly, but perhaps predictably, cast by the Scottish National Party as yet another initiative to advance the cause of breaking up the United Kingdom. That framing was not accidental, and it could scarcely have been more damaging to the assembly's legitimacy. From the First Minister's announcement to Joanna Cherry's remark that it was the "perfect way" towards separation, its role was jeopardised at its very inception. That is not, however, the fault of the participants in the assembly; they have given an honest and positive response that was based on the remit they were given.

I was pleased to be involved in the assembly's political panel, and to attend one of the meetings in Clydebank back in January last year. Unfortunately, the pandemic had an impact on opportunities for direct and open engagement, and the report is open about that.

The assembly has undoubtedly made a real effort to put forward considered views with a wide consensus. Its report also contains a number of stories from participants that reflect some of the problems that they have faced as well as their positive experiences of the process.

We have arrived at a set of recommendations that will find some agreement, but they will also challenge members of all parties. That is how we should consider even those recommendations that jar with our own views or positions—as challenges. We should consider the underlying problems that they highlight, measure our proposed solutions against those of the assembly and make a case for our decisions.

We should also recognise that the report highlighted issues that we cannot claim to be unfamiliar with: concerns with the delivery of education and training, the cost and availability of good-quality housing, and the need for a more sustainable future. Many of those are the bread-and-butter issues of a strong devolved Parliament. They may take up some amount of time in the chamber, but they are areas where progress has often seemed painfully slow and even wide consensus around solving issues seems to count for little. If the citizens assembly achieves one thing, it should be a focusing of our priorities to grasp the thistle of difficult problems and tackle them head on. The public do not accept long-standing failures because they are difficult to fix, and neither should we.

One conclusion that I have drawn is that those issues are, in the main, ones that have a deep impact on everyday lives. They underline the values held by many people—of community, of providing a hand up, of making public services work well and of investing in our future. Sadly, those are not the central priorities of the current Scottish Government. Those on the Scottish National Party benches, who once cast the assembly as a means to further their obsession with breaking up the United Kingdom, should reflect on that.

It is not difficult to find something in each of the assembly's recommendations. We should all recognise the areas where we need to see change. The report is passionate about progress, fulfilling potential, being innovative and creating a Scotland where the barriers to success are reduced and the ability to thrive is front and centre of our priorities, and where people are valued and opportunities are available to all. That that was the result, despite the efforts of some to turn the assembly into something different, is a credit to the participants.

The assembly suggests some ways to ensure that such engagement carries on and becomes a more accepted part of democratic decision making. That should be an important consideration, not just for this Parliament but for other Parliaments and our local authorities. Continuing the conversation in new and different ways will, I hope, be one of the legacies of the assembly.

15:56

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It would have been good to have had this debate in the chamber with interventions. I would be happy to take an intervention, although I realise that the system is not favourable towards that.

I, too, thank the citizens assembly for a very interesting report and for the opportunity to interact with its members on Monday. In particular, I commend the members for reaching consensus on so much of the report. I asked whether they thought it was realistic for a Parliament to be so consensual in its debates and activities. Claire Baker pointed out that a lot of what happens in Parliament is consensual, which is true, but I think that the panel accepted that that would be more difficult on big contentious issues such as independence and taxation.

I suspect that most of us would agree with the 10 points in the vision. The topics covered included integrity, honesty, job creation, health and social care services, a realistic living wage, tackling poverty, education, skills, and opportunities for young people. Not many will argue with those. I was intrigued that the assembly members wanted taxes to be simplified and understandable. A lot of us would like that, but it is pretty optimistic to think that we can achieve it—we have some way to go to do so.

I was also interested that they saw humility as a desirable quality for leaders. I am not sure that everyone at Holyrood would agree with that. It seemed to me that there is a suspicion of paid politicians and an assumption that we MSPs are out of touch with people. I accept that that may sometimes be the case, but I hope that it is not always so.

The start of the members' introduction says:

"We, the people of Scotland, present this report"

to Government and Parliament. That is a big statement, suggesting that the assembly is either more representative of, or more in touch with, the general population than elected MSPs are. We should take that kind of statement seriously. The assembly is a cross-section of society, but it is not elected, so are we questioning democracy if we follow that logic?

Some of the recommendations go down the same route. Recommendation 2 suggests that

"Government and Parliament should: ... make decisions jointly with citizens".

That raises a number of questions for me. Who are those citizens? Are they elected? If it meant more use of referenda, I would be open to that, but I am not sure that that is what it means.

Recommendation 3 suggests that there should be

"a 'house of citizens' to scrutinise government proposals and give assent to parliamentary bills."

It goes to say:

"There should be an oversight body to ensure this."

I accept that our system of democracy is not perfect and that—as other members have said—there is plenty of room for improvement. However, I think that, in general, this Parliament has engaged much more with ordinary citizens than Westminster has. For example, I was on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee during the passage of the bill that became the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. We spent a lot of time out and about and met a very wide range of people. We should absolutely listen more and engage more. However, we should be a little wary of introducing new bodies, which could actually undermine the democracy that most of us prize.

Recommendation 8 suggests that MSPs should do more

“to act on the views of ... constituents”

and should act less along party lines. We touched on that point at Monday’s meeting. However, I have some issues with that. Generally speaking, voters vote along party lines and the individual candidate probably makes a marginal difference in most people’s minds—they are expecting a package of policies that the party stands for.

There are also practical issues, such as how I can find out what my 70,000 constituents actually want, rather than simply hearing from the usual round of vociferous chairs of community councils. Even if I can find out what my constituents want on an issue, what happens if they want lower taxes when I ask today but they want more to be spent on the national health service and local services when I ask tomorrow? People’s wants can be inconsistent with one another, and one of our jobs as MSPs is to get the balance right between competing priorities.

The party system has its disadvantages and I believe that we all need to stand up to our leaders and whips at times and just say no. However, I struggle to see a better way of working. When I lived in Nepal in the 1980s, political parties were banned, so theoretically everyone who was elected was independent. However, that did not work.

I could have spent my whole speech talking about democracy in general, but I would like to go on to the “Tax and Economy” section of the report. I agree with a lot of the general points and aspirations and I think that some of the things that the report suggests are already happening—or we are at least trying to make them happen. For example, recommendation 29 proposes investing in specific industries and I think that the enterprise agencies and the Scottish National Investment Bank are aiming to do just that. Similarly, recommendation 31 talks about centres of excellence in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects and recommendation

32 refers to the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises. I whole-heartedly agree with those points.

There is a clear theme in that section, which is that taxation is not well understood; that is mentioned in recommendations 23, 25, 26, 27, and 28. We need to take that point seriously; perhaps a future finance committee could take the issue up. We need to be more up front with citizens in saying that, generally speaking, better services mean higher taxes. If we want a national care service with better paid staff, which I do, let us be honest and up front with folk and tell them that it will cost 1p or 2p—or whatever it might be—on income tax.

To finish on a point of complete agreement with the assembly, we absolutely should clamp down on tax “evaders and avoiders”. I fear that that is easier said than done, but it ties in with the desire for a simpler, more understandable tax system. It would mean fewer loopholes for rich individuals or rich football clubs to try to sneak their way through.

I very much appreciate the time and effort that the members of the citizens assembly have contributed in producing the report that we are debating. The topic has been very big and wide ranging and I agree with Patrick Harvie that it would be interesting to see how the assembly would tackle a more specific topic, as I think has happened in Ireland.

16:03

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to contribute to the debate. Scotland’s first citizens assembly—in its first report—is rich in ideas and full of ambition and energy, and this short debate should be the start of our engagement. I thank the members of the assembly and the secretariat, as well as the experts and advisers who informed their deliberations. It has been a challenging year for them to undertake that work, but they have persevered and produced an excellent report.

I was delighted to meet some of the members of the citizens assembly on Monday, at an event—to which John Mason referred—that was hosted by the Presiding Officer. They talked about how much they had enjoyed the experience and how, for some of them, it was the first time that they had engaged in policy discussions and decision making or had spoken in public forums. The report, in addition to setting the policy proposals, effectively reflects the richness of the experience for each member.

I pressed the members of the assembly on whether there had been disagreement on any issues. Although only very small numbers of

members disagreed on the majority of proposals, we can identify areas where there was a bit more dissent, and I was curious as to why that was. Were there concerns over costs or policy, or was there a recognition that there can be tensions between different policies and proposals?

Assembly members emphasised that they worked collaboratively and sought and achieved consensus. Many of them said that they changed their minds and were persuaded by others' ideas and proposals. It was that openness and willingness to listen to others that allowed for such a degree of consensus to be reached in the report.

The assembly has produced a strong agenda for the future of Scotland, covering key areas of social policy, agreeing that change is needed and offering a package of ideas. The challenge given to its members was to think about Scotland in the 21st century and about how public discourse and knowledge could be improved to support more informed decision making.

The report talks about putting aside the issues that divide us and seeking common ground. There was a conscious decision to seek agreement and work together, trying to find areas where members could come up with proposals that would improve Scotland.

Assembly members spoke about the lack of trust in politicians and politics. The report says:

"Recent years have seen us lose confidence and trust in politics and we wanted to hear the facts, the honest reality, the truth of how Scotland is governed and the difficult choices that we face".

That is an important message for the Parliament. There is a need to improve scrutiny, accountability and transparency. The report represents a call for us to stop tinkering around the edges and to start tackling the big change that people are asking for. The assembly proposes radical change for the economy, with support for a four-day week, a legal living wage and a ban on zero-hours contracts. Regardless of whether members across the chamber agree with those policies, it is clear that the assembly has identified areas of our society where change is needed.

One quote used in the report is that

"we need systemic changes, in healthcare, social policy, employment, and protection of the vulnerable."

Participative democracy is increasingly used as a way for citizens to be involved in decision making. It can support better outcomes, help Governments and Parliaments to take hard decisions and build trust between citizens and Government. As other members have said, the Irish citizens assembly, which addressed the country's eighth amendment, provides a good example. On a significantly divisive issue in

Ireland, its citizens assembly made an important contribution to the debate on abortion, providing space for an open and honest debate to happen, which resulted in a huge societal change for Ireland.

Scotland's citizens assembly was given a broad, fairly open task. On that, the report says:

"An important and unusual feature of this Assembly has been the very broad nature of the remit ... and it has not been possible to cover issues in the depth that would have come with a more narrowly drawn agenda."

As for how to progress the assembly's work, it would be beneficial for the Parliament were a future assembly to commission further work on some of the report's recommendations. At the meeting on Monday, there was a suggestion from assembly members to have working groups or sub-groups. A different approach would have been to focus on a limited number of issues and to look at them in greater depth. It is worth considering how the recommendations can be afforded that level of scrutiny.

I am looking forward to the publication of the research findings and the social research report that is expected in September. That could help to inform us on how a model could be progressed.

The citizens assembly is reminiscent of the founding principles of this Parliament, with its proportionate voting system, a less confrontational chamber and an expectation that politicians would have to reach a consensus on policies and that our membership would be diverse.

We have come some way from those ideals and increasingly divisive issues dominate our national debate. The citizens assembly members themselves describe the assembly as

"a roadmap for doing politics differently in the future."

Scotland's Climate Assembly is on-going. It was established under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and the Scottish Government is required to "publish a statement" responding to the climate assembly's report within six months. A different status was given to that assembly when it was established.

It is important that an expectation is placed on the Government's response and the Parliament's response. We need to demonstrate how citizens' engagement can drive effective change.

The report that we are discussing today must not be left to gather dust. Although the motion says that it will be for the Parliament or the next Government to take forward the work in the next session, we should agree a formal response.

I support the Labour amendment. I am pleased that we are reaching consensus this afternoon and that all the amendments are expected to be

passed. For those who are listening to the messages that are coming from the citizens assembly, it is important that we all work together to deliver the best possible future for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Bob Doris is the last speaker in the open debate.

16:10

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): As others have done, I thank the 100 Scottish citizens in our Citizens Assembly of Scotland, who came together to consider how to find a consensus on the future of Scotland. I also thank all those who have supported the assembly's discussions and deliberations over eight sessions between October 2019 and December 2020—no easy task, given that much of the assembly took place during the height of the first lockdown caused by Covid-19.

I suppose that it is stating the obvious, but if 100 citizens can come together and have a sensible and serious discussion on how to take Scotland forward, there is clearly a challenge to us all—the 129 MSPs who sit in the Parliament—to be able to do likewise. There is a lesson to us all about a political culture that emphasises the winning of a debate and the scoring of a political point rather than a discussion about how to work together as a Parliament, even when we do not necessarily agree, and to do our best for Scotland irrespective of our differences.

The report makes powerful recommendations on income and poverty, such as making

“the payment of the living wage a legal requirement for all employers”

and making “zero-hour contracts illegal”. I particularly like the recommendation around defining poverty, which is to

“ask citizens three questions: do you have a roof over your head? Can you heat your house? Will you be able to put hot food on the table? If the answer is no, you are in poverty.”

I am sure that we appreciate the need for technical definitions of poverty. The commonly accepted definition of “relative poverty” is:

“individuals living in households whose equivalised income is below 60 percent of median income in the same year.”

The definition goes on to say that

“this is a measure of whether those in the lowest income households are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole.”

Sometimes housing costs are included, sometimes not, and there is a different definition of “absolute poverty”. As I said, there are good reasons for those definitions—I get that—but what the citizens assembly sought to do at a stroke was

to cut through technical definitions to get to the heart of our citizens' lived experience of the reality of poverty. It is a salient reminder to our Parliament that we have to find ways to do exactly the same thing.

I welcome the recommendation to increase

“the minimum wage for young people aged 16 to 24 to the living wage.”

I appreciate that that power is reserved, but young people, by and large, have a raw deal. I want to say a bit about students. I get that there are mature students out there, but many students are young. Particularly during Covid-19, summer jobs, jobs at Easter, non-term-time and part-time jobs have disappeared like snow off a dyke, yet students have no access to universal credit. We have to systematically consider the impact of changing social conditions on our young people, and I am sure that the citizens assembly could do that well.

There is a variety of recommendations about how we can potentially get more powers to the Scottish Parliament—on immigration and international relations—or greater powers over tax. I am minded that, during his contribution—which was very good—Anas Sarwar said that he would like the question of what our devolution settlement should look like to be studied. At the start of the debate, the Conservatives spoke about differences of opinion. Anas Sarwar and I have different opinions about whether Scotland should be an independent nation but, irrespective of that, we have to find ways of reconciling those differences to come together as a Parliament.

If Scotland does not vote for an independence referendum at the elections in May, we should of course consider what our devolution settlement should look like. However, I hope that we agree that Scotland should have a second independence referendum and assert its national sovereignty. Irrespective of our different views, we should be able to sensibly, maturely and professionally come together to work in Scotland's best interest.

That was a constitutional point, but I will finish by talking about something that is absolutely not about the constitution—the assembly's recommendations on apprenticeships and opportunities for young school leavers and graduates in trades and skills, as well as academic pursuits, which matters were of particular interest to the citizens assembly. The recommendations provide an early opportunity for the Scottish Government to measure itself in relation to, for example, the young persons guarantee, its policies with Skills Development Scotland, and further and higher education. Irrespective of our political beliefs and who forms the next Scottish Government, the Government and the Parliament

should be required to give themselves a report card on how we are tackling some of the significant and serious issues that have been raised by the citizens assembly.

I look forward to the Scottish Government and our Parliament coming together to measure up to the aspirations of the citizens assembly, because it is up to both the Government and the Parliament to deliver in order to meet those aspirations. Let us be straightforward—Governments of any political hue, whether in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or the rest of the UK, will not always meet targets or achieve the outcomes that they set for themselves. Quite rightly, Opposition parties should scrutinise and hold Governments to account, but they should also propose constructive solutions. The Parliament should work in partnership to get to where we want to be as a country, and the Citizens Assembly of Scotland has shown us a route map to do that.

This afternoon's debate has been very helpful, and I look forward to learning more about the future work of the citizens assembly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:16

Patrick Harvie: I am pleased to have had the chance to take part in the debate and that, broadly, it has been consensual. Several members have referred to the fact that, in the inception of the citizens assembly, there was a bit of a danger that it would get caught up in big, binary constitutional debates in which we all already have our entrenched positions. Other than one or two slightly grumpy comments today, it seems as though most people have moved on from that and recognised that the citizens assembly has the potential to enrich our national debate in new ways.

I will reflect on one or two of my recollections of the binary constitutional debate that we had in 2014. In many of the public meetings at which I spoke, I had the strong impression—and I still believe this—that a great many people in Scotland were capable of disagreeing in good spirit and seeing both sides of an argument. Whichever way they ended up voting, they were able to engage with both sides of the argument. Most people do not engage in politics in a rigid, binary way. That is still true, and will be true again if Scotland's national debate returns to the question of independence. That is one of the reasons why deliberative processes, such as citizens assemblies, can enrich our national debate. They bring in people who are not already seeing things through a rigid, binary frame and thinking, "I'm in this camp, you're in that camp, and that's why we

disagree". Citizens assemblies can get beyond such thinking and, in this case, it has done so.

Claire Baker reflected on her experience of speaking to some members of the assembly who were actively engaging in political debate for the first time. That engagement is to be welcomed.

As several members have said, in this debate we will all find things with which to agree and disagree. Some people will be enthusiastic about rent controls and others less so. Some people will support what the assembly has said about climate change, but others may be a little more sceptical. In the report, I can find several references to economic thought that is clearly rooted in growth ideology that I do not share. None of that is the point, because the purpose of the assembly is not to decide on and implement specific policies but to enrich our debate in ways that we as elected politicians cannot do on our own—to throw open the doors.

I am reminded of my experience of the first session—before I was elected as a member of the Scottish Parliament. I was a campaigner for the repeal of section 28, which was, from my point of view, a nasty, pernicious and homophobic hangover piece of legislation. Getting rid of it became a very difficult process. A deeply divisive campaign was run against my community's human rights. However, it felt as though this Parliament's doors were open. I was able to engage with the political and committee processes and to give evidence to MSPs as a witness.

That sense of its being a Parliament whose doors are open and in which the citizens of Scotland are able to participate has always been an important part of my reason for having supported the creation of the Scottish Parliament in the first place. We do not always get it right, but we must never stop innovating and finding new ways to throw our doors open. The greater use of citizens assemblies is undoubtedly a part of that.

It is no great secret that John Mason and I disagree pretty fundamentally on a great many issues, but in his speech he agreed with something that I said, so I will agree with something that he said—that people can want incoherent or inconsistent things. He is absolutely right about that and it is one of the reasons why I am not drawn to the idea of Government by referendum on specific measures—the idea that every tax policy, every spending policy and every piece of legislation should be subject to a referendum. Referendums are for putting to the people the questions that we cannot resolve through the Parliamentary process—the big, overarching choices, such as which path our country should take. All that is enhanced by a rich national debate.

Another point that Mr Mason talked about was whether citizens assemblies should evolve into a role that is akin to that of a second, revising chamber. I think that there is great merit in that. Yes, there are questions about the legitimacy of somebody who has been randomly selected, instead of chosen by an electorate, but, for goodness' sake, we should compare that to what the UK has by way of a second chamber, in which people are given jobs for life and can never again be held accountable. The idea of a citizens assembly as a revising chamber—even if set up a bit like a committee, to examine and revise one piece of legislation—has, I think, great merit.

On issues from the climate assembly to the potential drafting of a future constitution for Scotland, and on divisive political questions such as drugs policy—which elected Parliaments often fail to address in a coherent way—a great many questions would be greatly enhanced by the wider use of deliberative and participative processes such as citizens assemblies.

Finally, I once again thank all those who have contributed to the work of the assembly, and I look forward to Scotland's national debate being further enriched in new ways by the continued use of participative processes to challenge as well as inform us.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Alex Rowley will close for Labour.

16:23

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to be closing for Labour in the debate on "Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland". I offer our thanks to everyone who participated in the assembly, and I hope that more work can be done to bring people into active participation in politics and looking at the issues that impact on us in our country.

Back in September 2019, I opened a debate for the Labour Party indicating our support for the principles of the Citizens Assembly of Scotland. In that debate, I said:

"Too often I find myself having to advocate for democracy".—[*Official Report*, 11 September 2019; c 50.]

In the period since then, we have seen massive changes in our world. The pandemic has changed our way of life. It has created problems with how we participate in democracy and it has already drastically changed how we do politics. On top of that, there have been assaults on democracy around the world: a military coup in Myanmar, mass protests in Hong Kong and the storming of the US Capitol by far-right activists—all that and more in a very short space of time. Such drastic events in our world should highlight why the principles of deliberative democracy and their use

in Scotland should be welcomed. More democracy is no bad thing, and in its absence we sometimes see terrible impacts.

I noted back in 2019 that the use of citizens assemblies is a proven and respected method when it is done correctly. They can help services to work together and allow us as a country to develop our culture of citizenship. One of their key benefits is that they can allow complex issues to be explored in depth by the people who are directly affected by them. I remember hearing from those involved in the Irish citizens assembly who had advice and lessons for us. Although the assembly has done well, there is definitely room for improvement and there are opportunities to learn from the assembly, particularly for the Scottish Government.

One of the key pieces of advice from the Irish assembly was to ensure public participation and media buy-in. I think that that has been somewhat missed, as the public were not particularly aware of the citizens assembly and the media seemed to be uninterested. That is not to criticise the work of the assembly—I acknowledge that we have come through a difficult time when the focus has been on Covid—but it is important that, where improvements can be made, they must be made, if we are to continue using this method of participative democracy effectively.

Those issues were known beforehand, and the Scottish Government could have done more to ensure greater engagement and wider promotion, because it is crucial, if this is the way forward, that the public are aware and engaged and that the press want to report these things. Further to that, the success of the assembly will only be truly known if the Government takes on board at least some of the recommendations and is able to explain what it is taking on board and why. It is all well and good having participative democracy for the sake of it, but proof of its success will be the action that is taken based on the assembly's recommendations.

Labour's amendment welcomes the bold and ambitious recommendations that have been put forward to tackle inequality in Scotland, including capping private sector rents, making energy efficiency measures more affordable and investing in green infrastructure, and it calls on the Scottish Government to give an annual statement to the Parliament on what action has been taken in response to the work of the assembly. If we do that, we can build confidence in the assembly and confidence that, when people give up their time and energy, it will be worth while.

As they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the proof of the success of the assembly will be whether it makes a difference. Did the Government listen? Did other political

parties listen and what action did they take? The answers to those questions will take time but, if we truly want to change the way we do politics and the way our democracy works, we will have to demonstrate that we have listened and that people giving up their time to participate in citizens assemblies are not wasting their time but are contributing to tackling the big issues or at least building consensus in the country on how to tackle the big issues of our time. I thank everyone who gave up their time to bring forward the report.

There are some big issues in our country on which there is not only division but outright conflict. If, as a nation, we want to address such issues, the approach of bringing people together to examine the issues, find ways through and build consensus has to be the way forward.

In conclusion, I thank everyone who was involved. It is now over to the politicians and political parties to demonstrate that we have listened and are committed to acting on the report and, even more, to a new way of doing politics. Time will tell.

16:30

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I do not have a long time left in this Parliament and I want to use my remarks this afternoon to reflect on the state of our politics. I hope that I will not completely break this afternoon's consensus, but I will be candid and say things that might make some members uncomfortable.

The report of the citizens assembly urges that we should do our politics differently and, in particular, that our politics should be more firmly rooted in the values of

"integrity, honesty, humility and transparency".

Why do we not do our politics differently? Why do our citizens, when they examined Scottish politics—as they have, in the form of the assembly—conclude that we lack integrity, honesty, humility and transparency?

What are the forces that have driven us to a politics that lacks integrity, is dishonest, proud and self-satisfied rather than humble, and is opaque and secretive rather than open and transparent? Well, it is the goddamn constitution, isn't it? Our politics has become corrosive and toxic because of its obsession with the constitution. It is corrosive because it erodes trust and toxic because it puts people into artificial, binary camps where, instead of working with one another, we just shout at one another.

Democracy rests on the fundamental point of trust that the people's representatives care about the same issues that the people they represent care about. The people of Scotland care about

jobs, skills, housing and schools. They care about the impact of the pandemic on our mental health and wellbeing and they care deeply about what kind of economy we will emerge into when we finally get out of lockdown. Are those the priorities of SNP ministers? No, I do not think so. Is this a Parliament that has been consumed, as it should have been, by debates about jobs, skills, housing and schools? No. Even when we debate schools, as we did yesterday, we do not argue about how to improve them or how to raise educational standards; we talk about how to drag and force SNP ministers, against their will, to publish the results of an international review of what has gone wrong in schools on their watch.

Is it any wonder that our citizens conclude that our politics lacks transparency? We should not have to debate SNP secrecy and cover-ups; we should be debating the real issues of substance that matter to people's children, as our school standards slide down the international league tables.

Therefore, I agree with the citizens assembly that our politics needs integrity and honesty, but anyone who looks at the way in which the governing party has treated this Parliament's inquiries into the Government's handling of complaints of sexual misconduct would search in vain for a glimmer of integrity or honesty.

I agree with the citizens assembly that our politics lacks transparency. The SNP is the only Government in Europe that sought to use the pandemic as an excuse to insulate itself from freedom of information rules. Just last week, we were treated to a "Through the Looking-Glass" moment, when the Lord Advocate tried to explain away the disgrace that innocent men were maliciously prosecuted, by pretending that, somehow, it was a malicious prosecution in which no individual acted with malice.

The citizens assembly that produced "Doing Politics Differently" ended much better than it began. It was announced as part of a package of measures that was designed by the SNP to accelerate a second independence referendum. That was a pity, as I think that the minister would now concede, at least privately. The idea of citizens assemblies has merit. As an experiment in shining light in dark corners and on stubborn problems of public policy, it should be repeated, but not, I would urge, on the goddamn constitution. Why not a citizens assembly on the national shame of Scotland's drugs deaths? Why not a citizens assembly on the mental health crisis that we now face or on the future of social care? All are problems that we talk about in the Scottish Parliament from time to time but which we have manifestly failed to resolve.

In the end, “Doing Politics Differently” turned out to be not very interested in the idea of independence. As Dean Lockhart pointed out in his opening remarks, the vast majority of the citizens assembly’s recommendations fall within existing devolved competence. The message seems clear: let us have a politics that focuses on the things that make a meaningful difference to people’s lives.

I have voiced my criticisms in my remarks, but let me end on a much more positive note. As we know, this is a Parliament of minorities. None of us can get anything done on our own. Unless we build bridges with colleagues in other parties, we can pass no law, make no change and win no vote. Of the four values that are set out at the beginning of the citizens assembly report, the one that we need to bring to those attempts to reach out and build bridges is humility.

The Parliament’s best legislation bears the hallmarks of genuine cross-party collaboration. I think of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill, and members from across the Opposition parties working together in the Social Security Committee to improve a bill that in its first iteration lacked the ambition that we thought it needed. That was near the beginning of the current session. Now, at its end, I would cite the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill as an example of members of the Government and Opposition coming together, not to trade blows but to fix problems in the legislation.

The way in which we dealt with the bills on child poverty and hate crime meets the four tests championed by the citizens assembly: integrity, honesty, humility and transparency. When we act with those values in mind, it brings out the best in us all. We can do it—we can do politics differently. When we choose not to do it, it is exactly that—a choice.

The Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary to conclude the debate.

16:37

Michael Russell: I want to make one point about what we have just heard because I do not want to allow the debate to descend into the place where, regrettably, Adam Tomkins has gone. I want to make a comparison between 1999 and 2021. I have been in the Parliament—with the exception of four years—throughout that time. If we could go back to 1999 in some form of time machine, we would see a very different form of politics and a different type of democracy. I think that we would say to ourselves, “Thank goodness for the Scottish Parliament. It has changed things and moved things on”. One of the reasons why it has moved things on is because we have regularly recognised the legitimacy of different views. What

we have just heard was essentially an attempt to demonise the legitimacy of another point of view. That is regrettable. It was unnecessary and wrong.

I want to dwell on the positivity of the debate. I issue a challenge to all my fellow members who have listened to the debate today, including you, Presiding Officer. Change in democracy should challenge us as politicians. We discovered in 1999 how difficult it was to do politics differently. I came into the Scottish Parliament having been the chief executive of the SNP and opposite me on the Labour benches was someone who had been chief executive of the Scottish Labour Party—indeed, he became First Minister for a time. We discovered that it was really hard to work against the grain of politics as it was done elsewhere and as we had been doing it. Politics is often—then and now—confrontational, point scoring and a case of the winner takes all. The winner expects to take all.

We also use language that puts people off, even if they are not put off by that nature of politics. I want to be nice about Anas Sarwar’s contribution. However, he said that he hoped that the citizens assembly would

“hold our feet to the fire”,

and that is the kind of phrase that people do not like. Who would volunteer to work in a system in which we expect to have our feet held to the fire? We have a way of talking and of operating—not all the time, but we have it—that is not conducive to engaging people and bringing them with us. A culture of confrontation will not produce positive change, but a culture of co-operation might do so. However, it is hard to establish, and the longer that one has been in politics and the more one knows about it—and perhaps the higher one has risen up the greasy pole—the harder it is to recognise that culture of confrontation and work against it.

I agree with Adam Tomkins that, when we find ways of working together, we can make it work. We did that at the start of the pandemic, on the two bills that I was honoured to take through the Parliament. The approach was that we were all in it together and had things that we needed to do together. Regrettably, that approach has broken down. It really broke down over the vaccination programme, when there was an attempt to exploit the situation for political gain. It is always a difficult time in the Parliament when we are coming up close to an election. Tensions run high and people say things that they regret. However, we tried that approach of working together, and it worked for us.

Interestingly, on the point that Adam Tomkins made about the FOI measure that we proposed because of the demands of the pandemic, when it

appeared that the measure did not have majority support, we moved away from that. Therefore, it is far from some huge stain on our character. It was proposed as a recognition of exception and, when the proposal did not have majority support, it was removed, and rightly so.

Our culture of confrontation is still in evidence, and we need to do something about it. We also need to understand that the language that we use and what we choose to do are part of the problem. We need to understand a third truism, which is that democracy is never static or perfect and that it continues to change. The abbé Sieyès, the intellectual father of the French revolution, started a great deal off with a pamphlet that was called “What Is the Third Estate?” At the start of that pamphlet, he posed three famous questions. He asked:

“What is the third estate?”,

to which the reply was, “Everything”. He asked:

“What has it been hitherto in the political order?”,

to which the reply was “Nothing”. Then he asked:

“What does it desire to be?”,

to which the answer was, “Something”.

Again and again, the challenge is to consider who in our debates is, in essence, nothing. Who deserves to and should take over the debate and become something, as the driving force of our democracy? The answer now is the type of direct democracy that we see in the citizens assembly.

However, that brings a challenge to each one of us in politics, and John Mason expressed the nervousness about it well. It is not even a question of sharing and still less one of holding feet to the fire; it is about a new order replacing what we have, and that will happen in time. Therefore, although I, too, will not be in the next Parliament, the challenge to it is to accept much of the what—although not all of it, as there are bits about it that we would want to debate—and to accept the coming challenge of how democracy takes place and to keep moving.

To do that, we will have to rise above the sort of regrettable things that we have heard today. I am glad that it was only from a few people, but they have been there. Regrettably, Adam Tomkins and Jamie Halcro Johnston were the divisive voices of the past. Today, we have the chance to be the voice of the future.

We are moving towards the type of democracy in the citizens assembly. It will be difficult and it will not be an even process but, in 20 or 25 years, democracy will be different just as, in Scotland at least, it is different now from what it was in 1999. We need to progress, not regress. The UK is regressing democratically, but I hope that Scotland

will continue to progress democratically, and that the progress will be with a citizens assembly.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes our debate on the report of the citizens assembly. We are actually ahead of time, so I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders to bring forward decision time to now. I call on the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be brought forward to 4.44 pm.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

16:44

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We move to decision time.

The first question is, that amendment S5M-24165.1, in the name of Dean Lockhart, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, on “Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens’ Assembly of Scotland”, be agreed to. Are we agreed? I ask members to put “No” in the chat box if they disagree.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-24165.3, in the name of Anas Sarwar, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, on “Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens’ Assembly of Scotland”, be agreed to. Are we agreed? Again, I ask members just to put N or “No” in the chat box if they disagree.

There is disagreement, so we will move to a vote. In order to vote, members will have to access the voting app, so I will suspend the meeting for a few moments. Broadcasting will be switched off, and we will come back when members have accessed the voting app.

16:45

Meeting suspended.

16:49

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Some members might still be joining us, but we will move to the vote.

The question is, that amendment S5M-24165.3, in the name of Anas Sarwar, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, on “Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens’ Assembly of Scotland”, be agreed to.

This will be a two-minute vote, simply because it is being done entirely online and it will be safer to allow two minutes. Members can exercise their vote now.

The vote is now closed. I ask any member who was not able to exercise their vote to let me know by commenting in the chat function.

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise—I had a problem logging in to the platform. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Wheelhouse. I will make sure that your vote is added.

The Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance (Ivan McKee): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was also unable to vote. I would have voted yes, too

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McKee. That vote will also be added to the voting register.

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the vote on amendment S5M-24165.3, in the name of Anas Sarwar, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, is: For 86, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-24165.2, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, on “Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens’ Assembly of Scotland”, be agreed to. If members do not agree, please put “No” in the chat function.

There is disagreement, so there will be a division. This will be a two-minute division.

The vote is now closed. If members had any difficulties in exercising their vote during that division, they should let me know by putting a comment in the chat function.

I am just checking to see whether any member wants to raise a point of order. No one does.

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 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)

Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the vote on amendment 24165.2, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, is: For 116, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

There was an indication that there was going to be a division, but the amendment has been carried unanimously.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, on "Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland", as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed? We are not agreed.

There will be a division. I will allow two minutes for the division, as we are doing this entirely online.

The vote is now closed. Please let me know in the chat function if you were not able to vote or if you had any other problems and need to raise a point of order.

I need to make a correction to the vote on amendment S5M-24165.3, in the name of Anas Sarwar. I read out the result of the division as: For 86, Against 29, Abstentions 0. That should have been: For 87, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)

Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S5M-24165, in the name of Michael Russell, on “Doing Politics Differently: The Report of the Citizens’ Assembly of Scotland”, as amended, is: For 89, Against 0, Abstentions 29.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes *Doing Politics Differently - the Report of the Citizens’ Assembly of Scotland*; extends its thanks to the members of the Assembly for their hard work, efforts, commitment and collaborative approach, especially given the inevitable difficulties caused for the Assembly by the COVID-19 pandemic; welcomes the desire shown by the Assembly for Scotland to be a leader in environmental policy and in particular its recognition that climate change is increasing the risk of further pandemics; commends the report for further consideration by Members in the next session of the Parliament, informed by a full response from the incoming Scottish administration, while recognising that different political parties will take a different view on the recommendations of the report; welcomes the bold and ambitious recommendations put forward to tackle inequality in Scotland, including capping private sector rents, making energy efficiency measures more affordable and investing in green infrastructure, and calls on the Scottish Government to give an annual statement to the Parliament on what action has been taken in response to the work of the Assembly.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Men's Sheds Movement

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-23991, in the name of Maurice Corry, on Scotland's men's sheds movement. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. Members who wish to speak in the debate should type R in the chat box now.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the role of the Men's Sheds Movement in encouraging health and wellbeing; understands that since 2013, Men's Sheds have provided the opportunity to learn new skills through a variety of activities and offers a social, safe and welcoming space to meet people and find information on local projects within the community, including those in the West of Scotland; notes with regret the impact of COVID-19 on the Men's Sheds Movement, which has led to the temporary closure of all Men's Sheds in keeping with lockdown restrictions, amid a sharp increase in the number of people experiencing feelings of loneliness and social isolation; appreciates that despite the challenges this has presented, the Scottish Men's Sheds Association has continued its work to assist and support men's shedders to forge social connections virtually and in April 2020 welcomed Sir Harry Burns as its new patron to promote and represent the movement; welcomes the £30,000 funding from the Scottish Government to help those Sheds whose fundraising has been most severely affected by the pandemic, and notes calls for all MSPs to share in celebrating the work of Scottish Men's Sheds and to continue to protect its place in communities through this pandemic and for many years to come.

17:05

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to bring the motion for debate today. Scotland's men's sheds movement has become an ever-important fixture across our local communities. Each shed is living proof that every person is of value and has something to contribute.

The movement could not have developed as it has without the work of the Scottish Men's Shed Association. The SMSA has over 180 registered men's sheds that are either up and running or in development, spread across all 32 council areas. The association, along with Age Scotland and other partners, has long raised awareness of why those groups deserve our full attention. Run completely by volunteers, men's sheds are open, welcoming places for men to put their capabilities to practical use by learning and sharing new skills, which can be as wide ranging as woodworking, furniture repair, gardening and cookery. More than that, these spaces provide those who attend, who are known as shedders, the opportunity for shoulder-to-shoulder friendship and camaraderie.

My region of West Scotland is privileged to have such sheds at the heart of its communities. There is the amazing work of the Clydebank men's shed and the Saltcoats men's shed, which I have visited in recent months. Both have done well in a recent competition. There is also the Garnock valley men's shed in Kilbirnie. I was particularly impressed with some veterans who had joined the one in Kilbirnie, one of whom said that, with the help of his colleagues, he had managed to turn his life around.

Free from any obligations or expectations, members have a real sense of ownership of their sheds, each of which is shaped by their own interests and accomplishments. That ethos underpins the entire movement and points to why it is so clearly successful. That is especially the case from a health and wellbeing perspective. An Age Scotland study on the so-called "shed effect" showed that many shedders have found renewed purpose in their lives through their involvement, which they feel has had a direct and positive impact on their mental and physical health. For some, their local shed is a way to overcome loneliness or mental ill health in a place where they feel at home. For others, it is a valuable way to use their time in retirement or a welcome distraction from life's burdens.

The local, asset-based voluntary model of the men's sheds movement is key to how it impacts people's lives. A ground-breaking study by Glasgow Caledonian University recently captured that by highlighting that the key value of men's sheds—that they are run by men, for men—means that formalising or pigeonholing men's sheds into a healthcare role is not the answer. Instead of being overburdened, shedders, who already face challenges, deserve to be equipped with greater, long-term financial support to further galvanise them to do what they already do well: engage men in their own health management entirely on an informal and voluntary basis.

The Scottish Men's Shed Association is passionate about its aim of attracting groups who can be more hidden or harder to reach. In that regard, its recent work to forge links with veterans—which is beginning to take place in co-operation with the veterans of the unforgotten forces consortium—will, I am sure, be a valuable way for ex-service personnel to reintegrate into their communities. I sincerely look forward to seeing the outcome of that work.

The role of men's sheds in improving health and wellbeing means that they have, over time, become an important part of their community fabric. As well as offering a space in which to signpost local services and information, shedders make a tangible difference to community life, whether through local tree planting, fundraisers for

local charities or the creation of a community garden. Their warm and vibrant involvement, which emanates inclusivity, is a prime example of grass-roots community empowerment at its best.

As so many community organisations have, men's sheds have felt the impact of Covid-19 keenly, and, in keeping with guidance, sheds continue to be closed through the lockdown. On-going pressures on fundraising and the acquisition of suitable premises have grown more prevalent, which has presented challenges for sheds in maintaining sustainability and resourcefulness. Therefore, the Scottish Government's funding grant of £30,000 in response to those challenges is welcome, and I am sure it will go some way towards assisting groups.

With advice from the SMSA and Age Scotland, shedders have sought to stay connected, whether through phone calls, social media or buddy systems, and they have helped the more vulnerable in new and innovative ways. Some have collected shopping for those who are shielding, and some have helped with personal protective equipment production. Others have made bird tables and benches for the benefit of local care homes. Moreover, the Inverclyde men's shed group, who were winners of the SMSA shed of the year 2020—well done to them—helped to organise a soup shed for local families and constructed street food larders for Belville Community Garden. As the chairman said, such small acts of kindness and markers of community resilience show that men's sheds are certainly worthy of our appreciation.

The pandemic has emphasised what we already know to be true: men's sheds are invaluable as a community-based organisation. They are vital in forging connections and enhancing men's health and wellbeing. At the same time, the movement recasts our idea of ageing and later life, showing that positivity and opportunity know no bounds. Despite the additional stress that Covid-19 has placed on shedders, they have learned that nothing can be taken for granted, especially our connections with those around us.

Far from taking the movement for granted, it is for policymakers and stakeholders to ensure that men's sheds are supported in the long term. As they and other community-based organisations come alongside older people as we emerge from the pandemic, I hope that tailored guidance will be forthcoming from the Scottish Government to assist them. They are a clear asset to our communities and a critical way of safeguarding wellbeing, and our response must reflect that.

17:12

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate Maurice Corry on securing debating time. I am delighted to be speaking about the crucial role that men's sheds play in communities across Scotland.

After a lifetime in full-time employment, retirement can be daunting for many. Without the daily routine and social circle that most jobs entail—or used to, pre-lockdown—newly retired men often face loneliness, social isolation and an overall sense of loss. That problem is exacerbated by the steady decline in community engagement across much of the western world in recent decades, which is exemplified by an aggregate loss in membership and number of volunteers in many of our civic organisations.

I therefore welcome the recent explosion in the number of men's sheds in Scotland. The first Scottish men's shed was set up in 2013; yet, only eight years later, 133 sheds are open, with 56 in development. Sheds not only provide a workshop space where their 2,499 members can work on projects, crafts or repairs; a growing amount of academic research suggests that they also significantly contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of users.

I have two men's sheds in my constituency. The one in Kilbirnie covers the Garnock valley and the other covers Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston, which are known as the three toons. Last September, Inverclyde men's shed won the Scottish men's shed of the year award. Although I congratulate them on their win, Garnock valley men's shed, which covers a much smaller local population, finished a very close second. Frankly, there should have been a steward's inquiry.

Initially, when the Garnock valley group took over a derelict depot on the edge of Kilbirnie public park, there was no running water and no toilet, the roof leaked and they were on a temporary occupation licence. After its first public meeting, in November 2017, the group's membership quickly grew to 80, and it diversified to offer a range of activities, with a music room, bike repairs and a dedicated scale-modelling room. Over the past three years, however, astonishing improvements have transformed the building in order to meet members' needs and interests.

Unfortunately, the on-going pandemic has had a severe impact on Scotland's men's sheds movement, as Maurice Corry touched on. Like all other sheds across Scotland, the two in my constituency, which were thriving pre-pandemic, have now been locked down for almost a year, leaving some of the isolated men whom they used to cater for lacking support. Both sheds are run by volunteer trustees who now regularly use online

activities to keep in touch with shedders. The club has an active group operating online and provides plenty of tutorials and opportunities to connect socially through video calls.

Shed representatives are particularly grateful for the donation of devices from Connecting Scotland. That has allowed some members with little internet knowledge to keep in touch with each other and, in one case, to make contact with relatives over Christmas. Unfortunately, for some men, social isolation extends to still not having internet access. The Garnock valley men's shed believes that the mental health of some of its members has suffered considerably as a result.

The £30,000 funding from the Scottish Government to help those sheds whose fundraising has been most severely affected by the pandemic was warmly welcomed. There is little doubt, however, that the services of sheds will be in even greater demand post-Covid. I therefore agree with the SMSA that there is now an opportunity for the Scottish Government to invest further in men's sheds not only through core funding but through backing the recruitment of development officers throughout Scotland.

Ultimately, further investment in Scotland's men's sheds would be an investment in the health and wellbeing of our people. The value of men's sheds can best be summarised by a quote from the daughter of a stroke survivor who is now a member of the three towns men's shed:

"You have given me back my dad and given him back his life."

Once again, I thank Maurice Corry.

17:17

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to speak in the debate and I add my thanks to my colleague Maurice Corry for bringing it to the chamber and allowing us to discuss men's sheds. Many members have, I am sure, visited men's sheds in our communities. I had the pleasure of visiting the Govan Men's Shed when we were still able to get out, pre-pandemic.

The debate is very timely, coming, as it does, on the back of yesterday's debate on mental health. As we explored yesterday, mental health was in crisis even pre-pandemic. Across the country we had problems with poor mental health and, at that time, we were discussing how we could have parity between physical health and mental health. The pandemic has amplified that exponentially.

The third sector will be needed more than ever, post-pandemic. Statutory services are under extraordinary pressure at the moment and we will have to look first at how to maintain the third sector and, secondly, how we utilise it along with

statutory services to tackle what, to my mind, will inevitably be the next pandemic—poor mental health.

The thing with men's sheds is that they are very much targeted at men. We are, of course, man the hairy hunter, therefore we do not need any help, thank you very much. However, one of the key drivers of poor mental health is isolation; men have traditionally been very poor at asking for that kind of help.

A men's shed creates a comfortable environment where an interest in something else, whether it be gardening, woodwork or whatever, opens up the opportunity to discuss more personal things. It allows the participants to create interaction and friendships—to which Kenny Gibson alluded—when, all of a sudden, through retirement such interaction has been removed. The men's shed is that opening for interaction.

As I have often said, it is so important, throughout life, to have other interests—sport, art, music, drama, gardening, woodwork or whatever it happens to be. That allows—[*Interruption.*] Sorry?

I thought that I had an intervention there, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You did, but I do not think that it was intentional. Please carry on.

Brian Whittle: As I said, it is important that we have access to outside interests, whatever they happen to be, that we can take with us throughout our lives. The men's sheds movement allows that to happen.

I ask the cabinet secretary what the Scottish Government is going to do to ensure that those organisations are still here, post Covid. We know that the men's sheds movement, like many parts of the third sector, is under extreme pressure at this time because of a lack of finance. As I said at the start of my speech, we need the third sector now more than ever. The men's sheds movement will, I hope, continue to grow and will still be there post the pandemic.

I will be interested to hear from the cabinet secretary how the Scottish Government proposes to ensure that the third sector remains vibrant, and how provision can be integrated with statutory services in order to treat people who are experiencing poor mental health.

Once again, I thank my colleague Maurice Corry for bringing the debate to chamber.

17:20

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank Maurice Corry for bringing this

interesting debate to the chamber. I am very pleased to speak in it.

We all need company and companionship—that is very much part of the human condition. The past year has brought that home to us so vividly, as we have been unable to connect in person with friends and family. As has been said, the pandemic has changed our lives in so many ways, and loneliness and isolation are the cause of much of the distress that we have had to endure. We know that it is particularly hard for the older generation, who are cut off from their families and neighbours.

The importance of men's sheds cannot be overemphasised. There are hundreds of men's sheds throughout Scotland. The movement began in Australia in the 1980s, and the official description reads:

"A men's shed is a community-based, non-commercial organisation that is open to men. Men's sheds provide a place where men can feel included and safe. The aim of men's sheds is to improve the health and wellbeing of their members."

I have two sheds in my constituency, in Kirkintilloch and Bearsden, and that is what they undoubtedly do. Having visited them both, I know how important they are for men to gather as part of a connected community. As soon as I walked in, I could feel the warmth and camaraderie in the shed, and—coming from a family that is completely devoid of any DIY competence—I was in awe of the skills in and ingenuity of the work that was taking place there.

A helpful briefing from Age Scotland tells us that 93 per cent of shedders felt at home in their shed; that 94 per cent of shedders had made good friends; that 76 per cent said that their physical health had improved; and that 79 per cent said that their mental health had improved. Men are renowned for not speaking about their emotions, which—as we know—can lead to problems. Samaritans Scotland tells us that, in Scotland, men are three times more likely than women to die by suicide, and that middle-aged men experience higher suicide rates than other groups. What is more, less well-off middle-aged men often do not get the support that they need. Many men do not see community-based support services as being relevant to them until they have reached a crisis point.

Men are clear about what they want from a support service: the opportunity to contribute, a feeling of inclusivity, the chance to work towards common goals, peer support and the feeling that they have shared experience with someone else. Initiatives such as men's sheds can provide a supportive space that is consistent with all those things, and can help to support wellbeing and to

reduce social isolation before someone reaches a point of crisis.

However, it is important to say that people do not have to be struggling with mental health problems to join or enjoy a men's shed. Many members are retired, many have skills that they would still like to practice and many just want camaraderie or the banter that they experience when they are working. Men's sheds are perfect for that, as I witnessed during my visits. Tools at the ready, kettle on and a never-ending supply of biscuits—what a great atmosphere they have.

During the pandemic, men's sheds have, like every other such organisation, been unable to meet in person, but members have been keen to keep contact in virtual meetings—as we have heard from other members in the debate—to discuss how they are getting through this terrible time and to make plans for when they return.

In conclusion, I cannot recommend the concept of men's sheds highly enough. All the information about joining locally is available online, so if any men out there are looking for a post-lockdown boost to enrich their lives, I say join up now. It could be the best decision you make.

17:24

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): As other members have done, I thank Maurice Corry for securing the debate.

Since arriving in Scotland, men's sheds have been started up in many of our communities. We have heard about some of them from members. Men's sheds played a very important role in the lives of the men who regularly attended them physically before Covid-19 forced their temporary closure. I know that I speak for all the participants in today's debate when I say that I hope that they can safely reopen soon.

Many members have shared stories about the men's sheds in their communities. When I first spoke in Parliament on this issue in March 2019, I mentioned the men's shed in Coatbridge, which had been formed six months previously, and it was already proving valuable for the members who attended. At that time I mentioned that I was wishing them well in re-establishing their men's shed: there had been a fire, and the venue where their meeting took place had been totally destroyed. I am happy to say that they recovered from that setback, and that the shed continues to play an important role in the lives of those who have become involved.

In that same debate, I spoke about the health and wellbeing benefits that men can accrue from men's sheds. That is important because—as we should reiterate—in our society, many men adhere

to an outdated stereotype that they should not ask for help with their mental and emotional wellbeing. They are also far less likely to seek medical help with their concerns, and men's sheds can play an important role in helping with that, too.

The role of men's sheds among men in poorer communities has been understated. Loneliness and isolation, which have been mentioned by other members, have been linked to poverty, especially among working-age adults. Those who work for long hours on low pay and in poor conditions often need to work at the expense of socialising, and they may not be able to afford recreational activities.

Research by Samaritans has highlighted that many less well-off men struggled with poor mental health and suicidal feelings for years because opportunities to help them were missed. The men who were interviewed did not see community-based support projects as relevant to them before they reached crisis point. They also said that they wanted support services to offer the opportunity to make a contribution and to develop a feeling of inclusivity, with peer support and feelings of shared experience with others.

Interestingly, in 2017, Age Scotland surveyed shedders and reported that 86 per cent of them felt more involved in their communities, 93 per cent felt at home and 94 per cent felt that they had made good friends in their local shed. The majority of them also reported improved mental and physical health and the development of new skills. It is therefore clear that men's sheds are vital in tackling some of the key indicators of poverty.

The coronavirus has brought with it additional challenges to mental health through factors such as loneliness, where men's sheds play such a vital role. The pandemic itself, lockdown and the closure of men's sheds have therefore been a setback to the wellbeing of some members of our society.

Maurice Corry's motion mentions the £30,000 grant that was awarded to help sheds whose fundraising has been most significantly affected by Covid-19. That is of course welcome. I understand that that was on the back of a £50,000 grant for the Scottish Men's Sheds Association in May 2020. That has been vital for keeping the umbrella organisation going during the unprecedented challenges that we have faced and for offering opportunities for members to virtually connect.

Although some men's sheds continue to meet virtually, not being able to access or use virtual or computer equipment is a particular challenge among men of the age groups who most commonly come together in men's sheds.

When I last spoke on men's sheds, I concluded by stating my

"hope that men's sheds continue to grow all around the country so that more men in Scotland can benefit from the improvement to their health and wellbeing"—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2019; c 44.]

which is what many shedders report. In echoing those sentiments, I commend the work that men's sheds are doing to support their members throughout Covid-19.

I restate my hope that men's sheds will soon be able to regularly meet face to face again. Once again, I thank Maurice Corry.

17:28

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Maurice Corry on securing the debate. I led the members' business debate on this very same issue on 21 March 2019, but those were very different days—"pre-Covid", as we will all be calling them.

There are quite a few men's sheds in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale, but I will focus on those in Penicuik and Peebles, both of which I have visited on more than one occasion. Finance is a key and pressing common issue, pre-Covid and certainly now, as are premises—although that has been resolved, in the main, in Peebles. Both those sheds, like others in my constituency, were doing a grand job in bringing men together to socialise, putting their skills to work at their own pace, perhaps repairing town benches or making bird feeders or lamps to sell at local fayres to raise funds for local charities and so on. Just as necessary was the use of skills to successfully work out how to apply for various funds, how to secure accommodation and so on.

I turn to Penicuik men's shed—whose modus operandi is similar to that of Peebles—which as yet lacks secure and suitable accommodation. It meets in a scout hut and, after years of trying to find a home, is still negotiating with Midlothian Council for suitable premises.

Penicuik men's shed is currently closed, as all men's sheds are, but its members are establishing protocols to safely reopen, such as warning signs and personal protective equipment. They have purchased Pathfinder, which is a distancing alerter that is worn on a lanyard and audible if too close to another wearer—we could perhaps all do with one of those in Parliament—and of course, most members have had their vaccine shots. Reopening is entirely in the gift of the scouts and, of course, when it is compliant with Scottish Government guidance.

Numbers are maintained with a weekly Zoom call of around 14, which is labelled, "It's good to talk." Members' mental health is a concern during lockdown, but efforts are in hand to reach out to

those who are considered the most at risk—shielding, living alone and so on. I believe that the shed’s active membership is currently around 38.

Peebles men’s shed has premises in what used to be the ex-servicemen’s club in Peebles and has around 80 members. Interestingly, as women, we can become part of the men’s shed. The members have worked hard to attract funding over the past three years or so, and now have grants in the bank.

About £10,000 from the council will pay for the purchase of the tools and equipment that they need and the training in how to use them; £9,000 from a common good fund will pay for the refurbishment of their local social and crafting space, with new walls, electrics, flooring, refreshments, cleaning-up area and furniture. They have £10,000 from the national lottery and have support towards rent from the Robertson Trust. I tell you this because it is a labyrinth of funding streams, and many men’s sheds members—shedders—spend their time working on that. Other fundraising has been restricted over the past year and they will get donations from members to keep the shed ticking by.

As with other men’s sheds, if and when members get the green light, Peebles men’s shed is reasonably well prepared with stocks of PPE. However, it still has some way to go to get the premises Covid-ready, although I understand that the workshops could probably get going straight away.

For both sheds—different in the stages of their evolution—Covid-19 has been and still is a huge challenge. Both sheds are keen to get going and to provide a safe place where men can stay healthy through activity and enjoy a bit of casual company. Ironically, social isolation probably gave birth to men’s sheds.

I finish with the words of Malcolm Bruce of the Peebles men’s shed, who said:

“The future? We will be back. It is what we do. There is too much at stake not to keep going. We owe it to our members who have supported us through Covid to provide them with the shed they asked for.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary to respond to and wind up the debate.

17:33

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): As members who took part in the debate did, I thank Maurice Corry for bringing the Scottish men’s sheds movement and the work of the Scottish Men’s Sheds Association to the attention of the Parliament once more. It is right that we continue

to support that important initiative—one that challenges social isolation and loneliness, contributes to positive health and wellbeing and provides many wider societal benefits to the communities that Scotland’s 189 men’s sheds serve.

As Christine Grahame pointed out, she lodged a motion in March 2019 to recognise the Scottish men’s sheds movement and the positive effects that it had on the shedders’ health and their communities. I remember from that debate—just as with this one—the positivity and good feeling across the chamber that members had for the sheds. Everyone had a story to tell about a visit to a men’s shed and what an uplifting and inspirational experience it was. Today’s debate has been no different.

I put on record my appreciation of the men’s sheds in my constituency of Clydesdale, including the one that I opened in Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill, not by cutting a ribbon but by sawing through a chunk of wood—it is typical of the men’s sheds movement to be so innovative and imaginative.

In 2019, there were less than 170 men’s sheds in Scotland with 1,600 members.

Today, there are almost 190 sheds with 2,449 members. Despite the challenges that the Covid pandemic has placed on us all, numbers are continuing to grow. That is due in no small part to the efforts of the Scottish Men’s Sheds Association and the tireless work of its chief executive, Jason Schroeder. Backed by sustained funding from the Scottish Government, the SMSA has been instrumental in embedding the men’s sheds concept in Scotland and enabling it to grow. Through Age Scotland’s shed development officer, we also provide funding of £50,000 per annum, which further demonstrates our commitment to supporting this incredibly important movement.

The men’s sheds in Scotland include older and younger men—unemployed and employed, skilled and unskilled. According to the SMSA, its value system is

“we value you for who you are, not what you do or have done”.

We know that men’s sheds have proven positive effects on physical and mental health. We also know that they contribute to tackling social isolation and loneliness by providing a space to meet, look out for one another and enjoy vital social camaraderie. That physical space is important. During the Covid pandemic, shedders have admirably risen to the challenge and have quickly organised Zoom meetings with one another, provided Facebook updates and digital support and given helpful advice on social distancing measures.

Elaine Smith spoke about the issue of people who are not digitally connected, which has become so apparent during the pandemic. I point to the significant investment that we have made in the connecting Scotland programme. As that project continues to develop throughout the year, I hope that Elaine Smith can look for opportunities for her constituents to make use of it. The SMSA has also been instrumental in that work by providing vital funding and support to sheds to enable them to communicate digitally. We have made additional funding available to the SMSA—in December last year, we provided it with an extra £100,000 as part of the direct response to supporting sheds during Covid. The package includes a £30,000 emergency fund, which the SMSA is managing and individual sheds can tap into for help while they remain closed.

We know that the physical space of the shed is what makes it so special, and we are aware of the need to get shedders back into their sheds as soon as possible, but that must be done carefully when it is safe to do so. Currently, the SMSA is finalising its own updated advice in the run-up to the reopening of the sheds. Through extra Scottish Government funds, it is also arranging the delivery of pathfinder lanyards to individual sheds, which, as Christine Grahame mentioned in her speech, will help shedders to maintain safe social distance from one another once back in the shed.

Most members will be aware of the range of activities that happen in many sheds, such as building buddy benches for schools, making planters or providing educational classes for the benefit of their wider communities. They also adapt well to the populations that they serve. Men's sheds are providing a safe space for groups such as veterans, which I know is of particular interest to Maurice Corry.

During recent times, men's sheds have shown a great sense of adaptability. An initial template that was devised by the Carse of Gowrie men's shed for a protective face mask has been shared via the SMSA through its entire shed network, enabling that vital protective equipment to be shared with people across the country. During lockdown, many such projects have been completed by shedders from their own homes.

Of course, lockdown has closed sheds, and closed sheds mean that shedders have to stay at home. What was a source of companionship, activity and fun to men across Scotland has suddenly stopped in its tracks. We know that a key aim of the men's sheds movement is to tackle social isolation and loneliness, which men can suddenly face during key life transitions such as retirement or the loss of a partner. Many members made that point in their contributions.

I am delighted that my colleague Christina McKelvie, the Minister for Older People and Equalities, has portfolio responsibility for leading the Government's work in that space. Throughout the pandemic, she has engaged regularly with stakeholders in our national implementation group and heard at first hand how the pandemic has worsened some people's existing experience, but also brought in new people who had not felt isolated or lonely before. Christina McKelvie is taking forward work to respond to that key issue and support the many people who are affected by it.

Our national strategy for tackling social isolation and building stronger social connections recognises the important role of men's sheds and other community-based infrastructure where people meet regularly for company and camaraderie. They will be important as we seek to rebuild and reignite our communities in recovery. We will continue to work with our partners to develop that important intervention nationally, including by providing support to the Scottish Men's Sheds Association.

Our evidence base continues to grow rapidly, and it corroborates that of the established international evidence on men's sheds. As Maurice Corry, Rona Mackay and others noted, men's sheds provide positive views of aging and later life. That was referenced in "The Shed Effect" study that was carried out by Age Scotland, which was funded by the Scottish Government. That report highlighted that 76 per cent of those who were surveyed agreed that their physical health had improved as a result of being involved in the shed, and 79 per cent of those surveyed felt that their mental health had improved as a result of shed involvement. That aligns perfectly with what Kenneth Gibson said about one woman's description of the impact that a shed had had on her father: she said that it gave her back her dad. Those immensely powerful words show just how important the sheds are.

It is clear. We all agree that men's sheds are brilliant things and that they transcend the sum of their parts. They give back so much more than any of us could ever have foreseen. They are places of joy and happiness for the shedders; they impact so positively on mental and physical health; they ensure that their members get a warm cuppa and a meal; they closely look after their people; and they ensure that no one is left alone.

However, they do more than that. They impact positively on their wider communities. They help to support the wellbeing of us all, society wide. Everyone can benefit from a men's shed in their community. That is why they are so important and still need our strategic support, and why it is important that everyone, including our local

partners—local authorities and the third sector—and, more generally, the national health service and community workers, continues to back the men's sheds movement in Scotland and the Scottish Men's Sheds Association.

In response to Brian Whittle's points about the third sector more generally, I point him to the social renewal advisory board's funding. We are continuing to work with our third sector partners on how we continue to support the third sector more generally. Third sector organisations, including men's sheds, have been immensely important in ensuring the resilience of the country in response to the pandemic. They have rolled up their sleeves, have got on with things and have met the challenges that the pandemic has posed in our communities. They have done that with nimble agility and have made sure that they provide support on the important issues that need to be tackled across our communities.

We will continue to work with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and others on how we support, recognise and respect the third sector as we go forward, because it has done so much. As the SCVO campaign points out, in light of the pandemic, third sector organisations

"have never been more needed".

The men's shed movement is phenomenal, and members have spoken vividly about how much it contributes. Recognising its achievements and its continued work is worthy of time in our Parliament. Again, I thank Maurice Corry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. That concludes our debate on men's sheds. We will move on in a moment to the next item of business. First, I hand over to my fellow deputy presiding officer, Linda Fabiani.

Highlands and Islands Medical Service

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-23483, in the name of David Stewart, on the Highlands and Islands medical service. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. Members who wish to speak in the debate should put an R in the chat box.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament celebrates the Highlands and Islands Medical Service, which was set up in August 1913; notes that it was established following the National Health Insurance Act 1911, which provided workers with health insurance but did not cover crofters and great swathes of the Highlands and Islands; recognises the exemplary research that was carried out by the Dewar Committee, which was chaired by Sir John Dewar and comprised of men, women, doctors, teachers and others who travelled the length and breadth of the region and whose recommendations included standardising the cost of doctors' visits regardless of distance, creating a minimum wage for doctors, funding more district nursing associations and increasing communication channels for doctors, and recognises that it was the first state-provided health service in the world and is generally considered to be the model for the NHS, which was established 35 years later.

17:43

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): [*Inaudible.*] I thank all members who have signed my motion. To those who have not, I say that I warmly welcome all sinners who care to repent.

The establishment of the medical service in 1913 was, in my view, the greatest achievement in the history of the region. Picture the scene: nurses riding pushbikes and motorbikes, cutting across some of the most difficult terrain in the country; and doctors, with their sleeves rolled up, putting their strong arms to the oars and moving from one scattered rural population to another, navigating from place to place in simple rowing boats. That was all part of one great effort to bring care and treatment to people in what would later be recognised as the world's first provision of state-funded healthcare.

The service brought medicine, creams and, critically, medical expertise to the super-rural—[*Inaudible.*]—no care at all. Its practices and principles were to become the bedrock—the very foundation—on which our health service was created.

The Highlands and Islands medical service came into being after it was discovered—[*Inaudible.*]—exempt from the National Health Insurance Act 1911—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Stewart. Your sound is very bad and we are finding it difficult to pick up what you are saying. I suggest that you turn your camera off, which may improve your sound.

David Stewart: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Chaired by Sir John Dewar, the Dewar report of 1912 sought to understand the impact—*[Inaudible.]*—on the region. That was no armchair exercise. His large team travelled across the Highlands and Islands, engaging with and listening to communities in Inverness, Orkney, Shetland, Lewis, Skye, Oban and many other settlements. It is difficult to exaggerate the enormity of that task, with the inadequate transport infrastructure that was available in the early part of the 20th century. Doctors, crofters, fishermen and others were consulted across the region.

It was found that the geography of the Highlands and Islands was problematic, both for doctors in reaching people, and for patients—*[Inaudible.]*. Diets were poor, homes were damp and disease, spreading from livestock, was rife. Many people died needlessly.

Here is an extract of the evidence given by Dr James Reardon—*[Inaudible.]*—to the Dewar report:

““What do you blame? To begin with, there is no foundation for the children. The mothers don’t nurse their children, and at the age of three months they are supposed to be able to take porridge and sops. The reason for that is that the milk of their cows is given to the calves, and there is no milk for the children. It is a case of the survival of the fittest.”

The Dewar report was to change lives for the better. Its philosophy was that income, class or geography should not be barriers to receiving—*[Inaudible.]*. It recommended the establishment of a minimum wage for doctors, funding for more district nursing associations and standardisation of the cost of doctors’ visits, regardless of distance.

Parliament approved those recommendations, and the Highlands and Islands medical service was swiftly established in August 1913 and handed an annual grant of £42,000, which is worth more than £1 million today—good value for money.

The service was a rousing success. The grant provided accommodation, transport, further study and holidays for healthcare workers, and the standard of healthcare began to exceed—*[Inaudible.]*. Those successes were detailed in—*[Inaudible.]*—a review of the state of Scotland’s healthcare systems. It said:

“On the basis of the family doctor, there has been built up a flexible, central administration and a system of co-operative effort embracing the central department, private GPs, nursing associations, voluntary hospitals, specialists,

local authorities and others to meet the medical needs of the people.”

Additional funding from the Treasury in the 1930s led to a further expansion of the service. Stornoway and Wick now had surgeons, followed by Shetland and Orkney in 1934. In 1935, the first air ambulance service was established, with the first patient, fisherman John McDermid, lifted in 1933. He was in urgent need of a stomach operation and could not wait to travel by sea or road. An hour after he was lifted off Islay, Mr McDermid arrived in the—*[Inaudible.]*—where he was treated. By 1948, the air ambulance service was carrying 275 patients a year across the Highlands and Islands.

[Inaudible.]—half of Scotland’s land mass were able to—*[Inaudible.]*—which improved their quality of life, social mobility and community spirit.

By the time that the national health service was established in 1948, by the Atlee Labour Government, the Highlands and Islands medical service had been running for 35 years. The rest of the United Kingdom was able to learn from the successes of communities across the Highlands and Islands.

The early pioneers of 1913 deserve our praise, admiration and recognition. I have no doubt—*[Inaudible.]*. Nye Bevan—*[Inaudible.]*—concept of a national health service that would be free at the point of use. Not for the first time, the Highlands and Islands provided inspiration and leadership, with a philosophy that it is better to light one candle than to forever curse the darkness.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Stewart. We made out most of what you said, but it was quite difficult at times. If you have the basis of your contribution digitally, please email it through and we will ensure that all members who are participating in the debate and the official reporters have a copy of it.

We move to the open debate. Speeches should be of around four minutes, please.

17:50

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will switch off Outlook to avoid any undue irritation.

I thank David Stewart for bringing the motion to the chamber. It is one that is worthy of discussion. I feel the need to preface my words with a health warning of sorts, in that I am not a medical expert.

In reading through the 1912 Dewar report into health in the Highlands, which is the subject of our debate, I readily identified with one witness above any other—the crofter on North Uist who fainted while holding up a tallow candle for a visiting doctor who was operating on his neighbour’s

strangled hernia. That episode and others that were recorded in the remarkable report to the United Kingdom Parliament give us a perspective on the huge geographical challenges that health services had then, and have even now, to overcome in that part of Scotland.

As others have pointed out, the challenges also serve to remind us that the Dewar report led to the then unimaginably radical conclusion that only a health service that was free at the point of need would ever work. That led to the creation of the Highlands and Islands medical service, which 35 years later provided, arguably, the model for the national health service itself.

To say that the Highlands and Islands in 1912 were poorly served by health services is a fairly monumental understatement. As David Stewart set out, the Dewar report exposed what had been a chronic political failure to deal with the problem at any point throughout the famines and clearances of the preceding century.

The report describes a time, only just beyond living memory, when large areas of the Highlands and Islands had neither roads nor telephones. The few doctors there were so poorly paid that they had to charge fees to cover their frequent need to hire boats and horses. One doctor in Lewis described trying to serve the scattered population of 7,000 people in his district on foot. Given that, at that time, the average income, after rent, of a crofter in the Western Isles varied from place to place from £10 to £26 per annum, doctors were, for appreciable reasons, often only called on when it was too late.

Many people on the islands testified to the inquiry into such injustice, including—memorably—Father Macneil on Eriskay, who complained about the lack of medical care on the island. He pointed out that the schoolmaster was having to attend the births of babies with the aid of a medical dictionary.

Another witness testified that in parts of the Hebrides people were walking 30 miles just to search out the powers of a seventh son of a seventh son, for want of any medical option.

The Dewar committee's recommendations were enacted not long before a global pandemic. Its main recommendation was radical indeed: the establishment of a health service that should be free at the point of need. The committee's ideas were implemented in the Highlands and Islands and 35 years later formed the basis of the national health service in Scotland. It is right that we mark that historic anniversary, and how it transformed the lives of people in my constituency and elsewhere.

This is an opportunity also to recognise the unique challenges that health services face on

islands and other areas that have scattered populations, and to pay tribute to the work that health and care services continue to do today, sometimes in challenging circumstances, to make Dewar's hopes a reality.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Edward Mountain has been having connectivity problems, so I call Stewart Stevenson, who will be followed by Lewis Macdonald.

17:54

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I have bypassed my domestic broadband failure by being out in my car and using my phone to connect. That will work perfectly well, but more fundamentally, I sit looking out at the very last of the sun over the Moray Firth to the Highlands and the area from which my father came. He was born and brought up in the Black Isle.

My main hobby these days is genealogy. Therefore, I look at many certificates, particularly death certificates, of my ancestors and the ancestors of friends. What is remarkable from looking at the cause of death for many people in the Highlands into quite modern times, is that the certificate will simply say: "General debility—no medical attendant." In other words, there were no medical people to tend to people at the end of their life and—as I know perfectly well—at other points in their life.

The Highlands and Islands medical service was a remarkable and visionary attempt to right the wrongs of poor access to proper healthcare, which had been wholly absent all across rural areas of Scotland. One of the early appointments was a community nurse being sent to Hirta—St Kilda—just in time for the first world war to break out.

The world into which my father was born in 1904 in the Highlands was a fundamentally different environment from that of today. Every decade has seen the health service and health provision in the Highlands, and across Scotland and beyond, change. My first dentist, for example, had no medical qualifications whatsoever, so he could not prescribe or give anaesthesia when he was working on the teeth in people's mouths.

The Highlands and Islands medical service was a remarkable and visionary step that came from the Liberal Government of the time, which also introduced the national insurance system that provided people with pensions for the first time. In one of the imaginary tales that were written more than 100 years ago, Para Handy talks about pension farming and about medical provision in the Highlands and Islands, from the point of view of the coastal trade in which he and his crew sailed around our coasts.

I particularly congratulate David Stewart on bringing the debate to Parliament. He, as I and others are, is coming to the end of his parliamentary career, so this will probably be the last debate that he leads. If that is so, there is no finer way for a parliamentarian of his considerable distinction to go out—albeit that I have not agreed with him on every subject—than on a high, by bringing an important topic to Parliament for debate.

Today, we have a health service that is modelled on the experience of the service. Without it, we would probably not have had what we now take for granted in the NHS in Scotland today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Stevenson, for showing your commitment by going out to sit in your car.

17:58

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, congratulate David Stewart on securing the debate, and I echo the remarks that were made by Stewart Stevenson towards the end of his speech. David Stewart won his first parliamentary election 24 years ago, albeit to a different Parliament, and in all that time his commitment to the Highlands and Islands and to campaigning to improve public health have been plain for all to see. The topic is very apt for a members' business debate in his name, because the story that we celebrate today is one of public service and of promoting public health in the Highlands and Islands.

We should never forget that the creation of the Highlands and Islands medical service was a result of the absence of a cash economy and the challenge for doctors to make a living in the crofting counties at that time. Clearances and emigration had created some of the most sparsely populated areas in western Europe.

Crofters had gained the vote for the first time in the 1880s, and the Crofters' Party sent members of Parliament to Westminster and crofting land rights were secured. That ended the clearances, but crofting remained a subsistence economy—as Alasdair Allan said, not one in which patients could readily lay their hands on cash to meet medical fees.

As the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* put it in 1911:

"The districts are enormous, the population very thin and very poor, and means of communication are few",

and as Morrice McCrae wrote in 2003 in his history "The National Health Service in Scotland: Origins and Ideals, 1900-1950":

"No doctor in the Highlands could easily afford to buy a car or a motor boat, although in many cases he needed both."

Victorian and Edwardian Britain's reliance on the market to provide medical services was a classic case of market failure. Private practice could not sustain general practitioners in the Highlands, and the very limited services that were funded by local ratepayers or by charities could not hope to fill the gap. Once the law provided every British citizen with a right of access to medical services, under the National Insurance Act 1911, the only way to deliver that in the Highlands and Islands was to set up a public medical service.

My father and his brothers grew up in the Hebrides in the 1920s and 1930s. Those were hard and often hungry times. Traditional remedies that had sustained people for generations could still be found, but the Highlands and Islands medical service had begun to bring modern scientific and medical knowledge to the service of even the most remote communities.

By the end of the 1920s, the number of GPs in the Highlands and Islands had increased from 100 to 165. They were now on secure incomes with, as David Stewart said, a minimum guaranteed. The service also funded jobs and homes for nearly 200 district nurses, often with small hospices attached to the house and with bikes or motorbikes for doing their job of going from home to home across vast rural areas.

The next decision was to go beyond primary care and to invest state funds in what had previously been charitable or cottage hospitals. From 1924, a full-time consultant surgeon in Stornoway was funded by the Highlands and Islands medical service. During my father's childhood, it became possible for the first time for crofting families to access both out-patient and in-patient services as a matter of course without leaving the Western Isles, which provided huge benefits for all, from the cradle to the grave.

The Highlands and Islands medical service served its region for a generation. The next generation built the national health service on the same principles and with the same transformational impact on public health. As we celebrate the NHS today for all that it continues to do, David Stewart has done us all a service by reminding us where it all began.

18:02

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): The debate has certainly been—unintentionally—entertaining, so far.

As others have done, I thank my colleague David Stewart for bringing the motion for debate. At a time when the value of our NHS is so dearly felt, it is appropriate that we reflect on the pioneering work that was carried out in the

Highlands and Islands 35 years before the creation of the NHS in 1948. I also recognise the contribution that David Stewart has made to the Highlands and Islands over many years, and I wish him well in whatever he chooses to do next. He has certainly been a source of advice and information for me.

To go back to the topic at hand, we owe so much to those who campaigned for, lobbied for and created a service that brought affordable healthcare and support to clinicians and communities alike more than a century ago. I believe that their work had a massive influence on the creation of what we now take for granted in healthcare. Many others have mentioned the Dewar report, which led to the creation of that pioneering service.

I will focus on the legacy that the service has left in many of our communities. In many communities throughout the Highlands and Islands, some homes are still referred to as the nurse's house or the doctor's house. Although very few of those remain homes for medics, they stand as a testament to the recognition that healthcare in remote rural Scotland has many requirements that are different from those in urban settings. Housing was identified as a key factor in retaining and supporting medical practitioners. That is still relevant today. In my home county, Caithness, and throughout the constituency of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross, good-quality affordable housing for healthcare professionals remains a key issue. Although steps are being made in the right direction to address that, it shows how thorough and forward thinking the Highlands and Islands medical service was.

Another legacy is the funding and creation of many small hospitals. For example, in 1920, the cottage hospital in Invergordon was acquired from the Royal Navy and repurposed as an infectious diseases hospital. It is now the county community hospital and is a vital part of the health and social care infrastructure in Easter Ross, which is borne from the legacy of its predecessor. In the early part of the 20th century, more than 60 small hospitals throughout the mainland Highlands provided a range of services.

Public health and healthcare in general have come a long way during the past century, as we all know. It is almost hard to believe that hospitals had to be constructed specifically to deal with outbreaks of disease. For example, a smallpox hospital had to be built in Wick and it operated for almost 30 years. I am happy to report that smallpox is not an issue in the town any more.

Our population is far healthier than it was in the past. Science and technology have improved healthcare immeasurably. However, questions about the provision of service remain and the

question that is continually being scrutinised is whether centralised units are better able to care for patients or whether patients from remote rural communities should expect more of their treatment to be delivered closer to home.

To this day, the Highlands and Islands are continuing their tradition of pioneering service. The NHS Near Me digital technology was created and developed in NHS Highland and is now used to support and treat patients throughout the country. Without it, many of us—even some in the Parliament—would have been unable to attend medical appointments during the pandemic. The Highlands and Islands have been pivotal in transforming our NHS in many ways over the years.

The debates about funding and resources for remote rural healthcare that were begun by the pioneers of the Highlands and Islands medical service continue to this day, and I suspect that they will for some time to come. However, one thing that is certainly not in question is that the NHS is still supporting, caring for and helping our communities. For that it deserves our heartfelt thanks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We were trying very hard to be able to hear Edward Mountain's contribution—as was he. However, it seems as if that is impossible, because there are connectivity problems from his location, so I am afraid that I will have to go straight to the minister. I am sure that we are all very upset not to hear from Mr Mountain.

18:07

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Mairi Gougeon): I thank David Stewart for the debate. It has been enjoyable to listen to everyone's contributions, and I thank everyone who has taken part. It has been fascinating.

It is important that we reflect on and celebrate the innovation of Scotland and its people. The Dewar committee's report led the way in establishing a new model for health and healthcare provision in the Highlands and Islands and, as others have said, the Highlands and Islands medical service model for the NHS is poignant at this time. The world-class care that the NHS in Scotland is providing during the pandemic demonstrates how far the healthcare system has progressed since the Dewar report. The report set solid foundations for the provision of healthcare for people living in remote and rural areas. Those foundations have continuing relevance today and provide the basis on which we have responded to the Covid-19 pandemic.

I hope that the Dewar committee would have welcomed the fact that the latest budget will support the safe and sustainable recovery of the NHS with record funding in excess of £16 billion—an increase of more than £800 million in core health and sport funding to allow investment of £11.9 billion in health boards. That includes £1.9 billion for primary care, and a spend in excess of £1.1 billion for mental health services.

Not only has much changed in the provision of health and healthcare services since 1912, much has changed since this Parliament marked the centenary year of the report in 2012. I highlight the commitments that the Government has made in three key areas of remote and rural healthcare: general practice, technology and the national islands plan. Since the agreement of the GP contract offer in 2018, we have significantly expanded recruitment incentives for rural GP posts across Scotland. We have increased GP relocation packages and widened their eligibility to cover all remote and rural practices. We want to make general practice an even more attractive career option, so we have funded bursaries for GP specialty trainees who take up posts in remote and rural areas in Scotland. The bursaries have helped to distribute trainees more evenly across Scotland.

Since 2016, we have supported the Scottish Rural Medicine Collaborative to develop recruitment and sustainability measures. That has included our support to the rediscover the joy in general practice project, which has so far led to the recruitment of 33 doctors to work up to 18 weeks a year in remote and rural areas. In addition, Scotland's first graduate entry medicine programme—ScotGEM—focuses on careers in general practice and remote and rural working.

We could argue that the Scottish Government's remote and rural working group, which is chaired by Sir Lewis Ritchie, is our modern-day Dewar committee. The group was established to consider how rural GP practices can best be supported to deliver the new GP contract and to strengthen their sustainability. Sir Lewis published his report of the group's work in January 2020, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport had no hesitation in accepting its recommendations, including the establishment of a national centre for remote and rural health and social care, to foster and promote innovation and excellence in Scotland and internationally.

Digital technology was, of course, unknown when John Dewar and his committee colleagues wrote their report. The use of digital technology to support people to remain independent, or to manage their condition from home, has been a priority in Scotland for a long time, and it was key to our Covid response. The NHS Near Me virtual appointment system has been crucial in ensuring

that people could access healthcare during the past year. Its use has increased significantly, from 300 consultations per week to 21,000 per week. Feedback on the service has been positive, and we expect it to be a core part of delivering modern health and care services.

Information technology challenges remain a significant issue—we can see that, given that not everyone was able to take part in the debate—which affects our ability to deliver digital health and care services. The connecting Scotland programme aims to support 50,000 of the most vulnerable people in Scotland to access digital services and devices, learning and skills and connectivity.

We know that good-quality healthcare underpins life on Scotland's islands, as it does life in rural mainland communities, and many good examples of excellent provision are set out in the national islands plan. Health and wellbeing is at the heart of the plan, which is why we have committed to work with NHS boards, local authorities and health and social care partnerships to ensure that there is fair and accessible healthcare for those who live on our islands.

The fact that we are debating a report from 1912 demonstrates the continuing influence and impact that Sir John and his colleagues have had on Scottish healthcare. Remote and rural healthcare has improved immeasurably since that time. As we emerge from the Covid pandemic, our vision for world-class healthcare in Scotland remains. We will continue to protect the NHS and to provide the necessary investment and planning to ensure that our healthcare system goes from strength to strength.

Meeting closed at 18:13.

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