



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 29 April 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 29 April 2010

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Living Wage

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6216, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on a living wage.

09:15

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I begin by recalling a hustings organised by the Poverty Alliance that I attended earlier this week, and in particular the Conservative candidate, who was a good, fun, feisty debater. He was very right wing but fun to debate with and keen to persuade the audience that Conservatives care about poverty. I believe him, and I begin the debate by acknowledging, and by asking the whole chamber to acknowledge, that none of us in the Parliament is secretly twirling our moustache and thinking what a great thing poverty is. We all care about it. We have different policies to try to address it, but the concern and anger that exist about the level of poverty in Scotland today should be, and rightly are, shared across the political spectrum.

However, caring is not enough. Even just finding policies to deal with poverty and people in poverty is not enough. If all that we do is ameliorate the effects of poverty, generation after generation will face the self-same problem. We will allow the same problem to continue to be created year after year, generation after generation, and successive generations of politicians will continue to have to come up with new policies to deal with poverty.

We must not be distracted from dealing with the underlying structural causes of poverty in the way that we run our economy. We must go beyond that and recognise not only that poverty matters but that inequality matters. It is about not only the level of wealth that people have, but their relative wealth. It is about how well we share wealth in society, not just how much economic growth we achieve as a whole.

I refer members to the Poverty Alliance briefing that has been circulated. It explains, to those who might not be aware—some people in Scotland and the United Kingdom who do not personally experience poverty do not always understand or acknowledge it and think that it is perhaps a thing of the past—that almost 70 per cent of workers in, for example, the hotel and restaurant sector earn less than £7 an hour. As the Poverty Alliance

points out, three fifths of those workers are women; it also points out the gender inequality that exists in low pay in the retail and wholesale sector and the public sector. What we do not know about is what happens in the contracts that the public sector lets. What happens to the workers who are in the private sector but fulfilling public sector contracts? We do not have enough information about how many of them are low paid.

There are different ways of calculating a living wage. The Scottish living wage, campaigned on by the Poverty Alliance, trade unions and other organisations, is based on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation minimum income standard. A living wage of £7 an hour would bring 70 per cent of single adults who are currently living below that level up to that standard. There are other options. If the principle of a living wage can be agreed, we will need to look at the level at which it is set, how we increase it in line with rising living standards or inflation, how we uprate it and whether we should change it to a proportion of the average income. There are a number of models, but I hope that we can agree on the principle.

We are clearly failing to reduce inequality in society. I am sure that members of all political parties will be aware of the arguments made in the book “The Spirit Level”, which explains why a more equal society is better for everyone—raising some people up to a safety net at the bottom is not enough; we must have a fundamentally more equal society.

Our motion recognises a number of things that we have to do to achieve that. We need to return to progressive taxation and end the scandalous situation in which people on very high incomes pay a lower proportion of their income in tax than people on low incomes. We need to tackle high pay as well as low pay if we are going to become a more equal society: one that will increase health and happiness, reduce social problems—there are too many to list—and reduce in-work poverty.

As I said, the organisations involved in the campaign include a number of non-governmental organisations and trade unions, but political support has been expressed in the Parliament and elsewhere. I acknowledge the members’ business debate that Frank McAveety led in the chamber not so long ago. The motion was supported by 22 members of political parties—that support represents a clear majority in the chamber. Some of the quotations from that debate are telling. Frank McAveety recognised that

“we will have ... heated debates”

in the coming months and years about the difficult economic circumstances to come and the choices that may have to be made. However, he argued that

"the fundamental point is that we should ensure that folk are not left behind, particularly those on the lowest rung of our community."—[*Official Report*, 17 September 2009; c 19806.]

That is crucial—it is the nub of the issue. We must move beyond the idea of a safety net at the bottom and stop thinking that, as long as people get on to that lower rung and do not fall off it, that is okay. We need to have a society that fundamentally respects the equal dignity of all people. That must be expressed in material as well as non-material terms.

Fairness is a concept that I think is in every political party's manifesto for the UK election: fairness, fairness, fairness. However, it is a concept that is open to interpretation—it means different things to different people. We need to be moving towards greater equality. It has never been more objectively clear that the more equal societies around the world are

"happier, healthier, safer and greener".

If we want to achieve those social goods, instead of simply hitting the reset button on the failed economic model, we must ensure that what comes out of recovery is fundamentally better than what went before. That means having a more equal society.

There are many things that the Scottish Government, the UK Government and local government should do—indeed, some local authorities are doing them, and I am sure that that point will come out later in the debate. The Parliament should endorse the principle that a living wage for all is the least that a rich society such as ours can afford.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that unacceptable levels of poverty and income inequality continue to blight Scotland; notes that the income of the richest 10% of people in Scotland is approximately the same as the total income of the poorest 50%; further notes that, among working-age adults, in-work poverty is still on the increase; believes that a more equal society would be a happier, healthier, safer and greener society and that this must become a core objective of government at all levels, and therefore calls on the UK Government to commit to the immediate introduction of a living wage for all, set at £7 per hour, and on Scottish ministers to bring in this living wage for all public sector workers and employees of public sector contractors and for this change to be funded by tackling high pay in the public sector and by fairer taxation on both high pay and financial transactions.

09:22

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): I thank Patrick Harvie for bringing the subject to the attention of the chamber and for the tone that he adopted, which I hope we will all adopt throughout the debate.

The Scottish Government's position is very clear. We believe that a more equal society—I emphasise "more equal"—would be a

"happier, healthier, safer and greener society".

That is why we have made it such a priority.

We agree with Patrick Harvie that the levels of poverty and income inequality in Scotland are unacceptable. We firmly believe that a fairer distribution of income and wealth is key to tackling poverty. Our overall approach is to try to create a more successful country with opportunities for all. One of the great prerequisites for the abolition of poverty and for more equality in our society is full employment, and we regard the drive towards full and fuller employment as a key priority in tackling poverty and inequality.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): With regard to the Government's stated policy of redistribution, will the minister do one thing? Will he carry out an equality assessment of the £420 million cost of the council tax freeze—that is how much the Government has said it has cost—to establish who it has benefited most: those on the lowest incomes, or those in the highest income households?

Alex Neil: In actual fact, we have commissioned more general work on the council tax and, in particular, on its impact on those at the lower end of the income scale, which in relative terms is very unfair compared with its impact on those at the higher end. For us, the key driver for abolishing the council tax is its unfairness. It is related neither to income nor to wealth but to residency alone, which is not even a proxy for income or wealth levels.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): If the minister is arguing that people on low incomes are suffering particularly and that there should be greater equality, does he therefore agree that the council tax freeze has exacerbated inequality? Given that it does not benefit anyone who qualifies for council tax benefit, a disproportionate amount of the money that the Government has put into the freeze must, by definition, be going to people who are better off.

Alex Neil: No. In fact, the council tax freeze has benefited many people who do not qualify for council tax benefit but who are nevertheless on a relatively low income. To qualify for that benefit, a person must be earning less than about £6,000 a year, and I would not call anyone who earns just over £6,000 a year particularly well off. The group of people, many of them pensioners, whose income is just above the threshold to qualify for benefit or rebate are spending a proportionately higher level of their income on council tax than they would pay under a local income tax. That is

one of the reasons why we have been so insistent about the need to relate local government finance and revenue raising to the ability to pay.

Indeed, that would all be part of a wider reform that we would carry out if we had the powers to do so in this Parliament. In the meantime, however, I hope that whoever wins the election at Westminster—

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Alex Neil: I will give way in a minute.

I hope that whoever wins the Westminster election looks at the fundamental issue of the interrelationship between taxation and benefits. Many of our taxes redistribute things the wrong way. For example, people who earn £150,000 a year pay far less, as a proportion of their income, in national insurance contributions than people who earn, say, £10,000 or £11,000 a year.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Duncan McNeil: Will the minister give way?

Alex Neil: I give way to Patrick Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful. Although I agree with some of the minister's points about tax and disagree with others, I am sure that he will move on to talk about the living wage and, principally, public sector workers for whom the Scottish Government is responsible.

Alex Neil: I will indeed continue in that vein if I can get a chance to do so and if there are no further interruptions.

The Scottish Government's targets are very much focused on solidarity and reducing income inequality. Indeed, our primary target, which is to increase the proportion of income received by the poorest 30 per cent of households in Scotland by 2017, was chosen specifically to ensure that we focus on the working poor as a priority group. Our response to the challenge of low pay is being driven forward through "Achieving Our Potential", our flagship policy on poverty and income inequality, and we share the commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

Because I want to comment further on the issue of low pay, I will not have time to comment on the amendments that have been lodged.

On the Scottish Government's public sector pay policy, I must first of all emphasise that the Scottish Government is not responsible for all Scottish public sector workers, many of whom are still under the aegis of either the UK Government or local government. Moreover, many of those who work for the Scottish Government and its agencies are subject to UK national pay

bargaining procedures instead of having their pay set at the Scottish Government's discretion.

That said, addressing low pay is one of the Scottish Government's four key pay policy priorities in its 2009-10 public sector pay policy. The policy itself encourages public bodies specifically to consider their lowest paid staffing groups and makes it clear that policies should take into account delivery of the solidarity target that I have just mentioned. The most recent pay deal for Scottish Government staff had a particular emphasis on assisting our lowest paid staff, and the rise is a reflection of our commitment to recruitment and retention. Moreover, everyone in the national health service in Scotland, which is by far our largest group of employees, is on the living wage.

Unfortunately I do not have time to say much more. I will try to make further points in my closing speech.

I move amendment S3M-6216.2, to leave out from "therefore" to end and insert:

"welcomes the action that the Scottish Government has taken to freeze pay for government employees on higher salaries and the progress that the Scottish Government is making toward achieving a living wage of £7 per hour for government employees and employees of the NHS in Scotland."

09:30

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(Lab): I thank the Greens for bringing this motion to Parliament. I know that the issue is set out in their general election manifesto, and I wish them good luck in drawing attention to it through this debate.

However, I am happy to say that the debate allows me to draw attention to Labour's own general election manifesto, which, in the "Living Standards" chapter, says, under the heading "Making work pay":

"The National Minimum Wage is one of our proudest achievements. It protects and sustains millions of low paid workers. To ensure that the lowest paid share fairly in rising prosperity, the Low Pay Commission's remit will have the goal of the National Minimum Wage rising at least in line with average earnings over the period to 2015.

To underline our commitment to helping the lowest paid we will ask all Whitehall Departments, within their allocated budgets, to"

consider how they can

"follow the lead of those who already pay the Living Wage. This will be supported by measures to address high pay in the public sector—reducing pay-bill pressure in the years ahead."

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does Mr Whitton agree that, had the national minimum wage been introduced in 1999 at the £5 an hour

rate that the unions and others asked for, it would now be more than £7 an hour and we would not be having this debate? In Ireland, for example, the national minimum wage is equivalent to £7.50 an hour.

David Whitton: I thank Mr Wilson for his intervention, but the fact is that he and other members of the Scottish National Party seem to have some difficulty with the national minimum wage. History records that when the Tories tried to talk out the National Minimum Wage Bill in 1998 the SNP MPs, including our own First Minister, were in their beds asleep. It was left to Labour MPs to vote through the legislation. The SNP's current Westminster leader, Angus Robertson, was also asleep when he was unable to say in an interview what the minimum wage rates were. That is not a mistake that I think Mr Wilson would make. I remind Mr Robertson and any others who do not know that, from October, the minimum hourly rate will rise from £5.80 to £5.93 for those over 21; from £4.83 to £4.92 for those aged 18 to 20; and from £3.57 to £3.64 for those aged 16 and 17. There will also be a new minimum of £2.50 an hour for apprentices.

The SNP is not the only party that seems to have a problem with the national minimum wage; the Tories, too, have form with the policy. As we know, they were deeply hostile to it from the start, saying that it was the end of the world and would cost thousands of jobs. Where have we heard that recently? Our proposed increase in national insurance from next April has brought similar cries of doom and gloom and comments about "the jobs tax".

I accept that our amendment does not go as far as the Greens would like, but it recognises that it was a Labour Government that moved to tackle inequality in pay and to legislate for employers who refused to give their workers a decent hourly rate. No doubt many of those employers are signing up to the Tory campaign against the proposed national insurance increase. It is interesting to note that the measure, which would cost Marks and Spencer, for example, around £10 million a year, is opposed by its chief executive Sir Stuart Rose, whose salary is £15 million a year. Many of his workers would not have to pay the increase in national insurance and, in any case, one way for the company to get over its difficulty is to cut its chief executive's salary by two thirds. I also point out that a Labour London mayor introduced the London living allowance and a Labour administration at Glasgow City Council introduced the living wage rate of £7 an hour for all its workers.

As we have heard, low pay remains a real issue for almost 700,000 Scottish workers, the majority of whom, as Mr Harvie mentioned, are women,

who face particular problems in the hotel, restaurant and retail sectors. In local authorities throughout Scotland, 20 per cent of the workforce—again, the majority are women—earn less than £7 an hour. We on this side of the chamber believe that progress towards the introduction of living wage rates should be maintained where possible, and I commend our amendment to Parliament.

I move amendment S3M-6216.4, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"believes that the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 was one of the most seminal pieces of the legislation of the twentieth century in terms of promoting dignity at work but regrets that it was finally passed without the votes of any Conservative or SNP MPs; welcomes the commitment in Labour's 2010 manifesto to further increase the minimum wage at least in line with earnings over the next five years and the further extension of the living wage in government departments; notes the example set by Glasgow City Council in introducing a living wage for its employees, and supports the further extension of the living wage, working in conjunction with the tax credit system, to ensure that work always pays."

09:34

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): I thank Patrick Harvie for raising the issue and for the tone in which he did so. That is important, because none of us should doubt the good intentions of all of us in Parliament, whether or not we take a different perspective on how we reach the aim. Patrick Harvie showed remarkable political maturity in accepting that similar aims might be achieved in different ways.

The Greens' motion acknowledges the difference between what the Scottish Government can do and what the UK Government can do. That takes us into what is perhaps the core of the issue when we first consider the concept of a living wage—the question why the minimum wage, which applies nationally, is not simply used.

David Whitton reminded us of the minimum wage level. A single adult with no children who works full time for the minimum wage is eligible for tax credits. That is support from the Government so, on the face of it, there is an argument about why that support is not simply provided through a different minimum wage level. Mr Whitton also described the proposed minimum wage increase in October. After that increase, the same adult with no children who works full time and who is currently eligible for tax credits will see that eligibility cease.

That situation reflects the margins at which the minimum wage is set. Someone who works 40 hours a week for the minimum wage is eligible for about £10 a week in tax credits. That sum of money is not significant, but it makes a difference for people who receive that wage level.

It is worth noting that, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, income inequality is greater now than at any time since the 1950s. The IFS says:

"it is fair to say that youth unemployment and income inequality have risen under Labour, and that ... the incomes of households with the lowest incomes are now lower than they were in 1996-97."

The key question to ask is why. If we are interested in tackling that, we must understand the consequences.

In another report, the IFS says that factors that we might consider to be drivers of inequality, such as the ageing population and the north-south divide, explain little of the change in inequality in the past 40 years. It says:

"More surprisingly still, the earnings gap between men and women has actually acted to *reduce* inequality, as the relative earnings of women have 'caught up' with those of men."

The IFS says that the most important drivers of increased inequality are occupation—the earnings gap between unskilled workers and professional or managerial workers has widened—and education, as relative wages among better-educated members of the workforce increased throughout the 1980s. The IFS says that that is consistent with the idea that skills-biased technological change was responsible for much of the increase in inequality, as new technologies have complemented the work of skilled and educated workers but substituted for the work of lower-skilled workers.

The IFS also says:

"households headed by an individual with a degree are ... four times wealthier than households headed by an individual with no qualifications"

and that inequalities in wealth are much greater than inequalities in income.

If we want to tackle inequality, it is clear that the best way to do so is through a thriving economy, a more skilled workforce and levelling up rather than trading down.

Patrick Harvie: I understand the argument, but it is curious that Derek Brownlee acknowledges that inequality in society increased all through the period of economic growth that we had before the recent recession. Why did economic growth over all those years not achieve what he says that it would achieve now? Is not progressive taxation the only way to reduce inequality?

Derek Brownlee: We have a progressive tax system—

Patrick Harvie: No.

Derek Brownlee: The system might not be as progressive as Mr Harvie would like it to be, but it is undoubtedly progressive.

The point is that different models of economic growth exist. If we have a more skilled workforce and a higher economic growth rate, inequality will be tackled. That is the best way of dealing with inequality. It is much more important to focus on creating new skilled jobs and on growing the economy to tackle inequality and poverty.

I move amendment S3M-6216.1, to leave out from "a more equal" to end and insert:

"economic growth is the best means of tackling poverty and inequality, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to pursue measures to boost the economy, create jobs and improve the standard of living for all."

09:38

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Like other members, I commend the Greens for initiating the debate.

I strongly disagree with the Conservatives' approach. Our taxation system in the United Kingdom is not progressive. How can a taxation system be progressive when the lowest quartile of taxpayers pay six times as much in tax as a proportion of their income as do those who are in the highest quartile? The gap between the richest and the poorest has widened under Labour, from not a bad start when it took over.

The taxation system is not progressive and is incredibly complex. The United Kingdom's tax code is the largest in the world at more than 1,000 pages; it overtook that of India when Gordon Brown was the chancellor. That does not necessarily cause problems for the very wealthy, who can hire expensive tax advisers and lawyers, but the constituents and people in Scotland whom we are talking about do not have the benefit of being able to recruit accountants or tax advisers and are faring worse.

Simply relying on a trickle-down approach is not right—we need to take a radical look at our taxation system. The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government can also change direction and must do so. The minister said that no equality assessment of the council tax freeze policy had been conducted. In the four years from 2008 to 2012, the council tax freeze will cost £700 million. Movement towards free prescriptions will cost a further £130 million and free school meals will cost £50 million. That £880 million package disproportionately helps high-income families rather than low-income families. That is a fact.

Mr Brownlee quoted the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Its assessment of a council tax freeze in England and Wales, which would be comparable

to the freeze policy in Scotland, is that “the largest cash gains” would go to the richest households, as they tend to live in larger properties with the largest council tax liabilities.

Derek Brownlee: That is precisely why council tax has a link with income, although Mr Purvis and the SNP always argue that it does not. If he argues that people who live in larger houses benefit more and are richer, and therefore that that is unequal, council tax must by definition be more progressive than he has spent however long in the past 10 years complaining that it is.

Jeremy Purvis: If Mr Brownlee wants to argue that council tax is progressive, that is a whole other debate. He would lose that argument with the low-income pensioners and other individuals who come to my advice surgeries, who would say, “The only way that the system can be progressive is if I move house.” How on earth is that fair or progressive?

The Government’s approach, which is costing £880 million, benefits high-income families that earn more than £100,000 a year more than it benefits low-income families.

What would make the biggest impact on inequality? One proposal, which is in our manifesto, is that of lifting the income tax threshold.

Johann Lamont: Will Jeremy Purvis take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: Jeremy Purvis does not have time for an intervention.

Jeremy Purvis: Given the difficult economic situations for the budget, it is not fair that the Government’s pay policy puts more cash in the pocket of someone who earns higher wages than it puts in the pocket of someone who earns lower wages. That happens because of a simple percentage increase in wages. The Government’s policy is to have a 1 per cent uplift, which would mean that the 5,300 people who work in the public service in Scotland who earn more than £80,000 would have considerably more money in their pockets than would someone who earns £15,000. One of the best ways of achieving the aim on which I think we all agree is to change radically the Government’s pay policy. It is regrettable that the Government has not said that it will do that.

I move amendment S3M-6216.3, to leave out from “therefore” to end and insert:

“believes that, during the tight financial climate, public sector pay policy should be structured to ensure that those on lower incomes benefit more than those on higher incomes from pay changes.”

The Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. I have no spare time, so I ask members to keep speeches tight, please.

09:43

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

The debate is important. It is not just about the mechanics of the living wage in isolation but about the bigger picture of social justice, fighting inequality, tackling low pay and the basic concept of liberty that is embedded in the Beveridge report and the Attlee Government’s creation of the welfare state.

Of course, no one suggests that the living wage is a magical golden bullet that will solve all Scotland’s most intractable social inequalities at a stroke, but I strongly support the work of the Scottish living wage campaign and of organisations such as the Poverty Alliance.

Some might say, “Doesn’t the minimum wage already look after low-paid workers?” The minimum wage was a major achievement by the Labour Government in 1998 and of course it addressed extreme low pay. I remember leaving the Commons bleary-eyed at 9 am after 28 divisions in an all-night sitting before the National Minimum Wage Bill was finally passed. I felt proud—not in a self-serving sense—that politics could make a difference for the thousands of low-paid staff in the Highlands and Islands and throughout the UK who received an immediate boost, such as bar staff in Aviemore, catering workers in Fort William and shop assistants in Inverness.

The minimum wage worked for extreme low pay, but a living wage is another tool to tackle the plight of low-waged workers in Scotland. We do not need a crystal ball or to search for the ancient predictions of the Brahan seer to work out whether the living wage will work. We have only to examine the experience in London, Oxford and Glasgow or, on the international stage, in Calgary, Los Angeles, Maryland, San Francisco or the 120 other cities throughout the United States and Canada that have a living wage policy.

In Calgary, economic analysis after the introduction of the living wage reported increased income for lower-paid staff; improved health and quality of life; and reduced dependency on Government assistance. The study showed that Calgary was able to attract better workers and improve productivity. The results were consistent with many of the other living wage cities in the US and Canada.

To come back to the Scottish context, where did the £7 an hour figure come from? Patrick Harvie covered that. Work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that a single adult working full time needs more than £7 an hour to reach a minimum socially accepted quality of life.

What is the scale of the problem? Frank McAveety referred to that in our previous debate

on the matter, but the figures vary according to which survey is used. The Scottish living wage campaign quotes the figure of 700,000 low-paid workers in Scotland, based on labour force survey data. The Scottish Government—as I hope the minister will testify later—uses the annual survey of hours and earnings, and the most up-to-date figure from that survey that I could find from the Scottish Parliament information centre yesterday was 386,000 low-paid workers. Let us consider snapshots in other sectors: there are about 5,000 low-paid workers in the NHS. Figures that I got from written answers show that, in my region, there are 869 in the Highland Council area, 407 in Moray, 631 in Argyll and Bute, 360 in Orkney and, interestingly, none in Shetland.

What about the effect on business? Private sector suppliers to local government, the NHS and the Scottish Government should be encouraged to build a living wage into contracts. A Scottish living wage employer award should be developed to encourage uptake by employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Guy Stallard, a director from KPMG Europe, is quoted by the Fair Pay Network as saying:

“We have found that paying the Living Wage is a smart business move as increasing wages has reduced staff turnover and absenteeism, whilst productivity and professionalism has subsequently increased.”

A number of organisations have incorporated that into their procurement policies.

Poverty wages are bad for business and communities and have no place in Scottish society, which is part of the sixth-biggest economy in the world. Making work pay is the route out of poverty. My experience on the doorsteps is that people want a hand up not a handout. It is about fairness and equality. More than 60 per cent of low wage workers in Scotland are women.

Finally, Presiding Officer, as I am running out of time—

The Presiding Officer: Very briefly, please.

David Stewart: The living wage provides a virtuous circle, using the multiplier effect. We estimate that between—

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but I have to move on. I gave you fair warning.

09:48

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Patrick Harvie’s motion is timely, but it is in two parts. The living wage is one part, but the last lines in his motion—those about the gap between the richest and poorest in the public and private sectors, and about fairer taxation and financial transactions—must be part of the debate because, if we want to help our people who suffer from

poverty and low wages, we must have an economy that is gearing up to give them work. We will do that partly by encouraging business and by ensuring that tax avoidance is taken into account.

The way in which the public sector attracts leaders to its ranks has to be competitive. At the top, that is the case, but it is also the case at the bottom because, although 9 per cent of people in the public sector are on lower pay, 29 per cent of people in the private sector earn less than £7 an hour. The public sector has set a lead and it is important for us to remember that the Scottish Government has attempted, through the solidarity approach, to get the emphasis on to taking people in lower pay out of the danger area.

In 2008, 454,000 people in Scotland were earning less than £7 an hour and 63 per cent of them were women. That is one of the major issues that the minister and others have raised: we must regard it as a central part of the argument about low pay and a living wage. Figures show that 70 per cent of people who work in hotels and restaurants and 51 per cent of people who work in the retail and wholesale sector earn less than £7 an hour. Those are large parts of the private sector. The Scottish Government would like to have the powers to deal with that, but there is no proposal in the Calman commission’s recommendations for the Scottish Government to deal with private sector pay.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

Other countries that had heavy industry but have had to modernise their economies have found models with which to move forward and reduce the gap between those who are at the top of the tree and those who are at the bottom. That has been done by fairer, progressive taxation. If we are to have the money to support the development of the economy that will allow people in the private sector to get better pay because it is expanding, we must tax things such as international financial dealings. The SNP believes in such transaction taxes—the Tobin tax—and is looking to the G20 to find agreement on that. We must not punish countries that have been financially prudent, such as Canada and Australia, but we must agree to make that tax money available to help to tackle poverty not only here, but in the developing world.

Greece’s failure to capture tax from avoiders and the rich is part of the source of its debt—as well as its speculation in collateralised debt obligations. The point is that we must have a tax system that allows us to provide meaningful support to the people who need to get a living wage. David Stewart gave us the example that points the way: Calgary has a booming economy

and that is why it has been possible to attract people to that area. We must have a developing economy in Scotland so that the private sector starts to catch up with the public sector.

09:52

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I congratulate all those who were involved in the living wage campaign throughout the United Kingdom—I think that it started in London—and those in Scotland who have pursued it. They have played an important role in addressing and in asking us to challenge poverty and low pay.

Tackling low pay has not always been an area of consensus. Indeed, even inside the Labour and trade union movement, there was a long argument about the extent to which free collective bargaining would ensure that low-paid workers would be properly remunerated. There came a time when we considered the fact that there was a disproportionate number of women among the low paid and we recognised that the trade unions in themselves could not protect low-paid workers. Therefore, our movement came to the view that Government intervention was necessary to protect people's entitlement to a basic level of pay to save them from the exploitation that some of us remember all too well, such as security guards being on £1.50 or £2 an hour.

Such exploitation was justified in the name of the economic growth and prosperity that are mentioned in the Tory amendment. It is significant that, when the economic crisis emerged, the first solution that some people within the business community proposed was that the national minimum wage was a problem, so perhaps we should get rid of it. We should commend the businesses that are responsible and that recognise that part of good business and their being in partnership with our communities is that they ought not to exploit people.

The briefing from the Poverty Alliance recognises that, in the debate, the living wage is not the same as the safeguards that have been put in place through the national minimum wage and the tax credit system. One is not a substitute for the other, but they reinforce our commitment to ensuring that people do not languish in low pay.

We have to consider whether any measure will make a difference to the people about whom we purport to care. The Tory amendment talks about economic growth as being the best way out of our difficulties but, beside that, we must have shared prosperity, which will not happen by accident. Government must introduce measures that will make that difference. The national minimum wage presents such an example, and the living wage

creates such a challenge for us all, wherever we are.

Rob Gibson talks about the big picture—the huge issues—but that cannot be an alibi for not doing what we can, where we are. The Scottish Government must be challenged on its priorities. It usually describes its anti-poverty strategy in terms of three issues: the council tax freeze, the extension of free school meals, and free prescriptions. Any equality assessment of that strategy will tell us that those do not benefit the poorest people in our communities.

Jeremy Purvis's party talks about exempting from paying tax anyone who earns less than £10,000 a year, but the Institute of Fiscal Studies tells us that the beneficiaries of that policy would be three of the four wealthiest groups in the income table. I wonder what equality assessment has been done on that. We need an honest and focused approach, and we need tough targets and monitoring. I regret that the Scottish Government has not continued the challenge of producing an annual report on whether it is meeting its targets on poverty, because such reports can be a spur to action.

I would like the minister to clarify what has been done by the Scottish Government. I understand that although Nicola Sturgeon costed a package for introducing the living wage to the NHS, it was vetoed by John Swinney. Is that true? Has the Government considered how it can use procurement policy not just in its powers to address the needs of public sector workers but to challenge the private sector to improve the scandal of private sector low pay? Will the minister support Glasgow's approach? Will he acknowledge housing associations that are implementing the minimum wage? Will he, when he sums up, identify not just the principle that he believes in, but the areas in which he has control and power in terms of that principle's being implemented?

09:56

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): This is not the first time that the Parliament has debated a living wage and poverty, and it is not the first time that I have spoken on the issue. So important is the subject, however, that I congratulate the Scottish Green Party on bringing it back to Parliament for debate.

The health of society is inextricably linked to inequality. It is worth reminding ourselves of some of the basic facts. In a nutshell, the United Kingdom is one of the most unequal of the world's developed countries. That inequality has widened considerably in the past couple of decades and, most important, has grave consequences for

crime, health and educational attainment—in fact, for any parameter related to individual and societal wellbeing that we care to mention. The elimination of inequality, therefore, should not be an optional add-on to a party's policies. Parties that do not put it at the top of their agenda do not deserve anyone's vote—not even the votes of the superwealthy. Research shows that even the superwealthy are not immune to the ill-effects of the social malaise known as inequality.

Let us look at some of the figures. One in five people in the UK lives in poverty. Since 2002, the poorest tenth have become £9 a week poorer and the richest tenth have become £94 a week better off. According to the Office for National Statistics, the poorest fifth pay more tax as a proportion of their income than the richest fifth and there is overwhelming evidence that socioeconomic mobility in the UK is a myth. UK Government figures that were released this year show that in England, the lives of children from families of low socioeconomic status, who have the same high IQ as children from families of high socioeconomic status, start to diverge at the age of only 22 months. That is socioeconomic determinism.

According to Ben Morgan of Oxfam, even if we add up the value of everything people at the bottom of society own, we will still find them deep in debt. They do not just have next to nothing; they have less than nothing. They are people who play by the rules, he says, but who still need to borrow to stay afloat, however hard they work. It is impossible to live like that endlessly. The mortality figures bear Mr Morgan out: the poor die young. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, the life expectancy of a child born in Calton in Glasgow is 28 years less than that of a child born just a few miles away in Lenzie. In short, inequality kills.

So, what are we going to do about it? We cannot raise everyone to the wealth of the super-rich. The planet does not have the resources, and emphasising individual greed does not benefit society. By all means raise tax on the superwealthy and institute a Robin Hood tax, but before that we should clamp down on tax evasion and avoidance. If one totals estimated evasion, avoidance and otherwise uncollected tax, tax dodging in the UK is estimated at £130 billion annually. There is no need for cuts in public expenditure; just deal with the tax evaders.

If we want to encourage people to pay tax, we should stop turning our money into nuclear weapons, profits for arms manufacturers, and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and hundreds of service personnel. There should be no more weapons of mass destruction, no more illegal wars and no more lies.

We could set maximum wage ratios in public bodies. With the huge amount of evidence to show that inequality is a cancer, the various Governments in the UK can and should lead the way by setting maximum wage ratios for public bodies. We should set a decent minimum income for all, funded by redistributive—not regressive—taxation, by savings on military expenditure, and by scrapping identity-card schemes.

Furthermore, if we institute a living wage, we can give people the dignity of living on their earnings, instead of their suffering the humiliation of working while still being unable to support their families. They will be happier and healthier, and they will undoubtedly live longer. "A living wage" is well named.

10:00

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston)

(Lab): I am pleased to contribute to a debate on such an important subject. The living wage is not a new idea and the achievement of a living wage has been a campaign in the Labour movement for nearly 100 years. The Independent Labour Party first debated the living wage programme in 1924, and adopted it two years later at its annual conference. Even so, there was considerable debate about it among socialists at the time. One major argument in the ILP was that a living wage was unachievable in a capitalist society. James Maxton made the point that while the ILP wanted socialism, the workers wanted a living wage, and the fact that capitalism could not provide it was a big propaganda point against capitalism. As Johann Lamont said, the trade unions inside the Labour Party were concerned that it might interfere with free collective bargaining. However, an accommodation was reached. The ILP's living wage policy applied to Government employees first, followed by workers in firms receiving Government money—another point that was made by Johann Lamont—and then, after two years, to all other industries.

That is happening at the moment. In March last year, following London's action five years ago, Glasgow City Council adopted the living wage model for its staff. It is especially pertinent that we are debating the issue between international workers memorial day yesterday and May day at the weekend—a holiday that was given to workers by the late Michael Foot. Yesterday, I spoke at the third international workers memorial day service at Summerlee heritage park, a museum in my constituency, which was organised by North Lanarkshire Trades Union Council. There was also an event there in February to launch the NLTUC's campaign for a living wage of £7 an hour in Lanarkshire.

Since then, I have been trying to engage my constituents in supporting the campaign because it is important that they do so. To inform them about it, I included an article on the campaign in my most recent newsletter. However, I was badly let down by a company called Mailbox Nationwide Ltd, and my newsletters have not been delivered to the vast majority of my constituents, which is extremely disappointing. The company has been blasé about it. Unfortunately, it means that my constituents do not have the appropriate information to help in the campaign to press the council on that important policy.

The living wage campaign is about securing a decent pay packet that allows workers to access housing, pay their bills, feed and clothe their families, and have disposable income to spend on activities that better-off people take for granted. In February, Richard Leonard, writing in the *Morning Star*, pointed out that a wage that was set at the London rate of £7.60 an hour would lift 25 per cent of the entire workforce in North Lanarkshire above the breadline. Even if North Lanarkshire adopted the Glasgow rate of £7 an hour, the lowest paid fifth of all women workers would benefit. In a news release from the GMB union, Richard Leonard also made the point that part-time women workers living in the Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill UK Parliament constituency receive the poorest pay in Lanarkshire, with more than 60 per cent—nearly 5,000 women—on less than £8 an hour. It is a major equality issue; a living wage would have a dramatic impact on low-paid part-time women workers, and would help in the quest to close the unacceptable gender pay gap.

There can be no doubt that Labour's minimum wage was a radical step in supporting workers. When it was introduced it raised the floor for the lowest paid 20th percentile in North Lanarkshire. Unfortunately, many employers simply use it as the rate for the job, and there are still too many working poor people in our society. I hope that North Lanarkshire Council heeds the call for the policy, as it would be fitting for the council to become one of the first to implement a living wage. The ILP championed the policy in the 1920s, and three of its socialist members were linked to Lanarkshire. Bargeddie was the childhood home of John Wheatley, Jennie Lee was first elected to Parliament as a Lanarkshire representative at the age of 24 and, of course, Keir Hardie was born in Lanarkshire. In Parliament in 1912—almost 100 years ago—Keir Hardie called for basic workers' rights, such as a maximum eight-hour working day and a minimum living wage that matched the cost of living. That is what we should now be pursuing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We move to the wind-up speeches.

10:04

Jeremy Purvis: The debate started with Patrick Harvie saying that it is not sufficient for parties simply to care about the issue, because sentiment will not make the difference that we need. I agree. We need to look at actions, both those that the parties promise in their different approaches and those that they have taken in government, whether at UK or Scotland level.

Johann Lamont quoted the Institute for Fiscal Studies review of the tax policies of all the parties. It is fair for her to quote that report, but let me quote in full what it said about our proposal to lift the tax threshold:

"In isolation, this giveaway could not be described as progressive, but to consider the distributional impact of the Liberal Democrats' package as a whole we must also consider who would lose from the tax rises they would introduce to pay for this tax cut".

What makes the policy progressive is not the proposal in isolation, but the fact that we would pay for it by a mansion tax on properties that are valued at more than £2 million and, as I said in my opening speech, by closing the loopholes for those who can afford tax advisers and who thereby contribute to the £40 billion of tax avoidance that has continued during the many years in which Johann Lamont's party has been in UK government.

Alex Neil: How many properties in Scotland are valued at more than £2 million and would therefore qualify for the mansion tax?

Jeremy Purvis: For band G and band H properties, the minister will know the figure. He will also know that taxing properties in that way would allow us to lift 533,000 people in Scotland out of paying income tax. He has the figures, so I am sure that he will be supportive of the policy when he has regard to them. Indeed, that shows one of the benefits of being part of the United Kingdom. If we have a United Kingdom policy that recognises that Scotland has more people on lower wages and fewer £2 million properties, perhaps we can be more progressive across the UK so that the south-east of England, which the minister is forever condemning and criticising, becomes a little bit more redistributive within the United Kingdom.

Let those who seek to raise such issues be clear about the effect of their own policies. As I pointed out, for the period 2008-12 the Scottish Government will have provided a £700 million tax cut through the council tax freeze. We know that the 130,000 properties in band A and households with less than £16,000 will not gain from the council tax freeze. We need openness from the Government on that.

Finally, the SNP's Rob Gibson said that low pay occurs particularly in the hotels and restaurants sector, but he suggested that the Scottish Government can do nothing about that because it has no levers over the economy. I gently point out to him that hotels and restaurants—in his area and in my constituency—are now facing increases in their tax bills, for a tax that is fully devolved to his Government, of up to and over 100 per cent. Last week, John Swinney finally wrote to me to confirm that a number of options for transitional relief are available to hotels and restaurant businesses. However, as Rob Gibson knows, the SNP voted against any such support. Does he think that such increases in devolved taxation, which have been introduced while his party is in government, will have no impact on jobs and wages? I hope that he will reflect on that policy, as I suspect that the scale of the increase will have an impact.

10:09

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): In the main, the debate has been very good and has had the appropriate tone, which Patrick Harvie set in his opening speech. With levels of poverty in Scotland that are unacceptable and with in-work poverty on the increase, the Conservative response is that we need to boost the economy so that jobs can be created. As a policy response, our priority is to keep people in work and to try to create new jobs to help more people to get into work.

The debate takes place at a time when unemployment has again been on the increase. The most recent figures, which were published last week, show that the number of unemployed people in the United Kingdom has increased by 43,000 to 2.5 million people. In Scotland, the figure increased by 6,000 to a total of 208,000. Combined with the inevitable fiscal squeeze on the Scottish budget, those figures suggest that we face a serious issue.

However, the debate so far has not explored the potential impact of Mr Harvie's proposals on the private sector and, from a money point of view, on the public sector. The private sector is currently struggling. Businesses are trying to keep their heads above water and are struggling for survival. My slight concern about the motion and about the implication of what many contributors to the debate have suggested is that the proposals could cost jobs. The Poverty Alliance's very helpful briefing suggests that its proposals would benefit 60 per cent of employees in the retail sector. If the retail sector was forced to increase the wages of 60 per cent of its employees, that would inevitably cost jobs and make it extremely difficult to create new jobs in that sector. For the hospitality sector, the figure was put at 70 per cent.

Patrick Harvie: Does Gavin Brown accept that, even for the private sector, a question of will is involved? Any private sector business that was willing to have a maximum wage ratio of 10:1 would be able to afford the policy.

Gavin Brown: However, Mr Harvie must accept that most, if not all, private sector companies are bound by contractual entitlements at every level of the organisation. Whether at the lowest level, in the middle or at the level of senior management, there are contractual entitlements that companies cannot simply ignore. Ultimately, if companies did that, they would end up before an employment tribunal and would have to pay the money anyway, in addition to the legal costs.

As regards the impact on the public sector, budgets have already been squeezed this year. According to the Centre for Public Policy for Regions and according to the Scottish Government's chief economic adviser, the outlook for the next five years is extremely worrying. My concern is that, given that there will be a fixed amount of money coming in, an increase in the wage bill now will inevitably lead to jobs being lost and jobs not being created.

For those reasons, the Conservative party will vote for the amendment in the name of Derek Brownlee.

10:13

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I thank Patrick Harvie for bringing the debate to Parliament. From different angles, we have expressed our shared values about the desire for a more equal society. Members have highlighted how low pay has an impact on certain sectors within our communities, in particular on women. We have heard about the social justice dimension and the impact on families. We have also heard about the benefit that a living wage can bring to society. I welcome the minister's desire for full employment, which is an objective that we share.

I want to spend a couple of moments on the business case for a living wage. Many of the research documents that are available to us, including a study of the living wage in London, identify that the benefits of the living wage include easier recruitment and retention, reduced recruitment costs, higher-quality staff, better attendance at work, better productivity, motivation and loyalty, and better-quality service. My colleague David Whitton was about to mention the Staffordshire University business school study on the economic impact of the living wage in Stoke-on-Trent, where the economic multiplier effect—that is, the impact of the living wage on the economy—has been very positive. The study concluded that, for every £1 an hour more that

was paid to a public sector care worker, £1.63 was injected into the local economy. That suggests that, combined with the social values that we have already expressed, a living wage would be “a smart business move”, in the words of Guy Stallard, who is the director of KPMG Europe. Fair Pay Network quotes Guy Stallard as saying:

“We have found that paying the Living Wage is a smart business move as increasing wages has reduced staff turnover and absenteeism, whilst productivity and professionalism has subsequently increased.”

Therefore, a strong business case can be argued in favour of the living wage.

The debate has raised some interesting subjects, including the council tax freeze. I recollect the interesting work that the *Glasgow Herald* carried out in relation to Scottish Government ministers and the benefit that they have gained from the council tax freeze. We should reflect on the points that Mr Purvis made on that issue.

Local income tax is not often mentioned, but we did hear a mention today of that unworkable tax, which was condemned by most of Scotland. Perhaps we will hear about it again in the near future.

Ironically, Mr John Wilson challenged my colleague David Whitton on the subject of the national minimum wage. The SNP slogan was “Stand up for Scotland”, but SNP members were not able to get out of bed for the low-paid people of Scotland.

We should acknowledge the good work that was done by the Labour mayor of London, who introduced the living wage, and by the Labour-led Glasgow City Council. We need to provide good examples of the social impact and benefit of a living wage, as well as the economic impact, which I have sought to argue for this morning.

Johann Lamont asked some key questions, which I will repeat to the minister, in relation to the powers that are available to him. The SNP often talks about the powers that it does not have, but the Scottish Government does have powers in this regard, which it should be using. The point that was made about the debate between the health secretary and the finance secretary over the NHS and the living wage was particularly interesting. It would be nice to hear an answer on that, and on the procurement strategy and policies of the Scottish Government, and the impact of that on advocating the living wage and making it a reality. There is also the impact on Government departments and pay policy to consider.

The living wage provides a virtuous circle of spending in local communities, with the economic multiplier that it brings to the local economy. It is fairness in action for both the employer and the

employee. It is a good marriage between economic efficiency and social justice. I seek members’ support for the amendment in my name.

10:17

Alex Neil: I agree with Gavin Brown and Andy Kerr: this has been a fairly civilised and good debate. It is perhaps a shame that it is restricted to just over an hour, as the subject is very important. I will try to answer the points that have been put to the Government as far as I can within my time, and to explode some myths that have been perpetuated yet again.

The Labour Party’s commitment to a living wage would be more credible if it had done anything in its past 13 years in power to implement it, which it has not done. As Elaine Smith articulately pointed out, it has been Labour Party policy to have a living wage since 1924, 86 years ago. During the interim, there have been six Labour Governments, yet we still do not have a living wage. The Labour Party has a record of failure and incredibility on the issue.

Duncan McNeil: Will the minister take an intervention?

Alex Neil: The Liberal Democrats talk about a mansion tax. To impose a mansion tax in Scotland would require them to undermine the Scotland Act 1998 totally and to override the powers of this Parliament and the rights of local authorities.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the minister give way on that point?

Alex Neil: No, I will not. They cannot even tell us how much money the mansion tax would raise—and they talk about prudence.

Jeremy Purvis: Well, if the minister would—

Alex Neil: The member could not answer the question when I asked him it, so he should sit down.

As far as myth is concerned—

Jeremy Purvis: Will the minister give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is not giving way, Mr Purvis.

Alex Neil: On the myth about the National Minimum Wage Bill, let me point out that there were 33 Scottish Labour MPs in bed at the time, too. Indeed, Tony Blair was in bed at the time of the division that Mr Whitton referred to. Facts are chieftains that win a ding—that is the reality.

The other myth, which Johann Lamont articulated, is that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth tried to veto a plan to implement the living wage in the national

health service that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing proposed.

Duncan McNeil: Will the minister take an intervention?

Alex Neil: That is a lot of nonsense. As Andy Kerr should know, being a former health minister and finance minister, we have actually implemented that plan from 1 April.

Duncan McNeil: The minister is feart.

Alex Neil: If we have implemented it, how can it have been vetoed?

Duncan McNeil: Feart!

Alex Neil: Ah'm no feart o you, Duncan.

On the wider issue, the current lowest rate of pay in Scottish Government core activity is £6.53 per hour. Under this Government, that will increase to £7.23 an hour from 1 August. Unlike the Labour Government in London, the SNP Government in Scotland is implementing the living wage.

Duncan McNeil: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is not taking an intervention, Mr McNeil.

Alex Neil: Labour has had 13 wasted years; we have had three productive years, in which we are implementing the policy that Labour failed to deliver for 86 years.

Of course I pay tribute to Glasgow City Council and to the leadership of Steven Purcell—we have done so publicly. Elaine Smith has referred to North Lanarkshire Council. It is the only other Labour-controlled council in Scotland, and it has had to be brought screaming and kicking to implement the equal pay and single status strategy, which—

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention on that?

Alex Neil: No—the member did not sit in on the debate.

Only now is North Lanarkshire Council being brought screaming and kicking to implement that pay strategy, at a very late hour. We will take no lessons from the Labour Party on the living wage. It is to the eternal shame of the Labour Party that over the past 13 years the level of income inequality in the United Kingdom—under Gordon Brown's stewardship—is now the worst that it has been in decades. That is Labour's record. We are proud of our record. We are delivering the living wage, not just throughout the national health service in Scotland but throughout every area of

government for which we are responsible. We can be proud—but not Labour.

10:22

Patrick Harvie: I thank Alex Neil for his kind remarks about my constructive tone. Oh, the tragic irony.

Seriously, I recognise that Alex Neil and members of other parties have acknowledged that the debate is not just about poverty; it is also about income inequality. In his opening remarks, the minister was challenged by members such as Johann Lamont and Jeremy Purvis on the impact of the decision to freeze the council tax. There is an entirely valid debate there, which I will address in a few minutes, in responding to Jeremy Purvis's points.

Duncan McNeil: Does Patrick Harvie regret that the SNP whips prevented someone with a great record on this issue from participating in the debate? John Wilson has been involved in the campaign for a living wage for many years. Does Patrick Harvie agree that it is a disgrace that the SNP whips prevented that man from speaking in this debate?

Patrick Harvie: I would very much have welcomed his contribution to the debate.

Let me move on. There are measures that the Scottish Government can take. Alex Neil said that the debate is not all about the Scottish Government, and that we should consider local government, too. The Scottish Government has the power to use the historic concordat, single outcome agreements and so on to ensure that local government is delivering in this respect. The minister said that the Scottish Government cannot control or regulate the private sector. Yes, it can, through procurement—as Johann Lamont mentioned—and also through the various agencies.

Let us consider, for example, the tourism sector and the support that Government agencies give to it. That support could be contingent on the adoption of a living wage. We cannot directly control what the UK Government does but, in many subject areas, we have shown that, when Scotland takes a bold stand, it has an impact across the political culture and among all political parties throughout the rest of the UK. We can give leadership.

David Whitton asked us to recognise Labour's record on the issue. I entirely do so. I agree with aspects of Andy Kerr's amendment. I entirely agree that

"the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 was one of the most seminal pieces of the legislation of the twentieth century in terms of promoting dignity at work".

I hope that David Whitton agrees that the 1998 act in itself is not enough but needs to be built on and developed. An uprated minimum wage of £3.64 per hour is unacceptable. We must acknowledge the age inequality in the minimum wage system.

Jeremy Purvis's comments were important. He made a case against the council tax freeze. There is a case for and a case against the freeze, and we can have that debate. I might have much sympathy with the argument that Jeremy Purvis made; other members might have less sympathy with it. However, his comments were important for another reason. We must acknowledge that a difficulty that we have arrived at across the political culture is that all political parties, whether they are in government or in opposition, have found themselves painted into a corner. Throughout my life I have heard ministers from the four other political parties that are represented in the chamber today allowing tax to be portrayed ever more starkly as a political villain. We are told that public services are good but tax is bad. That just does not add up. We have had promise after promise of Swedish levels of public spending and public services, with American levels of tax. That cannot work and we should not be in the least surprised that after decades of such talk we have become an ever more unequal society.

If we are to turn that round and reduce inequality, we need our whole political culture to change. We need greater recognition that tax—paying collectively for public goods—is a positive thing in society. On the day when I see a Government-sponsored television campaign that urges people to shop tax avoiders that is backed by as much money as are the campaigns that ask people to inform on benefits cheats, I will know that we have made progress. Far, far more money is lost to the Exchequer through tax avoidance than through people in poverty trying to play the system instead of sitting back and letting the system play them.

Derek Brownlee acknowledged that inequality is important. However, we must recognise the need for progressive taxation instead of the current system in which vast salaries are paid on the false premise that a tiny group in society have some kind of magical powers and we must not lose the best of the best—that is a lie and a con and we have to throw it out. If we want a more progressive taxation system, we need to challenge those values.

Johann Lamont reminded us that there are people in the business community who will take any opportunity to challenge or criticise the minimum wage.

Political parties, instead of using the UK election campaign to compete on policies to crack down on tax avoiders and bonus junkies, are courting the

tax avoiders and the companies that they run, as leaders of the business community. The parties are even seeking those people's advice on the tax and national insurance decisions that face us. That is the political culture that we need to throw out if we are to become the more equal society that all members have said on paper that they support.

Democratic Reform

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6215, in the name of Robin Harper, on democratic reform.

10:28

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): The Scottish people are about to go to the ballot boxes again and this time round they will vote in one of the most extraordinary elections that we have faced for some time. The sitting Prime Minister himself described the election as “wide open”.

I hope that there is an open invitation for more diversity to be brought to the green benches of the House of Commons at Westminster. However, the voting system that is in use for the general election does not, cannot and will not reflect the true colours of Scottish opinion. We will be left yet again with a Parliament at Westminster that does not truly reflect how we cast our votes, because we cannot yet vote under a system of proportional representation.

The Scottish Greens have brought this debate to ensure that the Scottish Parliament speaks proudly and positively on the issue. We want to give the Scottish Parliament a chance to make a clear stand against the long-discredited system of first past the post and in favour of a fairer system of voting for the Scottish people in the Westminster elections.

More than that, we want to tell people throughout the United Kingdom that PR is already working, and working well, here in Scotland.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Rubbish!

Robin Harper: I thank George Foulkes for that intervention.

During the past 11 years, Holyrood has matured into a successful, modern, European parliamentary democracy. PR has served us well and we should say so clearly, particularly at this time.

George Foulkes: Will the member take an intervention?

Robin Harper: I will not take an intervention from a member who has already indicated his view by describing my speech as rubbish before he even heard it. I advise the member to listen.

The mood of public opinion has turned firmly against first past the post. The polls have demonstrated an appetite for change and some of the most recent results show that public support for proportional representation is at an all-time high, with around two thirds of the public in favour.

In 1999 and 2003, I remember how many people felt that their vote had counted for the first time. I am quite sure that they included Conservatives who had not thought that their votes had counted for a long time.

Even Alex Massie, from that bastion of Conservatism, *The Spectator*, has questioned how sustainable first past the post is. He said:

“Electoral reform didn’t matter a damn when the Big Two won nine in ten votes; if they only win six in ten then matters seem rather different and you have an awful lot of people sitting on the sidelines, frustrated and feeling ignored and shut-out from the conversation.”

The current system of first past the post means that tens of thousands of voters see their votes go to waste. The Electoral Reform Society reckons that about 70 per cent of votes are wasted. The system allows a party that receives a tiny minority of votes to win a clear but undemocratic majority of seats. For example, in 2005 Labour won 55 per cent of the seats contested, with just 35 per cent of the popular vote. That was absurd. Most people voted against their local member of Parliament and barely a third of votes delivered Labour a whopping majority. It is no wonder that confidence in politics has fallen so low. An unfair electoral system mixed with an expenses scandal makes for a pretty toxic cocktail.

In Scotland there is a system of proportional representation for every layer of government apart from Westminster. Scottish voters are used to voting for different political parties in the constituency and list votes for Holyrood and, by and large, they understand well how to use their votes to get the results that they want—although the results are not necessarily those that members of the Scottish Parliament want. Westminster remains a political pariah, with its archaic system of voting, which was intended for a two-party state. The system is well past its sell-by date.

The single transferable vote system offers the best and fairest form of proportional representation, while preserving a local link between members and the areas that they represent. Every voter’s preference counts. There is no need for tactical voting. Voters are likely to get at least one member of Parliament from a party that they support, even if that is not their favourite party.

Generations of establishment MPs have protected a system that favours their parties but which seriously disadvantages their constituents.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I thank Robin Harper for his support for STV and for extolling its virtues, but will he say why he made a submission to the Arbuthnott commission in favour of the additional member system—and not STV—for the Scottish Parliament?

Robin Harper: At the time it seemed the best system available to us, and there was a good record of it working extremely well in Germany.

As I said, generations of establishment MPs have protected a system that favours their parties but which seriously disadvantages their constituents. It must not be allowed to continue. Any Government should either be backed by a majority of the electorate or be prepared to work as a minority Administration. Fairer votes have worked at Holyrood and in Scottish local government, and the time has come to bring reform to the Westminster Parliament too. I urge members to back the call for Holyrood's successful use of proportional representation to be set up as an example to inspire reformers in that last bastion of wasted votes and overpowerful minorities.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the current UK general election must be the last to use the discredited first-past-the-post electoral system and that the single transferable vote is the best way to ensure that the public receive the democratic representation that they deserve in future.

10:36

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): I have not been convinced by Robin Harper's arguments—he might not be surprised to hear that. I noted that he did not use the word “constituent” or “electorate”, which is telling. There was no evidence in his speech that STV would ensure that representatives are more accountable to their constituents than to their party leaders. Robin Harper's contribution was flawed in that respect.

In the amendment in my name, we state clearly our position, which is that we should continue to maintain the constituency link. There are arguments for and against us in that respect, and the first-past-the-post system has many challenges, but we cannot move away from the fact that it has successfully provided an opportunity for communities to elect and deselect representatives on many occasions, sometimes to the detriment of members of this chamber. Local examples include Dennis Canavan and Jean Turner, in respect of whom communities in Falkirk West and Strathkelvin and Bearsden had an opportunity that would not have been afforded to them under the STV system.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): The point that the Labour Party must answer is that the first-past-the-post system also gave us Mrs Thatcher, despite the vehement opposition of two thirds of the electorate.

Paul Martin: I would not disagree with Robert Brown on the fact that we unfortunately had Margaret Thatcher for that period.

There is no evidence that the use of STV in local government has increased voter turnout. We have raised that issue in the chamber on a number of occasions. It is a fixation of the media that we have not been able to increase voter turnout, and during the recent local government elections there was no evidence that the introduction of the single transferable vote system had enabled us to increase voter turnout. I also note that STV for local government has created comfort zones in many multimember wards throughout Scotland. I cannot see how the electorate have benefited since we introduced the system for local government in 2007.

I am not one for defending the minority Scottish National Party Government, and I will not start this morning, but I cannot help but observe what the so-called proportionality of this Parliament has created. I ask members to recall the events of last year's budget, when the Green party had such a disproportionate effect on the outcome of the minority Government's budget. It should be noted that 4 per cent of the regional votes were cast in favour of the Green party, and nearly 1 per cent for Margo MacDonald. It was clear from the budget negotiations that those who were elected with the fewest votes were able to make their demands of the minority Government.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It is arithmetical reality that the Green party in this chamber had two votes on the budget. Any other two members could have negotiated had they wished to. The question is one of the power of the whips, which controls back benchers. It would be a far better and more mature democracy if back benchers of all political parties threw their weight about.

Paul Martin: It is a mathematical fact that more than 10,000 votes were cast in favour of me in my constituency of Glasgow Springburn, while 10,000 votes were cast in favour of Patrick Harvie in the whole of the Glasgow region. Considering that, I think that the effect that Patrick Harvie had was disproportionate.

Patrick Harvie referred to *The Spectator*, so I refer him to an article in it by Fraser Nelson that is headlined, “The pitfalls of a minority government”. He states:

“The Greens were bribing”

the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth,

“asking for £22 million for some home insulation scheme, then upping it to £33 million. As always with the PR system, the tail wags the dog.”

I could not have put it better myself.

I do not fault members for seeking to negotiate the position to their advantage; I simply point out that every system, including proportional representation, has its flaws. Surely it is unacceptable that those in the chamber who received the fewest votes can command such power during budget negotiations.

I note from today's *Business Bulletin* that the SNP is silent on the issue. SNP members may argue for a more proportional system—we will hear from them—and they may argue against the first-past-the-post system, but I must ask why so many SNP members seek the prize of the constituency MSP position. Many of them shadow constituency MSPs, and many have sought the prize successfully—Nicola Sturgeon and Bruce Crawford among them. They had such enthusiasm for seeking constituency representation during the previous session that they will surely continue to support that constituency link and the first-past-the-post system.

In conclusion, as I have said, there is no perfect system, but we need to be clear about the fact that we wish to retain the constituency link. We should reflect on the fact that the STV system is flawed and serves up many anomalies. I ask members to support the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S3M-6215.2, to leave out from “the current” to end and insert:

“there is no perfect electoral system, with each having advantages, disadvantages and the potential to produce anomalous outcomes; acknowledges the value of the constituency link in promoting and preserving accountability and the service of elected representatives; believes that democratic reform should encompass far greater change than simply potential changes to the system of election, and welcomes the significant progress in this regard, including devolution in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London, the ending of hereditary peerages in the House of Lords and the enactment of the Human Rights and Freedom of Information Acts.”

10:42

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the opportunity afforded by the Scottish Greens to debate the topical issue of voting systems. I regret that that is where the consensus ends, because I do not agree with the terms of the motion that the Greens have lodged and the aim to introduce a single transferable vote for Westminster elections. Having heard Paul Martin's speech, I think that there is a degree of consensus between us and those on the Labour benches, not least on the basis of the sedentary intervention from George Foulkes, with whom I have some sympathy—at least on certain occasions.

The first-past-the-post voting system has served us well over many years. It has delivered stable

Governments at Westminster, with a parliamentary majority that has allowed them, whatever their political complexion, to tackle the difficult issues facing the nation. At a time of economic recession—the worst in recorded history—and crisis in our public finances, now is not the time to change the voting system to prevent any party from achieving an overall majority.

The great advantage of the first-past-the-post system is that it puts the voters in charge. When they feel that the Government has run its course, they can vote for it to be replaced in its entirety. Of course, that is exactly what happened in 1997, when, as my party knows to its cost, a Conservative Government that had been in power for 18 years was replaced wholesale with a Labour Government. Although that was a very uncomfortable experience for my party, I have no doubt that it reflected the mood of the country at the time.

The difficulty with proportional representation is that it transfers power from the people to the politicians.

Patrick Harvie: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry—I have only four minutes. Let me make some progress.

There has been much debate about the issue in the past few weeks and talk of the possibility of a hung Parliament. Let us imagine that we had proportional representation and were virtually guaranteed hung Parliaments in every election. If that was the case, we could even have a situation in which, post election, the Liberal Democrats do a deal with Labour, who might have come third in the election, and put it back into power. That outcome would clearly be unacceptable to the people, but that is what happens if we have proportional representation.

Robert Brown referred, rather inaccurately, to the history of Margaret Thatcher, who never obtained less than 40 per cent of the popular vote. Under proportional representation, we could face a scenario after the election in which Gordon Brown continues in office as Prime Minister with the support of the Liberal Democrats. Someone who has been rejected by the people could be propped up in office by the Lib Dems under PR. That is why PR is wrong.

The worst aspect of PR is that it has allowed the extreme socialists of the British National Party to gain a foothold in the European Parliament as representatives of English constituencies. Under the first-past-the-post system, those extremists would have no prospect of being elected, but under PR they have been given a leg up, which has provided them with a platform for promoting their pernicious policies. The election of two BNP members of the European Parliament is the best

possible argument against the use of PR for Westminster elections.

Tricia Marwick: The member mentioned the European Parliament elections, but BNP candidates were elected because people voted for them, not because of the voting system. Why have many tens of BNP councillors been elected in England under the first-past-the-post system?

Murdo Fraser: It is deeply to be regretted that the use of PR has resulted in the BNP being given a platform in the European Parliament. It was a mistake to move away from a first-past-the-post system.

We do not believe that the current system is perfect; indeed, we have called for it to be reformed. Far too many constituencies in which Labour MPs are elected have very small electorates in comparison with those in which Conservatives MPs are elected. We need a fairer distribution of seats, and we believe that the Boundary Commission should be given that remit. A more equitable distribution of seats would provide a fairer outcome for all and would mean that the good aspects of the first-past-the-post system in delivering strong and stable government would be preserved.

I move amendment S3M-6215.1, to leave out from “UK” to end and insert:

“first-past-the-post electoral system has delivered decades of strong and stable government in the United Kingdom; regrets that the adoption of proportional representation for European elections has resulted in the election of members of the British National Party; supports the retention of first-past-the-post for Westminster elections, and calls for the necessary reforms to be made to the system so as to ensure a fairer outcome in future UK elections.”

10:46

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): I begin by clarifying that I am pleased to support the Green party’s motion, particularly as the UK general election campaign enters its final week. The campaign has raised many issues, not least the need for electoral reform. The Scottish Government supports Robin Harper’s call for an end to the first-past-the-post electoral system and the introduction of proportional representation.

The advantages of PR are well known, but there are those who tell us that PR inevitably leads to unstable government—we have just had one such rant from Murdo Fraser. That is not true. There are examples of successful and stable Governments around the world that have been elected under various forms of PR. Germany is an example of a stable country that is led by a Government that was formed under PR. Elections in Germany are decided by the additional member system. PR is

widely used throughout Europe. Outside the UK, every other European country, except France, uses it. In the European states, there are 15 coalitions, seven majority Governments, including Greece, and three minority Governments.

Paul Martin said that the system that is used for Scottish Parliament elections, the additional member system, encourages the behaviour that he referred to. The use of an STV system would knock that on the head. Where does Labour stand on the alternative vote system, which Paul Martin did not mention once? Where does Paul Martin stand on that?

Paul Martin: We have not heard Bruce Crawford—or any other member—use the word “electorate”. Is he suggesting that STV should be introduced for Scottish Parliament elections?

Bruce Crawford: The SNP has advocated the use of STV for many a long year because it gives parties an incentive to present a balanced team of candidates to maximise the number of high preference votes that they receive, which helps the advancement of women candidates and candidates from minority groups, who might otherwise be overlooked in the search for a safe candidate in a first-past-the-post election.

The first-past-the-post system is implicated in many things that turn people off politics: safe seats that the campaign treats as if they were irrelevant; the targeting of swing voters in marginal seats that makes all parties sound alike; and the adversarial posturing that goes on between elections. There are no safe seats under STV, candidates cannot be complacent and parties must campaign everywhere, not just in the marginals. Reforming the voting system is part of the process of reconnecting the people to politics, and in that regard it could make a significant difference.

Since 2007, we have had a minority Government in Scotland and, prior to 2007, we had a coalition Executive. The combination of those factors has not led to instability, as the detractors of PR would have had us believe. PR provides a more accurate reflection of voting intentions and gives people the opportunity to elect a wider and more representative range of candidates that reflects the make-up of society, while still allowing candidates to maintain a close link with the communities that they represent.

In 2007, there were many who argued that the minority Government would not survive. Few would have predicted how successful it would have been three years on. It has meant that new ways of working together have had to be adopted, which have allowed us to deliver for the people of Scotland. I will take a moment to highlight the achievements of the minority Government, the list of which is comprehensive.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Perhaps the minister should not do that just now.

Bruce Crawford: Okay. I guess that I will conclude there, as my time is up.

10:51

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): We have heard some extraordinary things so far in the debate. Paul Martin cited Fraser Nelson, of all people, in support of his proposition, while Murdo Fraser used the current situation under the first-past-the-post system and the prospect of a minority Government at Westminster as an argument against PR, which seems a bit peculiar to say the least.

It may not come as a surprise to the Parliament to learn that Liberal Democrats will support the motion on democratic reform, which is a timely call not just for proportional representation to be used in Westminster elections, but for the introduction of the STV system. I welcome Green support for the cause but, as Robin Harper fairly acknowledged, it has been the remarkable success of Nick Clegg in the prime ministerial debates and the surge in support for the Liberal Democrats that has put the issue smack in the centre of the political debate.

Social justice is a cause that Labour members go on about—they claim that it is close to their hearts. Democratic renewal is very much a social justice issue; indeed, it is central to the delivery of social justice in our country. I understand the naked political interest that causes Labour and the Conservatives to favour the first-past-the-post system that so favours their parties and to reject the fair system of PR that gives proper representation to other parties, but I find it extremely difficult to regard as a principled stance a position whereby one person's vote is treated as having three or four times the value of another person's vote. When the polls show that the three major parties all have support of around 30 per cent, the public are, I think, rather surprised to discover that that could result in the Tories and the Labour Party gaining 260 seats each and the Liberal Democrats getting only 90 to 100. Welcome to democracy, Westminster-style.

To be fair to Labour, it has played a major part in introducing PR to Scottish Parliament and Scottish local government elections—Paul Martin tried to expunge that record—but on voting reform at Westminster, it has been hugely evasive. As has been mentioned, Labour's last-ditch conversion to the non-proportional alternative vote system took place only when it became clear that it was going to lose the general election.

Of course, PR has a downside. It brought back the Scottish Conservatives from the land of the

undead and it gave the minority SNP Government its chance—although there is an interesting twist to that, given that yesterday it was revealed that Alex Salmond has lost half the support that existed for independence when he became SNP leader for the second time: the figure is down to only 15 per cent.

There is another interesting aspect to the potential for PR at Westminster. Its use would destroy the artificial Conservative majority in England and the artificial Labour majority in Scotland, thus restoring a commonality to political trends across the UK and taking the sting out of the West Lothian question.

Those are interesting quirks, but STV PR would put the people and their concerns at the centre of the political process. The country has manifestly had enough of the two old parties; of the electoral pendulum swinging back and forth between them; of a war in Iraq that was entered into against the will of the British people; of billions of pounds of public money being poured into the banks without it being a condition that the obscene executive bonuses be ended; and of Mrs Thatcher and her destruction of society, which was carried out when the Conservatives had a majority of the seats but only a proportion of the vote and against the gritted objection of two thirds of the public. Labour's intransigence on voting reform has a great deal to answer for.

Voting reform at Westminster is not just a long overdue measure of social justice and popular empowerment in itself. It is central to a swathe of long overdue political reforms that are required to clean up the system, not least of which is the need to end the Prime Minister's ability to call a general election at a time of his choosing.

Something interesting is happening at this election. People—young people in particular—are reconnecting to the issue, girding their loins for something different and seeing hope, optimism and opportunities for the future. Much of that focuses around the boring, anorak, but vital question of fair and equal votes. Tonight the Scottish Parliament can play its part in the process by backing the motion.

10:55

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I thank the Green party for bringing us the debate on STV PR. I confess that I was beginning to get withdrawal symptoms, because it must be at least two years since we had such a debate. As a self-confessed geek about electoral systems, I thank the Green party for providing me with a timely fix.

It is important for us to understand why we are debating PR today. It is because the Labour Government, in its death throes, is desperately

trying to find a lifeline for when it is thrown out of office next Thursday. Labour members have watched the return of the Tories in the Scottish Parliament through PR, and they realise that the Labour Party might need PR for itself at Westminster in the future.

I agree with the Greens that STV PR is necessary for Westminster. There is no point in trying to renew that discredited institution by bringing in more new members of Parliament than at any time for about 100 years if we do not also renew the electoral system that encouraged some of the excesses. Channel 4 did an analysis that showed that those who were most at fault—those who made the most claims—were those who were in seats that had the biggest majorities.

STV PR puts the voter in charge and gives every voter a voice. Perhaps after yesterday's events in Rochdale, the Labour Party does not really want voters to have that voice. STV PR takes the power out of the hands of political parties. It allows the voter to choose between parties and between candidates in each of those parties. If women wish to vote for only women candidates, they can do so. If they want to vote for only male candidates, they can do that, too; STV PR allows them to do so. If people wish to vote only for their preferred political party and for no other, there is nothing to stop them.

STV PR will stop forever the obscenity of the only people who have an impact in a UK general election being a handful of voters in a handful of marginal seats that change from one election to the next. That is what determines the UK Government. STV PR will give everyone an equal vote, regardless of where they live in the UK. Everyone's vote is not equal while marginal seats and the support of people at the polls in those seats are, frankly, courted and bought by political parties.

At the moment, Scotland has four different voting systems—local government, Westminster, Europe and the Scottish Parliament—and that is unsustainable. I worked hard to ensure STV PR for local government, and I believe that it should be introduced for elections to the Scottish Parliament. It is imperative that the Westminster Parliament also introduces STV PR.

I want to pick up on a couple of points that were made earlier in the debate. I found Murdo Fraser's amendment and speech to be quite shameful. Although it is true that BNP members were elected to Europe under a proportional representation system, the fact is that people voted for them, and they did so because the Labour Party and the Tories have all but abandoned constituencies to the BNP. It is worth reminding ourselves that BNP members have been elected in council elections all over England under the first-past-the-post

system. It is not the electoral system that is at fault for letting in the BNP; frankly, it is down to the other political parties.

I want to pick up very gently on the Greens—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should be winding up. Speeches are four minutes.

Tricia Marwick: On the Greens and Arbutnott, I welcome today's conversion to STV PR. The Greens are coming home, and it is very welcome.

11:00

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): The title of today's debate is "Democratic Reform", and that does not just cover the system of election to the House of Commons. First, we must reform the unrepresentative and unelected second chamber at Westminster: the House of Lords. That could be done by abolishing it, and for a while I was in favour of that; I voted for abolition when I was a member of the House of Commons. However, after further discussion and consideration, I am now in favour of a 100 per cent elected second chamber at Westminster, on the clear understanding that the second chamber be kept as a revising legislature. On that basis, the second chamber could be elected under proportional representation. There could be a very good argument for that, and the single transferable vote could even be used with, ideally, a third of the membership changing at every election.

The Lords would be the revising legislature, but the House of Commons would provide the Government, which needs to be stable. As Murdo Fraser rightly said, during most normal elections, the first-past-the-post system provides that stability. The first chamber would provide the Government and the second chamber would be the legislative chamber.

To achieve that, and to get some stability, we would need a written constitution to define the way in which both chambers would be elected and the respective powers of each. We need a written constitution anyway, because we now have the Supreme Court and the separation of powers needs to be more clearly defined. We also need it because we have devolved institutions, such as the Scottish Parliament, which need to have a clear role and their responsibilities set out in a written constitution. I hope that England will move towards having an English parliament sooner rather than later.

The electoral systems that I have described for both Westminster chambers are only part of democratic reform. I am in favour of voting at the age of 16, and I hope that the next Labour Government, to be elected next Thursday, will move in that direction. I am also in favour of

compulsory voting, which Helen Liddell has recently been advocating, and which has been very effective in Australia.

I am also in favour of voting taking place over the weekend. Why do we vote on a Thursday? Except for historical precedent, there is no logical reason. It would be much better if people could vote over the weekend when they are not working. Elections could even be held over Saturday and Sunday to make it easier for people to vote. All that is part of democratic reform.

The Liberals say that our arguments in favour of the first-past-the-post system are naked political interest. What about their arguments in favour of STV?

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

George Foulkes: No, no, no. I am in my final minute.

Are their arguments in favour of STV just pure benevolence? Are they doing it out of the goodness of their hearts? Of course not. That is naked political interest.

As for my good friend Robin Harper, whom I have known for decades, it is manifest rubbish for him to say that the system of election to this Parliament is great. We had a situation in which some man called Tymkewycz—no one knew who he was—got elected as an MSP for the SNP but then gave it up for some reason; Shirley-Anne Somerville, who was fifth on the list and had been rejected by the people of central Edinburgh then suddenly arrived as an MSP without any election whatsoever. That is not democracy. We have the craziest system for election to the Scottish Parliament, and if anyone thinks of adopting it, they are completely insane.

11:04

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I plead insanity.

Some of the arguments that have to be made about fairness need to be explored from the point of view of the proposition of single transferable votes in multimember seats. In that circumstance, there is an open list. Reconnecting with the people and holding MSPs to account could take place in that system. People would have a choice of candidates from the parties and would not need to vote for the ones that they did not like. In multimember seats with open lists, people could hold their MPs, MSPs and councillors to account.

The additional member system is more proportional in Germany, where half the members are elected by constituency and the other half are elected from the lists. The Labour Party made sure that, in the arrangements for the Scottish

Parliament, we had 73 constituency members and 56 top-up members, which is less proportional. It did not want full proportionality, which is where Labour members' arguments about the first-past-the-post system fall down. All the time, they have tried to keep things as undemocratic as they can.

British democracy is a contradiction in terms, but it is an idea on which we must take advice from people down south. Will Hutton, writing about the subject last Sunday in *The Observer*, said:

"Above all, if fairness is a value that we care about, the voting system is an offence to any conception of fair political representation. A state that can collude in this degree of unfairness in its electoral system is unlikely to be especially fair itself."

Having the debate about allowing people to be elected by a fairer system will change that state fundamentally. In fact, I believe that, once we do that, we will never again have majority government in the old form.

It is interesting to hear Lord Foulkes arguing for England to have a parliament of its own. That is fine. England's set of priorities may mean a different range of candidates getting elected there. However, what we have in Scotland is a four, five or six-party system that suits our needs.

It is of concern to me to hear the Labour Party and the Conservatives maintaining the argument that fairness is less important than majoritarianism. The SNP has long taken the principled position that votes must be fair and represent the views of the people, and we have championed proportional voting systems for decades. The only way of ensuring that the public's opinion is put into practice is to have the fairest system. Today's debate about STV in multimember seats addresses such questions for the first time.

As a Highlands and Islands member, I remember the Kilbrandon commission, which discussed PR for Scotland but found that there was some problem with very large seats with scattered populations. Nevertheless, it is possible to produce a variety of solutions to that, rather than have the whole of the Highlands and Islands as one seat.

The background against which we are having the debate is a British system that has been so unfair that, since elections became secret, the majority of people have probably voted against the person who was elected. Only once or twice in the past 100 years has the person who was elected belonged to a party that had a majority of the vote. That cannot be fair. We must move to multimember seats and STV.

I support the motion in Robin Harper's name.

11:08

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): From speeches that I have made in Parliament before, members will know that I have always wanted electoral reform. In previous debates on the subject, over the years, I have supported the basis for my position by quoting one of my Labour heroes, Aneurin Bevan, who said:

"The purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away."

I have also pointed out to colleagues previously that Labour was founded to break the established electoral system, as a modern, pluralist society requires that we reconcile the needs and desires of different sectors of society.

In this morning's earlier debate, Elaine Smith rightly referred to James Keir Hardie and the principles on which he founded the Labour Party. As the MSP for the constituency in which James Keir Hardie was born, I am proud to share his conviction in and support for electoral reform. Just as Elaine Smith was right to highlight Labour's views on the pay and dignity of working people, I agree with the words of the Labour Party in 1913, which stated that

"no system of election can be satisfactory which does not give opportunity to all parties to obtain representation in proportion to their strength."

To me, that is a matter of principle, and there is much about the outcome of PR systems that is flawed. For example, we have never been told what shady deal was done behind closed doors to get Patrick Harvie his convenership of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. However, every now and again we get indications of the outcome, and this debate might well be one of them.

Tricia Marwick says that she is getting withdrawal symptoms through the lack of discussion of the subject. Why has it taken three years from the first STV elections in local government for the issue to be raised again, especially since all of the pro-reform triumvirate opposite told us that the new system that had been introduced was insufficient to meet their demands and the principles of proportionality? Why have we never been asked, in the three years of this parliamentary session, to look again at the new local government system? I well remember the cries of the oh-so-principled parties opposite that we needed six and seven-member wards in local areas for STV to be acceptable to them. Yet, now that the new system has delivered SNP and Lib Dem councils all over the country and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is weighted in favour of the SNP, they have all gone quiet. Because they now have the power that they wanted, the new system suits them just fine. They

are doing well enough for the issue to have disappeared from the radar screen until now.

I cannot agree with Murdo Fraser that the debate is welcome. The timing of the debate, in the middle of a general election campaign, and the abandonment of a chance for the Greens to discuss environmental issues, for example, expose it for the opportunistic backroom deal that it clearly is. I suggest that Robin Harper and Patrick Harvie would have been better analysing the failures of the SNP on climate change rather than helping it out as part of their backroom deal.

Patrick Harvie: We did that two weeks ago.

Michael McMahon: The Greens could have used their time this morning to do that—it was not their debate a couple of weeks ago. This is their time, this morning, and neither of their two choices has been to debate climate change or environmental issues. They have clearly brought to the chamber a debate that suits their partnership with the SNP Government. I would have thought that, in the middle of a general election, the Greens would have wanted to talk about the environment in at least one of their subject debates. That just goes to show that, if we really want to hold the Government to account on its failings on climate change, we must look to Sarah Boyack and the Labour Party for a genuine commitment on the subject. I thank Patrick Harvie for giving me the chance to say that.

11:13

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Like Tricia Marwick, I have had some withdrawal symptoms. However, the déjà vu that I sensed from listening to the speeches of Paul Martin and Michael McMahon has quickly reminded me why I wanted to get off the drug in the first place. Those of us who sat on the Local Government and Transport Committee when it introduced to local government elections the democratic reform that is the single transferable vote will remember Paul Martin's contributions to that debate, and he has still not learned any different.

Michael McMahon: Will the member take an intervention?

Iain Smith: Not at the moment, thank you. I am just starting.

Paul Martin's amendment is, however, correct in saying that

"there is no perfect electoral system".

That is why we have every single system working somewhere in the United Kingdom. We have the first-past-the-post system for Westminster and English local government elections; the additional member system for the Scottish Parliament

elections; a form of the alternate vote system for the London mayoral elections; STV for Scottish local government elections and elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly; and the list system for European Parliament elections. So, we have plenty of practice in using different systems.

There is no perfect system—they all have their advantages and disadvantages—but the advantage of the single transferable vote is that it transfers power to the voter, which is the one thing that the Labour Party and the Conservatives do not want. They do not want power to be transferred to the voter. Under STV, the voter has the choice of whom to elect, not the parties, and that is the huge advantage of the STV system over any other voting system.

Michael McMahon: My brief intervention is to give Iain Smith the opportunity to correct what he said at the start of his speech. He said that, having listened to me, he understood why the Labour Party opposes electoral reform. He sat on the Local Government and Transport Committee with me and heard me making those arguments. Will he retract his accusation?

Iain Smith: I listened to Michael McMahon's speech this morning and I do not retract anything that I said.

The single transferable vote and proportional representation are, first, about accountability of members to the electors, because the electors have more choice in who they vote for and can therefore hold candidates to account at elections.

Paul Martin: Will the member accept an intervention?

Iain Smith: I do not have time. I have only two minutes left.

They are also about accountability in the Parliament. The Conservatives and Labour do not want strong Parliaments. They talk all the time about strong Governments. Yes, we can have strong government but what they mean by that is a Government that can do anything it wants without proper accountability to the Parliament, which is elected. Proportional representation is about ensuring that Parliament properly represents the views of the public and is able to hold Governments to account and keep them in line. Strong government is all very well if the Government is doing things right. Unfortunately, time and time again throughout the last decades, we have had Labour and the Conservatives following each other in turn, doing the wrong things and getting away with it because there is no proper accountability in Parliament.

They can bury their heads in the sand. Things are changing and the electorate is waking up to the fact that it has the power. However, we must

change the system, which can result in a situation where electoral estimates suggest that if the voters voted 30 per cent Labour, 30 per cent Tory and 30 per cent Liberal Democrat they would get a result of 306 Labour MPs, 210 Tories and 102 Liberal Democrats. How is that putting power in the hands of the voters to change the Government, as Murdo Fraser claimed in his opening remarks? Of course it does not put power in the hands of the voters. It puts power in the hands of a corrupt, potty electoral system. That is not acceptable and we must change it.

Finally, I wish to respond to Murdo Fraser on the issue of the BNP. The list system is not the best system to elect a European Parliament. It is more likely that parties such as the British National Party will get elected under a list system than under the single transferable vote. That is why I want to see a proper system that gives the voters power to prevent people from parties such as the BNP from being elected. However, as Tricia Marwick rightly said, it was not the voting system that elected the BNP, it was voters. That was a result of the mainstream parties failing to take the BNP head on and prove that the politics of hate does not work. We must ensure that we do that in future. All parties must do that. We must ensure that the politics of hate does not work and bring in a system of voting that allows us, perhaps, to talk about the politics of hope.

11:18

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(Con): The tendency of some politicians and parties to behave like the emperor Nero and fiddle while Rome burns never ceases to amaze me. Everyone knows that the major issues to be addressed at this time and in this election are the recession, economic recovery and the crisis in our public finances. The economy is the mother and father of all issues because everything that affects the wellbeing and welfare of the people flows from it. It is the overriding issue on which the Conservative and Labour Parties are focused, albeit from different perspectives and with different messages, as one would expect. However, we can always rely on the political Neros of this world to miss the point, and lo and behold, the Liberals, the Scottish National Party and the Greens have not disappointed us. We want to talk about the economy. They want to talk about PR and single transferable votes. How irrelevant! As Bill Clinton rightly said, "It's the economy, stupid."

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that David McLetchie will note with great enthusiasm the strong focus on economic policy in the Green party manifesto, but surely he is not saying that he does not recognise that there is also a fundamental crisis in democracy in the UK. Surely we cannot approach

the UK election after the year that we have just had without acknowledging that crisis and its importance.

David McLetchie: We have a democratic system of government in all our Parliaments in the United Kingdom and every single adult in the country will have the opportunity to exercise their vote in the election next week.

We have been over the course on voting systems before, but it is worth while to say again that we are far more likely to see a change of Government in this country with a first-past-the-post system than we ever are with STV. STV would not have produced the political landslides that we have seen in recent times, whether for the Conservatives in 1983 or the Labour Party in 1997. There would be no more Portillo moments. Why? Because the single transferable vote in multimember constituencies gives even more power to the party machines than does first past the post.

Robert Brown: It does not.

David McLetchie: I will explain it to the member. Under STV, what decides the Government is not the election but the backroom deals that are cut after the election. It is a not a system that asks the people to decide who governs. It is a system that shuts people out of decision making.

Iain Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

David McLetchie: No. I want to make some progress. I will come to the member's point.

In doing that at national level, it undermines the principle of consultation and community representation—the principle that the member that we elect, irrespective of their party, has a responsibility to all their constituents, as opposed to being at the beck and call of their party and its bunch of local activists. Paul Martin made that point well.

For proof of that proposition, we have only to look at what happened in our STV council elections. As we all know, we have three or four-member wards and all the political parties limit the number of candidates that they put up in each ward to the number of seats that they believe can realistically be won. In virtually every case, only one of the three or four seats is up for grabs and the election focuses on the battle between the parties for that one seat. Two thirds or three quarters of the seats in the ward can safely be predicted before a single vote is cast or counted. There are as many safe seats under an STV system of election as there are under first past the post. Arguably, there are more safe seats under

STV. The argument that STV somehow promotes accountability or empowers voters is wholly false.

As George Foulkes said in his excellent speech, and as is evident from the range of points in the Labour amendment, there is far more to democratic reform in the UK than arguing about one particular system of electing members to councils and Parliaments. We believe that we need democratic reform. We need fair and equal votes in fair and equal constituencies, with equal votes of equal value—a principle that is enshrined in the American constitution.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should wind up.

David McLetchie: We should enshrine that principle in our governance and the election of members to our Parliaments in the UK. It is something that we do not have at present.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must conclude.

David McLetchie: That demonstrates that we have a lot more to focus on than obsessing about a single voting system. There are many more important issues facing the country than how we elect the Westminster Parliament.

11:23

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): Reform of the voting system for Westminster is not a key issue for ordinary people who are considering their choice of party in the forthcoming election. I cannot confess to experiencing the withdrawal symptoms that Tricia Marwick mentioned. I have been out on the doorsteps and the subject has not been mentioned once.

Perhaps voters do want some renewal of the parliamentary system following the seismic events of Westminster expenses and the global banking crisis and a general desire for more accountability, but as David McLetchie and George Foulkes said, democratic reform is about more than just reform of the voting system. It is about devolving power from the centre, which the Labour Government has done through devolution; reform of the House of Lords; increasing voter turnout; and engaging with the electorate on decisions that affect their lives.

Labour has supported and benefited from the first-past-the-post system, but we gave up that vested interest when we took part in the Scottish Constitutional Convention and supported a proportional system for the Scottish Parliament. That system has been reviewed by the Arbutnot commission, which supported the continuation of the additional member system and rejected the use of STV for the Scottish Parliament. There is a lot to be said for the system that we have.

The Scottish Green Party's motion focuses on a system of proportionality from which it benefits. Perhaps it would be fairer to the Green party to have STV, but that does not mean that it is the best proportional system. No system is perfect, but if we face a choice, we must focus on the principles that matter to us. The first-past-the-post system has provided stable government for the UK, people understand it, and I do not see any real demand to change it. An STV system means highly localised politics, and that is not best for government. There are serious weaknesses in an STV system.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Pauline McNeill: I will give way to Patrick Harvie, who supports the motion, but he should be brief, as I have a lot to say.

Patrick Harvie: I understand the argument about stable government, but why is it right that a Government that does not have a majority of support among the public should have the right to a stable mandate?

Pauline McNeill: There are weaknesses in every voting system. I will deal with the weaknesses of the STV system. I suppose that it depends on what matters to a person. The link between a constituency and its elected member matters to Labour, and an STV system seriously weakens that link. Commentators say that an STV system with multimember wards creates a pervasive clientism, and they talk about members becoming super-social workers as they compete with one another for profile. Even supporters of STV cannot deny that there are weaknesses in it. Ideas for government will suffer under such a system, as politics become more localised.

Trends in Ireland show that the STV system is not even necessarily proportionate. In 2007, Fianna Fáil received 41 per cent of the vote and 47 per cent of the seats; Fine Gael received 27 per cent of the vote and 30 per cent of the seats; and the Greens received 10 per cent of the vote, but got only 3.6 per cent of the seats.

Robin Harper said that voters are disillusioned because Labour and Conservative Governments have had large majorities, but there is support for majority government among voters. It is not true that everyone out there is demanding coalition Governments, which often result from STV systems. There are various views out there. Criticisms have been made of coalition Governments that Labour has been part of. Coalition Governments are criticised on the basis that manifestos are thrown aside, programmes for government are negotiated, and the voters do not get a chance to vote on those programmes. We must be realistic about the weaknesses in all the systems.

Minority government also creates anomalies. Smaller parties have a disproportionate influence on big decisions. The SNP Government can generally use the fact that it is a minority Government as an excuse for not implementing its manifesto. There are anomalies in every system, and STV is not the answer to the criticisms that have been made. The suggestion that PR would not have given us a Thatcher Government is questionable.

In its 2005 manifesto, Labour said that it has always said that it is prepared to consider change by way of a referendum. We support the first-past-the-post system and say that there must be consensus on any change. There are principles that we must stand on, and any change must be made only if it is supported in a referendum.

11:28

Bruce Crawford: It is strange that the four Labour members who have spoken have not mentioned the alternative vote system. I wonder what they are running away from in light of their manifesto commitment to hold a referendum on that. Not one Labour member has mentioned that system. George Foulkes made criticisms of the additional member system that Pauline McNeill defended, but not one Labour member has talked about—

Pauline McNeill: Does the minister support AV?

Bruce Crawford: I do not support AV; I support STV. That has been made clear.

There has been a great deal of focus in the general election campaign on the implications of a balanced Parliament at Westminster after the vote on 6 May. Many people, including members today, have tried to portray a balanced Parliament as a disaster waiting to happen, as if the only way in which a country can be run is by an election giving unfettered power to one party, regardless of the breakdown of votes. We should view the prospect of a balanced Parliament more positively. I say to David McLetchie in particular that, if no party has an overall majority, there will be opportunities for parties to work together to find common ground. An obvious example would be all parties working together to address the current economic crisis. Instead, the media, politicians such as Murdo Fraser, and others have claimed the economic crisis as a reason to fear a balanced Westminster Government. There has been much speculation that a balanced Parliament would lead to terrible consequences—that it would wreak havoc on the markets, and precipitate a sterling crisis and the intervention of the International Monetary Fund—but the statistics and facts simply do not back up that view. Ten of the 16 countries that enjoy a

triple A rating from the main credit agencies, including Canada, the Netherlands and Austria, have coalition Governments.

Iain Smith: Will the minister confirm which of Greece and Germany has a majority Government and which has a balanced Government?

Bruce Crawford: There is a majority Government in Greece—we can see the economic crisis there—and there is a coalition Government in Germany, where there is relative stability.

History has shown that majority Governments in this country are not in themselves a means to economic stability. In 1976, the majority Callaghan Government called in the IMF as the value of the pound plummeted. In 1985, sterling fell to little over \$1, despite the fact that Thatcher enjoyed a clear majority. A lot of nonsense has been talked about such matters in the chamber this morning.

Proposals for reforming the Westminster voting system are not without precedent. In 1917, the Representation of the People Bill included proposals for a mixed STV and AV system. The STV proposal was rejected by the unionists and supported by the Liberals—no change there then. That proposal, which would have dramatically changed the face of Government in the UK throughout the 20th century, inevitably fell following a long period of deadlock between the House of Commons and the unelected House of Lords, which we need to see the end of.

Paul Martin: What was so stable about January 2009, when the First Minister advised us that he would not be blackmailed by the Green party on the budget?

Bruce Crawford: I will say what has been stable about the SNP Government. We have got three budgets through the Parliament and 1,000 extra police on the streets, the council tax has been frozen and taxes for businesses have been reduced throughout the country. That is what stability from the SNP Government means.

Let me deal with Murdo Fraser's view that STV allows members of extremist parties to be elected. PR is designed to provide representation to parties that achieve a reasonable share of the vote. That applies to small parties with democratic values, but I accept that it can also apply, particularly in some systems, to extremist parties. However, as other members have said, the voting system does not cause that. A first-past-the-post system can also let in extremist parties. Recent local authority elections in Barking, Stoke-on-Trent and Burnley are examples of that. There is a vital difference between representation and control. Obnoxious parties can be represented under PR, but it is almost impossible for them to gain control. By contrast, the BNP has all the borough council seats in part of Burnley despite having obtained

nowhere near the majority of the vote. Representation is often a step towards political defeat for extremist parties. The public scrutiny that comes with being in office quickly exposes their inadequacy and the inadequacy of their policies.

A poll that was conducted yesterday by YouGov and *The Sun* shows that 37 per cent of people throughout the UK who were asked thought that a hung Parliament would be a good thing, whereas 47 per cent thought that it would be a negative thing. By contrast, 49 per cent of those in Scotland who were asked thought that a hung Parliament would be a positive thing, whereas only 40 per cent thought that it would be a bad thing. That is because minority government has been working in Scotland and the SNP Government has been delivering for the people of Scotland.

11:33

Robin Harper: I will start by addressing a point that Paul Martin made. When we have combined with the Labour Party and the Liberal party to defeat the Government in vote after vote in the chamber, I have not noticed any reluctance by the Labour Party to use the two Green party votes. Paul Martin made an entirely spurious point. Does Labour want us to hand over the government of this country entirely to the SNP for the rest of the session? I think not.

Tricia Marwick dealt with Murdo Fraser's point well, and I will say no more about that. However, his assertion about having fairer constituencies and ensuring that they are nearly precisely the same size is like shifting the deck chairs on the Titanic: it will achieve nothing. Neither he nor the other Conservatives have explained to me or to anybody else exactly how that would achieve more democracy.

Bruce Crawford made the important point that there would be no more marginal seats under STV. The other important point is this: the two major Westminster parties share between them 337 or so safe seats; that is, seats where the result of the vote can virtually be spoken for. Those parties want to keep that situation and the power that they have had over the country for generation after generation. They swap power between themselves and they do not want to let anybody else in. Pauline McNeill claimed that there is no lust for proportional representation among this country's population, but will she explain to me why the Liberal Democrats, who support PR, now lead the Labour Party in the polls? It is precisely because proportional representation is one of the Liberals' policies.

I liked Robert Brown's phrase about restoring commonality, because that is exactly what STV is

producing in our councils. A restoration of commonality means that people know that they can take their problems to the councillor of their choice, by and large. That is one of the things that STV delivers at local level.

I mentioned Tricia Marwick's contribution, for which I thank her very much. George Foulkes will be absolutely delighted to hear that, like him, the Green party supports the abolition of the House of Lords and its replacement with an elected second chamber. Like him, we believe in having a written constitution. Like him, we believe in 16-year-olds having the vote. Those are all things that would improve democracy. I plead with George Foulkes to go one step further towards a democratic electoral system.

Iain Smith made a good point when he said that although the other two main Westminster parties, Labour and the Conservatives, want strong Governments, they do not want strong Parliaments. That has been clearly seen. Their idea of stability is to have Prime Ministers who, one after the other, surround themselves with a phalanx of special advisers who divide them from not only the people, but their own back benchers. Those Prime Ministers have ruled from behind a palisade, not letting even their back benchers into conversations with them, let alone hearing the views of Opposition parties.

David McLetchie said that everybody knows that the economy is the overriding issue. Yes, of course it is. The Green party has debated the economy every time that the subject has arisen in the chamber. We have also debated the environment every time that the subject has been brought to the chamber. Today we assert that, with an election shortly ahead of us—the result of which we do not know, but which will certainly not be helped by the first-past-the-post system—we must acknowledge that the electoral system is a problem. David McLetchie also said that there would be as many safe seats under STV as under first past the post, but that is not the case. There would be as many people who would think that they might be elected, but a greater variety of parties would be safely represented under STV. That is what we want—greater fairness of representation.

Michael McMahon: Will the member give way?

Robin Harper: No, I am sorry; I have about 20 seconds left.

We would like, as a result of STV, to see everybody's vote count: no more marginals and no more safe seats.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:39

Glasgow City Council (Recycling)

1. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with Glasgow City Council regarding recycling. (S3O-10290)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): I have just got my card into the console in time.

Scottish Government waste officials have met Glasgow City Council on a number of occasions to discuss recycling. The most recent meeting was in mid-March, when officials discussed issues including the zero waste plan and Glasgow's plans to improve recycling performance.

Pauline McNeill: Glasgow City Council has been criticised for having a poor recycling record, but that record is improving, with an additional 25,000 bins for glass collection and 40,000 bins for organic waste collection. Given that a factor in reaching its targets is the high number of tenement properties, which make collection difficult, what financial account has the Scottish Government taken of that in order to help Glasgow to have better targets so that every house has access to recycling facilities?

Roseanna Cunningham: The Government recognises the challenges that Glasgow City Council faces in increasing its recycling and compost uplift. I do not think that anybody wants to minimise the extent of those challenges, nor do I want to minimise the extent of the ambition in the council.

Considerable support is available to local authorities to improve their performance, which includes the advice and guidance that Glasgow currently receives. Glasgow City Council gets its share of the total local authority budget and has to decide how it applies the funds. Other types of support are also being developed. I think that Pauline McNeill will find that Glasgow is getting as much help as it is possible to give it in the circumstances, and we hope that that will result in increased recycling levels in that council area.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): It is a fact that Glasgow City Council has the worst recycling rate in Scotland and it is projected that it will spend £13 million in landfill tax alone, an issue that is reserved to Westminster, as we all know. Have any representations been made to the United

Kingdom Government to ask it to consider suspending landfill tax, which could deliver capital spend of £130 million in Glasgow?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am not aware that any such approaches have been made by anyone in Government in recent months. There is a new approach to defining municipal waste, which means that Scotland has already met the revised 2013 landfill directive target, so we are making considerable progress.

I reiterate that we accept that Glasgow City Council faces significant and particular challenges in maintaining and increasing its levels of recycling, and we want to do everything in our power to help it to overcome those challenges.

Schools (Indiscipline)

2. Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to address indiscipline in schools. (S3O-10305)

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government is supporting local authorities and schools to promote positive behaviour and relationships and to create peaceful learning environments. Curriculum for excellence provides opportunities for a broad, flexible and individualised curriculum that contributes significantly to keeping children and young people motivated and engaged in relevant and enjoyable learning.

The Government provides support to local authorities and schools through funding the positive behaviour team with £600,000 a year and the pupil inclusion network Scotland with £50,000 a year. Strategies and techniques supported by the positive behaviour team include nurture, restorative practice, solution-oriented approaches, staged intervention, cool in school and the motivated school.

“Behaviour in Scottish Schools 2009” research indicates that overall perceptions of positive behaviour, low-level negative behaviour and serious indiscipline and violence have improved across the board, particularly in secondary schools.

Elizabeth Smith: Last week, the schools minister rightly highlighted the value of outdoor learning in helping pupils to become more enthusiastic and self-disciplined. Will the Scottish National Party deliver in this parliamentary session its 2007 manifesto commitment to five days of subsidised outdoor education for children from our most deprived communities?

Keith Brown: Substantial progress is being made towards that goal. Indeed, at the event in Aberdeenshire to which Elizabeth Smith referred,

an online resource was announced that will give schools much easier access to outdoor learning. In the past, one of the major obstacles to outdoor learning was the fact that, because of fears about health and safety issues, because of cost or just because of availability, some teachers were not sufficiently aware of the opportunities. The online resource that we have produced should help to address those issues and contribute towards achievement of the target.

Child Protection Strategy

3. Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of various recently reported high-profile child protection issues, whether it has reconsidered its overall child protection strategy. (S3O-10284)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): The Scottish Government is constantly working to improve Scotland's child protection system. We are nearing the end of a major review of national child protection guidance and will issue draft revised guidance for consultation in early June.

Last year, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education completed its first round of multi-agency child protection inspections, with every local authority area in Scotland visited. That has given us, for the first time, a comprehensive picture of how child protection services are performing across the country. We are now well into the second round of inspections and are looking for improvement in every area. We are also implementing the getting it right for every child approach, which emphasises early intervention, taking action to improve children's lives before serious child protection concerns arise. Every child death is a tragedy. Where things go wrong, we must learn and improve, but the overall system is sound and improving.

Tom McCabe: As I am sure the minister is aware, a range of respected professionals in Scotland think that there are significant societal problems that are beyond the reach of any one service and that our failure to respond is causing concern in our communities about our care system and the impact that such problems are having on our society in general. The minister mentioned the comprehensive review that is under way. Will he take on board the concerns of genuine professionals that a response is beyond any one service and that it may be time for us to take a more universal view of what will genuinely protect children in Scotland?

Adam Ingram: I agree with the sentiments that Mr McCabe expresses. Professionals' concerns are focused on children who are affected by parental substance misuse. That is a key issue with which we must grapple and to which we must

find solutions. A number of initiatives are on-going on that front, especially as part of the getting it right for every child approach. A pathfinder scheme in Angus is focusing on the problem of children who are affected by parental substance misuse. I reassure Mr McCabe that we are conscious of the need to find solutions in such areas and are not complacent in any way.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Staff working in child protection do a difficult and sensitive job. Although all of us are shocked and disturbed by the high-profile cases of children who tragically fall through the net, those are not the norm. We do not hear about the many cases in which children are successfully protected and families are supported. Will the minister reaffirm the Scottish Government's support for the dedicated staff who work in such difficult circumstances?

Adam Ingram: It is only natural that we remember in particular the minority of child protection cases that have a tragic outcome. When children are not kept safe from harm, we must look carefully at what has happened and learn from that. However, we must not forget the thousands of children who are supported and kept safe by our child protection services and the thousands of families who are given the help that they need to provide the right environment for their children. We do not hear about those cases. The First Minister and I have said many times that child protection practitioners do a difficult and vital job. On the whole, they do it well. They deserve our support and thanks, and should not be singled out as scapegoats and blamed for the crimes of others.

Tax Havens

4. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what bodies for which the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth is responsible, apart from Caledonian MacBrayne, have subsidiaries based in tax havens. (S3O-10270)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): David MacBrayne Ltd is the only national, devolved public body for which the Scottish ministers are responsible that has established an offshore subsidiary company.

George Foulkes: I assure the cabinet secretary that I thought carefully before lodging my question and I am not asking him to answer for previous Administrations. However, given what he and the Scottish National Party said in opposition, does he not think that it is quite wrong for a body for which he has responsibility to be tax dodging? Will he think again and get that changed?

John Swinney: Lord Foulkes referred to the decisions of previous Administrations, to which I need to refer to put my answer in context.

The previous Administration took the decision that the establishment of an offshore crewing company in 2006 was necessary to avoid putting Caledonian MacBrayne at a competitive disadvantage in relation to potential bidders for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services contract. The arrangements were cleared by the then Scottish Executive and Her Majesty's Treasury. They are part of an industry approach that is designed to avoid competitive disadvantage and are not unique to the Scottish jurisdiction—they are United Kingdom arrangements. National insurance concessions have been agreed with the Treasury to reflect that, into the bargain.

The "Scottish Public Finance Manual" states clearly that the motivation for undertaking a change of this type cannot be tax avoidance. The motivation behind the arrangement is to enable Caledonian MacBrayne to compete effectively and to ensure that it can provide the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services. Most members took that position in advance of the change of Government in 2007.

Domestic Aviation

5. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it supports an increase in domestic aviation between Scotland and other mainland United Kingdom airports. (S3O-10310)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scottish Government does not support an increase in domestic air services where practical and more environmentally friendly alternative forms of transport exist.

Patrick Harvie: That is encouraging. I have lost count of the number of times that the minister has told me in glowing terms of the statistics for his travel choices and his desire to reduce his reliance on domestic aviation. Why, then, is his neighbour in the ministerial tower, Jim Mather, responsible for an agency—VisitScotland—that is placing adverts in English newspapers that tell people to fly to Glasgow, Edinburgh or Aberdeen for a day trip to Scotland? The adverts will either increase domestic aviation, in which case they are incompatible with the minister's previous answer, or they will not do so, in which case they are a waste of money.

Stewart Stevenson: My colleague Mr Mather is most vigorous, energetic and successful in promoting Scotland's economic development. I look with great interest at the work of High Speed Two Ltd, part of whose remit is to consider the

case for extending sustainable transport—high-speed rail—to Scotland. If that key initiative is pursued, hundreds of flights per week will be taken out of domestic aviation from Scotland, to be replaced by effective, environmentally friendly means of transport. The Government is utterly committed to that; would that some others were.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Notwithstanding the thrust of Patrick Harvie's question, will the minister examine how we can increase the number of domestic flights in and out of Wick airport, which has spare capacity? As a matter of priority, will he ask the enterprise network and his transport officials to examine how we can maximise that opportunity?

Stewart Stevenson: Wick airport is one airport where practical, more environmentally friendly options are substantially more limited, therefore it is an important part of the transport infrastructure for the far north of Scotland. I note, in particular, that take-up of the air discount scheme is lower in Caithness and the north of Scotland than elsewhere. I encourage people to register for the scheme, as that will reduce the cost of air travel and make journeys more effective. I talk regularly to the airlines that serve Wick, and we are supporting their operations. I will continue to talk to them and I have taken note of the issue that the member raises.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Notwithstanding Patrick Harvie's views, I trust that the minister recognises the valuable contribution that Prestwick airport makes to the economy of Ayrshire, and, indeed, the equivalent contribution that I am sure airports make to other areas. I hope that the Scottish Government will continue to do everything possible, wherever and however it can, to support the development of Prestwick airport and the local jobs that rely upon it.

Stewart Stevenson: Prestwick airport is clearly an important part of the economy of the area that the member represents.

It may be appropriate to take the opportunity to thank airport operators for their substantial contribution to ensuring that transport continued to operate in a way that limited the damage that was done to transport choices recently when there was ash over the United Kingdom. They did a very good job.

A96 (Inveramsay Bridge)

6. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made to upgrade the A96 at the Inveramsay bridge. (S3O-10306)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We are progressing options to upgrade Inveramsay

bridge with Network Rail as part of the wider priority of improving the Aberdeen to Inverness rail line. Once that work is completed, consultation on a preferred road alignment for the replacement Inveramsay bridge will take place as part of the upgrade of the A96.

Nanette Milne: I am somewhat disappointed that the minister is still not saying when we can expect to get rid of the bottleneck at Inveramsay, as promised by Alex Salmond in his 2007 election leaflet. People in Gordon expected action during this session of Parliament. With just a year to go and no road works yet in prospect, they are justifiably feeling a bit let down by the party in which they put their faith. When can we realistically expect action on the bridge? Are we looking at another broken promise?

Stewart Stevenson: The first and only action that has ever been taken to address the issue of Inveramsay bridge stems from the personal intervention of the member for Gordon. People in that constituency very much welcome the fact that we included the project in the strategic transport projects review. We have engaged in looking at the three options for road interventions. It is clear that working with Network Rail, in the context of our improving rail services for people between Aberdeen and Inverness, is likely to be the most effective way forward. We expect to get information from Network Rail on the options and the alignment. We are making the kind of progress that was never even contemplated by any previous Administration.

Freedom of Information

7. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it remains committed to freedom of information. (S3O-10311)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): The Scottish Government is, and always has been, fully committed to freedom of information, as set out in the six principles on freedom of information that we published back in 2007.

Robert Brown: It is one thing for the Scottish National Party to waste its own money on spurious court actions, but why does the SNP Government not stop wasting public money and drop the appeal in the Court of Session that is trying, on spurious grounds, to block the release of information? Will the minister at least put in the public domain a list of the requests for information that the Government is currently blocking? What has the Scottish Government got to hide? Is it trying to block the release of information until the expiry of its term in office?

Bruce Crawford: I recognise Robert Brown's deep and long-standing commitment to freedom of

information, but I say to him that only a small proportion of requests were rejected as invalid following the court decision. After further consideration, some of those were subsequently accepted as valid. The vast majority of requests have been dealt with as normal. In the last quarter of 2009, the Scottish Government released some or all of the information requested in two thirds of cases.

On the court decision, there is a genuine difference of opinion between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Information Commissioner regarding the implications of a complex legal judgment. That difference of opinion has largely been resolved and we now disagree on only one fairly small technical point. It would not be appropriate to comment on that technical point, as we may need the Court of Session to clarify it. However, we can say that it is a relatively small technical point that is likely to affect only a very few FOI requests.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Following the "Panorama" programme on the abuse of older people in their own homes and the exposé in *The Herald* on neglect in residential care, I asked for details of discussions within the Scottish Government and discussions with the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, to establish whether what ministers were saying they were doing in relation to this serious matter was actually being done. Does the minister agree that it is entirely inappropriate to use a court ruling to prevent that information from coming into the public domain, given how important it is to give people confidence that older people are protected wherever they are cared for?

Bruce Crawford: Johann Lamont has raised a point that is obviously very important to her. The minister concerned will have heard her pleas, but I assure her that, on all occasions, the Scottish Government is fully committed to the intention behind the freedom of information principles.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-2355)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will be putting forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Iain Gray: Labour is committed to protecting investment in our schools and hospitals. Last week, on television, the Deputy First Minister was asked eight times whether she would match that promise; eight times she failed to do so. Will the First Minister promise to protect investment in schools and hospitals?

The First Minister: Yes. [Laughter.]

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Iain Gray: The question, though, that voters will be asking themselves is this: when the First Minister says yes, is that the same as when he said yes, he would cancel student debt; when he said yes, we would have smaller class sizes; when he said yes, first-time buyers would get grants to help them; when he said yes, he would match our school building programme brick for brick; or when he said yes, he would build the Glasgow airport rail link? The trouble is that no one believes the First Minister's promises anymore. He breaks them all, so why should we believe that he will protect Scotland's schools and hospitals?

The First Minister: The answer is yes for the 65 out of 94 headline manifesto commitments that the Government has already achieved.

As Iain Gray asked a longish question, perhaps I can give the chamber a few highlights of the things that have been achieved. We have achieved a council tax freeze over the past three years; the small business bonus scheme, which was opposed by the Labour Party; and abolition of tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges. We also reversed Labour's decision to downgrade the accident and emergency units at Monklands and Ayr hospitals and delivered funding for 1,000 more police on the streets of Scotland. I know that the chamber is anxious for me to go on to list the other 60 but, with the Presiding Officer's forbearance I will list just one more: the Scottish National Party is the only party committed to public services in Scotland against the cuts being planned by each and every one of the London parties.

Iain Gray: Let us look at the SNP's commitment to public services in Scotland. Two and a half thousand teachers and 1,000 classroom assistants have been cut; the Edinburgh airport rail link and its 3,000 jobs have been cut; the Glasgow airport rail link and its 1,300 jobs have been cut; and £2 billion-worth of schools and hospitals have been cut, the cost of which has been a cut of 30,000 construction jobs.

Thirty years ago, I was a teacher organising strikes against Tory cuts; now our teachers are organising strikes against nationalist cuts. The First Minister's economic spokesperson has just been on the television, saying that under the SNP there will be no miserable cuts. What are these—happy cuts?

The First Minister: I wonder whether Iain Gray has had the opportunity to read the report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. I know that it embraces all the London parties and perhaps we will get the opportunity to come to the other two in due course. The IFS report, which was published yesterday, says that Labour has not specified 87 per cent of the cuts implied in its budget programme.

Labour plans to cut £250 billion from front-line public spending departments throughout the UK, which implies a £25 billion cut for Scotland. The economic adviser to the Scottish Government first revealed that and it was confirmed—[*Interruption.*] Does Iain Gray or Andy Kerr dispute the Institute for Fiscal Studies report, which confirmed the information that the Scottish Government supplied? The reality of the spending programmes of the London parties and of the mountain of cuts that the Labour Party plans is being laid bare in the election campaign. What better argument could there be for Scotland to have control of its resources, to ditch the £100 billion of wasted expenditure on Trident nuclear weapons and to take the only alternative to the decade of despair that every London-based party plans?

Iain Gray: The First Minister's record on cuts is second to none. He has made more cuts than any politician in the past 13 years of British politics. Now we read in no less than the *Financial Times* about the cruellest cut of all—cutting a deal with the Tories. We should not be surprised, because the SNP's London leader, Angus Robertson, votes with the Tories more often than Scotland's only Tory MP does. David Cameron's local champion must be Alex Salmond, who voted with David Cameron 70 per cent of the time. Alex Salmond could not get out of his bed to vote for the national minimum wage, but he gets out of his bed to vote for the Tories. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Iain Gray: I ask the First Minister to tell us now: will he betray Scotland by doing a deal with the Tories?

The First Minister: Iain Gray seems blissfully unaware that, in this Parliament, he votes with the Conservative party 75 per cent of the time—[*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I remind Iain Gray that we started the election campaign with a Labour chancellor—Alistair Darling, for whom Iain Gray used to work—saying that the cuts that the Labour Party planned would be tougher and deeper than those of Margaret Thatcher. I know that Iain Gray will want to provide the advice that he gave Alistair Darling in the past and to give advice in the future, but it is significant that Gordon Brown had no problem with meeting Margaret Thatcher, although he seems to have considerable problems with meeting old-age pensioners in Halifax. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. [*Interruption.*]

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): It was Rochdale, not Halifax.

The Presiding Officer: Lord Foulkes, when I ask for order, I expect to have it.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to hear that my party is so popular with so many opponents. I am not in the least surprised at that development.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-2356)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Annabel Goldie's party does not seem to be popular with many voters.

As far as I can judge, the Prime Minister is not in a mood to meet anyone at the moment.

Annabel Goldie: Last Sunday, in a television studio, the First Minister was asked:

"had Thomas Hamilton, the Dunblane killer, survived and been sentenced to life imprisonment in a Scottish jail, would you have released him if he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer?"

The First Minister replied, "No". I agree totally with his answer. Will he explain the difference between the mass murderer Thomas Hamilton and the mass murderer Mr al-Megrahi?

The First Minister: It seems to me that the hypothetical case of Thomas Hamilton would not have passed the first principle in the Scottish Prison Service guidance for the release of

prisoners on compassionate grounds. Annabel Goldie knows what that principle is.

Annabel Goldie: I will cut to the chase and leave the First Minister to explain. The point is that the integrity and status of our Scottish criminal justice system are at stake and that the First Minister has publicly stated two irreconcilable and totally contradictory positions in relation to two mass murderers. I ask him again how he justifies that contradiction. How can he support the release of one mass murderer and totally oppose the release of another?

The First Minister: I take it from Annabel Goldie's second question that she does not know what the criteria for compassionate release are. I have them here, so perhaps I can remind her. The first criterion for the Scottish Prison Service, whose recommendation must be made before a minister can even consider compassionate release, to examine is that

"The release of the prisoner will not create a risk of re-offending or put the safety of the public at risk".

Whatever may be said about Mr al-Megrahi's release, nobody seriously believes that it put the safety of the Scottish public at risk. From what we know of Mr Hamilton, who murdered 16 children and a teacher in Dunblane, I would find it impossible for anyone to judge that he would not be at risk of reoffending or would not put the safety of the Scottish public at risk. If he could not even fulfil the first principle in the Scottish Prison Service guidance, my answer was not only consistent but fully justified.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-2357)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The next meeting of Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Tavish Scott: Last night, Alex Salmond was asked on television whether he supported splitting casino banks from prudent, solid retail banks. Speaking as leader of the Scottish National Party, he sat on the fence. Today, he is presumably back as First Minister—at least till 1 o'clock—so which side is he on: the taxpayers or the casino bankers?

The First Minister: Tavish Scott should try to give the Parliament the full information that I discussed in the interview. To me, the point of interest and concern is a simple division not between retail and casino or investment banking, but between the aspects of the financial sector that need to be protected, supported and guaranteed and those that, in the words of the

governor of the Bank of England, must be allowed to fail. That is the decision that must be made and, now that Tavish Scott has had that point explained to him, I know that he will accept that it is at least a matter for further consideration, which was the point that the governor of the Bank of England made.

Tavish Scott: That is certainly one interpretation of what the governor of the Bank of England said.

This week, I met an oil and gas business in Aberdeen that has developed a tidal turbine. It has international interest, which would create jobs in Scotland. It wants to develop the turbine in the United Kingdom at the Orkney test centre, but that Scottish business cannot get the money because its bank will not lend.

The financial institutions simply do not care. The Royal Bank of Scotland is 84 per cent owned by the taxpayer but admits that it has missed its £16 billion target for lending to business. However, such banks owe their existence to British taxpayers. Last week, the First Minister announced support from the Government for small and medium-sized businesses—that is one of the things on which he and I agreed in the Scottish budget this year—so will his Government work to get the banks back on the side of business in Scotland? What steps can he take to support their break-up to separate the safe, secure high street banks on which we all rely from the casino banks that gamble on the world's markets with other people's money?

The First Minister: Tavish Scott and I agree about the importance of enforcing the transmission system of lending from banks throughout the financial sector to businesses, not only renewable energy businesses but businesses throughout the country. I am bemused as to why that cannot be done when the Government has a majority shareholding in the Royal Bank of Scotland and a significant shareholding in the Lloyds Banking Group. I cannot understand why it has not been brought into effect. Therefore, there is a substantial measure of agreement between the Liberal Democrats and the SNP on that issue.

As Tavish Scott knows, I welcome agreement. I am always trying to find consensus, which is why I was so delighted to see that someone called Willie Rennie, who is standing for the United Kingdom Parliament, says in his election leaflet:

"We have got rid of the tolls on the Forth Bridge".

I took that to mean that he agreed with us so much that he is planning an imminent defection to the SNP.

Pregnant Women (Smoking)

4. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what measures the Scottish Government is taking to encourage women to give up smoking during pregnancy. (S3F-2368)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is investing record levels of funding in national health service smoking cessation services—more than £40 million in this spending period, compared with £27 million in the previous one. As a result, action to discourage women from smoking during pregnancy, using evidence-based approaches, is being taken throughout the country. In 2008, 1,733 pregnant women accessed cessation services—an increase of 31 per cent from 2007. It is encouraging that smoking during pregnancy has fallen from 29 per cent in 1995 to less than 20 per cent in 2008, although, as the research published earlier this week highlights, many pregnant women still find it difficult to quit in spite of all the best efforts of the NHS and others in Scotland. However, we continue to do all that we can to encourage them to make a healthy lifestyle choice for their own sake and that of their unborn child.

Christine Grahame: A pilot project is under way in NHS Tayside that offers grocery vouchers to pregnant mothers in exchange for their agreeing to quit smoking. What plans does the Government have to extend that pilot throughout Scotland?

The First Minister: Christine Grahame is right to point to the substantial intervention that is being piloted and to the success of the pilot. It should be recognised that we are taking wider action to shift cultural attitudes to smoking and to prevent young people from starting smoking in the first place. That action involves the ban on cigarette displays and cigarette sales from vending machines under the Tobacco and Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act 2010. It is also key to reducing smoking throughout the population, including among pregnant women. Ministers are actively considering how to roll the pilot out throughout the country.

Curriculum for Excellence (Implementation)

5. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how ministers will respond to the Ipsos MORI poll carried out for the Scottish Government showing that only 25 per cent of secondary teachers believe that they are sufficiently prepared for the implementation of the curriculum for excellence in August 2010. (S3F-2363)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The curriculum management board survey of teachers found that the majority of those responding—58

per cent—expressed confidence that their school is ready to implement the new curriculum. However, the survey revealed that some teachers, particularly in secondary schools, lack confidence, which is why we have put in place a 10-point action plan that directly addresses the concerns that teachers have raised. The plan includes additional resources—making an additional £3 million available to support implementation—and provides the practical help that teachers have asked for. We are confident that the action plan will meet the concerns that some teachers have, and we will continue to discuss those concerns with the teaching unions. However, it is important that the management board, which includes representatives of the teaching unions, unanimously recommended that we go ahead with implementation in secondary schools, saying that it is

“assured that the existing programme plan remains realistic and achievable.”

Ken Macintosh: The action plan was indeed welcome, although, as the First Minister knows, it does not fully meet the anxieties of teachers, let alone parents. Will he respond to the concerns raised by the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association on subject content and coursework? Is he able to do so before the SSTA's conference on 7 May? In particular, will he make up his mind whether pupils will be examined on the coursework that they study in their third year of secondary?

The First Minister: The education secretary is meeting the SSTA and the other teaching unions, because the discussions do not rest on the 10-point plan. It is important for Ken Macintosh to remember that the 10-point plan was announced after the various surveys, including the one that he mentioned, were done. The 10-point plan, which I have in front of me, goes into great detail on many of the areas that had been expressed as concerns. Ken Macintosh can be absolutely assured that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will be having close discussions with the SSTA and other teaching unions. I am sure that Ken Macintosh knows that, although the roll-out of the curriculum for excellence in secondary schools is this year, the examinations are four years away.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the First Minister acknowledge that the main reason for concern among secondary teachers about the curriculum for excellence is not its principles but the lack of any clear picture about what will be required of teachers to meet the new demands of the Scottish Qualifications Authority's examinations structure? Can he give us a timescale for when that structure will be available?

The First Minister: That is one of the aspects that the education secretary is discussing with the teaching unions. I know that Elizabeth Smith has supported, or at least made favourable reference to, the 10-point plan, on which those detailed discussions are taking place in a friendly and co-operative way.

Elizabeth Smith will remember that every curriculum change that has been introduced into Scottish education over the past two generations has been met with concern and difficulties. That is inevitable when a substantial curriculum change is being introduced. The education secretary has emphasised our pledge to continue discussions so that we can allay those concerns, go through the points of concern and, I hope, achieve the same broad consensus across the teaching unions that already exists in the management board.

I know that Elizabeth Smith and others would not want to give the wrong impression about the range of substantive quotes from people who have come out strongly in favour not just of the 10-point plan but of the principle of the curriculum for excellence. It is supported by many significant people from across the education sector in Scotland, including parents, teachers and their representatives and headteachers. I know that she would not want to give the impression that there is not a huge reservoir of support from people who believe that the curriculum for excellence is indeed the way forward for Scottish education.

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): Will the First Minister clarify how the plan that he has spoken about will encourage—or perhaps, dare I say, champion—the cause of the curriculum for excellence with local authorities, which will play a substantial role in driving the issue forward?

The First Minister: One change that the education secretary—and, indeed, his predecessor—made was to bring on to the management board a wide representation of interest groups in Scottish education. There is substantial support for that reason. Of course change causes uncertainty and difficulty—that is an inevitable part of introducing change—but the manner in which the change is being processed and gone about, and the manner in which the education secretary has set to his task, will bring the maximum support behind the curriculum for excellence. I know that Hugh O'Donnell will be right there with us as we move to implement this vital reform.

Alcohol (Minimum Pricing)

6. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the First Minister when the Scottish Government will confirm its preferred minimum price per unit of alcohol. (S3F-2365)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As Jamie Stone knows, a highly constructive debate is taking place in the Health and Sport Committee on the principle of minimum pricing as a measure to reduce consumption and harm. As the Deputy First Minister indicated to the committee, we will come back to Parliament with our preferred minimum price. I am sure that Jamie Stone will appreciate the importance of that. Parliament will be able to scrutinise the specific price with the same energy that it is giving to scrutinising the policy. Of course, it is greatly encouraging to those of us who believe in minimum pricing that support for the principle continues to grow. There is a willingness by some colleagues to scrutinise the evidence closely and to look at the issue in terms of the long-term benefits to Scotland as well as the principle that is involved.

Jamie Stone: Will the price be announced before the bill is approved at stage 1? Does the First Minister agree that it is impossible for the Parliament properly to assess the Government's policy of minimum pricing without a stated price, given that the price determines the legality of the policy, its impact on consumption and—one might add—receipts to the Exchequer? He will be aware of the Health and Sport Committee's work on the bill, but is he also aware that the Subordinate Legislation Committee has asked for more information? Given that the delay in stating the price has delayed the bill, will he now listen to the Parliament's serious concerns and commit to naming the price before the Parliament approves the bill at stage 1?

The First Minister: The price will certainly be named before any final vote in the Parliament.

I say to Jamie Stone that it is important—as I am sure Mr Rumbles will appreciate—to consider how much support there is in principle for the concept of minimum pricing. I said that I was greatly encouraged by the growing consensus, but I was particularly impressed by page 41 of the Liberal Democrat manifesto, which declares that the Liberal Democrats are

“in favour of the principle of minimum pricing”.

I was even more encouraged by Norman Lamb, who is the UK health spokesman for the Liberal Democrats. On the BBC's “Daily Politics” show yesterday, he said that he fully backed minimum pricing as a concept. There is a growing support and a reservoir of concern, which is exemplified by the advocates of change in principle south of the border—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Rumbles.

The First Minister: When Mr Rumbles gives us the same support north of the border, that growing concern will be reflected in growing support for the

policy in this Parliament, to match the growing support outside it.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the growing concerns about the legality of the proposed measure. Does he believe that the European Union should be notified now about any aspect of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, under the technical standards directive? If not, at what point does the European Union get notified about the minimum pricing proposals? Is it when the price is set? If that is the case, will the First Minister, in the interests of transparency and parliamentary scrutiny—he believes that he has nothing to fear—tell us when he will name the minimum price?

The First Minister: The member will have looked at the comments of Alcohol Focus Scotland about the claims of illegality under EU law, which I know Jackie Baillie would not wish to misrepresent in any way. It says that the opinion by the Advocate General to which the Scotch Whisky Association has referred

“relates to specific cases of minimum pricing for tobacco and cannot be interpreted as a judgement on the legality of minimum pricing in general. Indeed, the European Commission confirmed in a written statement”

to a Labour MEP

“earlier this year that EU legislation did not prohibit Member States from setting minimum retail prices for alcoholic beverages.”

Now that Jackie Baillie has been reminded of the excellent work of her colleague in the European Parliament in eliciting that clarification, she will not wish to give any impression that she and her colleagues are somehow trying to dodge the question of principle, which so many Labour members south of the border are prepared to embrace and support.

It seems passing strange that parliamentary representatives in England, where there is a serious problem with alcohol, are prepared to support minimum pricing, whereas some people in this Parliament in Scotland, where we have an even more serious problem with our relationship with alcohol, are trying to dodge the issue. Particularly at this time, because we wish to demonstrate the virtue of a consensus Parliament with a balance between the political forces, members of this Parliament are called on to put principle before political objectives when the health of Scotland is at stake.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have closely scrutinised the evidence on this matter, and I remind the First Minister that the new data on minimum pricing from the University of Sheffield now predict almost half the number of alcohol deaths that the first estimate did, and 38 per cent fewer hospital admissions over 10 years

compared with previously. How can the Health and Sport Committee and the Parliament reflect an accurate account of the Sheffield modelling when there have been such significant changes in the predictions?

The First Minister: Surely Mary Scanlon would be the first to accept that the figures from Sheffield still indicate a substantial number of avoidable and preventable deaths and, moreover, widespread damage to the general health of the population. Mary Scanlon would not wish to give any impression that a substantial number of deaths through the absence of minimum pricing would be acceptable. Even less would she wish to give the impression that she is oblivious to the substantial body of research that tells us that the policy is one of a number of measures that can help to reorientate Scotland's relationship with alcohol, improve the public health of Scotland, save lives and protect our young people from harm.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The only piece of evidence in support of minimum pricing was the University of Sheffield study, which has been fatally undermined this week by the revisions to its figures. Why will the First Minister not drop the unwanted and probably illegal policy of minimum pricing, so that we can get on, develop a consensus and move on with proposals on which we can all agree, such as the proper enforcement of the current laws?

The First Minister: We all agree on enforcement of the current laws and we all agree that the issue requires to be addressed. I find it surprising that some members seem to be saying that, because the current University of Sheffield assessment of deaths and damage, if it is correct, is lower than the previous assessment, it is somehow acceptable. Surely the evidence indicates that minimum pricing can help to prevent deaths in Scotland and social and health damage in the general population. If Murdo Fraser accepts that aspect of the research, why on earth does he not find a consensus with those of us who want to address the problem and protect the health of Scottish society?

12:30

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Health and Wellbeing

National Health Service (Budget Pressures)

1. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether any national health service boards have recently announced a need to reduce services, nurse training or the recruitment of nurses and doctors as a consequence of budget pressures. (S3O-10323)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Boards are rightly required to continually assess their expenditure to ensure the delivery of best value and make the most effective use of funding for the benefit of patients. Boards consider a range of efficiency measures with a view to identifying those that will not impact on patient care. Those savings are not about cuts, as all savings are retained locally for reinvestment in front-line services. That combination of increases in funding and local retention of savings will ensure that priorities are safeguarded.

Nicol Stephen: As Nicola Sturgeon knows, NHS Grampian is facing £34 million of cuts. Richard Carey, the board's chief executive, has said that the board is facing an "incredibly tough" year. Can the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing guarantee today that front-line services will not be affected by that £34 million cut? More important, can she say who is to blame for the cut? Is it the Scottish National Party Government in Edinburgh or the Labour Government in London? Does not the cut totally undermine the commitment that the First Minister gave in this chamber this morning? We now see that the truth is that the SNP is cutting, not protecting, front-line services.

Nicola Sturgeon: In the spirit of consensus, I should say that I agree with Nicol Stephen that all health boards—as well as all parts of the public sector and the rest of society—are facing tough times. That is the consequence of the economic and financial climate that we live in. However, as a matter of fact—this is a matter of fact—the budgets of NHS Grampian and other health boards are not being cut. NHS Grampian's budget has increased this year. The board has set itself the task of making £34 million of efficiency savings. As I said in my original answer, the definition of efficiency savings requires that they do not impact adversely on patient care. Further, it is a cardinal principle of this Government's

efficiency savings programme that efficiency savings be recycled within health boards that make them, so that they are reinvested in front-line patient care. That is an important principle.

On Nicol Stephen's more general question, we have in this financial year taken steps within our budget to protect the national health service, in the face of £500 million of cuts that are being imposed by Westminster on the overall Scottish budget. That gives a clear indication of the priority that this Government gives to the health service and front-line health services. As the First Minister did this morning and as I have done previously, I am happy to restate this Government's commitment to protecting the health budget and the health services that the people of Scotland rely on.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Last week, I asked the First Minister whether civil servants who are modelling the future Scottish budget have been asked to exclude any reductions in the health and wellbeing budget lines. The First Minister replied, "No". How does that equate to what the cabinet secretary has just said about how budget lines will continue to be protected under the SNP?

Nicola Sturgeon: Jeremy Purvis might or might not know that officials of the Scottish Government are asked to consider all sorts of eventualities on an on-going basis.

I do not think that the First Minister or I could be any clearer in the commitment that we are giving. It will be on the record again today, as it has been on the record on many previous occasions, that we give the utmost priority to front-line public services and the NHS. That does not have to be taken just as a commitment for the future; anyone who looks at the Scottish Government budget for this financial year will see that clear commitment to the budget of the NHS. That commitment to protecting the funds that the NHS has available to spend on front-line services will continue into the future.

Dispensing General Practitioner Practices (Rural Areas)

2. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it will take to ensure that dispensing GP practices in rural areas are protected. (S3O-10313)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): General practitioner practices may be required by a health board to dispense to all or some of the board's patients in areas where there is no community pharmacy. In the event that an application to open a community pharmacy in such an area is successful, the board will assess the need for that GP practice to continue dispensing to some or all of its patients. If a

practice subsequently loses its dispensing income, it will remain eligible for general medical services funding on the same basis as any other GP practice. However, we are reviewing the regulations and arrangements for pharmacy applications, and we published the consultation document "Applications to provide NHS Pharmaceutical Services: Review of the Control of Entry Arrangements" on 22 March 2010. That document has been made available to all members, and I would welcome any views that they wish to give.

Jim Hume: In Newcastleton in the Scottish Borders, the local dispensing GP practice is at risk because a large pharmacy plans to open in the area. Will the minister clarify exactly when her department will undertake a review of the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 to take account of situations such as that of a dispensing GP practice in a rural area that has no representation on the area pharmaceutical committee, or when no account is taken of the impact on a dispensing GP practice of the loss of dispensing income?

Shona Robison: It was always the intention that dispensing income would be for dispensing services. As the member will know, applications to open a pharmacy are matters for individual health boards. We introduced an amendment to the regulations last July to ensure that health boards consult the public, which previously did not have to happen. It is for boards to determine how best to fulfil that duty. The Government consultation that I mentioned seeks views on that specific issue and others that the member has raised. I again encourage him to make known his views in that consultation.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Will the minister advise on what criteria towns and villages, where for decades there has not been a pharmacy or dispensing GP practice—such as Kinglassie in the constituency that I am privileged to represent—must meet to secure a pharmacy?

Shona Robison: As I laid out in my answer to the initial question, health boards will consider applications to open community pharmacies. They will consider issues such as how the area is currently served.

Helen Eadie rightly raises the issue that in some areas people want a community pharmacy to open, whereas in others people want to retain their dispensing GP. Through the consultation process that we are undertaking, we want to ensure that we get the right balance so that patients are best served. That might be through a community pharmacy and all the services that come with it, which we should remember are extensive. Where a community pharmacy is not operating, we want to ensure that patients are not disadvantaged—

that is why we have dispensing GPs in the first place. Again, I encourage all members to contribute to the consultation.

Energy Assistance Package

3. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it plans to make any changes to the energy assistance package to increase uptake of the scheme. (S3O-10292)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): I keep the uptake of the scheme under constant review. I look forward to seeing the impact of an amendment to regulations that should come into effect in May and which will extend the benefits of stage 4 of the scheme to more families, as recommended by the fuel poverty forum. We have already made changes to the scheme on the basis of addressing fuel poverty, which is at the heart of the programme. It is about addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged people in Scotland.

Mary Mulligan: What can the minister do to make the energy assistance package less bureaucratic? It has been found to be off-putting for a number of older people, who have given up on the process. I am happy to furnish the minister with examples, if he wants them. Furthermore, how much was spent on the energy assistance package in March 2010?

Alex Neil: The figures on the spend will be produced shortly.

If Mary Mulligan can give me examples that show too much bureaucracy or red tape, we will address that, because that defeats the programme's purpose. I am always keen to remove red tape from any programme, and especially from one that is directed at poorer people.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Has the minister received my letter about my constituent who is over 60 and who has never had a central heating system but who withdrew from the programme because of the bureaucratic complexity to which Mary Mulligan referred? Will he ensure that a fast-track procedure applies to people who have never had a central heating system and who are therefore self-evidently entitled to one?

Alex Neil: I do not recall receiving that letter, but I am happy to check it out and to reply to Malcolm Chisholm. If I have not already received it, I will ask for it. I will consider the issues that he highlights, ask my officials to address them and write to him.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Question 4 has been withdrawn and question 5 was not lodged.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it in order for a question to be withdrawn that appears in today's *Business Bulletin*?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question does not appear in the *Business Bulletin*—

Jamie McGrigor: It does—I am talking about question 4.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry; the question is not on my sheet.

Jamie McGrigor: It is in the *Business Bulletin* that I just picked up at the back of the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If a question is withdrawn at short notice, we can do nothing about that. The person who is to ask a question must be here to ask it.

Palliative Care Staff

6. Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how the required numbers of palliative care specialists and nurses are established and calculated and what these numbers are, broken down by national health service board. (S3O-10337)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS boards determine their workforce requirements on the basis of the numbers of patients who are involved, the assessment of clinical needs and other local and geographical issues. Palliative care is delivered by multiprofessional teams that involve a wide range of health care professionals and specialists, not all of whom are necessarily classified for statistical purposes as being directly involved in palliative care. When specific data are available, the latest workforce statistics show that, as of 30 September 2009, 22 consultants in palliative medicine and 68 clinical nurse specialists in palliative care were employed throughout NHS Scotland. A breakdown of those figures by NHS board is available on the ISD Scotland website.

Christopher Harvie: What are the possibilities for increasing the number of palliative care specialist nurses and assistant positions, which provide practical support and quality-of-life improvements for end-of-life patients?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Christopher Harvie for his question and his interest in the subject. The Scottish Government is working hard with NHS boards and other stakeholders that are involved in delivering palliative care to increase the number of trained doctors who deliver front-line services, for example. As part of that, 14 trainee doctors in palliative care will complete training in the next five years. That number is expected to exceed the number of consultant retirements in the same period.

As part of boards' continuing analysis of the skills mix in clinical teams, they are developing roles for advanced nurse practitioners and health care assistants to provide practical support for end-of-life patients.

As Chris Harvie and other members know, as part of the "Living and Dying Well" action plan, the Government is working in partnership with the voluntary sector and other key stakeholders to facilitate care arrangements for end-of-life patients in the most appropriate settings, in accordance with clinical and other needs and with personal wishes.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am sure that we are all trying to work towards a gold standard of palliative care, so that people throughout the country receive the best possible care that they can towards the end of life. Is the cabinet secretary confident that the plans that are in place will provide enough people to ensure that standard of care?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am confident of that, but we will continue to keep a close eye on the situation. As I think many members would agree, palliative care services have been good for people who are living with cancer but not as good for people with other terminal diagnoses. "Living and Dying Well" is aimed at and focused on improving the quality of palliative care for everybody who needs it. As Nanette Milne knows, monitoring arrangements are in place and various working groups are taking forward the actions in "Living and Dying Well". We monitor the progress closely.

Nanette Milne and Christopher Harvie are right to emphasise the people who deliver the services in the front line; I refer to my comments to Christopher Harvie. We are working with NHS boards to ensure not only that we have in place the right number of staff but that the right mix of skills is available. People with palliative care needs have complex needs and it is important that they are all catered for.

I appreciate the continuing interest that many members have in the issue. We will continue to work hard to ensure that we improve services.

Scottish-Islamic Foundation (Reallocation of Funding)

7. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it reallocated any of the £128,000 that was repaid to it by the Scottish-Islamic Foundation to any other organisation or charity in the financial year 2009-10. (S3O-10265)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): The recovered funds were not allocated to any other organisation or charity. As is standard and proper practice, all unused funds

were collected centrally and used to meet expenditure priorities for the Scottish Government in the normal way.

Bill Butler: That is, to be frank, a disappointing and evasive answer. However, I will raise another aspect. It is important to remember that a six-figure allocation from public funds was given to an organisation with no track record of delivery that had, until recently, a Scottish National Party Westminster candidate at its helm. The Government axed a £100,000 fund to support school-twinning projects that were imaginatively and effectively challenging sectarianism in Scotland, so will the minister now give serious consideration to using the money that was reclaimed from the SIF to reinstate that fund and to support grass-roots projects that can and will deliver for people in Scotland?

Alex Neil: My answer was not evasive. It is just a fact of life that it is, and always has been, standard procedure to reinvest such moneys in central funds and not to earmark them for any specific additional project.

On the more general issues that Mr Butler raises, I will remind him of two points. First, the initial funding application was considered by the previous Executive and had all-party support. Secondly, Audit Scotland has already thoroughly investigated some of the issues that he raised and has found nothing unwarranted in the actions of the Government or of the Scottish-Islamic Foundation.

Housing (Barnett Consequentials)

8. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive on what basis the recently announced £31 million from Barnett consequentials for housing will be distributed. (S3O-10266)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): We are currently considering options on how the £31 million additional funding from Barnett consequentials for affordable housing developments should be allocated. The agreed allocation of funding will be published on our website, once it is announced.

Malcolm Chisholm: As the minister is committed to delivering our internationally acclaimed homelessness obligations, which come into play in 2012, will he ensure that the £31 million and, indeed, housing allocations in general, are targeted at the local authorities—such as the City of Edinburgh Council—that will, because of shortages of affordable rented housing, find it difficult to meet and maintain their homelessness obligations as well as meet the needs of those on the waiting lists?

Alex Neil: In relation to the allocation of the £31 million primarily for registered social landlords, and the third tranche of council house money—another £25 million that is currently under consideration for allocation—we are mindful of the need to give high priority to the criteria that relate to achieving the homelessness target in 2012. That will not be to the exclusion of all other criteria, but it will be an important consideration in all cases.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): I draw the minister's attention to a recent answer by his colleague Stewart Stevenson, which highlights that the total Scottish Government expenditure on the Edinburgh trams project has reached £353 million and rising, a total that could have built tens of thousands of homes in the capital and elsewhere. Does he agree that that funding would have been better spent on tackling Edinburgh's housing shortage and that the money that has already been contributed to Edinburgh from kick-start council housing and any Barnett consequentials that may follow should be spent on housing rather than on an ill-begotten transport project?

Alex Neil: I have a great deal of sympathy with the points that Shirley-Anne Somerville has made. It is clear that there are many priorities for spending in Edinburgh. This party and this Government certainly did not regard the trams as having higher priority than housing or, indeed, than other essential services such as education and health. I have every sympathy with the argument that Shirley-Anne Somerville makes.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): When the Scottish Government allocated the £120 million accelerated funding and the previous £31 million Barnett consequentials, some of the money was spent on flats or houses that were already built—so-called off-the-shelf housing. Does the minister think that it is acceptable that the Scottish Government has no record of how much local authorities paid for such housing and that it has, therefore, no way of knowing whether good value was achieved for the public purse?

Alex Neil: All our spending is evaluated in the normal way at local authority, central Government and registered social landlord levels. On obtaining value for money, we follow the same procedures as were followed when Mary Mulligan was a minister. I am absolutely sure that we will have achieved value for money, because that was an up-front condition of getting the money in the first place.

Alcohol (Minimum Pricing)

9. Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it has

received for its proposals to introduce minimum pricing for alcohol. (S3O-10331)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Minimum pricing is backed by a broad coalition, which includes all 17 of Scotland's public health directors; four United Kingdom chief medical officers; the British Medical Association; the royal colleges; the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland; the Scottish Licensed Trade Association; the Church of Scotland; the House of Commons Health Select Committee; Molson Coors; Tennents; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; and seven children's charities, including Children 1st, YouthLink Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland.

Written evidence submitted to the Health and Sport Committee showed that 107 submissions were in favour of minimum pricing and 27 were against it.

It is hugely encouraging that those who deal with the consequences of alcohol misuse support a policy that, as part of a wider framework for action, will reduce consumption and harm and kick-start the culture change that we need.

Nigel Don: I thank the cabinet secretary for that large list of folk who have supported her. I would like to add to it. She might be interested to hear that I recently undertook a survey of Aberdeen residents and that, of the 1,700 responses that I received, almost two thirds were in favour of minimum pricing. Given the support that she mentioned and the clear backing of the public for minimum pricing, when does she anticipate having the full support of the Parliament for it, which will ensure that the concerns of residents in Aberdeen and throughout Scotland are not ignored?

Nicola Sturgeon: That question might be better directed at others in the chamber, but I will do my best to answer it. I am certainly greatly encouraged by the growing support for minimum pricing. I have already given a long list of organisations that think that it is the right thing to do. The right thing to do is not always the easiest thing to do, but it remains the right thing to do. Over and above the organisations that support minimum pricing, I, too, certainly detect from the discussions that I have had around Scotland a shift in public opinion. I am not arguing that we have persuaded everybody of the merits of the policy, but I believe that there is growing public support for a measure that is targeted, proportionate and effective.

One of the reasons for that growing support is that people are also increasingly aware of the damage that alcohol misuse does to society—the damage that it does to the health of individuals and to families and communities and the crime problems that it creates. I believe that the

argument is being won and is capable of being won decisively.

I genuinely hope that, at the conclusion of the constructive debate that is taking place within the Health and Sport Committee at stage 1 of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, people will put the evidence and the benefits of the policy ahead of party politics. If that happens, I believe that we can all unite behind the policy.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

In the year up to March 2009, there was a reduction of 21,337 occupied bed days for patients with an alcohol-related condition. The new data from the University of Sheffield predict a fall in hospital admissions of 640 in the first year. Given that a significant reduction in hospital admissions is already taking place, how can future figures be attributed to a minimum unit price for alcohol?

Nicola Sturgeon: I have the greatest respect for Mary Scanlon's interest in all matters health—I do not always agree with her, but I know that she is genuine in her views—but she is on dodgy ground in trying to argue, as she did with the First Minister earlier, that the impact of minimum pricing on hospital admissions, on deaths and on other health harms that are caused by alcohol will not be important and worth striving for just because the impact might not be as big as someone once suggested.

It is good that the most recent figures show a reduction in the number of occupied bed days due to alcohol misuse, but I passionately believe that the number of occupied bed days lost to people who are admitted to hospital for alcohol misuse is still far too high. As long as that remains the case, I believe that we have a political and moral obligation to come together to find solutions to the problem.

I accept the responsibility, on me as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and on us as a Government, to persuade people of the merits of the policy, and I am determined to continue to try to do that.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The cabinet secretary is always very persuasive.

There is no difference among the parties in recognising the scale of the problem and task that we face, but the key question is whether minimum pricing is the right measure and will have the maximum impact. The First Minister failed to answer any of my questions earlier, so I hope that the cabinet secretary will answer our concerns about the legality of the policy.

Does the cabinet secretary believe that the European Union should be notified now about any aspect of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, under the technical standards directive? If not, at what point

will the EU be notified about the minimum pricing proposals? If that will happen only when the price is set, in the interests of transparency and parliamentary scrutiny—and, indeed, if she wishes to gain support for the measure—will she tell us prior to the stage 1 debate what the minimum price will be?

Nicola Sturgeon: The provisions of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill do not require to be notified to the European Commission under the technical standards directive. I hope that that is a clear enough answer to Jackie Baillie's question.

However, we are required to ensure that the proposals comply with the law. As any member from any party who has looked at the legal rules will know, European law does not prohibit minimum pricing per se. I hope that there will be no argument about that important point. As I have said repeatedly—I have laid out the matter again in a substantial letter to the Health and Sport Committee—whatever minimum price is set will need to meet all the tests to ensure that the price is within the law. As a Government, it is our responsibility to do that, which is why we are taking so much care around the decision on the price. When we have reached our conclusions on that—as the First Minister said earlier, we will endeavour to do so before the final vote on the bill—Parliament will have a full opportunity to scrutinise the regulations, which will be subject to the affirmative procedure.

On a final point, I am glad that Jackie Baillie thinks me persuasive, although I would never claim that. However, no one—not even I—can persuade people whose minds are closed. My biggest regret about the issue so far is that colleagues, particularly those on the Labour benches, took a position before hearing any of the evidence. Labour announced its position on minimum pricing before the Health and Sport Committee started to take evidence. That is a matter of deep regret. If Jackie Baillie is prepared to cut a deal, here is what I offer her: if she is prepared to open her mind, I am prepared to do my very best—my persuasive best—to bring her round to our policy, which has significant backing and will do a great deal of good for health in Scotland.

Aberdeen City Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (Priorities)

10. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with Aberdeen city alcohol and drugs partnership on its current priorities. (S3O-10261)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Scottish Government officials recently met Aberdeen city alcohol and drugs

partnership to support it in establishing an outcomes framework to undertake service redesign. That is part of the Scottish Government's programme of work with alcohol and drugs partnerships to support local implementation of the ADP delivery framework that was published on 20 April 2009 and of the national drug and alcohol strategies "The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem" and "Changing Scotland's Relationship with Alcohol: A Framework for Action".

Scottish Government officials have also held meetings with NHS Grampian officials that the three local alcohol and drug partnerships attended. Those discussions were part of a series of visits to boards to monitor their performance in delivering alcohol brief interventions, drug and alcohol treatment waiting times targets and health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment targets.

Richard Baker: Methadone can play a key role in stabilising the lives of drug addicts. Although ministers have said that they wish to reduce reliance on methadone in Grampian, the amount of it that is being given to drug misusers has risen sharply. How will the Scottish Government support Aberdeen city alcohol and drugs partnership—perhaps through the service redesign that the minister mentioned—to ensure that programmes are in place to help addicts turn their lives around and to help more of them to cease their dependence on methadone?

Shona Robison: The thrust of "The Road to Recovery" is very much that—helping addicts to recover. That requires a range of services to be offered. What will work and be of assistance to one person might not be what is required by another. In that context, methadone has its place. We all wish reliance on methadone to be reduced, but Richard Baker and all other members will recognise that it is a complex issue to which simple soundbites do not do justice. Many people in many families wrestle with the issue, and the Government is of course taking the matter forward, I hope in a consensual way with other parties in the Parliament.

Isle of Man (Reciprocal Health Care Arrangements)

11. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what reciprocal health care arrangements are in place between the Isle of Man and the national health service in Scotland. (S3O-10332)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Scotland, along with the other devolved Administrations, is included in the United

Kingdom Government's reciprocal health agreement with the Isle of Man, which has been in place in its present form since 1977. Residents of the Isle of Man can receive urgent or immediately necessary treatment during a visit to Scotland if the need arises due to sudden illness or accident. That is also the case when Scots visit the Isle of Man.

Bob Doris: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the case of my constituent, Margaret Caldwell, an 86-year-old lady in Glasgow with family in the Isle of Man. She was worried when she recently found out that the reciprocal arrangement had almost come to an end, and that only on 1 April this year was it extended for a further six months.

The lady went ahead with a trip to the Isle of Man, where she took pneumonia. She told me that it was a blessing that the reciprocal arrangement was there. The clock is ticking on that arrangement, however: it will last only for another six months. Will the cabinet secretary liaise with whoever becomes the new UK health minister to pursue a future reciprocal agreement? If that fails, will she and the Scottish NHS get together to work out our own reciprocal arrangement, so that people such as Margaret Caldwell can go to see their families in the Isle of Man with peace of mind?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will answer Bob Doris's question in two parts. I understand the importance of the issue to his constituent.

First, Bob Doris is correct to point out that the UK had indicated its intention to terminate the agreement between the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man, which would have involved the termination of the agreement for the devolved Administrations. We were approached by the Manx Government about the possibility of establishing a fresh agreement between the Isle of Man and Scotland. We indicated that we would be interested to learn more about that proposal and to discuss it further, on the understanding that it would not involve any exchange of public funds between Governments. Because of the decision of the UK Government to extend the existing agreement for a further six months, those discussions have not progressed. Should the agreement be terminated in future, we would be willing—without committing ourselves to any particular detail—to have that further discussion.

My second point is a very important one for anybody travelling to the Isle of Man, or indeed anywhere else outwith the European Union: whether or not a reciprocal health agreement is in place, travellers should make appropriate travel insurance arrangements, including a medical element, before they travel. The reciprocal agreements cover immediately necessary treatment in the country where the person is—in

this case, the Isle of Man. They do not cover repatriation costs in the event of illness, accident or, indeed, death. Notwithstanding any reciprocal health agreement, it is vital that travellers take out the appropriate health insurance.

Pharmacy and Dispensing Services

12. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to ensure that the views of local communities are taken into account when considering the provision of pharmacy and dispensing services. (S3O-10321)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Through the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) (Scotland) Regulations 2009, the Scottish Government amended previous regulations to place a duty on health boards to take reasonable steps to consult the local community when applications are made to open a community pharmacy in a given area. It is a matter for health boards to consider who and how to consult.

In addition, we are reviewing the regulations and arrangements for pharmacy applications. We published the consultation document, "Applications to provide NHS Pharmaceutical Services: Review of the Control of Entry Arrangements" on 22 March. The document has been made available to all members and makes specific reference to the issue that Iain Smith raised. I welcome members' contributions to the consultation.

Iain Smith: The minister will be aware of the situation in my constituency. An application was made to open a pharmacy in Leuchars, which will affect general practitioner dispensing services in Leuchars and Balmullo. Is she aware that when my constituents wanted to make representations on the issue to the national appeal panel for entry to the pharmaceutical lists, they were advised by the panel secretary that she would accept letters from patients up to the date of the hearing, if they were forwarded through the primary care department? Representations were duly made, but the national appeal panel ruled them to be inadmissible. Does the minister think that that was acceptable? Given what happened, does she think that the appeal had a fair hearing?

Shona Robison: I am aware of the issue that the member raises. He will shortly receive an answer to his letter on the matter.

As things stand, members of the public cannot make direct representations to the national appeal panel. However, as part of the appeal process the panel will consider again the evidence that was presented to the pharmacy practices committee on the initial application, which can include representations from interested parties and/or the

public and their representatives, such as a community council. Interested parties can be, for example, the area medical committee, which represents all GPs in a given area. The national appeal panel can also consider new representations from the public if they are provided to the panel by one of the interested parties.

As I said, I will reply in detail to Iain Smith's letter. I encourage him to raise the issue in the consultation process, so that we can give it due consideration.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 13 was not lodged.

Alcohol (Minimum Pricing)

14. Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will announce its proposed minimum price per unit of alcohol before the stage 1 debate on the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill. (S3O-10324)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The Health and Sport Committee is considering the principle of minimum pricing and has before it modelling that shows the possible effect of a range of minimum prices. A constructive debate is taking place on the principle of minimum pricing and if the principle is agreed another constructive debate will no doubt take place on the price that should be set.

The Scottish Government is carefully working through the different issues that require to be taken into account before it proposes a specific price to the Parliament. Regulations proposing a specific price will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure, to ensure that there is an opportunity for the Parliament to scrutinise the rationale and considerations that led to a specific price being brought forward.

Jamie Stone: I posed the same question to the First Minister earlier today, for the same reason. Some knowledge of what the minimum price per unit might be is surely pertinent to the proper consideration of the bill. That is what the Health and Sport Committee and the Subordinate Legislation Committee have said. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the issue is pertinent to the proper consideration of the bill? Will she therefore give serious consideration to letting us know what the minimum price might be? Not to do so would be to undermine the proper workings of the Parliament in its examination of a bill.

Nicola Sturgeon: We are not undermining the proper workings of the Parliament by acting in the way that we are acting. Stage 1 of any bill involves consideration of the bill's general principles, and at stage 1 of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill the

Health and Sport Committee is considering—and subsequently the whole Parliament will consider—the principle of minimum pricing.

The First Minister said this morning that we intend to bring forward the specific price before a final vote is taken by the Parliament. That is appropriate. Over and above that, the Parliament will have a full opportunity to scrutinise the price, under the affirmative resolution procedure. That is the proper and appropriate way of doing such things.

It strikes me as inconsistent of members who continually express concern about the legality of minimum pricing—as they are entitled to do—then to encourage us to do something that would undermine our legal position.

We must take the decision on the pricing in a careful and considered way, and we must take into account all the evidence. For example, we have only recently received the updated University of Sheffield report, and we must take that into account before coming to a conclusion. Decisions will be taken in the right and proper way and, obviously, in a way that allows Parliament the fullest opportunity to scrutinise not just the principle but the detail.

Affordable Housing (Barnett Consequentials)

15. Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to allocate the £31 million from Barnett consequentials for affordable housing developments. (S3O-10326)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): We are currently considering options on how the £31 million additional funding from Barnett consequentials for affordable housing developments should be allocated. The agreed allocation will be published on our website, once it is announced.

Brian Adam: Will the minister give an assurance that preference will be given to areas of high-pressure housing demand such as the north-east? How does the programme fit in with the encouragement that the Government has given to new-build local authority housing?

Alex Neil: As I have said, for both the £31 million allocation and the third tranche of council house money, which is £25 million, housing need will be the overriding consideration, including issues such as homelessness, areas under housing pressure and other pressures on housing need in each area of Scotland. That will be our top priority. We have presided over record spend, record build, record starts and record completions in housing, and we will continue to do so.

Social Services Workforce

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6223, in the name of Adam Ingram, on changing lives: a confident, competent social care workforce.

14:57

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): I welcome the opportunity to have today's debate and to recognise the important contribution that is made to the lives of the people of Scotland by all those who work in social services, whether in the statutory, voluntary or private sector.

Let me say at the outset that the Scottish Government is inclined to support the Labour amendment, although we are not yet convinced of the Conservative call for another independent review of social work services.

The review that led to the 2006 report "Changing Lives: Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review" took a fundamental look at all aspects of social work services, because people at the time felt that they were not working well enough, that Scotland was changing and that resources were limited. That review identified many examples of services that were transforming and protecting lives and communities, but it also found a social work profession and services that were under great pressure, lacking in confidence and not delivering to their full potential. Both those who worked in services and those who received services felt that there was a growing mismatch between the important values and expectations of social work services and their actual experience. It was also clear that social services alone could not solve society's problems. Change was needed; more of the same was not an option.

To deliver on the aspirations in "Changing Lives", our key focus has been on developing a confident, competent and valued workforce and delivering personalised services that improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

The Social Work Inspection Agency overview report on the findings from its independent inspections of all 32 local authorities in the past five years tells us what has been happening in social services in Scotland. It confirmed:

"The messages are clear; the majority of people of all ages who use services and their carers have valued them and think they have made positive differences to their lives. Staff who provide services are committed and look for ways to improve the services they offer to people."

There are excellent examples of support and services that are flexible and responsive to the

needs of service users and carers, and which meet the demands of change. For example, smart, plug-in technology is being used in West Lothian, where unobtrusive electronic movement sensors, coupled with flexible, responsive and joined-up care-at-home services, are not only supporting people to stay in their own homes but proving to be a catalyst for changing the culture of the workforce, reducing demarcation across staff and agencies, maximising flexibility and encouraging an adaptive approach as people's needs change.

There are many services that allow people to be active participants in shaping, creating and delivering their care to meet their needs. That personalisation is at the core of services for older people in North Lanarkshire, where systems are in place for agreeing with people what their day care needs are, whether they need a meal, some company or the chance to pursue a hobby, and for measuring whether those outcomes have been achieved.

There are also many examples of cases in which collaborative work is done with partners to wrap services around people instead of sending them from pillar to post, from agency to agency. Local resource centres in Clackmannanshire, Aberdeenshire, East Ayrshire, Perth and Kinross, and Shetland offer a mix of services for older people, such as home care, integrated day care, care housing, respite care and carer support, all of which are delivered from one centre. In South Lanarkshire, social work and education services do effective joint working, which involves young people in residential care sitting down with professionals to consider what they need. The result is that they get a good standard of education, complemented by appropriate support, which helps to improve their future prospects.

As we go forward, it is crucial that there is a focus on early intervention and prevention, that we avoid the escalation of service needs, that we manage risk and that we provide improved outcomes. We know how important that is in improving children's life chances and choices and what happens in the rest of their lives, but such an approach can also support older people to live in the community, independently and with dignity, for as long as possible.

Approaches such as the befriending service in East Dunbartonshire, which recruits people with limited mobility to provide telephone support to others, or the good morning West Dunbartonshire service, whereby socially isolated older people are called daily to check on their wellbeing, can increase the resources that are available to help people and can tackle issues before more specialist intervention is required. There are many more examples of people's lives being improved day in and day out by front-line practitioners

working collaboratively with others to make a difference.

However, SWIA indicated that provision was variable across the range of services for adults and children that are provided throughout Scotland and that there were wide differences in levels of services and funding but, reassuringly, it reported that its recommendations for improvement were acted on in the vast majority of cases. Evidence of that was provided during follow-up inspections. Improvement is continuous.

The SWIA report challenges local authorities and their partners to examine where they stand in relation to the key features of high-performing areas and to consider how they can learn and improve. It clearly points out the shortcomings across a range of services, which I expect local authorities to examine in the light of their own services and local needs.

It might be expected that the level of funding is the key driver of performance and the ability to make a difference, but SWIA's report emphasises that leadership, rather than the level of spending on services or an area's deprivation level, or even its rurality, is critical to the performance of social work services. It states:

"Leadership was of critical importance in the performance of social work services."

It impacts

"on outcomes for people who use social work services"

and, crucially, on "staff morale and confidence". A clear link exists between good performance in the delivery of social work services and the presence of good leadership, not just operational or professional leadership, but corporate leadership, including that from elected members. That is an important finding as we move forward.

The agenda continues to be challenging and, as the Labour amendment points out, significant demographic changes are coming down the line. There are also wider changes, not least of which is the squeeze on our financial resources in the immediate future.

In his report on the "Outlook for Scottish Government Expenditure", which was published earlier this month, the chief economic adviser to the Scottish Government indicated that Scotland enjoyed

"a period of sustained real increases in the resources available to fund public services"

between 2001 and 2009-10.

Although we do not yet know the exact details of the size and composition of tightening in the United Kingdom to bring down borrowing, it is clear that public spending will be subjected to a period of significant constraint in the years ahead.

That could mean five consecutive years of real-terms cuts in the Scottish budget, which could be between £3.5 billion and £4 billion lower in real terms by 2014-15. Such an outlook for future funding requires realism and a genuine willingness to put aside a silo mentality. We need to focus on what can be done collaboratively with the available resources. We need strong, focused and purposeful leadership at national and local level. The Government will continue to work with key partners to achieve our purpose of sustainable economic growth.

Community planning partnerships can be key vehicles by working strategically to manage combined resources to deliver joined-up health, social care and educational support. A more strategic approach to planning and commissioning within and across agencies, with stronger links between financial plans and service plans, is required. The skills, expertise and creativity of the people who work in services must be fully utilised, whether that is in the statutory, voluntary or private sector. Opportunities to share training, develop common skills and break down culture, language and technology barriers must be identified and grasped.

We must encourage and support the capacity of people, families and communities to be part of the solution and actively work with services, whether through developments in self-directed support and direct payments, through taking the budget and responsibility for their own care package where appropriate, or through just being good neighbours and looking out for the wellbeing of others. Shifting the focus towards anticipatory and preventive approaches rather than responding when need, cost and impact on the individual have escalated is at the heart of the Government's policies, and it needs to be embedded.

Underpinning all that is the need to continue to value and develop the workforce, whether in the statutory, voluntary or private sector. I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge the excellent work that is being done. I am clear that we are not starting from a zero base; great strides have been made in Scotland in recent years. However, in taking up the challenges that we face, we will need realism, resilience and a genuine willingness to make the transformational change to continue to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland.

I look forward to this afternoon's debate.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the significant contribution made to the lives of the people of Scotland by all those who work in social services, often in difficult and complex circumstances; agrees the need for a confident, competent and valued social services workforce to deliver safe, effective and personalised practice; notes the work that has been done following the review of social work

services, Changing Lives; notes the finding from the performance inspections of the Social Work Inspection Agency that leadership is of critical importance in the performance of social work services; welcomes the focus on leadership being jointly taken forward by the Scottish Social Services Council and the four social services learning networks, and endorses the need for political, operational and professional leadership and engagement to support and develop the social services workforce.

15:09

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):

This afternoon, Labour will support the Government's motion on the social care workforce, but with an addendum that seeks to highlight the particular challenges that we will face over the coming years as our population ages and people live longer.

The motion rightly highlights the important role that people in the social care workforce play in supporting and protecting some of the most vulnerable members of our society. It is right that that is recognised at a Government and parliamentary level and that those who work in social care understand the value that local and national politicians place on the work that they carry out. We all know that bad news stories relating to child protection and the protection of vulnerable adults are often seized on by the media. It is right that serious cases of abuse or neglect are highlighted and investigated. It is also right that all tiers of government are held to account for failures when and where they occur and, importantly, that effective actions are taken to reduce the chances of any recurrence. Nevertheless, we must ensure that those concerns are proportionate and set within the context of a social care service that delivers a high standard of care and protection for the vast majority of the people whom it looks after.

Unfortunately, the large number of good news stories in which social care staff help to support people in the community or help to protect vulnerable children go largely, if not entirely, unreported. I therefore welcome the steps that have been taken by the Association of Directors of Social Work and the Scottish Social Services Council in their social work changes lives campaign. The campaign highlights real-life good news stories in which the intervention of a social care worker has had a real and positive impact on an individual's or a family's life.

The SWIA report "Improving Social Work in Scotland" highlights the importance of strong leadership—something that the minister picked up on in his speech—at both managerial and political levels. Such leadership demonstrates an understanding of the problems that are faced by the social care workforce as well as a commitment to tackle those problems. The report points out

that the leadership of social work has a direct impact on staff morale and confidence. In particular, it concludes that action is needed to improve staff confidence that the social work service is valued by elected members. That is an important point. Recent issues such as job evaluation and organisational restructuring have had an impact on the way in which social care workers perceive elected members and senior management. That can only be made worse by the coming budgetary constraints, which is why it is vital that strong, knowledgeable leadership is shown both in local government and in national Government. Such leadership must demonstrate an understanding of the pressures that result from organisational restructuring and budget constraints and must engage in a meaningful dialogue with staff members. Equally, social care workers from all sectors must accept the fact that demographic and financial conditions dictate that change is necessary.

Although the SWIA report points out that there is not always a direct correlation between spending levels and service levels, we must recognise the financial challenges that are coming. Many of the key elements that are required to develop a well-performing, responsive and flexible social care workforce could easily come under pressure during the coming spending cuts that all councils will face. For example, the SWIA report highlights the importance of staff development and training in recruiting, retaining and improving the social care workforce.

I am aware that senior social care managers are concerned that budgets for training and staff development could be an early casualty of spending cuts. With that in mind, I ask the minister to outline what steps he plans to take to ensure that workforce development is protected. Does he recognise the importance of such training and development? Does he recognise that increased statutory responsibilities, such as those associated with the implementation of the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007, will have a major impact on an already stretched workforce? Will he say what additional funding will be made available to Scottish councils for the predicted additional number of adult protection referrals that will result from the implementation of that act? Does he recognise that failure to provide sufficient resources—including funding for additional staff—could lead to increased workload pressures, which have a proven correlation with sickness levels? I look forward to the minister responding to those questions during his closing speech.

If the social care workforce is to be able to respond to changing needs and to changing statutory and budgetary environments, it is vital that, from day one of employment, it is engaged in continuous learning and development. The

continuous learning framework has an important role to play in ensuring that throughout the country there is a consistent approach to on-going staff development and training. I welcome the launch of the continuing learning website, which provides a range of tools to improve areas such as supporting proper induction, recognising prior learning, developing leadership capacity and supporting registration.

A recent article by Harriet Dempster, director of social work in Highland Council and president of the ADSW, highlighted the need for a fresh look at the relationship between the individual, the family and the state. In particular, she called for a return to an approach to social services that is firmly located in the community. The minister will be aware that in the 1970s and 80s, community work was an integral part of most social work departments in Scotland, providing support to community-based organisations such as food co-ops, home help projects and healthy living centres, all of which built strong communities and reduced the burden on the state. Importantly, that approach is also a good way in which to build strong social capital, which has a beneficial effect on all aspects of community. I have real sympathy with the approach, which is worthy of further investigation. We are keen to know the Scottish Government's view on it.

I conclude as I started, by commending the many thousands of people who are engaged in social care, who often have quite literally a thankless task. We should be clear about the value that they contribute to Scottish society. Their efforts really do help to make Scotland a more caring, compassionate and civilised country. Day in, day out, they help to protect vulnerable children and adults. They improve the quality of life of thousands of senior citizens. In criminal justice services, they help to rehabilitate those who are willing to be rehabilitated, and they even manage groups of people that most of us would have real difficulty dealing with, such as sex offenders. Their hard work and commitment deserve the support of the Parliament and the Scottish Government. Where mistakes are made, let us recognise and rectify them, but let us also celebrate the excellent work that social care workers do every day on our behalf.

Labour will listen carefully to what the Conservatives have to say about their amendment. Although we support their call for a greater focus on dealing with alcohol and drug problems in families, we wonder about the need for a review, given that SWIA has just completed a review of social work services in Scotland. We are therefore a little sceptical about the need for the Conservative amendment. Labour's amendment reasonably calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that social care services are sufficiently

prepared and resourced to meet the demands of an increasing older population.

I move amendment S3M-6223.2, to insert at end:

“; while acknowledging the important role of the social work and social care workforce in supporting and protecting people across the whole age spectrum, notes the impact of changing demographics and, in particular, the increase in the older population on the demand for services, as indicated by the Social Work Inspection Agency report, *Improving Social Work in Scotland*, which estimates that by 2018 the number of people aged 85 and over will have increased by 40%, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that social care services are sufficiently prepared and resourced accordingly, taking into account the fact that many older people are themselves carers.”

15:19

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I warmly welcome this afternoon's debate. I say at the outset that we will support the Scottish Government's motion and Labour's amendment. I am aware that I have some work to do to persuade members that it is worth while for them to support our amendment, too.

I agree whole-heartedly with what the minister and Karen Whitefield said about social care workers. We, too, commend the outstanding work of the thousands of social care workers throughout the country who do a first-class job day in, day out, often in extremely difficult circumstances that demand a huge variety of skills. I hope that we can all agree that the overwhelming need is to provide them with support rather than blame them personally for any of the shortcomings that have been identified in various reports. We need to recognise that four out of five people who access social care are extremely happy with the service that they receive and with the idea that social care workers are often best placed to help them to lead a more independent life.

Notwithstanding that, many of the statistics on the number of those who require support are deeply worrying. The statistics for children are particularly stark. Some 137,000 children have no parent in work, 200,000 children are living in poverty, 60,000 children are affected by the drug problem of one or more than one parent and 100,000 live with parents who are addicted to alcohol, therefore it is not surprising that the number of children who are looked after by local authorities has increased every year since 2001. Over the past 11 years, within that overall rise, there have been steep increases in the numbers of pre-school and primary school-age children—32 per cent and 29 per cent respectively. That is one of the most worrying features—perhaps it is the most worrying feature—that we must address. It is incumbent on all of us to take on board the serious warnings that the Social Work Inspection Agency

has issued about the implications of those increases for the future, specifically the expected growth in the number of teenage children who will require to be looked after away from home.

Similarly, we cannot ignore the Social Work Inspection Agency's conclusions, which make it clear that there is all too often a postcode lottery when it comes to the quality of care. The agency found that not enough local authorities

"had consistent and coherent approaches to achieve long term security for children".

It found that, too often, the

"quality of risk assessments was inconsistent"

and that there was frequently wide variability in local authorities' funding. Those differences are simply not acceptable. I do not for a moment doubt the minister's good intentions, but we must do more to address the fundamental failings in the system, many of which relate to the unlevel playing field that exists across the country. Findings too often reveal that vulnerable children and families are not receiving the care and support that they need, and that vulnerable children and families have been left to take on an enormous burden of responsibility without adequate back-up.

I turn to why I am calling for an independent inquiry. I am not doing so because any of the work that has been done previously has been harmful in any way; in many cases, that work has been exceptionally good. I am well aware of all the work that was done under the previous Executive and that has been done recently in the Parliament, and I pay tribute to those who are engaged in that work. However, as is the case with many other aspects of public services in this country, the challenges that we face from the demographics involved, which are highlighted in Labour's amendment, are significant and immense. I am talking about the number of elderly people who are expected to live much longer in the years ahead and the number of children who are expected to go through the system.

On the changing culture of social work care and how local authorities operate, I am very much a supporter of the principle of getting it right for every child, which is outstanding and has in itself brought about a different culture—we look at the services in a much more integrated and holistic way. However, I am asking for an independent inquiry because I do not think that we can address all the needs of social services with the existing resources. The culture of how we approach matters has changed much recently, and it will continue to change. It is a bit like the higher education question. We cannot expect demand to continue to increase, given the level of resources that we will have. Labour and the minister have

highlighted the fact that resources will be very tight for some time to come.

We must also accept that more than half of those who are in touch with social work services are not in employment, education or training; indeed, we must be clear that that figure is approaching 100 per cent in some council areas. That is why it is vital that our most vulnerable children can access proper educational support and have more input to their futures beyond school as a matter of course rather than as a matter of chance, depending on the local services in their particular area. I appreciate that all parties have worked immensely hard to improve the process, and I am sure that we will hear from the minister about that in the near future, but we need to do more to harness the support that is required right across the system.

We must also engage in a much more structured conversation with the excellent voluntary sector groups that do so much to try to improve the lives of vulnerable families. The whole philosophy of GIRFEC, and its related principle of ensuring that there is a more holistic approach to care, is absolutely right, but it is also challenging and has implications for our care services.

All public services, and especially social services, can benefit so much from good-quality partnerships with the voluntary sector. Volunteers and voluntary organisations play a vital role in ensuring that we all live in a strong and cohesive society. They do an excellent job and we believe that there should be much more joined-up working between social services and the voluntary sector so that they can take advantage of each other's strengths.

I finish by stressing the need for commitment in United Kingdom policies to make Britain a more family-friendly nation. On this side of the chamber, we believe firmly that there is a need to support families in the tax and benefits system, to extend flexible working and to improve the structure of parental leave when families are most in need of help. We must not underestimate the enormous role that is played by kinship carers and foster parents, which was flagged up prominently in the reports. Their input is crucial, and we must be conscious of the support that they need when fulfilling a role that would otherwise be fulfilled by social services staff. The Scottish Government has worked hard in that respect, but there is still more to be done, just as there is more to be done with drugs and alcohol policies. There is much to be gained from cross-party support as we go forward.

I am only too conscious of the challenges that lie ahead and of the urgent need to support our most vulnerable families and all those who care for them. Some of the challenges are enormous,

which is why I repeat my party's call for an independent review of all social work services.

I move amendment S3M-6223.1, to insert at end:

"also notes that the Social Work Inspection Agency concluded that there were wide variations in the level of social care service provided by local authorities throughout Scotland and therefore calls for an independent review of social work services to identify the local authorities that need more help, and, furthermore, calls for the Scottish Government to facilitate greater use of the expertise of the voluntary sector and for greater focus from the Scottish Government on tackling the misuse of drugs and alcohol, which the Social Work Inspection Agency has identified as leading to an increase in the number of children needing to be looked after."

15:26

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): I see that the cabinet secretary was so entranced by the thought of hearing me speak that he left the building, which is not necessarily a bad judgment on his part, but that is another matter.

I start my contribution on behalf of the Liberal Democrats with a specific thank you to approximately 100,000 members of the workforce in Scotland—those in the voluntary sector, statutory services and the private sector who deserve our thanks for the work that they do with the people they support in practical ways. Day and daily they demonstrate Scotland's real values.

For better or worse, our society has developed in such a way that we have placed increasing responsibility on the shoulders of social services to work with, protect and support those in our communities who are the most vulnerable, the most challenged and, all too frequently, the most challenging. However, as our world has become more complex, so too have the demands and expectations that we place on that workforce and, consequently, the burdens of responsibility that we place on it have grown. Regardless, it is incumbent on us all, particularly politicians, to recognise that such workers are not a panacea for all of society's ills, nor should they always be the whipping boys, girls, men or women when things occasionally—thankfully rarely—go wrong. They carry a huge duty on behalf of us all.

Liberal Democrats are proud of the role that we have played since the re-establishment of this Parliament in recognising and, I hope, valuing the role that the social service workforce plays. In a previous existence, I was part of that workforce and I am familiar with some of the things that other members, in particular Karen Whitefield, referred to, such as the need for people who are not the best paid in the country to be valued and given the confidence that the role they play deserves. We have not been particularly good at that in any of the areas of social services and we are not

necessarily good at giving workers in those areas the training to allow them to achieve the professional standards that we expect of them.

That is even more critical now, as we move away from institutional care to the much more personalised approach to the delivery of services to which the minister referred. We need to have regulation, but regulation will not ensure that those working in the area have the skills, support and leadership to ensure that service users are best served by their profession.

There have been many changes. I will focus for a while on the personalisation agenda, which has huge implications for the workforce in terms of changing practice, developing skills and recognising that personalisation is all about choice—what care people want, when they want it, who they want to provide it and how it will be provided. I recognise what Karen Whitefield said about strong leadership, but I favour the word "effective"—the two are not always mutually compatible. The challenge for the workforce under good leadership is to shift from designing care packages in team meetings, at which the service user is simply the service user, to enabling and empowering service users to make choices for themselves and letting them explore the choices that might be available, rather than the choices that the professionals are giving them.

As Liz Smith said, it is also about appropriate risk assessments. Such assessments should be carried out on the basis of what benefits the individual and does so safely, rather than on the basis of the litigation that service providers may face if something goes wrong. All too often, services are provided on a defensive basis, to protect the service provider rather than to enable the service user.

The minister mentioned independent living, in respect of which there are major challenges. In all local authorities, the queues are around the block when it comes to giving people an opportunity to access independent living, either through the independent living fund or through any of the other packages of resources that are available. Glasgow City Council has a waiting list of two and a half years. If we are serious about independent living, we need to enable the people who are leading on the issue to be confident that the finger will not be pointed at them and that they will not be challenged for enabling people to live the type of lives that many members take for granted.

There is no doubt that we face demographic challenges. The Equal Opportunities Committee heard from Jon Harris of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, who stated:

"we will still have to consider fundamental issues about how we deliver services, particularly services that we know will become more expensive because of demographic

changes. For example, by 2031, there will be 83 per cent more 75-year-olds. We have to rethink and take a longer-term perspective.”—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 20 April 2010; c 1611.]

In doing so, we must value the work and role of our social care workforce, working more smartly—but not necessarily more expensively—to deliver services.

15:33

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

I open by declaring an interest. Last year, I was honoured to become a social work champion, as part of the ADSW’s social work changes lives campaign, which, I am delighted to hear, has just been extended for a further year.

I am also a local champion, but I am a social work champion and my employment before I was elected was in the training and assessing of social care workers. I have first-hand knowledge of the dedication and commitment of those who work in social services and stand in admiration of the professionalism that they display day in, day out.

As we have heard, the Scottish Government recognised the need to strengthen leadership in the sector and to create a single, integrated qualification and professional development framework. The Scottish Social Services Council responded admirably. I pay tribute to the work of the Scottish Social Services Council, noting the development of the childhood practice award, which helps to develop the professional skill set that workers in social work need. The approach has been centred on the needs of the children who use social work services, and that is the right approach to take. It is a development from the service sector with minimum interference from Government, which draws on the knowledge and experience of the best practice and the best practitioners to develop a qualification that prepares students for the delivery of high quality care in education. It is a development that is attracting interest from around the world—again, Scotland blazing the trail.

The council is also driving forward the development of leadership in the profession, as we have heard today.

The Scottish Government chairs a steering group that has been set up to provide strategic direction in partnership with the council and others. It will develop a clear strategic vision for leadership in social services, using a model of accessible, flexible learning, which I benefited from greatly in my career. It will improve senior leadership capacity within social services and will review the current leadership model. That focus on leadership—that lighting of the lamp to guide the

footsteps of the profession—provides a solid foundation on which the professionals can build.

No system is perfect, and no group of workers is perfect. There are problems and challenges in every walk of life. Social workers and social carers are people whose employment sends them into some of the most challenging situations in domestic life. They are people who see and seek to mend some of the damaged lives in our society. They are people who seek to improve other people’s lives. However, I do not claim beatification for them or set them apart from the rest of society. They are people with flaws, vices and virtues and, in my experience, a lot of compassion. We ask them to do a difficult job and they accept it. We ask them to help hold society together and they respond with generosity.

Social capital is the glue of society and is enhanced by the proper treatment of the most vulnerable members of society. We can judge the health of our society by the manner in which it protects its weakest. Our social work services renew our social capital every day, and we should seek to nurture and improve those services. That is why I praise the minister for his foresight in launching the continuous learning framework to improve outcomes for people who use social services by supporting everyone working in social services in Scotland to be the best that they can be.

I understand that the council has a project team working with the learning networks and other partners to spread the word about the framework. It has already helped 112 organisations, and the work continues.

With the framework growing and proper registration due to be complete in just a few years’ time, the service is growing in professionalism. When the council was first established, only 20 per cent of the workforce had the relevant qualification for their job—my first job, when I first started training in social work, was to get everyone in learning disability services in Glasgow trained to the minimum level, and it was an absolute privilege, as I met some amazing people who were working in some challenging situations. By 2015, however, all of the workforce will be qualified and registered. That is great, and should be welcomed.

As we have heard, registration and regulation will mean that all social service workers will have a qualification that is relevant to their job, which will raise the professionalism and status of the sector and ensure that people who use the services can rely on a trained and trusted workforce. That will be an embodiment of the “confident, competent” workforce that is referred to in the motion.

There is supposed to be a Chinese curse that goes, “May you live in interesting times.” We are

certainly living in interesting times in politics right now. However, that curse is reputed to be the weakest of three, the other two being, “May the government be aware of you” and “May you find what you are looking for.”

Thanks to the Scottish Social Services Council, social services staff live in interesting times; the Government is most definitely aware of them; and I think that they might just find what they are looking for—but that is not a curse; it is a positive thing.

The profession is developing from the inside and is doing so without politicians getting too involved. It is a great success story for the profession and for Scotland—a professional service being developed and delivered by professionals intent on improving the services that they provide.

I look forward to seeing a gradual and on-going improvement in the outcomes of inspections as the on-going improvements in the qualifications, training and professionalism of the sector continue.

I applaud the council and its partners for the excellent work that they have done and are doing.

I am pleased to support the motion in the name of Adam Ingram.

15:39

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I do not know whether you, Presiding Officer, or other members saw an intriguing article in the papers this week with a headline that read:

“Nurses blame Holby City for unrealistic expectations”.

Apparently, the portrayal of medical miracles in television dramas such as “Holby City” is responsible not only for raising hopes of what can be achieved in our hospitals, but for feeding the blame culture, which results in endless and expensive litigation against our national health service staff when things go wrong. To be honest, I am not sure that I bought the whole argument, but it is true that nurses have long been worried about their portrayal as ministering angels of mercy, which is a flattering but not very helpful description and a set-up that almost demands a fall.

If nurses are the angels, social workers and social services staff are undoubtedly the demons—they are blamed for every damaged child or every case of abuse or neglect that they encounter. In fact, those who work in social services attract the opprobrium without the initial flattery. Those are simply popular stereotypes but, unfortunately, they help to undermine and damage one of the most important workforces in the public

sector. Rather than simply value and respect those who care for the most frail and vulnerable members of society, we are too quick to pounce on them and hold them responsible for everything that goes wrong.

I want to highlight the role that we politicians play in furthering those stereotypes or, I hope, challenging them. The minister and my colleague, Karen Whitefield, commented on that in their opening remarks. The point is not so much that we, too, use the convenient shorthand of angels of mercy for nursing staff and other carers—we do—but more that we offer supposed solutions to some of society’s most intractable problems. After each and every tragedy, we respond to the calls of, “Something must be done.” I do not believe that we intend to, but we help to create an illusion that the problems could be fixed if only social workers did this, that or the next thing.

There are of course actions that we can take now that would make a difference. I am not saying that they would solve all the problems that face the social work profession or care in our communities, but they would certainly move us in the right direction. The efforts that have been made as a result of the 21st century social work review and its “Changing Lives” report have been crucial to improving the profession’s morale. Good leadership and improved support and management will help those who deliver social services and those who receive them.

The briefing by Unison and the British Association of Social Workers that was circulated before the debate was particularly informative. One of the many quotations in the document that particularly caught my eye was from the final report of the social work task force in England. It states:

“We are in no doubt that too many social workers are carrying caseloads which can be too high and make it hard for them to do their job well. There is very strong evidence that the absence of effective management of workload makes practitioners feel de-skilled, lowers their morale and can lead to poor health”.

The scary thing for me when I read that description of the pressures on front-line social service staff was that I recognised—with some guilt, I must say—the similarities with my office. Members are certainly not social workers, but many of us and our constituency staff will know what it is like to have simply too many cases to deal with. Dare I say it but, in members such as me, staff do not necessarily have the most effective managers of case load. If we MSPs feel the stress of managing difficult case loads, it is not difficult to imagine the pressure on social care staff, on whose shoulders so much more depends.

The other crucial policy development that I am pleased we support across party and political

divides is the getting it right for every child policy, which has at its heart the principle of sharing information and sharing responsibility without avoiding it. I hope that it will make a tremendous difference over the long term.

The cases that make the headlines that so damage staff in social services often involve helpless children or frail elderly people. The question that is always asked is, "How could we let such vulnerable people down?" However, as several members have said, social workers and carers often have to deal with needy, manipulative, demanding, aggressive, obstructive, violent, disturbed and abusive individuals. At the same time, and sometimes in the same cases, those people will themselves have been neglected and abused and need protection. It helps no one to stereotype the social care workforce, to oversimplify often complex lives and to overreact or to try to find someone to blame following the worst cases; instead, that hinders our efforts to develop and support a confident and competent social care workforce.

What other attitudes or prejudices do we politicians add to the mix, with the best of intentions but perhaps sub-optimum outcomes? I do not particularly want to stray into imminent election territory, but I am conscious that the family is often held up by politicians from all sides as being the ideal supportive and loving relationship in which to bring up children and care for the elderly. We tend to mythologise family ties, yet we know that the family bonds and relationships that we praise can hide domestic violence. While social workers are excluded from a family home or kept in the dark, family members can be complicit in keeping quiet about horrific abuse and neglect. We read or hear rarely about strangers abusing children; far more commonly, authorities look to a close relative such as a father or uncle. However, we do not round on families—we blame the authorities and social workers.

Perhaps an even trickier question is deciding how acceptable intervening in family lives is. At the turn of the 20th century, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was known in poorer communities as the Cruelty—an organisation that would come and take people's kids from them. The Cruelty was an ironic term that reflected the them-and-us attitude of the working classes to middle-class interference.

Of course, we have come full circle. The emphasis on keeping families together at all costs that is reflected in the Children Act 1989 means that babies born to families whose children have all been taken into care are left with parents who do not care for them. Parents with a known record of abuse and neglect are often given repeated chances to bond with their new children, until it is

too late. We need to review our approach to early intervention.

I mention in passing one of my *bêtes noires*: risk aversion, from which the social services workforce suffers, as we all do in today's society. In theory, we have put in place multitudinous layers of protection for the most vulnerable among us, but sometimes that supposedly protective shield is simply an illusion. Bureaucracy and report filling are used to protect staff or the service from blame rather than the child or vulnerable adult.

I suggested that additional resources are not the only issue that is at stake. It is difficult to see how worsening terms and conditions for staff can improve services. Community Care Providers Scotland has highlighted how much competitive tendering and continuous retendering of social services, particularly among voluntary sector providers, has had a detrimental effect on carers and the work that they do.

We need to become a more caring society. As politicians, we need to move away from holding out so-called solutions. Providing more resources, better training and organisational restructuring might help, but society becoming kinder and more thoughtful would really help. In policy documents, that is often included in the clumsy expression, "Building community capacity."

We are reminded every day that tough times might be ahead, that the spending environment is difficult and that public services will be under pressure. That is all the more reason to talk about reassessing our values and looking out for others—our neighbours, families and friends. The job is not just for social workers. As the memorably titled 2002 report into child protection said, "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright." As politicians, that is our job, too.

15:47

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): As other members have said, the debate is consensual, in contrast to what is probably being said the length and breadth of Britain as the general election campaign takes place.

All of us bring personal knowledge to the debate. As I have described before, in my last years as a Highland councillor, I was the Ross and Cromarty area chairman of social work. Doing that job for those years leads me to make one or two points that are connected with what other members have said.

I am worried about the perception of social work. I take members back to the scene after I was elected as a councillor for the Ross and Cromarty area, when the area chairmanships had

to be divvied up. There was competition and voting for the area chairmen of planning, roads and transport and so on. At the end, the area chairmanship of social work was left. The approach was almost, "Ah, well, we'll give that to Jamie—he can do it." That is a bit of a giveaway of the perception in Highland Council then of the social work service in comparison with other services. In the past, I have heard social work called a Cinderella service. That was the situation then, but I hope that it is not the case today. We must always fight against that perception.

Social work took centre stage for me almost by default, but I learned much in the four years in which I chaired the service. When I was a district councillor, I learned about children's services, old people's services and so on. I used to visit care homes regularly with my chairmanship hat on, which was good. On a lighter note, people seemed to know who I was, except for one old person—I think that I have told members about this before—who told her friends that she was delighted to have met Jeremy Thorpe, which was somewhat worrying.

The other point on which I want to touch is how carers work in our society. Through personal family connections, I am well acquainted with the outreach service that the Highland Council provides. In that service, I see people who are absolutely dedicated and crucial to people's lives—so it is a happy association—but I also see carers who work long hours and are having longer hours put on them.

I see a change in the way things are done. As we all know, old people get used to the same person coming to them, so when they get a new face—somebody they do not know—it can put them wrong. When the system involves a changeover in the people who go round from Monday to Wednesday, that can be somewhat worrying.

I absolutely associate myself with the Labour amendment in the name of Ken Macintosh. Representing the constituency that I do, with an ageing population in Caithness and Sutherland—particularly in the most remote part of Sutherland—I know exactly what the amendment is about. As members can imagine, the difficulty is compounded by distance and inclement weather. How does the social worker or carer get out to see the people who have to be seen?

Recruitment of new carers seems to be an increasing problem. I am not sure of the reasons, but it is not as easy to recruit as it was 10, 15 or 20 years ago. The 32 local authorities in Scotland or the Government may have to do outreach to encourage young people to consider it as a career. Perhaps that work should even involve youngsters as young as those leaving high school.

Some creative thought has to be given to that because, if I am correct, I detect that there will be a shortage given the number of people that we will require with an increasingly ageing population.

I could not speak on the subject without briefly touching on the problems that are faced. Karen Whitefield mentioned Harriet Dempster, who is responsible for social work in the Highland Council. In February, it was reported that the council was having to approve a package of £12.1 million-worth of cuts, which would result in 70 posts being axed in education, social work and technical services. I cannot give members the split of that, but it is a worrying feature, and Harriet Dempster is doing her best to minimise the impact on a crucial service.

I said at the outset of my speech that there was a danger of social work being perceived as a Cinderella service. Karen Whitefield talked about involving social work in the communities. That struck a chord with me because I have been to too many community council meetings in my constituency where I hear elected community councillors and people who should know better talking ignorantly about social work. I have even heard people on one community council suggest that social workers should be got rid of all together in a particular community. Such lack of information and ignorance is exceedingly dangerous for social work, so Ken Macintosh is correct that we must educate people and get them to understand what social work is all about.

I also praise Christina McKelvie's speech. It was worthy of note.

This is an informative and consensual debate. That shows the Parliament in its best light.

15:53

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I support Adam Ingram's motion highlighting the contribution that is made by all who work for social services in Scotland, especially the front-line workers and carers. I can say that because I work practically every day with such staff, who are supplied by private contractors to the Borders social work service. I, for one, would never be able to perform any parliamentary work without Wilma, Cath, Anne, Fiona and their colleagues, who help me with my 92-year-old parents, although some members might consider that that is a service too far.

There are many volunteers working in social care. The estimated 660,000 Scots who care for family and friends probably save the Scottish economy around £7 billion to £8 billion a year.

Adam Ingram stressed the importance of imaginative, subtle leadership. The challenge is to

integrate the various networks of support to provide assistance, relief and association through social care services. We must approach the issue of social care leadership by focusing on strengthening the confidence that the people who use such services have in their situation and their expectations. We must co-ordinate performance in response to users' changing needs. That is very important for elderly people who might be suffering from progressive, but not necessarily hopeless, dementia.

It is equally important to streamline administrative structures and procedures and to look at them from the viewpoint of the person who is being cared for, so that they can comprehend what is expected of them and are not baffled by complicated phone procedures and the like. It is important to channel funds to and place emphasis on the social workers and carers on the ground. That involves seeking a personal rapport with the people who require assistance and the carers who work with them. That is important because, often, the people who need support from social work services are particularly vulnerable—they do not just suffer economic hardship and health and emotional problems but very often find it difficult to express their feelings. As a result, they can feel overwhelmed and rejected by an unfamiliar, overtechnologised, bureaucratic system. For instance, they might fear the abolition of the cheque, because they have always been used to cheques and are frightened by the business of having a phone conversation that will inevitably involve being asked to press 1, 2 or 3. God, that baffles me—goodness knows what it must be like for either of my parents. Providing intelligent assistance from the start, mapping out the likely progress of a particular patient's condition and reducing bureaucracy are other leadership challenges for the future.

Co-operation, as well as leadership, is important. Other pragmatic elements can help to improve social work and social care. Forgive me if my examples focus on care and support for the elderly, but that is my personal experience. There is also short-term, emergency care. For instance, I am relieved one weekend in every month by my brother, who is a lorry driver, coming up from the south to look after my parents for a long weekend. A fortnight ago, he went in for a speedway run in Wolverhampton—he is 60 years old and should know better—where he fell off and ended up in hospital with a fractured pelvis. I went down there to help the carer at his house to do something that is often quite necessary and will become more necessary in future, which was to move all his electronics around, so that his computer and phone were down on his bed, where he could access them. That sort of technical intervention was required for someone who would not usually

be the subject of such care but desperately needed it at that time.

Much of social care is not just about dealing with ailments or sight or hearing impairments but about handling domestic equipment, such as the alarms that go wrong. I had a horrible hour when my parents' alarm, which rings in the Borders care section, got tangled up with the telephone system and none of us—not even the care people—could get to the bottom of it. The thing was going off every 10 minutes. Such high-technology equipment is put in to assist patients, but it can have great deficiencies, too, so it is important that people who can deal with it are easily accessible. We need such things as phone bells that are loud enough for people to hear and we need people to come in and help people with their hearing aids, which, if they have very small controls, are something of a problem.

I do not have a panacea to offer, but I have a suggestion. In many countries on the continent, students going into tertiary education are required to do a year of social service, which can vary from pushing and pulling to helping elderly folk with computers and household equipment. A voluntary community or social service year between high school and higher education or job training is valuable and is an important part of education, which offers the practical introduction to life that such students require. The voluntary year is not simply a burden.

Finally, when my daughter was growing up, we had an elderly Welsh lady in the house next to us. Miss Thomas, who had been born in 1905 and lived until 1999, was a person whose wisdom had accumulated over the years, along with her cheerfulness and intelligence. She kept a diary in which she noted down details of her condition, such as what she was eating and how she was sleeping. When I asked why, she said, "Because if someone comes in and finds me flat out, they will know at least something about my previous condition." She was very bright and still had the eyes of a young girl, as well as the intelligence. When we saw her last, the taxi driver, whom she had schooled in the local school, told us, "She will be out skiing next." As it happened, she was not there to see us when we went back, but she had lived her life for 94 years and she was still teaching people up to the end. I can think of no better tribute for anyone at the end of their life. Often, those whom we set out to help help us every bit as much we help them.

16:01

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):

From the many interesting speeches that we have heard this afternoon, it is clear that many members have some direct involvement in and

experience of social care, which has made for an informative debate. That is to be welcomed, given the importance of social care to the lives of those whom we, individually and collectively, represent. As others have done, I want to recognise at the outset the—at times very difficult—work that is undertaken by our social care workforce and the important contribution that such carers make to the lives of vulnerable people and families throughout Scotland.

Our amendment highlights the challenges ahead and the importance of policy planning across the sector, including for the elderly. Just as Elizabeth Smith drew attention to some considerable statistics on young people and children, I want to say a few words about the statistics on the elderly, to highlight my belief that social care for the elderly is at a crossroads. By 2042, the number of people aged 65 and older is expected to rise by an estimated 61 per cent, which will be equivalent to having 1.3 million older people. At the moment, older persons services account for roughly half the total spend on social work services; by 2031, the cost for elderly care alone could be £3.5 billion, which is more than treble the current level of spend. Given the timescales involved, the response to that challenge will require a concerted effort from across the political spectrum. That is why we felt it important to highlight the issue in the Labour amendment, for which we certainly welcome support from all sides of the chamber.

If we get it wrong now, the ramifications for the future care of the vulnerable elderly could be severe. Therefore, it is important that we prepare the workforce, which will undoubtedly face greater demands and increasing workloads without the time and resources commensurate to the scale of the problem. If staff morale is affected, that will ultimately affect those who rely on the services.

Christopher Harvie is the only member so far to have mentioned dementia. As convener of the cross-party group on Alzheimer's, I want to say a few words about dementia and social care. Ironically, as we get better at dealing with health problems such as cancer, stroke and coronary heart disease, we shift some of the needs from the health sector to the social care sector. Dementia is one of the huge challenges that we will need to address, which will require us to adapt our resources and our workforce.

Last year, the cross-party group on Alzheimer's published the report "People with Dementia in NHS Accident and Emergency - Recognising their Needs", which includes many findings that have some relevance to social work. As part of a literature review, we highlighted the findings of a 2006 Scottish Executive-funded study of undergraduate programmes in Scotland for all

health and social care professionals, which showed that there was

"very poor educational preparation on dementia care."

It is widely recognised that training is key to improving the quality of care for people with dementia, and it is essential that the training is of a high enough standard. That means addressing the need to adopt a system of recognition for dementia care trainers. I have been in touch with the dementia services development centre in Stirling this week. I am pleased that the centre has been awarded a massive boost of more than £300,000 from the Big Lottery Fund to address training needs in particular. Training can and should be viewed as a spend-to-save initiative. As well as improving the service, training leads to lower absence, improved morale and greater retention of staff. It is very worth while.

The minister and other members have mentioned the SWIA report—the minister pointed out some of its conclusions. In relation to the elderly, the report found:

"There was not generally a good range and quality of services for people with dementia. Social work resources were under pressure ... Services were generally inadequate to meet the scale of needs ... One of the main gaps we identified in many areas was a lack of support at the point someone was diagnosed and in the early stages of illness."

It concluded that

"services for people with dementia needed to be given much higher priority by councils."

I believe that we should take the findings of the SWIA report very seriously. The concerns that it raises regarding dementia care suggest that we have a considerable way to go in improving services. That raises the question of leadership, which many members have mentioned this afternoon. It is vital that we show leadership on such matters.

That, in turn, brings me to the Scottish dementia strategy. In September 2009, the Scottish Government gave a commitment to produce the strategy in the spring of this year. At that debate in the chamber, concern was expressed that the term "spring" was too indefinite in Scotland, and that it was rather elastic. The Parliament agreed an amendment to produce the strategy by April 2010, and the Government approved that amendment.

I am sure that it has not escaped the minister's notice that the daffodils have bloomed, and that tomorrow is the last day of April. I would welcome an indication from the minister in his winding-up speech as to when we can expect to see that important strategy document. I would hope that a significant part of its proposals will address how we can make services better, not just for the people with dementia and their carers but for

those who work on the front line, delivering services.

Social care is not an easy job, but it is a rewarding one—I think that those who are involved in the profession would say that. For every bad-news report that we see, there are many success stories that go unreported. Social care has changed the lives of many elderly people for the better, and the policies that the Scottish Parliament has brought in over the past decade should not be underestimated; they have undoubtedly made life better for many elderly people.

However, the challenges ahead are significant, and it is easy to come to the chamber today—as it was in September 2009—to talk the talk, but we need to follow the debate through with action. We need to ensure that the appropriate resources, training and policy planning are in place to enable the social care workforce whom we are supporting today to rise to the challenge with confidence. The thousands of elderly people in Scotland who depend on us to show that commitment and leadership deserve no less.

I support the amendment in the name of Ken Macintosh.

16:08

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): I pay tribute to the dedicated people, from a wide range of professions, who contribute to the provision of social work services. As Ken Macintosh said, some of our work as politicians and representatives seems like social work sometimes, but it is not a job that I could do full-time.

As Irene Oldfather said, when social work services are at their most successful, we do not hear about the work that is done. By its nature, it is a sector that receives publicity almost exclusively when it fails, and we do not hear about the incredibly difficult task that thousands of social workers throughout Scotland perform or about the many successes that they achieve.

No one can overestimate how stressful and thankless the job of social worker is. The nature of the job is often a cause of high staff turnover. I have huge admiration for new social work recruits who are catapulted into the difficult area of children and families services. It is sad that too many social workers—even the most dedicated social workers—suffer burnout. They need all the support that is on offer to encourage them to stay in the job.

The strength of leadership is fundamentally linked to the recruitment and retention of people in social work services. Good leadership is likely to

improve staff morale and confidence and increases the likelihood that people will remain in their jobs, whereas poor leadership has the inverse effect.

It is also the case that high turnover of staff has an impact on the quality of leadership: as people leave social work, the number of experienced staff who could take up leadership roles is reduced. That cycle needs to be broken. I welcome the greater focus that the Scottish Social Services Council and the four Scottish social services learning networks are putting on the development of leadership abilities among people in the sector. I am sure that all members hope that there will be improvements in social services as a result of that focus. Leadership is not confined to senior management in council social work departments and the private and voluntary sectors; leadership and drive are required throughout the workforce.

Of course, it is important that the focus on leadership does not distract from the need to put new ideas into practice and improve other aspects of social work services. As Hugh O'Donnell said, it is about putting in place a care package that places the user at centre stage and shows what choices are available to the individual and their family. It is about seeing the implementation of the package—refined, if necessary—right through to an end game in which the individual is resilient and able to live as independently as possible.

There are many excellent examples of good practice. At Craiginches prison in Aberdeen, a scheme will soon be a piloted in which a support team will mentor and advise offenders while they are in prison and after they have been released into their communities. The aim is to break the cycle of crime whereby all too often the same people are locked up in prison time and again. The provision of continuous support to get offenders' lives back on track after they leave prison is vital. I am sure that prisons throughout Scotland will closely monitor the scheme's impact on reoffending rates.

A joined-up approach to all aspects of social work services, such as the approach that will be piloted at Craiginches prison, is fundamental to the provision of effective care to everyone who needs it. Often, multiple organisations are responsible for services that fall under the broad umbrella of social work, so the need for clear and unambiguous leadership is vital if a joined-up approach is to be achieved. If there is confusion about who is responsible for delivering different aspects of social work services, or if there is a lack of communication and co-ordination about what is happening in vulnerable people's lives, problems can quickly emerge.

The key goal for the clients of social workers, education professionals or people who are

involved in drug or alcohol rehabilitation is to build up resilience and self-reliance, thereby going some way towards reducing dependency. The Government's embrace of early intervention and GIRFEC should, in the longer term, increase the number of families who can live fulfilling lives without intervention.

What is important is that people who are involved in providing social work services have the confidence in their decisions to be willing to make early interventions when needed before a crisis point is reached in people's lives. That confidence can be achieved only through good leadership of social services staff and through those staff members having a wealth of experience behind them, which makes the need to lower the high turnover of people in the sector even more important.

Having worked closely with the minister, I know the drive and leadership that he is providing and the efforts that he goes to, travelling throughout the country to enthuse people in the sector to drive up standards and to improve the lives of children and families, older people and offenders who need our support.

16:15

Hugh O'Donnell: This has been for the most part a consensual debate, but I am acutely aware that the minister will have listened closely and will wish to respond to some of the comments and observations that have been made, so I will keep my contribution brief.

The social care workforce is in many ways an unsung hero, considering the expectations that our society places on it. It is valuable and useful and gives that workforce its 15 minutes of fame, in Andy Warhol's terms, for us to discuss in such a consensual way the work that so often goes unrecognised—apart from the negative aspects of it.

I know that there is still a lot of work to be done. I am relying on the efforts of the minister, who I know has an extensive commitment to social services, to encourage all the local authorities, the private sector and the voluntary sector to work together to provide a universal type of service that may be a more cost-effective way of delivering the care and support that the most vulnerable in our society need.

16:17

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I commented to the minister as we entered the chamber earlier that I hoped that this would be a fiery debate. He said that, if I was expecting that, I was clearly in the wrong place. Nevertheless, it has been an interesting debate, and I congratulate

all the speakers, not least Jamie Stone on a gratuitous mention of Jeremy Thorpe, which is not a name that we often hear in the chamber.

The debate has served to bring to the fore an important issue that deserves our attention. We have heard from speakers throughout the debate how the efforts of social workers and social care workers across the country are vital to many people's lives. Their work is often carried out in the most arduous and challenging of circumstances.

The demographic challenges that are outlined in the Labour amendment and which were mentioned by both Karen Whitefield and Irene Oldfather, and the rising number of children who are looked after by local authorities, mean that it is more important than ever that we do what we can to provide and maintain an effective social care workforce.

As Elizabeth Smith said, more than 15,000 children are now in social care, and there has been a rise every year since 2001 in the number of those who need to be looked after. Despite that, the number of staff employed by Scottish local authority social services is decreasing, according to figures released last June. That leads to the clear conclusion that we are simply not doing enough to help the most vulnerable in our society.

I listened with great interest to the minister's comments at the start of the debate about the need for us to deliver joined-up services against the backdrop of the serious budget cuts that we know are ahead. I welcome the minister's mature approach. We will face some difficult times in the public sector, and if we are to ensure that the most vulnerable do not suffer as a result we must look at new ways of doing things. I was also interested in what the minister said about how, when looking at the effectiveness of social work services, leadership is more important than resources. There are lessons to be learned in that.

With all those statistics in mind, I welcome the "Changing Lives" review of social work services. The review's findings on the importance of clear and efficient leadership in supporting our social services workforce are an important step towards developing a more effective service. However, given the extent of the problems that social care in Scotland faces, more must and should be done to tackle them, which is why I fully support my colleague Elizabeth Smith's amendment.

In the report that it published in March, the Social Work Inspection Agency emphasised several vital areas that need to be addressed. Potentially the most worrying point that the agency made was about the postcode lottery that exists in social services. That affects the future of children in care. On average, more than half of those children who were still in contact with social

services were not in employment, and the figure went up to 100 per cent in the worst-performing council areas. The quality of risk assessments and of the care that is provided was found to vary hugely between councils, which is hardly surprising, given the variation in funding from council to council.

We think that if a consistently valuable service is to be established throughout the country, it is important that we have an accurate picture of the current situation. That is why we have called for an independent review of social work services, so that we can identify, as soon as possible, where we are failing those who rely on social care the most. We think that the backdrop of demographic changes that we have heard about is a powerful argument for holding such a review. Although we accept that we might still have to convince the minister and other members of the need for it, we hope that they will understand our arguments about why it is important for us to get a picture of the present situation.

Up to 60,000 children in Scotland are affected by a parent's drug problem and seven out of 20 children who are referred to the children's reporter have a parent or carer who has abused drugs, so it is essential that we tackle the issue of drugs in our society. We believe that by doing so, we can destroy the problem at its roots and help prevent more children from having to enter care in the first place.

We can take further steps to help fix our broken society by making better use of the voluntary sector and reducing the amount of Government interference and red tape, which act as a huge hindrance to many voluntary agencies. The funding of the voluntary sector is an issue that comes up continually, and it is one that I raise in the Parliament whenever I have the opportunity. When budgets are squeezed, there is always a temptation to cut off funding for outside agencies and the voluntary sector. In the coming years, with the budget squeeze that will apply to the Scottish Government budget, which will be passed down to local government budgets, there will be tremendous pressure on the voluntary sector. I would like the minister to provide as much reassurance as he can that the Government acknowledges the problem, that support will be given to that sector and that he will try to ensure that long-term, secure funding is put in place.

One of the most debilitating aspects of voluntary sector funding is the uncertainty that surrounds it from year to year, which means that organisations simply cannot plan ahead or offer secure employment because they do not know whether their funding will be sustained. It is vital that that is addressed if we are to tackle the serious issues that face the most deprived people in society.

It is always the most vulnerable in our society who are affected by Government failings. That is why we think that an independent review of social services is necessary. Although UK-wide policies to support families through the tax and benefits system will undoubtedly aid the situation, more needs to be done to ensure that people in the system receive the best that our tremendous social care workforce has to offer. An independent review would be useful in identifying gaps in service provision, particularly in the context of the likely increased demand for services and the downward pressure on budgets. I hope that other members will understand why we make that case. I have pleasure in supporting Elizabeth Smith's amendment.

16:24

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(Lab): I note that there is a significant amount of time to fill. I do not propose to fill it all, but I will attempt to ease the burden on the minister slightly.

The "Changing Lives" report that is mentioned in the motion highlighted the need for

"a joined up approach to prevention, in which social work services better support universal services to pick up and respond to the early signs of problems as well as tackling the complex problems of some individuals and communities."

So far, so good. We can all agree that a joined-up, prevention-focused approach is the right way to go. Simply saying something is not the same as achieving it, however, and we must acknowledge the changing nature of our society—to make a preventive approach work, we need a much more developed system of social work services than we have at present.

Some might say that there is a balance to be struck between intervening in people's lives and identifying appropriate need. How do we strike that balance? One of the problems is that so much social work policy has been driven by cases in which things have gone wrong—the well-known cases in which the system has fallen apart and dreadful things have happened to individuals—rather than by the vast majority of cases in which things have gone right. I hope that that is the case for the majority of interventions by social workers, particularly in the area of caring for children, but I suspect that the reality is somewhere in the middle. In some cases in which things go wrong, it is because of catastrophic failure in the system, but other failures are not catastrophic and we do not pick those up as well as we should. It is not the case that things go wrong in only a few instances and right in all others. The reality is that the results of interventions are much more mixed.

One of the problems is that we politicians are not clear or robust enough in identifying what we

want in sufficiently realistic terms. If we say to social workers that we expect them to intervene in 60 child protection cases a week, or whatever the figure might be, and we also say that every intervention must be of high quality, the way in which they manage an unreasonable workload is not likely to be entirely satisfactory in every case. As Ken Macintosh said, there will be a tendency to move towards risk aversion, and for social workers to do what is sufficient to avoid the problem of being identified as the person who is responsible if things go seriously wrong, while not necessarily having the time or resources to put an intervention in place that would achieve the most positive outcome.

As politicians, we do not always take our role in that process seriously. We are quick to blame if things go wrong, but perhaps we are not sufficiently quick to recognise when we are asking for impossible or contradictory things to be done by social workers or others in vulnerable positions.

Elizabeth Smith: The member makes an important and valid point about the role of politicians. There are certain things that we cannot do as politicians. Does the member accept that that is one reason why we should have an independent review?

Des McNulty: Elizabeth Smith is always the most reasonable and consensual of Conservatives, and she makes a fair point that we need to consider the reality, which could be done through an independent review. However, an independent review really needs to take place at the right time.

There could be two types of independent review. First, it could be an information-gathering exercise that is designed to drive policy forward—a set of problems is identified in general terms, and we ask the independent review to do more detailed work that will lead us towards policy conclusions. Alternatively, an independent review could be more focused on implementation. We decide what we are going to do, and ask independent experts to tell us how best to do it. Each of those two types of review implies that we have decided that there is a problem, what the problem is, and what we intend to do about it.

I am genuinely not sure that we are at that point. The fact that the debate is so consensual on the surface disguises the underlying reality that we all know: there are huge issues arising from demography and associated with budget capping. There are also changing practices and expectations in terms of support needs—not just in social work; arguably, it cuts across the care sector even more—and constraints on what the delivery agencies will be in a position to do. Unless we are collectively prepared to face up to that reality, an independent review will be a slightly

pointless exercise because the information that it generates will not promote action and will not drive implementation.

I watched the parliamentary leaders debate a couple of weeks ago between the candidates for Prime Minister, in which somebody asked the valid question, “What about people who are forced to sell their houses to provide for their social care?” My view is that, if someone has accumulated wealth in the form of property, it is reasonable that, in certain circumstances, the proceeds of that should be used to underpin their care—the responsibility should not necessarily fall on the state. If it is to fall on the state, there must be entirely different expectations about taxation, given the demographic problems that Irene Oldfather and others have been talking about. The number of people who require significantly enhanced care because of dementia alone is huge, and the taxation consequences are considerable. So, we face a real dilemma. I did not think that any of the candidates who were asked the question gave an economically correct answer.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member take an intervention?

Des McNulty: Murdo Fraser may be about to correct that position.

Murdo Fraser: Let us see whether we can extend the debate by having this discussion. I was interested to hear Des McNulty’s argument—which is entirely reasonable, albeit that I might not agree with it—about why people who have accumulated wealth should make a contribution out of their own pocket. Does he not recognise that there is a moral hazard attached to that? If people know that they will have their wealth taken away from them later in life, they might, during their working life, decide not to save money, buy a house or put money aside for a rainy day only to be penalised when they retire.

Des McNulty: That is absolutely right. In contrast to Elizabeth Smith, Murdo Fraser is more comfortable on the train of the broken society and in rolling back the state.

We must have an honest deal with people, whereby their expectations about what services may or may not be available over an extended period are managed. We should not assume that services will be put in place if we know that we will not be able to finance them over a period. People should not make incorrect assumptions, and we should not create a service that is inherently substandard because it cannot be properly financed.

There are a series of debates to be had about how we talk about needs, which needs will qualify, what standard of service should be provided and how it should all be financed. My concern about

the Conservative amendment is that the independent review that it talks about is about different arrangements in different localities. The problem in Scotland is the fact that the most deprived areas are typically those in the greatest need and they are not getting sufficient resources to match the level of need. However, I am sure that all localities could make the case that they have insufficient money to provide the social care services that they would like to provide.

It might take a long time to reach consensus, but until we get to being able to state the first principles of what we should be doing, what we can provide, what it is reasonable to expect and what we expect of our social work system and social work staff, the independent review will not take account of all the factors and considerations that need to be taken into account. Perhaps we need to be more open and honest with each other and with the people about the scale of demographic pressure and the consequences of different kinds of decisions. We may need more mapping out of what the consequences are of adopting approach A as opposed to approach B.

Fifteen years ago I was involved in a review of the voluntary sector by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. In the review, we argued that voluntary sector organisations that were subordinate to local government commissioners of services should be given three-year contracts and provided with the same kind of advance financial information about their budgets as local government was getting from central Government. We are now living in a time in which we do not know what the finances of central Government will be, never mind local government or voluntary organisations. That is causing a considerable amount of uncertainty among deliverers and recipients of services, all of whom are feeling some degree of pressure from the cuts that are in place and are worried about the consequences that may come in the future.

It seems to me that there is a sea change in the way in which we do things. We need to open out a fundamental debate about what social care we can and cannot provide and about the regulation of social work in order to get away from the blame culture that often operates in the area. As far as possible, we need to set a standard for how social needs will be met in the future.

The debate has been interesting. Many of the comments that were based on personal experience and broad agreement that social care is a good thing were, in themselves, excellent things to say, but there is a big problem in that many more people now require care services over an extended period than was ever the case in the past. There is a lot of pressure on social care providers because of the financial arrangements

under which they operate, and there is a lot of pressure on social workers because their necks are on the line when problems arise because things that they cannot entirely control have somehow fallen between the cracks. We need to find a better way in which to deal with that. Perhaps the consensual debate that we have had needs to be replaced in future by a different kind of consensus that addresses some of those problems.

I hope that I have made Adam Ingram's task a wee bit easier. I will let him carry on.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Thank you, Mr McNulty. That was a noble effort. I call on the minister to wind up.

16:38

Adam Ingram: I thank Des McNulty for his extended exposition. Like him and, I dare say, most politicians, I quite like the sound of my own voice, but I do not know whether others share that delight.

In my initial remarks, I welcomed the opportunity to have this debate. It has given us an extended opportunity to celebrate the work that is done by social care workers in Scotland day in, day out. As Mr Macintosh pointed out, they often face difficult and complex problems and they deal with people who can be very challenging.

We have had a thoughtful, informed and open debate that has underscored the complexity of the challenge in moving forward in social work and social care services. Members have recognised the financial challenges that exist, which will not be in the gift of any of us to resolve easily, and highlighted the crucial importance of how we work together to manage our way through matters, the critical nature of leadership in looking to the future, and the importance of providing leadership to Scotland's social services from the Parliament. It is recognised that it is essential to Scotland's future economic and social wellbeing—even in the midst of the current financial difficulties—that we continue to focus on improving services. It is not good enough to think about only maintaining services, particularly services that we know can be significantly improved.

I would like to focus on substance misuse, which I did not do so much in my opening remarks. Liz Smith and Murdo Fraser talked about looked-after children and emphasised the number of children who are coming into the system. That has been driven largely by the growth of the problem of drug misuse in our communities in the past couple of decades, which is clearly unacceptable. We will not be able to cope with the numbers that are coming into the looked-after system if we allow the situation to develop without

checking it. Tackling adult substance misuse specifically, and its effects on children and families, must be a key priority for the Government and the Parliament. We need to ensure that more people recover from drug and alcohol problems so that they can live longer and healthier lives, and so that they can be the parents for their children that they ought to be, to ensure that those children reach their potential through the education system and beyond.

It is vital, therefore, that we push forward with the national drugs strategy in "The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem", which we established within a year of coming into power with the unanimous support of the Parliament. One of the main elements of "The Road to Recovery" is in chapter 5, which focuses on children and families.

It is essential that we bring forward early and effective interventions. Liz Smith mentioned the number of much younger children who are coming into the looked-after children system. We are making progress on that symptom, but it is nonetheless extremely worrying that the numbers are growing so fast. We need to ensure that decisions that are made not only in emergency situations, but for long-term, permanent solutions for those children, are much better than they have been in the past. We all know about the number of placements that children have had and the impact that those placements have had on them and their future prospects. Early and effective decisions on permanent solutions for children who have been taken into care are important. In that regard, I am interested in the experiments by the health board, the local authority and others in Glasgow.

We know that alcohol consumption is another big problem in Scotland. As recently as the turn of the year, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's ChildLine service in Scotland and Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems produced a report on harmful parental drinking. Alcohol consumption is another major blight on Scottish society that we need to act on. We might disagree about some of the measures in the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, but surely we can agree that we must take much more effective action to reduce alcohol consumption in Scotland.

I turn to some of the comments that members have made. I will try to answer as many of the points that have been raised as I can.

Karen Whitefield expressed concerns about maintaining resources for training and professional development as budgets start to be squeezed. Of course, the SSSC has a key role in working with employers, particularly on registration and the promotion of qualifications. Christina McKelvie highlighted the development of the continuous learning framework as an important tool. We will

continue to fund the SSSC to help the roll-out and embed the use of the continuous learning framework throughout the country.

The SSSC also helps employers with labour market information for planning purposes. We continue to invest, to the tune of something like £5 million per annum, in the national centres of excellence: the Scottish institute for residential child care; the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability; Scottish training on drugs and alcohol; and the criminal justice social work development centre. We aim to maintain that investment to feed in to workforce development.

Karen Whitefield mentioned the role of community work. I would be interested to discuss further with her the possibility of a back-to-the-future development on that front.

Liz Smith and Hugh O'Donnell both referred to the need to reshape care for older people. The way in which we currently deliver services for older people is clearly not sustainable in the longer term and incremental adjustments at the margins are not enough. I said in my opening speech that we need to move towards a more anticipatory and preventive approach, with more rehabilitation, more reablement and a greater emphasis on self-care and supported self-care, with consequential support for unpaid carers and volunteers.

We now need to move forward, although not necessarily with an independent inquiry—as Liz Smith knows, we do not agree with the Conservatives' idea of having an independent inquiry. We need to engage with the people of Scotland and ask them to tell us what they think fair care for older people should look like. We are embarking on a public engagement programme along with partners in the national health service and local authorities. We are engaging with front-line staff and members of the public to gather vital information on how we can move forward.

How do we cope with cuts? Des McNulty indicated that we cannot continue with more of the same. We must look to redesign our services. I have been encouraged by the results that are coming through from the GIRFEC Highland pathfinder evaluation. Significant business benefits are to be gained by stripping out a lot of the bureaucracy and multiple form filling and by getting people to work much closer together, as significant cost savings are involved. It remains to be seen how far that will take us, but I believe that moving in that direction is the way to go.

Ken Macintosh mentioned the management of workload and the stresses on front-line practitioners, in particular social workers. As part of the changing lives agenda, we are bringing forward a practice governance framework, one of the key elements of which is supervision. Effective

supervision is the key to ensuring that social workers and social care staff are properly supported, that workloads are managed and that a work-life balance is maintained for staff, which is important. As Karen Whitefield mentioned, it is important that staff are able actively to get engaged in their development. Guidance is being prepared to take forward that agenda.

Irene Oldfather asked about the dementia strategy, which will be available early in June. I hope that that reassures her.

Maureen Watt referred to staff numbers. Some of the discussion of that issue is slightly ill informed, as the figures are derived from the latest local government quarterly statistics, which have been affected this year by Glasgow's creation of wholly owned private companies. That has taken about 2,500 social services staff out of the statistics.

Murdo Fraser mentioned the importance of the voluntary sector. Community Care Providers Scotland has provided a submission for the debate. We recognise the important contribution and innovative approaches that voluntary sector organisations provide in relation to care and support services in our communities. I do not want to see any diminution of that contribution. I have been concerned of late by a tendency at local authority level to look to ditch support for some non-statutory services, which is a big mistake in the long run. We may be able to tackle the issue through the development of our community planning partnership approach and single outcome agreements, but we need to get all the various partners much closer together on that front.

I am sure that I have missed one or two points, but I should move to a conclusion. The social problems facing the people of Scotland are incredibly complex, but we are reforming our social services. Doing that requires leadership and the active involvement of everyone in the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors, who must bend their practices, resources and creativity to delivering the personalised services that will improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities. We strongly believe that developing the social services workforce is essential. Put simply and plainly, Scotland as a nation needs to do that if we are to achieve our ambition.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on changing lives. Despite the finest efforts of the two closing speakers, I have no option but to suspend the meeting until 5 o'clock.

16:54

Meeting suspended.

16:59

On resuming—

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are 11 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on a living wage, if the amendment in the name of Alex Neil is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jeremy Purvis falls; if the amendment in the name of Andy Kerr is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Derek Brownlee and of Jeremy Purvis fall; and if the amendment in the name of Derek Brownlee is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jeremy Purvis falls. *[Interruption.]* I have not finished. In relation to the debate on democratic reform, if the amendment in the name of Paul Martin is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser falls. I trust that that is entirely clear.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-6216.2, in the name of Alex Neil, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6216, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on a living wage, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)

Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Abstentions

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 37, Against 45, Abstentions 13.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6216.4, in the name of Andy Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6216, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on a living wage, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)

Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6216.1, in the name of Derek Brownlee, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6216, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on a living wage, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
 (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)
 (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)
 (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 83, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6216.3, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6216, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on a living wage, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber)

(SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh)
 (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
 (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)
 (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)
 (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 32, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6216, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on a living wage, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 EWing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that unacceptable levels of poverty and income inequality continue to blight Scotland; notes that the income of the richest 10% of people in Scotland is approximately the same as the total income of the poorest 50%; further notes that, among working-age adults, in-work poverty is still on the increase; believes that a more equal society would be a happier, healthier, safer and greener society and that this must become a core objective of government at all levels, and believes that, during the tight financial climate, public sector pay policy should be structured to ensure that those on lower incomes benefit more than those on higher incomes from pay changes.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6215.2, in the name of Paul Martin, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6215, in the name of Robin Harper, on democratic reform, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeill, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the

division is: For 29, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6215.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6215, in the name of Robin Harper, on democratic reform, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)

(LD)

Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 54, Abstentions 29.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6215, in the name of Robin Harper, on democratic reform, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)

Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Abstentions

Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 41, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that the current UK general election must be the last to use the discredited first-past-the-post electoral system and that the single transferable vote is the best way to ensure that the public receive the democratic representation that they deserve in future.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6223.2, in the name of Ken Macintosh, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6223, in the name of Adam Ingram, on changing lives: a confident, competent social care workforce, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6223.1, in the name of Elizabeth Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6223, in the name of Adam Ingram, on changing lives: a confident, competent social care workforce, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 38, Abstentions 45.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-6223, in the name of Adam Ingram, on changing lives: a confident, competent social care workforce, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises the significant contribution made to the lives of the people of Scotland by all those who work in social services, often in difficult and complex circumstances; agrees the need for a confident, competent and valued social services workforce to deliver safe, effective and personalised practice; notes the work that has been done following the review of social work services, Changing Lives; notes the finding from the performance inspections of the Social Work Inspection Agency that leadership is of critical importance in the performance of social work services; welcomes the focus on leadership being jointly taken forward by the Scottish Social Services Council and the four social services learning networks; endorses the need for political, operational and professional leadership and engagement to support and develop the social services workforce; while acknowledging the important role of the social work and social care workforce in supporting and protecting people across the whole age spectrum, notes the impact of changing demographics and, in particular, the increase in

the older population on the demand for services, as indicated by the Social Work Inspection Agency report, *Improving Social Work in Scotland*, which estimates that by 2018 the number of people aged 85 and over will have increased by 40%, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that social care services are sufficiently prepared and resourced accordingly, taking into account the fact that many older people are themselves carers.

Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S3M-6031, in the name of Nanette Milne, on Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association (GCRA) for the support that it gives to patients recovering from a heart attack, cardiac surgery or any other cardiac condition in Grampian; notes that GCRA provides cardiac rehab exercise classes led by instructors in 16 communities across Grampian, and understands that GCRA is now the largest provider of cardiac rehab exercise in the voluntary sector in Scotland and has established successful partnership links with NHS Grampian, Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen Petroleum Club, BP Exel Club in Dyce, Meadows Sports Centre in Ellon and Garioch Sports Centre in Inverurie to provide facilities for exercise care in the community.

17:11

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Until I was contacted by one of the directors of Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association Ltd—or GCRA for short—I had no idea how much valuable work was being done by that organisation throughout Aberdeenshire. I am delighted that I have been given the opportunity to put some of its achievements on the record, and that Mr Pacitti has come down from Aberdeenshire to listen to the debate.

There is no doubt that cardiac rehabilitation for patients who are discharged back into the community can save and transform the lives of many people with heart disease. It improves general fitness, reduces anxiety and depression, and is proven to reduce deaths from heart disease by more than 30 per cent over 10 years. At a cost of £600 per patient, compared with £1,400 per day in a coronary care unit and £8,000 for a heart bypass, it is clearly cost effective. It saves national health service resources by cutting readmissions to hospital, and it reduces the risk of further cardiac events by helping people to make and maintain changes in order to have a healthier lifestyle.

Prior to 2001, cardiac rehab in Grampian was NHS funded and run by the Swedish style association, but those classes were stopped on the ground of safety. Thereafter, the NHS paid for the training of exercise instructors to British Association for Cardiac Rehabilitation—BACR—standards to allow them to take classes. The local authorities did not take up the running of such classes as anticipated, so three of the people who

had attended the Swedish style classes decided to set up an association to develop and run their own classes. That was eventually achieved after lengthy discussions with NHS Grampian as to their ability to cope with the task.

The inaugural meeting of GCRA was held in June 2002, following which it became a charity and began to run its classes. Thereafter, it became a company limited by guarantee and continues as such today.

The classes are run by instructors within BACR guidelines and use a mix of exercise styles. They are aimed at giving members the type of exercise that they want and enjoy, and have become popular and are much in demand. The association has grown to 600 exercising members in 32 classes, spread throughout Aberdeenshire. The total number of present and past members to date is estimated to be more than 1,100. I have heard excellent reports from participants, and it is my intention to see for myself, and to take part in, a class as soon as possible after 6 May has come and gone.

GCRA's funding initially came from a variety of local groups, private donations and fundraising events. Then, for three years from June 2004, it received New Opportunities Fund money, and in 2007 got significant funding from NHS Grampian. BACR training courses were paid for by the Grampian heart campaign and the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland. However, most of GCRA's funding now comes from annual subscriptions, class fees, donations and fundraising events—which is not easy to sustain in these straitened times.

Partnerships have been set up with local industry, a university and councils to enable classes to be held in their facilities at little or no cost to GCRA. The Robert Gordon University school of health science was approached and has run BACR training courses in Aberdeen, which makes it easier to recruit instructors locally. Negotiations to put in place elective modules for CR instructors within physiotherapy, occupational therapy and sports science degrees are continuing. That is a first in Scotland, and only Loughborough University is currently doing the same thing.

A survey is planned for the autumn to get clear information on GCRA's members, their motivation, what they like or dislike about the classes and how their health has improved, or otherwise, as well as statistical information on referral and so on. All that should be very useful for future planning.

From a rocky start, when NHS Grampian regarded the pioneers of GCRA as a "band of old codgers"—to quote GCRA's briefing paper—who did not know the implications of what they were

trying to do, GCRA is now very much a working partner with NHS Grampian. Hundreds of patients and GCRA members are being helped to return to normal, active lives in the community. Two members of the GCRA management board, all of whom work on a voluntary basis, now sit on the coronary heart disease and stroke managed clinical network project board.

It is GCRA's intention that there will be nowhere in Grampian where anyone who needs and wants a cardiac rehabilitation class cannot access one easily. That is an ambitious goal, but GCRA is working on it.

I am sure that members will agree that GCRA is an excellent example of the voluntary sector at its best: it provides a very real service to patients and saves a great deal of money and resource for the NHS in Grampian. The board would like to see what GCRA does being repeated throughout Scotland. To that end, it now works with the British Heart Foundation and with Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland to promote cardiac rehab throughout the country. It is working actively in the current Scottish campaign for cardiac rehabilitation and it participates in the Parliament's cross-group party on heart disease and stroke. I know that it has put questions to the Scottish Government about the future provision of cardiac rehab in Scotland, which I hope the minister will deal with in her response to the debate.

The availability of cardiac rehabilitation is patchy across Scotland at present. It ranges from being non-existent in many areas to being driven by the council, by the NHS or by the voluntary sector in other areas. It is clear that that is less than satisfactory.

In 2005, in a speech to the European Society of Cardiology in Amsterdam, Professor Bob Lewin said:

"If there were a pill that cost very little, reduced cardiac deaths by 27 (now over 30)%, improved quality of life, and reduced anxiety and depression, every cardiac patient in Europe would be expected to take it. There is no such pill, but taking part in a cardiac rehabilitation programme can provide all these benefits."

Surely such programmes should be available to all who need them.

I will finish by warmly congratulating the founders and management board of GCRA on their magnificent achievements to date, and by wishing them well for the future. I hope that the minister will take on board the importance of their work to the whole of Scotland and let us know, in her reply to the debate, what the Government will do to secure the availability of cardiac rehab to all those in our country who need it and want it, whatever their postcode.

17:18

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate and I congratulate the self-styled “old codgers” who had enough gumption to get up and do something themselves. That is the epitome of what we want Scots to do about their health. At one time, we had virtually the worst record in Europe on cardiac health. That is changing for the better, at least in part because the people of Scotland realise that we need to do something about it ourselves as individuals and as groups.

We ought to encourage groups of patients to address such issues. GCRA has been extremely effective in engaging with the professionals and, in particular, in funding the training of instructors at the appropriate nationally recognised levels. It is to its great credit that it raised—I think—around £18,000 to train 24 instructors to deliver the classes.

Nanette Milne did not, I am sure, mean to exclude the city of Aberdeen when she said that the GCRA operates throughout Aberdeenshire—that was, surely, a slip of the tongue—given that the classes are delivered throughout the NHS Grampian area. Not only are the classes delivered on different days and at different times, but they allow people individual choice about the kind of exercises in which they want to participate. People are given lots of opportunities to take part at levels that they are capable of achieving.

Undoubtedly, the classes provide a benefit not just to cardiac health: all sorts of evidence suggests that people who take up the classes feel better about themselves. For some folk—most individuals who might need cardiac rehabilitation will be older people—the classes can also be a great social occasion. Certainly, the prime movers behind the association seem to have taken up a considerable interest not just in their personal health, but in contributing to the general wellbeing of their colleagues throughout the area.

One question is whether cardiac rehabilitation, instead of being restricted, as it is at present, primarily to those who have already suffered a heart attack, might be advanced or offered to those who are at greater risk of having a heart attack. Many people who have angina—especially those who have chronic angina, although there might be other groups of people as well—might get exactly the same benefits. Perhaps that could be considered.

Of course, it is always a challenge for any Government to find finance for training facilities and so on to deliver change. However, given the cost benefit analysis that is available for cardiac rehabilitation—and given the dedicated commitment that the GCRA has shown in its

fundraising efforts—we should encourage the provision of such services throughout Scotland, and perhaps encourage its being broadened to include other groups of people who have cardiac difficulties.

17:22

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank my colleague Nanette Milne for securing tonight's debate. I commend Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association's partnership with the local councils—including Aberdeen City Council—and with the Robert Gordon University, the sports centre that is mentioned in the motion, British Petroleum and the Aberdeen Petroleum Club. The association is a great example of how health is everyone's business and not just the domain of the national health service.

The benefits of cardiac rehabilitation are undoubtedly significant, both for the patient and for NHS resources. For patients who have experienced cardiac events, cardiac rehab allows them to return to normal life and reduces by 26 per cent their chances of dying prematurely from heart disease. That is indeed significant. In 2008, less than 3 per cent of patients with angina and less than 1 per cent of patients who have suffered heart failure received cardiac rehabilitation, so much more needs to be done, obviously. As Nanette Milne said, the cost of cardiac rehab for one person is £600, whereas the cost for a heart bypass operation is £8,000, and a single day in a coronary care unit costs £1,400. Given that heart disease is the second most common cause of death in Scotland, cardiac rehabilitation not only saves lives but has a significant impact on NHS resources by cutting readmissions to hospital by 30 per cent.

The success of the Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association is an example of best practice that I hope will be examined and rolled out, where appropriate, to the rest of Scotland. On its website, the GCRA states:

“In the Grampian Region area more than 16,000 people suffer from coronary heart disease. Fortunately with correct medical intervention and change of lifestyle many can and do live a normal life.”

Clearly, the voluntary sector plays an integral role in the association. With the support of the Government, more associations throughout Scotland could provide the level of support that is available in Grampian and more people who are affected even in a small way by cardiac events could benefit from such services.

That brings me to the Highlands and Islands. The geography and remoteness of many communities, together with poor transport links and a lack of suitably qualified staff, are

undoubtedly challenging. Despite that, cardiac rehabilitation classes have been established, through funding from the Big Lottery Fund, the *Highland News* group, the British Heart Foundation and NHS Highland, and thanks to the dedication and commitment of many individuals.

Through the Highland heartbeat centre, which is based at Raigmore hospital in Inverness, it has been ensured that the majority of people can access classes within 30 minutes of their homes. Classes run from Wick in the north to Kingussie in Strathspey, and from Fort William in the west to Nairn in the east. It can be done. That will ensure that individuals can get access to experts, and advice on diet, medication, exercise and stress management wherever they are. Coupled with the classes, that provides a comprehensive and cost-effective way to rehabilitate people who have faced cardiac problems.

Community support in rural areas for people who have been newly diagnosed with cardiac conditions such as angina or heart failure remains underresourced. Brian Adam touched on that. I hope that the Scottish Government will allocate funds to support cardiac rehabilitation, particularly given the financial difficulties that face us over the next few years, which will undoubtedly impact on all public services.

Support groups such as those that exist in Grampian, which utilise the various skills of people in the voluntary sector and elsewhere, can have a positive and life-changing impact on those who have been affected by cardiac events. It is an example of putting the patient in the driving seat. Too often, patients are talked at and handed prescriptions. Initiatives such as those that we have been discussing give patients more control over their condition—it is a great example of putting money towards health benefits and the prevention of ill health.

17:27

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate. I join her in congratulating Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association on all its valuable work. I also pay tribute to all those in the NHS who provide care and treatment for people with coronary heart disease.

The Government has confirmed that tackling coronary heart disease continues to be a national clinical priority for the NHS in Scotland. That is right and welcome. Almost a fifth of deaths in Scotland are related to heart disease. That is preventable. Every year, about 10,000 people in Scotland survive a heart attack and 13,000 angina patients require admission to hospital. I absolutely agree with Mary Scanlon on the cost of that to the

NHS, never mind to the individual. All of those people, plus a further 6,000 patients with chronic heart failure, would undoubtedly benefit from cardiac rehabilitation. The number of people who are affected by coronary heart disease is greater still. There is a clear need for provision in this area in local communities.

Comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation can be delivered by multidisciplinary professional teams and by trained volunteers, who are all engaged in maintaining people's physical health. That involves not just exercise but behavioural change, education and psychological support, all of which are geared towards facilitating a return to normal living.

In most cases, as in Grampian, patients are the catalyst for setting up rehabilitation associations. I pay tribute to those in Grampian who took the time and trouble to get involved in establishing their group. That support is much valued, and not just by increasing numbers of people in Grampian; I also know that it is valued from my own constituency experience. It is fortunate that a number of local groups provide cardiac rehabilitation in Dumbarton, the Vale of Leven and Helensburgh. One such group is the healthy heart lifestyle club, which runs two classes a week at the Concord community centre in Dumbarton. I have been out and about with its members on a couple of occasions, and they put me to shame. The club was established 15 years ago, by staff working alongside patients at the Vale of Leven hospital. Those patients had been admitted following heart incidents. They underwent an initial rehabilitation programme at the hospital, and following discharge were referred to the club to continue their treatment by developing and maintaining a longer-term exercise plan.

Brian Adam was right when he said that classes become social occasions. The club has become quite a social group, with a number of things going on. It has grown in size and currently has approximately 40 attendees. Instructors are trained to certified standards of the British association for cardiac rehabilitation. Since the first group was established 15 years ago, a further three heart and lifestyle classes have been formed in the constituency. Two are run by the local authority, at the Vale of Leven swimming pool and at the Meadow centre in Dumbarton; the other, which is in Helensburgh, is run by a private instructor—that is unusual. Like the Grampian group, they all do exceptional work.

Nanette Milne was right to say that there is a patchwork of provision, which does not cover the whole of Scotland. We know that cardiac rehabilitation can improve the prognosis and quality of life of people who live with heart disease. There is no doubt that it is an effective preventive

measure. I agree with Brian Adam that we should consider broadening coverage to include people with other heart conditions, as a preventive measure.

I hope that the minister and all members will support and encourage the development of community-based cardiac rehabilitation services. It does not matter whether services are run by communities, local authorities or in partnership; what we need is a network of services that are accessible to every community. As Mary Scanlon said, cardiac rehabilitation works. It cuts readmissions and it can help to save lives. Anything that we can do to encourage the development of a network of services would be thoroughly positive.

17:31

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We need no convincing about the value of cardiac rehabilitation. The intervention is clinically effective. It transforms and saves lives. As a bonus, particularly in the current economic climate, it does not cost much in comparison with other interventions.

Nanette Milne described cardiac rehab well. The approach epitomises the self-management that is at the heart of our work on long-term conditions in general, because it encourages people to take responsibility for their health while having access to professional support when they need it. It is about rebuilding people's confidence and helping them to get back on their feet and regain control over their lives. The debate is therefore timely.

For the reasons that I have given, cardiac rehabilitation has featured strongly in our strategic work on heart disease for at least the past decade. It featured in the CHD and stroke strategy that was published in 2001 and in the first set of standards that were developed by the predecessor to NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. It is the subject of a guideline from the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network and it features in the new heart disease standards that NHS QIS will publish at the end of the month. The audit of cardiac rehabilitation services is an integral part of the NHS QIS heart disease improvement programme.

It is no coincidence that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing launched our action plan on better heart disease and stroke care last June at a cardiac rehabilitation class in Glasgow. The action plan sets out three key actions for NHS boards in relation to cardiac rehab. The thinking in that part of the action plan was informed by the cardiac rehab campaign that the British Heart Foundation and Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland launched in 2008. Given the effectiveness of cardiac rehab, the campaigners want it to be

available to everyone who would benefit from it. The Scottish Government shares that aim.

NHS Grampian offers a good example of the cardiac rehab services that boards can provide. Nanette Milne talked in some detail about why that is the case. The board offers a comprehensive service across six sites, and I am sure that the quality of the service has a great deal to do with the fact that NHS Grampian's CHD managed clinical network has a cardiac rehabilitation subgroup, which is chaired by the head of the Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association. The approach is also a good example of how the NHS can work in partnership with the voluntary sector, which is another key element of our work on long-term conditions.

It is clear that more could be done. We know from the campaign that we need to get more people who have heart failure into cardiac rehabilitation. Data from ISD Scotland, which Mary Scanlon referred to, showed that in 2007 only 1 per cent of people who had heart failure were getting cardiac rehab. I am pleased that they are mentioned in the clinical standards, because the SIGN guideline is clear about the benefits that cardiac rehab can bring to that group of patients.

Until recently, only people who had had a heart attack or a cardiac intervention had access to cardiac rehabilitation. In keeping with our anticipatory care approach, we want to extend the scope of cardiac rehab to other groups, such as those with unstable or new-onset angina. In keeping with the importance that we attach to tackling health inequalities, we want to ensure that groups who have been underrepresented—women, people from ethnic minorities and older people—are also included.

There are also issues about people in remote and rural communities, which have a particular relevance for Grampian. We should be thinking about making more of telehealth care and exploring innovative methods to expand its use. To do that, we are funding a project in NHS Highland that is developing a menu-based telecardiac rehabilitation service for people in remote parts of the Highlands. That will allow them to take part in specialist sessions at all stages of their recovery and will enable the setting up of a more comprehensive community programme. That could help with the cardiac rehab campaign's aim of offering alternative models, such as home-based rehabilitation.

Another example of good practice is the heart manual that has been developed in NHS Lothian. The action plan calls on boards to use it or an equivalent to ensure that people receive structured information and education to allow them to develop the skills to manage their own condition. The fourth edition, which I launched in 2008, relies

more on images to get its message across and to make it more user friendly, and that change has been welcomed. I know that NHS Grampian has been successful in making the manual available, and I hope that it can build on that approach to take forward the Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association's suggestion that there is a role for practice nurses in delivering cardiac rehab in community settings.

I am also aware of the value that NHS Grampian's cardiac rehabilitation subgroup attaches to the importance of education, and I share its view that people can self-manage much better once they have had access to information and education that is couched in language that they understand. That may help with the problem that the subgroup identified of people disappearing at the end of phase 3 of the rehabilitation programme and not going on to phase 4, which deals with long-term maintenance of physical activity and lifestyle change.

We are doing a lot of general work in those areas, but a very practical example of how we can encourage people to stick to the complete programme is the Braveheart project in Falkirk. It has created a role for older people who have themselves gone through cardiac rehab in mentoring others who are just starting the process. It has been shown to support people through phases 3 and 4 and to reduce readmissions to hospital. We would like all boards to adopt that approach.

I know that Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association has expressed concerns about resources to help boards take forward the improvements in cardiac rehabilitation services that we all want. The allocation of resources has to be a matter for boards, but I believe that the evidence base for the clinical and cost effectiveness of cardiac rehabilitation, the prominence that it is given in our action plan, the new standard that NHS QIS is publishing and the results that we expect from the next audit round—which will be interesting to members—will all help to strengthen the hand of those who seek extra resources to improve services.

I will be happy to keep members up to date on the progress that is made in improving access to cardiac rehabilitation as we take the work forward, and I will look at ways of doing that on a regular basis.

Meeting closed at 17:39.

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