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Official Report

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Thursday 6 October 2011

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

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

Housing

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01022, in the name of Keith Brown, on housing.

09:15

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): I am delighted to lead this debate on housing, which is my first such debate as Minister for Housing and Transport. I intend to use the debate to point out a number of challenges that face housing in Scotland; to set out the Government's housing strategy; and to update the Parliament on the progress that we are making on delivering the strategy.

Housing has been a cause and a casualty of the global financial crisis. Unsustainable lending practices by the banks and unsustainable promotion of outright home ownership, including the right to buy, contributed to economic volatility, put households at risk and undermined our objective of sustainable economic growth. The credit crunch and lack of mortgage availability for first-time buyers not only introduced barriers to home ownership but put housing developers out of business and people out of work.

The Government has acted quickly by accelerating capital spend on affordable housing; kick-starting a new generation of council housing; expanding access to shared equity for first-time buyers; and introducing, through the Home Owner and Debtor Protection (Scotland) Act 2010, new protections for home owners who are at risk of losing their homes. Although private housing construction fell, the number of social housing completions was higher than in any other Scottish parliamentary session, which kept thousands of people in work and helped to house those in need.

Following the financial crisis, we face a number of challenges. Demand for social and other forms of affordable housing remains high. First-time buyers face a tough challenge to save a deposit. Local authorities are making good progress on meeting the 2012 homelessness target, but our efforts to achieve that jointly with our partners are undermined by United Kingdom Government cuts in housing benefit. It is essential that we improve the energy efficiency of our stock if we are to meet our climate change targets and help those who have to pay large energy bills. Some people now

pay more for their energy than they do for their mortgage or rent. A further challenge is that the number of households is growing every year and our population is ageing. Achieving the right mix of housing is essential if we are to meet people's needs.

Despite the UK Government's drastic cuts of about 36 per cent over four years to Scotland's capital investment, our strategy is to tackle the challenges by making our funds work harder to deliver affordable housing; encouraging housing associations, developers and local authorities to work together to deliver housing that meets their communities' needs; and making better use of the existing housing stock and improving choice and quality for households.

I believe that we are leading the way in developing new ideas. The award-winning national housing trust initiative is delivering hundreds of affordable rented homes and supporting hundreds of jobs for very little taxpayers' money.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Will the minister confirm his party's manifesto pledge to deliver 6,000 homes for social rent per year? Will that target be met?

Keith Brown: As I have said previously in the Parliament, and as the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth has said to the Parliament and in committee, our target is to have 30,000 affordable homes over the next five years, 5,000 of which will be council houses and at least two thirds of which will be socially affordable housing. That is not a final figure, of course—we hope to exceed it if at all possible.

The innovation and investment fund allowed housing associations and others in the sector to develop alternative approaches to the funding and delivery of new affordable homes. Those initiatives are evidence of the progress that we are making in implementing our strategy.

Increasing the supply of affordable homes remains our top priority and is a vital part of our efforts to build a better and fairer Scotland, to address homelessness and affordability issues and to continue to regenerate our most deprived neighbourhoods.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Does the minister find it acceptable that the supply of social rented homes is plummeting, whereas he is talking about the broader definition of affordable homes? Is it acceptable to cut the housing budget by 36 per cent in real terms when the infrastructure budget of his department will increase in real terms in the next three years?

Keith Brown: I am not sure that I agree with the premise of the question that the supply of socially affordable houses is plummeting. I have just said that at least two thirds of the 30,000 houses that we intend to have over the next five years will be social rented housing. That is vastly in excess of the figures that previous Administrations delivered. The supply of those houses is not plummeting. The supply of affordable homes is increasing, it remains our top priority and it is a vital part of our efforts. I have no doubt that we will deliver our target to have 30,000 affordable homes completed by the end of this session.

To come back to the other part of Malcolm Chisholm's question, despite the cuts in capital spend for housing, we have prioritised more than £600 million for new housing over the period in question. That commitment enabled me to announce a doubling of investment in new affordable homes through the investment and innovation fund. The £111 million that we are committing through that fund will lever in more than £283 million in additional investment. Combining that money with the equivalent provision through Glasgow City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council will deliver 4,310 new affordable homes, more than 70 per cent of which will be for social rent.

Many people doubted housing associations' ability and capacity to deliver that kind of housing at £40,000 grant per unit, but the sector has risen magnificently to the challenge, and has drawn on its ability to tap into new sources of funding. Local authorities in Scotland are now building almost as many council houses as the rest of the UK combined, and private developers are taking advantage of guarantees offered through the national housing trust and our support for shared equity, which are providing lifelines for construction businesses throughout Scotland and homes that Scotland needs.

I underline the point that, as a result of the drastic cut in the capital budget, we are forgoing employing more people who would pay taxes rather than receive benefits. Investing now in capital in housing and transport means creating economic assets for the future at a cost that will be hard to replicate when the economy picks up again. This is the time to invest in capital.

Our record is there for all to see. Under the four years of the first Scottish National Party Government, more than 27,000 affordable homes were completed. That is a third more than the four-year total under the previous Administration. More than 19,000 of our total of 27,000 affordable homes were for social rent. As we look ahead, we are confident that, together with our partners in the housing sector, we have the ideas, capacity and commitment to keep Scotland building.

Obviously, investment in new supply dominates the discussion about housing, but we also need to make better use of existing homes. We have already said that we will look to limit further the right to buy to preserve social housing stock, and we will soon consult on proposals to allow councils to charge a council tax levy on long-term empty properties. Empty properties are a wasted resource. We aim to introduce legislation next year to allow councils to charge the levy from April 2013 to help to provide more revenue for them to use for affordable housing. The levy will also help to reduce homelessness by releasing more houses as owners rent or sell their empty properties. Our focus on alleviating the causes of homelessness stands in stark contrast to the actions of the UK Government and its swingeing housing benefit cuts, which—make no bones about it—will force people out of their existing homes. I have made my concerns about the reforms crystal clear to UK ministers, as the cabinet secretary has on a number of occasions.

Prevention and planning are important in preparing for the challenge of an older population. The Government supports older people's aspirations to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible, but significant demographic and financial challenges mean that we must find new ways to achieve those aspirations. I plan to publish a national strategy for housing for older people in December that will set out a clear vision for housing for older people and what needs to be put in place to achieve it.

With the challenge of reducing greenhouse gases and the rise in energy prices, it is essential that we build houses to the highest standards of energy efficiency. Progressive increases in our rigorous building standards are ensuring that new houses will be near zero carbon but, with the expectation that more than 80 per cent of current housing will still be in existence by 2050, improvements to the existing stock are also vital.

We are tackling fuel poverty head on with an increase of more than 30 per cent in funding to support fuel poverty and energy efficiency programmes.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the minister acknowledge that, although he referred to "progressive increases" in the building standards for new stock, we have not seen progressive increases in the funding for energy efficiency and fuel poverty measures and the increase this year to which he referred only partially reverses last year's cut? I just seek an acknowledgement of those facts.

Keith Brown: Those points were well covered yesterday in the statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment. Our programme is progressive and it

matches the need that is out there. Given some of the things that are causing difficulties, such as the energy price increases by different companies and failure to get support from Westminster, I think that the programme of fuel poverty support is realistic and ambitious.

I was about to say that we are also providing £50 million over the course of this session for a warm homes fund, so Patrick Harvie should consider in the round all the actions that we are taking to support communities that are affected by fuel poverty.

We saw very big increases in energy prices over the summer, which is why the First Minister has called for a summit with the energy companies.

The UK Government's green deal and energy company obligation will change support for energy efficiency measures, which is why the cabinet secretary announced yesterday a review of our fuel poverty strategy.

I have made clear our commitment to deliver 30,000 affordable homes during this session of Parliament. It will be interesting to see whether other parties would match or even seek to exceed that commitment by changing budgets. Our commitment is to deliver 30,000 affordable homes during this session.

Our approach and our priorities are shaped by the fact that Scotland is facing a period of almost unprecedented austerity as a result of the spending cuts imposed by the Westminster Government. Councils, housing associations and developers should be congratulated on rising to those challenges and using their creativity and innovation to deliver much-needed affordable homes.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the difficulties that the current economic climate presents for those in need of affordable housing; believes, in light of the severe constraints on public expenditure, that this challenge can be addressed only through the development of innovative and creative measures to provide a range of high-quality sustainable homes that people can afford and that meet their needs; notes with approval initiatives such as the National Housing Trust and the Investment and Innovation Fund; welcomes the willingness of local authorities, registered social landlords and developers to participate in these initiatives, and congratulates them on working together innovatively to deliver the maximum number of affordable homes in these testing circumstances.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call Lewis Macdonald, I point out to members that we are going to be extremely generous with time. Feel free to take interventions; if you do, I will make sure that you are not penalised in the time that you are allocated. Mr Macdonald, you have a generous 10 minutes.

09:27

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. Your generosity is, as always, much appreciated.

When John Swinney introduced the draft budget and spending review a couple of weeks ago, he made much of the merits of what he chose to call "preventative spending". Indeed, a casual listener might even have formed the impression that he had thought it up all by himself. Spend to save has, of course, been a shared objective of successive Governments and how best to do it is right at the centre of this debate.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations gave a very detailed response to the Finance Committee's call for views on the draft budget and spending review in which it spells out what I think are the key points. The submission states:

"Investing now in affordable housing, housing support, community regeneration and energy efficiency can save money in other budgets such as health, social care, education, justice and climate change."

Not many members would disagree with that, nor would many dispute the economic benefits and the jobs created by house building or the redoubled importance of houses built for rent at a time when levels of house building in the private sector have collapsed to a 30-year low.

Ministers have said that they agree with all that yet, two weeks ago, in the budget and spending review, we saw affordable housing take one of the biggest hits of any area of Scottish Government expenditure. Like-for-like figures in table 13.10 of the spending review document show the overall funding for housing and regeneration fall from nearly £390 million this year to only £265 million in 2013-14—as Malcolm Chisholm said, a cut of some 30 per cent. Within that, the budget line for housing supply is cut from £268.5 million to £133.5 million over the same period, which is a 50 per cent reduction in what ministers see fit to invest under that heading.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member give us a suggestion for some other capital programme that should not go ahead in order to fund housing, such as the Forth road bridge?

Lewis Macdonald: If John Mason is suggesting that the Government cuts the Forth road bridge in order to fund housing, perhaps he needs to take that up with his own front bench. That is not my proposition today, but I am very interested in his suggestion.

We are also told in the spending review document that there is additional funding for housing supply in the local government budget.

This year, that funding is worth £100 million, but the numbers for future years are to be confirmed. We have not yet heard from ministers what those figures will be but, when we do, I suspect that they will confirm that that on-going funding under the local government heading will come in at less than £100 million a year. In fact, the minister himself has used a figure of £250 million over three years. When he sums up, perhaps the cabinet secretary can explain precisely what that number will be. In any event, it will not make up for the loss of £400 million from the housing supply line of the housing and regeneration budget over the next three years.

That goes to the heart of our debate. New mechanisms to fund house building for mid-market rent or rent to purchase cannot make up for cuts of hundreds of millions of pounds in the mainstream budget for building social rented homes at the very time that such investment is needed most.

Some councils have chosen to explore the national housing trust route. Others, such as West Lothian Council, which is led by the SNP, have chosen not to do so. A range of housing providers have bid for project finance from the investment and innovation fund and have clearly worked hard to secure funding of any kind to take schemes forward, but those schemes do not get the Government off the hook of having to set a realistic budget for the sector as a whole.

There is another hook that ministers have got themselves on to, which they still show no signs of getting themselves off. Earlier, Keith Brown was invited to offer an explanation but chose not to do so. When the SNP sought re-election in May, it made a highly specific manifesto commitment, which ministers have spent the past five months simply failing to acknowledge. I will quote from page 17 of the SNP manifesto, a copy of which I have with me, if ministers need to see it for themselves. Next to an image of Alex Salmond and Alex Neil, it says:

"Overall, our aim is to build over 6,000 new socially-rented houses each year."

That could hardly be clearer, but I have tried in vain to get ministers to confirm that commitment or to explain why they will not do so. In a written reply, Keith Brown told me that ministers

"have not set an overall target for council/housing association homes for social rent",—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 29 June 2011; S4W-00866.]

yet that is exactly what they did in their manifesto.

After our debate before the summer recess, I wrote to the minister and offered him the opportunity to say why the party manifesto said one thing and his ministerial replies another. Back came another response that again said that there were targets for affordable homes in general—as

Keith Brown said earlier—but which made no reference to targets for social rented homes in particular. Instead, Mr Brown referred me to Mr Neil's evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, so naturally I made haste to find out what Mr Neil had said.

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): You should just have phoned me.

Lewis Macdonald: I could have phoned Mr Neil and I suspect that, if I had, I might have got a more direct answer than we have had so far in parliamentary debates. Perhaps that is a piece of advice that I should follow if he does not respond, but I hope that he will take the opportunity at the end of the debate, in a public communication, finally to answer the questions that have been put to ministers.

In his evidence to the committee, in response to a question from Malcolm Chisholm, Mr Neil said:

"We had two numerical commitments on housing in the manifesto."

That was true, but he went on to say:

"One was that over the five-year period we would build 5,000 new council houses ... The second was that we would build over 6,000 affordable homes each year".—[*Official Report, Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee*, 29 June 2011; c 31.]

No, it was not. The commitment in the manifesto was

"to build over 6,000 new socially-rented houses each year."

That is a different thing, and both Mr Neil and Mr Brown know the difference.

Maybe ministers are tired of avoiding that simple question—phone a friend might be the way to get out of that quandary. I am as keen as anyone to move the debate on. All that it would take is for ministers to tell us why their manifesto says one thing and their spending plans say another.

Malcolm Chisholm: Does Lewis Macdonald agree that the situation is even worse? When he replied to me earlier, Keith Brown said that the commitment was now to build 4,000 social rented homes, but the whole housing lobby believes that that is based on a set of completely heroic assumptions, given that only 1,500 social rented homes have been approved for this year and that, according to what the Port of Leith Housing Association in my constituency tells me, a typical new development for it will involve 30 per cent social rented housing and 70 per cent mid-market rent housing. In the past, the vast majority of housing in such developments was social rented housing.

Lewis Macdonald: That intervention goes to the nub of the argument. It is one thing to say, "We

are providing funding to build new houses,” but, if the provision of that funding shifts the balance away from houses that people on low incomes can afford to houses at mid-market rent, it will not achieve the objective that the SNP set out in its manifesto.

Nevertheless, I am happy to welcome the progress that has been made. As we have heard this morning, Mr Brown has moved on from the position he outlined in his 30 June letter to me, in which he refused to set a social rented housing target. On 22 September, the day after a spending review that was heavily criticised for its cuts to housing, he finally promised at a housing conference that

“at least two-thirds of these homes”—

the 30,000 affordable homes planned for the next five years—

“will be for social rent”.

That is good. It means that there will be at least 20,000 social rented homes. It is a big step forward from the lack of a social rented target that had been made apparent only a few weeks before and represents a clear acceptance from the minister that affordable homes are not the same as houses for social rent. However, there is still some way to go.

I guess that, tiresome though it may be, we will have to keep on reminding the SNP of its election promise. If we have succeeded in persuading ministers to increase their social housing ambitions from having no specific target at the end of June to having a target of 20,000 social rented homes at the end of September, we might even get them to endorse their manifesto in time for Christmas.

Of course, it will not be impossible for ministers to do so. As Malcolm Chisholm pointed out, they have to address the balance between different types of affordable housing in their current plans. They also have to listen to the views of those who are willing and able to build houses that are genuinely affordable for people on low incomes and ensure that there is adequate funding support to allow those developments to happen. Mr Neil and Mr Brown might need to have a word with Mr Swinney about his pledge of £500 million for preventative spending and explain to him just how preventative spending on new social housing can be. They might want to ask him about the consequentials from spending elsewhere that might be available to the Scottish Government and which were not accounted for in the spending review announcement of 21 September. Finally, they might want to explore the scope for adjusting Government priorities as the budget bill makes its way through Parliament in the months ahead. If they do not do so, the Scottish Government's

ability to deliver against any of its targets will remain uncertain as long as the available funding falls so far short of what is required.

That is not just an Opposition view; it is also the view of the housing sector. According to the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations,

“The most serious issue facing housing associations and co-operatives is that the overall budget for housing supply is falling steeply”

and an “austere grant rate” of £40,000 per unit for housing associations

“will not fund affordable rented housing, while keeping rents genuinely affordable to low income households”.

In other words, housing associations can build with that level of subsidy—indeed, we have seen as much—but only by borrowing larger sums per house, which will in turn require rental incomes that will price the poorest families out of the sector.

Shelter has also asked why the sector is apparently being punished for being willing and able to deliver homes at reduced levels of subsidy. If delivering more output for less input were indeed valued by ministers, one might have expected an increase rather than a cut.

Keith Brown: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, please.

Keith Brown: First, I point out that Shelter asked for around £610 million in the budget and just over £600 million is being provided.

Lewis Macdonald said that he will be tiresome and go on about this. I have no doubt about his ability to do so but, with regard to his consistent point that the budget is too low, can he tell us how much he would put into the housing budget and where he would take the money from? It is a fair question and people deserve an answer to it.

Lewis Macdonald: It is a fair question. Indeed, I put it to ministers. If they are listening to the housing sector, they know themselves—*[Interruption.]* Publishing a manifesto and then winning an election based on it will have certain consequences, one of which is the need to make decisions. If the ministers in front of us want to stand up for the housing sector, they have to explain to their colleagues why investment in housing is the best way forward for the economy and low-income families.

There is no buy-in from the sector to the Government's claim that it is doing all that it can in straitened circumstances to support Scotland's social housing. Like the builders, the housing providers believe that this budget represents a missed opportunity for housing and many people will hope that ministers will indeed think again.

I move amendment S4M-01022.3, to leave out from “, in light” to end and insert:

“that strengthened investment in social rented housing will benefit those in greatest need and will also stimulate economic activity and create jobs; notes the SNP’s manifesto commitment in the 2011 election campaign “to build over 6000 new socially-rented houses each year” and its failure to endorse that target while in government; regrets the lack of clarity about the Scottish Government’s future funding plans for new low-cost and mid-market housing in the Spending Review, and calls on the Scottish Government to address urgently the question of how it will enable sufficient new social rented houses to be built.”

The Presiding Officer: I call Alex Johnstone to speak to and move amendment S4M-01022.2. I will be generous with you, too, Mr Johnstone, if you take interventions.

09:39

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. In fact, the generosity that you have shown in this and previous debates indicates that the wise thing for us all to do is to use as much time as possible in case too much scope is left for the cabinet secretary when he winds up at the end of the debate. We know that he would use the time constructively but, if we ensure that his time is limited, perhaps we will all enjoy his speech a little more.

However, we are here to discuss housing. I welcome the opportunity that is provided by the Government’s debate to do that. Unfortunately, though, housing is an area in which the Government has left itself open to criticism. A look at the figures indicates that housing has been targeted for a significantly reduced budget in years to come.

Excluding the separate allocations for Edinburgh and Glasgow, this year’s housing figure of £268.5 million falls to £155 million next year and £133 million the following year, which represents a 40 per cent cut between this year and next.

Within the local government settlement, £250 million has been allocated over three years. That is an average of £83 million compared with the figure for 2011-12, which is £98 million. The £98 million this year was allocated to the councils in Edinburgh and Glasgow, but housing minister Keith Brown says that he wants to talk to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers about how the £250 million can be distributed across Scotland.

The picture is unclear. The total housing supply funding figure of £238 million for 2012-13—assuming £83 million within the local government settlement—means that, overall, housing supply

funding has been cut by one third on the £368 million figure for this year.

Jim Strang, chair of the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland, said:

“The Scottish Government says that the funding will enable it to meet its 6,000 homes per year target. We can only think that this confidence is based on the premise that current grant rates are, in the Scottish Government’s view, sustainable in the long term or can even be cut further.”

The Scottish Government has said that its target supply figures will now be based on completions, not approvals. In the long term that makes more sense, as a completed home is a tangible result. However, I cannot help thinking—and we have heard it already this morning—that that will allow the Scottish Government to turn its ailing 2011-12 figure into a roaring success as it will mean thousands of homes approved under the previous funding regime can be claimed as being within the Government’s targets.

The Scottish Government claims that the shortage of affordable housing can be addressed only by innovative and creative measures. That is true, in the current circumstances, but the fact is that the Government has failed to come up with anything innovative and creative beyond the clunking national housing trust, which continues to fall well below its targets, and the innovation and investment fund, which effectively makes registered social landlords do the Government’s job for it.

Alex Neil: Will the member break the habit of a lifetime and suggest an innovative and creative measure that we are not taking?

Alex Johnstone: We will get on to that.

The innovation and investment fund has encouraged RSLs to do the Government’s job for it, and local authorities are now borrowing money to pay for much-needed social housing. Meanwhile, Alex Neil and Keith Brown ship themselves around Scotland, turning up for photo opportunities wearing hard hats and high-visibility jackets.

In reality, the Government is bereft of ideas. However, there is much more that could be done, such as the introduction of more flexible tenancies that reflect the increased mobility of tenants. Given what the Government has said today about the importance of mid-market rents—on which I agree with it—it is important that we have a system that provides the mobility necessary to ensure that those mid-market rent properties are used to create vacancies within the social rented sector, so that a house made vacant can be let again to an appropriate tenant. Although the Government has said that time and again when it is objecting to the sale of council houses, it has failed to

understand that it can be as effective if it is applied within the rented sector.

Keith Brown: On that last point, will the member acknowledge that our shared equity initiatives do exactly that by freeing up housing stock that can be used by other people? Can he also say in what sense we are asking RSLs and councils to do our job for us and how that criticism fits with his ideology? I presume from that that he wants the Government to build houses, which is a strange idea for a Conservative.

Alex Johnstone: This is a time when we all have to find ways to make money go as far as possible, which means that some of us have to think the unthinkable. I would just like the Government to consider doing that occasionally as well.

Housing is about more than just bricks and mortar; it is about safe, sustainable communities. The Government needs to look closely at how it can empower local authorities and their partners to achieve that. For example, only last month, a convicted drug dealer from Angus was evicted from her home; although that individual chose to leave the area, she could, having been evicted for dealing drugs from her council house, have presented herself as homeless and vulnerable and re-entered the system. The opportunity exists to streamline the system and ensure that those who choose to prey on the vulnerable in our communities and deal in the misery of drugs lose their entitlement to a scarce resource such as social housing.

Alex Neil: I need to correct the member on that point. We have made it absolutely clear that anyone who is evicted because they have been using drugs in a council or RSL house cannot then present themselves as involuntarily homeless. It is only if someone is involuntarily homeless that the council is required to make provision for them. It is simply not true that someone who has been evicted for a drug offence can then go on to the homelessness register.

Alex Johnstone: I have heard that explanation from the minister before and I am sure that he remembers that we have had this exchange before. The problem is that the practice does not reflect his interpretation. Within local authorities, there is a reluctance to apply the more controversial elements of the law when the opportunity is presented to do so. As a consequence, the actions that are taken on the ground do not reflect the definition that the minister has just given. We need to ensure that that is achieved in the future.

Let us move on to some of our ideas. The lack of supply for both rent and low-cost home ownership is a problem that we must address.

However, the planning system is one of the blocks to that and is strangling developments. The opportunity for development is being denied by planning permission not being granted in many circumstances. The minister must consider what needs to be done to remove that blockage in the planning system.

Registered social landlord unit subsidy costs are high, so they need to be more realistic. The days of high subsidies are gone and everyone needs to accept the new funding landscape. Many RSLs do not fit the efficiency agenda that is being pursued north and south of the border. As a consequence, we need to consider whether they can be brought into larger units, perhaps reflecting regional identity within the larger groupings. We need to ensure that rents are affordable and not just for benefit claimants. Further, the standardisation of development, design, costs and build techniques will help to squeeze more out of the same pot.

The public sector has assets that are little used. Can we release them and ensure that that money is used to work more effectively in joint ventures with the private sector? Why not release the public sector from the shackles of secure tenancy and allow it to make the money work more effectively? Can we review property holdings to ensure that, where feasible, empty properties are forced back on to the market? We know what we have heard from the Government about taxing unoccupied houses, but why not incentivise properties back into use by more flexible financing and tenancy packages?

We could propose much more and will take the opportunity to do so as we go along, but we have a problem to address today. It would be remiss of me not to take the opportunity again to ask the minister to consider abolishing home reports before they cripple the market completely.

I move amendment S4M-01022.2, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"is concerned that housebuilding in Scotland has slumped to its lowest level in almost 30 years while the number of house sales is 10% lower than last year; is further concerned that, against this background, the Scottish Government has chosen to cut spending in housing and regeneration by 30%, with a 40% cut in the Supporting Economic Growth/Housing Supply budget line, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to take action to free up the planning system to boost the construction industry and to scrap home reports to boost house sales."

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. My generosity is not boundless, but it still exists. Mr MacKenzie, you have about six minutes.

09:49

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I declare an interest and ask the

Parliament to note my entry in the register of members' interests.

It is a great privilege to speak in the debate, because I have helped to build houses since I was a boy. I have seen huge changes in the house building industry over that period, almost all of them for the better.

I am sure that members will be relieved to know that the era of the builder's bum has almost gone. It has been banished and is no longer the acceptable face of Scotland's house building industry. Instead, we now have smart, sophisticated people working in a highly complex and technical industry. Having worked all over the UK, I can confirm that Scotland is at the cutting edge of good practice and new techniques in house building.

I hope that that sophistication will be matched by the speeches that we hear this morning, but I fear that we may be disappointed. In fact, I have already been disappointed. I fear that we will hear nothing more than plaintive cries for mair money. In the current climate, that is as naive as Oliver Twist asking for more porridge.

Hugh Henry: Does Mike MacKenzie acknowledge that, so far in the debate, ministers have been asked not for more money but for an explanation of why a specific commitment in the SNP's manifesto is not being delivered and will he explain why it is not being delivered?

Mike MacKenzie: That question has already been answered. I will not dwell on the semantics of the difference between two terms. The occupants of a house do not care whether it is part of a shared-equity ownership scheme or social rented; they are just pleased to have a house.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): Will the member give way?

Mike MacKenzie: No. I have already taken one intervention and I have to move on.

Jim Hume: Take two.

Mike MacKenzie: I might take one shortly.

Before we hear calls for more money, I hope that our Tory and Labour friends will tell us where they would find it. Which other budgets would they cut to provide it? What services and capital projects would they cut? Anybody can ask for more money.

I am disinclined to take lessons from the Tories on housing. That party sold off our public sector housing stock for far less than the cost of replacement and brought council house building to a standstill.

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): Will the member give way?

Mike MacKenzie: Not at the moment. I will explain why a little further on.

I am equally disinclined to take lessons on housing from the Labour Party, which knowingly helped to pump up property prices, believing Gordon Brown's proud boast to have ended boom and bust. It even considered allowing self-invested pensions—SIPs—to include domestic property to further inflate the property bubble. That bubble, which Labour helped to inflate, resulted in decreasing affordability and meant that the fall was even steeper when the bubble inevitably burst. As if that was not bad enough, the Labour Party lacked the political courage to end the Tory right to buy.

It has always been the Labour way to throw money at problems, as if that was always the only answer. However, the SNP Government will be judged not on the amount of money that it spends, but by the number of houses that it builds.

The SNP alone has shown the political courage necessary to end the right to buy so that councils can begin building houses again. The SNP alone has shown the political courage required to end the council tax discount for second home owners. Now, we are removing council tax relief for long-term empty properties to encourage the reoccupation of Scotland's 25,000 empty homes. The national housing trust is working with developers and councils to enable the completion of stalled housing projects, and the innovation fund is playing to Scotland's great strength in innovation—to great effect already.

The reality is that, to solve our complex housing problem, there are three golden rules: innovation, innovation and innovation. Beyond that, we need a multi-faceted approach that is open to new ideas because, as Einstein famously said, the definition of stupidity—which I am hearing from all the Opposition parties this morning—is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): On innovation, does the member agree that the co-operative model has a great deal to recommend it in relation to future housing, especially in view of sustainability, district heating and a range of other issues that can empower communities?

Mike MacKenzie: That is one of many innovative schemes that have come forward recently, and yes, of course, all innovation is welcome.

I will take no lessons from the likes of Alex Johnstone, criticising our ministers for wearing hard hats. I will not take lessons from Alex Johnstone or any member of the Opposition who has never laid a block, cut a rafter or nailed a slate on to a roof. I will take no lessons from anyone on

the Opposition benches who has not read and understood the Barker report, the “Firm Foundations” report, the Mackay report and, most recently, the “Homes Fit for the 21st Century” report.

On fuel poverty, I am proud of the Government’s commitment to the energy assistance package, to the universal home insulation scheme and to the boiler scrappage scheme, and I will not take lessons on energy efficiency from Opposition members if they have not read the Sullivan report and the hard-to-heat homes report and if they do not understand part 6 of the 2010 building standards or the 2010 standard assessment procedure calculations. That is partially why I have not been prepared to take some of the interventions.

Jim Hume: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike MacKenzie: No, I will not. [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: Can the member wind up?

Mike MacKenzie: Over the last three years, we have built 25,000 affordable houses—the largest number of houses built since the 1980s. Over the next five years, we will build 30,000 affordable houses and 5,000 council houses. That is what the SNP Government will achieve by working in partnership with councils, housing associations and builders in new and innovative ways, playing to Scotland’s great strength in innovation.

09:57

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): That was a rather strange contribution from Mike MacKenzie. If we were to accept his approach, no one in here should have the right to talk about education unless they have taught a child in a school and no one in here should have the right to talk about social care unless they have worked as a carer. The member may parade a huge list of documents that he has read, but what he actually demonstrated was a complete lack of understanding of the relevance of many of the points that have been made in the debate today.

Mike MacKenzie and ministers have asked what the Opposition would suggest for the use of budgets. Members of the Government party may want to reflect on exactly the same question. Let us think about the period from when the SNP came to power to now. What budgets will it cut to deliver the promise to cut class sizes in early years? What budgets will it cut to write off student debt? What budgets will it cut to give a grant to first-time home owners? We have heard nothing so far about how the SNP intends to deliver those promises.

The SNP has done exactly what it is accusing others of doing: offering to spend money without the wherewithal to deliver in the hope that it will prove attractive to the voters. What we are discussing is but the latest example of a series of disingenuous and frankly dishonest promises that have been made. The language and terminology have changed from a specific promise in the manifesto—asking people to vote on the basis of social rented housing being delivered—to something completely different, which is affordable housing. That is disingenuous and dishonest because those are two different things.

There is no way that the SNP will meet its target for social rented housing. [*Interruption.*] I hear someone say “rubbish” from a sedentary position, but we will wait and see. Lewis Macdonald was very specific in the questions that he asked. We will wait and see whether the SNP delivers on its promise of social rented housing over the lifetime of the Parliament. Frankly, it will not meet its target even in the first and second years. We are beginning to see double counting, and the Government is changing its announcements from units approved to units completed to cover up the fact that the number of units approved this year is nowhere near the 6,000 target. That will also allow the Government to claim credit for a second time for schemes that were approved in previous years. There is dishonest counting, never mind failure to meet targets.

The practical reality is that housing associations up and down the country—particularly locally based housing associations—are struggling. The £40,000 grant will not provide what they need to deliver housing, and they are having to borrow up to £70,000.

Keith Brown: Perhaps Hugh Henry would like to say what level of grant he would allocate to housing associations. He asks which budgets will be cut, but we have laid out our budgets exactly. Is it not dishonest and disingenuous of him not to tell us what he would do?

Hugh Henry: How many times do we need to come back to dishonesty and disingenuousness in relation to a specific manifesto promise that the SNP, not the Conservatives or Labour, made? The SNP won the election and now it has to deliver on the promises that it made. It is absolutely farcical of the minister to ask others what they would do. If he and his colleagues are so bereft of ideas that they cannot deliver their manifesto, they should move over and let others govern. They should not ask us, in opposition, without the full facts available to us, to do their job for them. They are the ones who made the promises and they are the ones who must be held accountable.

Good, honest practitioners up and down Scotland—many of whom were taken in through

their enthusiasm for the SNP in 2007—now face the harsh reality that their enthusiasm and trust were misplaced.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Hugh Henry: No, thank you.

They are telling me clearly that they cannot deliver the figures that the SNP proposes. In Glasgow, the number of units approved has gone down by 42 per cent over the past year—a 60 per cent cut in approvals of social rented housing. Local community-controlled housing associations are suffering and there is huge scepticism about whether the 21,000 homes for social rental will be completed with the £40,000 subsidy. Even COSLA says that council house building is unlikely to be sustainable at the current levels. The fact that the Government is now changing its announcements from units approved to units completed is yet another sleight of hand to cover an abject failure, a dishonesty and the fact that the SNP says one thing when seeking votes but another thing when it is in office.

The worst thing about this is the human cost. The Government is pushing more people, including homeless people, into the private rented sector at a time of housing benefit cuts and it is placing increased demands on housing associations. Housing association professionals tell me that they are awash with consultation documents, medical adaptations, a Scottish social housing charter with 71 commitments so far, the Scottish Housing Regulator's new role, the review of housing benefit and service charges for support, the threatened loss of the supporting people fund and the national strategy for older people. They are having to cope with all that as well as having insufficient funds with which to deliver the houses that the SNP promised would be delivered. We are facing a crisis in social rented housing and among the poorer sections of our community, and we are seeing a glib response from the SNP.

There must be thinking and well-meaning people in the SNP who are prepared to put aside their fundamental desire for unity in order to drive forward an independence referendum and they must surely be starting to say, "What are we doing? This is not working. This is wrong. It is frankly dishonest." Now is the time for them to answer the questions from Lewis Macdonald and others and say specifically where and when they will deliver the manifesto promise that they made.

10:05

Derek Mackay (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): I refer members to my declaration of interests. Like Hugh Henry, I was leader of

Renfrewshire Council, but I fear that we might both fail the Mike MacKenzie test. Have we ever physically built a house? I have not and I do not think that Hugh Henry has either, but I did manage to achieve something as leader of the council. We have both worn hard hats and high-visibility jackets and attended high-profile events in Renfrewshire, but the difference is that I built houses and Hugh Henry demolished them. That is the difference between the SNP and the Labour Party when in control locally.

New build is important, but we must also sustain our current housing supply. If we lost sight of that, it would be an extreme misdirection, so I want to focus on how we can sustain what we already have. In that respect, I was delighted as leader of Renfrewshire Council to lead a £149 million investment programme for the 13,000 tenants in Renfrewshire with the support of the Scottish Government. It was not easy. It required innovation, new ideas and partnership working, and we had no support from the UK Government, even though it could at the stroke of a pen have written off the housing debt—debt saddled on the tenants of Scotland—and released hundreds of millions of pounds for housing supply in this country.

We also have a serious threat in the Welfare Reform Bill, as rents will become a pressure. In many areas, rent increases have been matched to inflation or perhaps slightly higher, but they are fair if the money from those increases, as in Renfrewshire, is levered in to deliver investment in housing to meet or surpass the Scottish housing quality standard that I commend the Parliament for passing. Our citizens should not be living in inadequate housing. The issue is about not just supply, but the environment that our people live in. I speak from the personal experience of living in a council house that was not the best. It had no central heating or double glazing and it was riddled with damp. I am not alone, as many people have lived in council housing, but I resolved at an early age to do something about it.

When we delivered the investment programme for Renfrewshire, in incredibly difficult circumstances, I asked the director of housing, "If we see this plan through, will any of our tenants continue to live in inadequate, damp housing?" The answer was no. What a great achievement. What a wonderful thing to achieve for my community, but it was only done in partnership with a Government that was willing to innovate. We can compare that with the blackmail that we had from previous Labour and Liberal Executives and UK Governments.

We have to innovate with less resource. In these challenging times, what is happening in my constituency and in constituencies across

Renfrewshire, from where Hugh Henry hails? There are new council houses for the first time in 30 years, despite the difficult financial environment. There are housing association partnership homes to address gaps in supply and need. There is innovation, even though we have less resource.

There is less resource not because the Scottish Government has decided on that but because the UK Government has reduced capital spend to this country and this Government. Of course, it could help further. Alex Johnstone joined in with the “Just gie’s more money” gang. The UK Government could do that, expanding the borrowing capacity to ensure that we invest in council housing and other forms of housing. We will not meet the homelessness targets if we do not ensure the sustainability of our current housing stock and develop new stock as well.

We also require imaginative service reform. We should not just make a plea for more money, although more money absolutely would be nice. The current toxic mix of UK policies will certainly not help housing.

I have some sympathy with what Labour members said, but they would have much more credibility in the Parliament if they named the SNP policy choices that they think are wrong and should not be progressed. Labour is not facing an election; if its members said that their priority was housing and set out where money should be transferred from, I would believe what they are saying.

However, we just have crocodile tears from Labour. John Mason asked Lewis Macdonald which capital project he would not proceed with, so that we could fund more housing investment. There was silence. I make the offer to any Labour member to intervene and tell us what capital project they would not proceed with, so that they could invest in housing—

Malcolm Chisholm *rose—*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You are in your final minute, Mr Mackay.

Derek Mackay: There is silence again. Very telling, is it not? There is no credibility whatever—

Members: No! Malcolm Chisholm wants to intervene.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his final minute, Malcolm.

Derek Mackay: I will take the intervention.

Malcolm Chisholm: I will be brief. Did the member not hear the question that I asked of the minister? I made the point that the infrastructure budget is increasing in real terms. I am not suggesting one thing; I am saying that if we look

across the budget it will be perfectly easy to find extra money for housing.

Derek Mackay: That was as disappointing as Lewis Macdonald’s answer to John Mason. The member answered my question with a question rather than an answer. The Labour MP who came up from England to tell the Finance Committee how wonderfully the Scottish Government was doing on preventative spend—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close now, please.

Derek Mackay: Can I say, Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. You have finished.

Derek Mackay: Well, I am—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I call Colin Keir.

10:12

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): We all have the right to adequate, warm and secure housing. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says:

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family”.

Housing is central to that. A person’s home is one of the most important factors that affects their life, from the home of a child’s early years to the home that has been adapted for an older person, whether people seek to rent or aspire to move up the property ladder. The Government is successfully moving in the right direction in making housing a top priority for the next five years, and we should make no apology for our ambitions.

As we have heard, Scotland needs more housing. We need modern, affordable, and—this is crucial—high-quality 21st century homes. We can all agree on that. Population projections suggest that the number of households in Scotland will increase by more than 200,000 during the next 10 years. If we are to accommodate housing growth in the next decade we will have to invest significantly in the private and social sectors, as well as in emerging areas such as intermediate rent.

The Scottish Government’s response to the challenge has been encouraging. There is a solid commitment to build 6,000 affordable homes during each year of this parliamentary session. Indeed, the Government has not only identified the urgency of Scotland’s housing needs but taken steps to address the issue. Record investment is supporting the delivery of almost 28,000 affordable new-builds and there have been almost 25,000 completions during the past three years.

Most crucial, a new generation of council homes is being built, after decades of Labour neglect. The previous Labour-Liberal Administration did not build a single council house in Edinburgh or indeed in mainland Scotland. The myth that Labour is the party of social housing has been fully exposed.

The abolition of the right to buy for new tenants was one of the Government's most responsible decisions and will alleviate pressure on councils and benefit people who have been stuck on waiting lists for years. In my constituency, just after I was elected as a councillor in 2007, a council house was available for which there were more than 1,000 applicants, which is a damning indictment of the former Labour Administration in Edinburgh.

During the past two years there has been a 50 per cent reduction in sales of local authority homes in Scotland under the right-to-buy scheme. Graeme Brown, director of Shelter Scotland, said that the Scottish Government

"was right to reform the system to secure the supply of social housing."

I very much welcome the establishment of a Scottish social housing charter, which will look after the interests of tenants, homeless people and others who use the services that social landlords provide, and which focuses on issues such as quality of housing and environment.

The scars of the economic downturn could not be any more visible in the private sector, stalling its ability to invest in new development. The restricted availability of mortgage finance has exacerbated that, which is why the SNP's commitment to housing could not have come at a better time, as it boosts the construction sector and safeguards jobs across the country.

The challenge for the next few years will be how to increase the housing supply right across the spectrum in the current economic climate. It is clear that our housing system will continue to face challenges and, as a result of Westminster cuts to the Scottish budget, we must find new ways of investing and building homes, using Government funding to lever in maximum investment from other sources.

The Scottish Government's national housing trust and the innovation and investment fund are part of the answer, as we have heard. Indeed, just a few weeks ago through the latter scheme, the City of Edinburgh Council was allocated funding to deliver more than 600 new affordable homes. Edinburgh will see substantial progress in housing over the coming years. It is no secret to anyone that the capital has been struggling with social housing supply for many years. The 21st century homes project will facilitate the regeneration of

areas in my constituency, such as Muirhouse and Pennywell, where around 470 quality homes will be built. The long-awaited regeneration in the Muirhouse community is an exciting prospect that is expected to attract new business and investment to the area.

The scale of regeneration in the capital is probably best illustrated by the demolition of the infamous Sighthill tower blocks, some of Edinburgh's biggest eyesores, which were turned to dust less than two weeks ago.

I want to conclude by saying a few words on fuel poverty. Price hikes by energy companies are scandalous and many people will be suffering the consequences this winter. Through numerous schemes, the Scottish Government is working to lift people out of fuel poverty, but those irresponsible price hikes undermine that progress.

We will not get people out of fuel poverty unless the UK Government takes decisive action on energy companies and their out-of-control prices. However, to end on a positive note, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment's recent announcement to extend the energy assistance package to carers is a clear commitment to addressing the needs of vulnerable citizens in our society.

Housing is crucial for the economic, health and social wellbeing of our people. There are undoubtedly challenges ahead, but I am proud of this Government's record on housing and confident of the actions that we are taking.

10:17

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I recognise that this has been the toughest spending review since devolution. However, this Government has the majority to enable it to carry out its manifesto commitments and I urge it to fulfil its housing commitments. I welcome the grants that have been provided to the council and other housing providers in the North Ayrshire area for such social housing projects as the third phase of the Vineburgh project and the construction of a further 37 council houses in Kilwinning and Millport. However, there are still 5,900 people on North Ayrshire Council's housing list and 766 people presented themselves as homeless last year.

The last time that I spoke about housing, I urged the Scottish Government to make housing a priority and confirm that the budget for housing and regeneration would not be diminished. However, it seems that my pleas fell on deaf ears, and funding has been drastically cut. The housing and regeneration budget is clearly not a priority for the SNP Government. Capital investment to affordable housing has been cut by 19 per cent in

the first year and, once earlier adjustments are taken into account, that is a 30 per cent cut. That falls to almost 50 per cent in the second year.

According to Shelter, housing is the single biggest loser in the draft budget. It appears that housing is being pushed further and further down the priorities of this Government, which is of great concern to me.

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret McDougall: No. I am sorry, but I do not have time.

The SNP's election manifesto promised that the SNP would build 6,000 new social rented houses each year, and one of its flagship manifesto commitments was to build 30,000 new social rented homes during the next five years. The point that we are making this morning is about social rented houses. We have heard that it will, in fact, be 20,000 social rented houses, which is a drop of 10,000 in just a few months.

Those pledges were made in full knowledge of the hard times that we face. The Scottish Government knew how much money it would have available when it made those promises. However, based on the money that was made available in the spending review and the draft budget, the Government's manifesto commitments seem to be impossible to sustain. Shelter Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing stated:

"The SNP Government's flagship manifesto commitment on affordable housing is set to be its first big failure unless there is a radical rethink of spending priorities".

Fewer funds will also have a detrimental effect on the construction industry and the associated jobs. Between April and June this year, 10,000 Scottish construction jobs were lost, and a total of 30,000 jobs have been lost since March 2009. Does the Government think that it is wise to put further pressure on the construction industry and put the economic recovery at risk by hitting housing and regeneration so hard?

It seems that, as demand for new affordable housing is rising, supply is falling. The Government will struggle to meet even half of the target to supply 6,000 social rented houses this year, especially given the fact that so few developments have been approved, even though the Government has changed the accounting method that it used in previous years by doing some jiggery-pokery.

The spending review is a blow to the 156,000 families and households that have been waiting for years for a home of their own. That is all the more true because the Government signed up to the commitment made by the Labour Party in 2003 that all unintentionally homeless households would

be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012. I fail to see how that target can be met, especially considering that the number of people who live in temporary accommodation rose by 3 per cent during the past year alone, and continues to rise. That is even before the new housing benefit rules come into play.

I urge the Scottish Government to reconsider the budget. There is room for manoeuvre. In particular, there is an urgent need to re-examine the second and third years of the draft budget proposal, or I predict that the Government will not meet its targets on social housing and will be shown to have failed to achieve its election commitment to the people of Scotland.

Keith Brown: Will the member give way?

Margaret McDougall: I am sorry; I must continue because I am in my final minute. The Scottish Government will have failed to provide growth in the construction industry and it will have failed every homeless person in Scotland, all during this year in office.

10:23

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate on an issue as important as housing and I have no doubt that everyone in the chamber should support the measures outlined in the minister's speech and in the motion.

Housing is an issue that arises in every constituency and region represented in the Parliament and I am delighted that the Scottish Government is tackling it head on. Housing remains a priority for the SNP Government and I greatly welcome that.

The "Homes Fit for the 21st Century" policy paper that was published in February this year makes no apology for setting ambitious housing targets, and nor should it. Between 2009 and 2011, 3,295 council houses were approved and, in 2010, 1,055 were started. That is the highest figure in 20 years and a record of which we can be proud. We are seeing a Government working with local authorities and the industry to find innovative ways of plugging the affordable housing gap.

Given the pressures on public finances and the UK Government's drastic squeeze on capital spending in Scotland, the current emphasis on innovation and on ways to deliver more housing for less public subsidy is crucial. That is why I am particularly pleased with and supportive of the innovation and investment fund. That fund alone is providing £2.5 million of investment in Dumfries and Galloway. That is a huge boost for the projects that it will assist in Dumfries, Castle Douglas, Dalbeattie, Newton Stewart, Thornhill

and Lockerbie. The fact that nine of the 10 submitted bids for that area were accepted shows that the SNP Government is listening and taking note of where issues are arising. Not only that, but the Government is addressing those needs by providing vital funding.

The fund also allows us to address the national housing challenges, which are all the more acute as a consequence of Westminster-based cuts. The Tories' right-to-buy policy depleted much of Scotland's social housing stock, which adds to the challenges that we now face in delivering an adequate provision of social housing. As a direct result of the Scottish Government's policy of restricting the right to buy for new council tenants, we have seen a growing confidence from councils, which are willing to invest in new social housing.

In that, our councils are supported by Scottish Government initiatives such as the new national housing trust, which is an additional tool to help to make more new affordable homes available for below market rent in areas where not enough affordable housing is available to meet demand. The trust not only reinvigorates the housing market but offers the construction industry support. In recent times, how many of us have passed building sites where work has had to stop because of financial constraints? The national housing trust scheme is a way of ensuring that that work can restart and continue to an end point, which will help to rejuvenate the construction sector and to deliver a good stock of new-build houses.

Not only do we often see halted building works, but I am sure that many of us will agree that it is unacceptable that good homes should lie empty for long periods. Scotland is estimated to have 25,000 long-term-empty homes. That is a complete and utter waste when we consider the level of homelessness.

The SNP wants to give councils powers to increase the council tax that is levied on properties that are empty for six months or more, which will tackle the problem of empty homes. Councils will be given the option to decide to charge an additional levy or to give exemptions in some cases. In addition to encouraging the reduction of empty properties, that measure could raise up to £30 million a year for councils to spend on affordable homes.

Throughout the debate, the word "affordable" has been key. Rural communities feel that just as sharply as urban areas do. Just this week, the Bank of Scotland rural housing review said that house prices in rural Scotland have more than doubled in the past decade. The average price of a house in rural Scotland has risen by almost £80,000 since 2001.

Affordable housing has always been particularly difficult to provide in rural parts of Scotland, but recent financial constraints have made that even more difficult. In such times, we appreciate even more keenly the work of organisations such as the rural housing partnership among three housing charities, including the Dumfries & Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust from my region.

Those charities were instrumental in five of the recently approved innovation and investment fund bids and have a track record of working directly with rural communities to enable the provision of innovative, affordable rural housing developments. That can include providing low-cost self-build plots, selling discounted housing in conjunction with private developers and securing low-cost land for social housing projects.

Essential to those bodies' approach is identifying where need is greatest and working with communities and a broad range of partners. Most important, they are flexible, so they can alter their solutions for each community. For those reasons, they and others that do similar work should be congratulated.

I commend the motion to Parliament and support the Scottish Government in all its efforts to help the affordable housing market. I hope very much that members across the chamber will do the same.

10:29

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I, too, am glad to have the opportunity to debate such an important issue. The various statistics surrounding the housing debate in Scotland are eye watering and should concentrate minds across the political spectrum. Currently, 156,000 families in Scotland are languishing on housing waiting lists, and many of them have been doing so for many years. When we consider that population projections suggest a net increase of more than 200,000 households in Scotland by the end of 2020, we get a sense of the enormity of the challenge. That makes the SNP's 30 per cent cut to the housing budget in one financial year and its 42 per cent cut in real terms over the spending review period all the more difficult to understand. The settlement for housing that was announced in the spending review was one of the major disappointments.

Alex Neil: Leaving aside the fact that it is Danny Alexander who is making the cuts, I wonder whether the member can tell us what he would cut from the Scottish Government's fixed budget to increase the housing budget.

Jim Hume: There is a 12 per cent cut to the Scottish budget, but we are talking about a 42 per cent cut to the housing budget. If the Scottish Government had not spent four years trying to get

a non-profit distribution scheme to deliver the Borders railway project, it might not have wasted millions of pounds on procurement.

Stewart Maxwell: What is the answer?

Jim Hume: I have given two answers.

It is not only me and other Opposition members who are concerned. The Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland described the 2013-14 budget in particular as a "real cause for concern", and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations described the figures as "disappointing reading". The director of Shelter Scotland, Graeme Brown, did not miss the issue in his response to the spending review. He said that the 42 per cent cut in affordable housing investment

"is a devastating blow to the housing sector and now there is no way the SNP Government will be able to meet one of its flagship manifesto commitments of 30,000 new socially-rented homes"—

not affordable homes—

"over the next five years."

He continued:

"This is another hammer-blow to the 156,000 families and households across Scotland who have been waiting for months and years for a home of their own".

That brings me nicely to the shifting sands of the SNP's commitment on social rented homes—not affordable homes, which are a different matter. The Government is in trouble on the issue and it knows it. This summer, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment wrote to me on the issue and Keith Brown wrote to Lewis Macdonald saying the very same thing. The cabinet secretary said:

"We have not set an overall target for council/housing association homes for social rent."

That was in July this year.

The Government is trying to be very cute on the manifesto commitment. I, too, have a copy of the manifesto, or at least page 17 of it.

Stewart Maxwell: It is a popular manifesto.

Jim Hume: It is popular among Opposition members, who seem to like to collect fictional novels. The manifesto, which was published only in April, states:

"our aim is to build over 6,000 new socially-rented houses each year."

That is a target in black and white in the SNP manifesto, which the SNP claimed was fully costed. To renege on a commitment in a matter of weeks is not only cynical, but highly disappointing. The Government's eagerness to emphasise repeatedly that it intends to build 30,000 new social rented homes over the course of the parliamentary session has not gone unnoticed.

There is, of course, an important distinction between affordable and social rented housing. I hope that the minister or cabinet secretary will clarify that they know the difference.

To change tack, one unfortunate aspect of the housing crisis in Scotland is the impact that it has on children. Research that was published this year revealed that one in 10 children lives in overcrowded accommodation and that 186,000 children live in homes with condensation or damp. The implications of growing up in such environments will be obvious to members. Research has shown that children who live in housing that is overcrowded or in a poor condition are less likely than other children to achieve well in English and mathematics and more likely to have a long-standing illness or disability, and have more of a tendency to drink alcohol and take drugs. In essence, children who reside in poor housing face an increased risk of negative wellbeing.

The minister will be aware that the previous Administration introduced the Scottish housing quality standard to ensure that there was a floor below which the standards of social housing in Scotland should not dip. The Government has until 2015 to ensure that all social housing passes the SHQS, but 61 per cent of children are currently living in homes that are below that standard.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his final minute, so he will not do so.

Jim Hume: I would have done—unlike the member.

It is incumbent on the Government to ensure a fair start for our children, and I am keen to hear about how it plans to meet the target in the allotted time.

I will be unable to support the Government's motion. I agree with most of its sentiment and measures such as the national housing trust, which we have also committed to, but the end of the motion congratulates social landlords and developers

"on working together innovatively to deliver the maximum number of affordable homes".

I apologise, but I have concerns about the word "maximum" in particular.

I support Labour's amendment.

10:35

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): This week, we have seen just how far the UK Government and the Scottish Government diverge on housing policy. The short-sighted plans that have emerged this week from

the Conservative-Lib Dem UK Government to try to encourage even greater numbers of people to exercise the right to buy and thereby significantly exacerbate the shortage of affordable housing, which has been the long-term legacy of Thatcher both north and south of the border, are extraordinary. The Scottish Government is trying to reverse that legacy.

Ruth Davidson: Will the member give way?

Maureen Watt: Not yet. I am still in my first minute.

The UK Government's plans are another clear sign of how far out of step it is with the needs of ordinary people. Thank goodness we have a Government in Scotland that understands how critical it is to increase the availability of affordable housing rather than consign more people to ever-longer waiting lists.

Between 2008 and 2011, the SNP Government invested a record £1.76 billion and delivered 27,828 affordable new-build starts. That equates to 24,646 completions over the same period. There were around 7,500 new housing units, compared with only 6,000 under Labour. We should never forget that only six new council houses were built between 2003 and 2007 under the Lib Dem-Labour Administration. I say to Hugh Henry and Lewis Macdonald that the SNP was voted in on its record, and I am sure that Scotland's electorate trusts the SNP Government to deliver in this session. There were more new council houses in my constituency than Labour delivered in the whole of Scotland.

Lewis Macdonald: I welcome the fact that the SNP agrees with Labour on the iniquity of some of the changes that the Westminster Government is making, which will affect housing benefit and people in social rented housing. Does the member think that this is the right time to put pressure on our housing associations' reserves by reducing the level of subsidy for affordable housing, or is that the wrong response to what is happening at Westminster?

Maureen Watt: It is absolutely the right time to use reserves to build houses. People should not build up reserves when we are short of capital spending.

Within the incredibly tight budget constraints that have been passed on to us from Westminster, there is little doubt that the target of 30,000 homes over five years is ambitious. To achieve it, Scotland will need to make the most of more innovative ways of funding house building and maximise the return that is received on every penny of public investment. As the minister said, the national housing trust is one such innovation. It has been extremely positive in delivering more housing and providing work to the construction

industry on projects that would otherwise have completely stalled. Labour is stuck in the previous century in considering ways of financing house building while the SNP is forging forward and finding new and innovative ways to build houses.

Keeping the construction industry building is a critical part of economic recovery. That is why it was important that the Scottish Government diverted resources into capital spending in the spending review. Whether we are talking about the demand for new property from the public sector or the private sector or greater efforts to renovate and refurbish buildings, the importance to the Scottish economy of ensuring that there is work for the construction sector is not to be underestimated.

With just over 200,000 applicants currently on local authority housing lists, the need for more affordable housing in Scotland is unquestionable. At least two thirds of the affordable homes that the Scottish Government will support will be for social rent, which will go at least some way towards driving down housing waiting lists. The actions of the Scottish Government are positive, despite the extraordinarily tough financial conditions that have been imposed on it, and the Parliament should welcome them.

The need to make housing more affordable also extends to the need to support first-time buyers seeking to make their first step on to the housing ladder. With schemes such as the new supply shared equity scheme, the open market shared equity scheme and the rural home ownership grants scheme, the Scottish Government supported 5,287 households into home ownership in the first three years of the previous session of Parliament alone. That is compared with the 3,371 that Labour and the Lib Dems managed over the seven years leading up to that.

It remains the case that the biggest hurdle for first-time buyers is getting a mortgage. Shared equity schemes certainly help to lower that barrier, but housing developers need to ensure that there is a good supply of property that is aimed at first-time buyers rather than those further up the housing ladder. If suitable property for first-time buyers is scarce, it is inevitable that the demand will drive up the price and force buyers out of the market and on to housing waiting lists.

Although the short-term interests of developers might dictate that building for the upper end of the market is the best way to maximise their profit, the long-term sustainability of the sector rests on first-time buyers being able to make it on to the housing ladder.

The Scottish Government built an impressive record on housing during the previous session of Parliament and I am sure that it will do its utmost

to meet its commitments this time. I was pleased to hear about the bill giving councils the powers to increase council tax and the strategy for old people's housing, but the cuts in the Scottish budget mean that maintaining the progress that has been made will become more challenging.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Maureen Watt: It is clear that the Scottish Government will focus precisely on what matters most: the need to expand the supply of affordable housing. That focus will only serve Scotland well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Maureen Watt: When it comes to the health of our housing sector compared with that of our neighbours, we are in the right position. I support the motion in the name of the minister.

10:42

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): There is not enough detail in the spending review to see exactly how much money will be spent on housing. Some 40 per cent of the budget for new affordable homes is included in the local government settlement. However, the actual amount is unclear from budget documents, although the Minister for Housing and Transport has said that it is likely to be £250 million over three years.

There are significant question marks over the ability of councils to meet their commitments with shrinking budgets, but what we can see makes it clear that the Scottish Government will struggle to meet a range of housing objectives.

We really need level 4 figures to see just how badly the Scottish Government is doing at keeping its manifesto promises and meeting its commitments under existing legislation, such as the requirement under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016.

Energy Action Scotland estimates that meeting that target will require a total investment of around £200 million in each year of this session of Parliament, and yet the Government's spending on energy efficiency reduced this year and the spending review gives only £200 million over the next three years for domestic energy efficiency and fuel poverty. It looks extremely unlikely that the commitment will be met. If the Scottish Government wants consensus, why is it not listening to Energy Action Scotland and other organisations?

The SNP manifesto pledged to build 6,000 social rented homes for each year of this session of Parliament. Is it not funny how reality

sometimes gets in the way of promises and then those promises change?

Ministers now talk of 6,000 affordable homes, rather than the manifesto pledge. Of those, only 4,000 are now to be social rented. Even that less ambitious target is unlikely to be met, given that the money available for new affordable homes in the three-year period ahead is more than 60 per cent less than it was in the previous period. The target is to be achieved by giving lower subsidies per house. Even if that is successful, it is likely to be at the expense of social rented homes being built where they are most needed.

Bluntly, the subsidy of £40,000 per unit is not enough to make building new social rented accommodation a feasible proposition in areas of high deprivation.

Keith Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

John Pentland: No, I want to move on.

Social landlords have to pass on the increased costs somehow, but many households cannot afford higher rents, and those that can are not common in deprived areas. The minister told me recently that there is some flexibility for projects in such areas, but if higher subsidies are made available, that will reduce the overall number of units that can be built.

What of the other 2,000 affordable homes? Half are to come from subsidised home ownership and half from "intermediate rented homes" through the national housing trust. Intermediate or mid-market rents are, by definition, higher than some people can afford and are of limited use in areas of high deprivation and unemployment, such as parts of Motherwell and Wishaw, where help is most needed.

Scotland needs 10,000 new affordable homes a year to meet demand. With reduced budgets, there is no way that that can be achieved. As well as new affordable housing, we need to upgrade the existing housing stock. We need investment to improve the energy performance of housing, including existing private housing. The draft budget and spending review are underwhelming in their lack of ambition and do not provide the sort of investment that is necessary to deliver the emissions savings that the report on proposals and policies allocated to domestic energy efficiency to meet the requirements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

That is an extremely serious issue, because Scotland's housing is responsible for a quarter of our carbon emissions, but it is not only our climate change progress that will suffer—there are serious consequences for the economy and fuel poverty. Most improvements in energy efficiency will pay

for themselves through lower bills, but those who have the most difficulty paying for fuel are also those who have the most difficulty making and paying for improvements to increase their home's energy efficiency.

A third of Scottish homes—770,000 households—are in fuel poverty, and the latest fuel price rises are set to push that figure nearer to 1 million. Not spending on energy efficiency and fuel poverty creates other costs elsewhere. According to the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, for every £1 that is spent on fuel poverty, 42p is saved by the national health service. Such work is not only a great way of spending to save and meeting emissions targets; it acts as a significant stimulus to employment and the economy. It is estimated that nearly 10,000 job opportunities could be created through improving the energy efficiency of our existing building stock.

"Housing is crucial to the economic, health and social wellbeing of Scotland's people."

Those words are not mine or my party's, although I am sure that we would agree with them; they are from the SNP manifesto. Neglect them at your peril.

10:48

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It is good to start by remembering some of the achievements of the present and the previous Governments. There are two that I am particularly enthusiastic about: first, the restricting of the right to buy—I am perfectly clear that the reason for my constituents not being able to get the housing that they need is that much of it has been sold off; and secondly, the breaking up of Glasgow Housing Association, on which I again congratulate Alex Neil. Labour said that that was too hard and that it could not do it, but it has now happened. Although I accept that the GHA has improved, I would, in the longer term, like to see it being completely broken up so that local tenants can be in control of all the housing.

It has already been stated a number of times how worthwhile housing investment is, but the point is worth reiterating. For example, the briefing from the SFHA says:

"The activities of housing associations and co-operatives increase community wellbeing, improve public health, provide a sound basis for educational achievement and reduce poverty and social injustice."

Absolutely. The theme of preventative spending is that if we put money into housing, that will benefit us, the residents and society much more widely.

On affordability, which has been mentioned a number of times this morning, CIH Scotland makes in its submission the good and interesting point that

"CIH Scotland is working with SFHA and"

local authority housing officers

"to try to ascertain what capacity councils and housing associations have to build social rented housing at these grant rates over the next 5 years. Notwithstanding what we find, we believe that the Scottish Government should not make assumptions about such subsidy rates being sustainable".

If more of that kind of information can be brought to the table, I am sure that we and the Government will listen to it. However, it sounds like such information is not available at the moment.

Jim Hume: Does the member acknowledge that in its submission the SFHA also raises

"concerns about the size of the ... budget for housing supply and the Scottish Government's assumptions about leverage"?

John Mason: I have already partly answered that by pointing out that CIH Scotland and SFHA are undertaking a study on the issue. As for the use of the word "concerns", I think that we need to be realistic. We are facing huge problems across Europe and around the world. We have concerns about every budget, not just the housing budget, and in any case we are at the mercy of Westminster, which could arbitrarily cut our budget even more and give us even more serious problems.

I am very enthusiastic about housing associations, having worked for them a number of times, and understand that the Scottish Housing Regulator is carrying out a review of the way in which they are regulated. The regulator has suggested that committee members should be paid for working for housing associations and that there should be a time limit on membership of such committees. However, housing associations seem to have some reservations about those suggestions, especially the proposal to pay committee members. The east end of Glasgow, for example, has a lot of small local associations to which tenants put in a lot of time. Of course, not every tenant is willing or able to do so and payments for and time limits on committee membership might really change the whole situation.

On the limit on capital finance, one solution lies in the Scotland Bill and whether we can get better borrowing powers. Setting some arbitrary limit is not the way to go; instead, we should take the prudential borrowing route, which is open to councils, to allow the Scottish Government to borrow what it can afford to finance and repay. That might give us a bit more flexibility in the capital budget to spend more on housing in particular.

Malcolm Chisholm: As the member knows, John Swinney still has to allocate the £200 million switch from revenue to capital. Will Mr Mason and his colleagues argue that the housing budget should have the first call on that money?

John Mason: I am happy to say that my personal priority is housing. I see what is happening in my constituency, which has gained hugely from SNP investment in transport with the completion of the M74 and the opening of the new railway from Airdrie to Bathgate and is doing very well from investment in the Commonwealth games. I would certainly put housing and primary schools at the top of my own priority list.

The debate's purpose is to push housing up the agenda. Labour's top priority would be a rail link to Glasgow airport but, as I have made clear, my top priority is housing.

10:53

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Having dealt with housing issues for the past 35 years, I know that housing is an emotive subject—indeed, one can feel that emotion in this debate. Many inquiries that MSPs receive relate to housing. Over the past four years, the SNP-led Scottish Government has made significant progress in house building and I compliment the cabinet secretary and minister on their work in that respect.

The Government kick-started council house building after it had stalled under Labour. I remember the years when the Labour Party did not build one single council house. However many houses will be built in this session of Parliament, let us remember that Labour and the Lib Dems—the latter are not here—built only six houses between 2003 and 2007. More than 1,000 houses were started by the SNP in 2010—

Hugh Henry: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lyle: No.

Since 2008, more than £1.7 billion has been invested in new housing—the largest amount in any comparable period since the early 1980s. In 2008-9 and 2009-10, when the recession first hit, the SNP Government brought forward £120 million of affordable housing spend to support the construction industry.

The cuts that have been implemented by the UK coalition Government are hitting Scotland hard, but this Government and our housing minister are taking the correct steps to protect tenants and home owners. The housing minister is looking at new ways to invest and build housing using Government funding to lever in maximum investment from other sources. It has established

the national housing trust and the innovation and investment fund.

The Government is addressing the challenges of fuel poverty and domestic energy efficiency. It has increased the housing sustainability budget to £327 million over three years and it has funded the energy assistance package, the universal home insulation scheme and the boiler scrappage scheme. The energy assistance package has offered free energy advice, home insulation and the installation of new heating systems; more than 40,000 new heating systems have been installed since 2007.

The Government has four targets: to end homelessness, to ensure that there are properties for social rent, to end fuel poverty, and to improve energy efficiency. It is also taking action on empty homes. As has been stated, there are more than 25,000 long-term empty homes in Scotland, which is a national scandal. Those homes should be used to clear housing waiting lists. I appreciate the point that was made by one of my colleagues earlier about the number of people on the housing waiting lists, especially in respect of my area.

I suggest that it is the right of all to have a decent and affordable house. Over the past 35 years, I have dealt with people who have had damp houses and houses that are not fit for their children. We have steadily improved such houses over a number of years; the SNP Government will do more.

First-time buyers face a challenge in obtaining mortgages, so the banks need to do more to help them. It is wrong that people have to save up £10,000 to £20,000 before they can get a mortgage.

Cuts in housing benefit should be opposed. During the summer, I had the opportunity to visit two housing association developments in my region. The first was a Bield Housing Association development at Woodburn Street in Motherwell, which is an excellent facility that caters well for its residents. I enjoyed the couple of hours I spent there, seeing what Bield was doing for its residents. The second was a development in my area, at Corson Court in Bellshill. It is owned by a trust and provides sheltered accommodation. It was also an excellent facility.

Most of our elderly people wish to remain in their homes, so we should do all that we can to allow that to happen. On Tuesday I attended an event in the Parliament that was hosted by Sandra White MSP with Bield Housing Association and Hanover Housing Association. I compliment those associations for the work that they are doing in Scotland.

Labour, the Tories and their Liberal friends criticise us for house building, but they have failed

us in the past by not building any council houses since 1976—I am sorry, they built six. The SNP Government has made a start. I support the motion.

10:59

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

Yesterday I spoke in the debate on welfare reform. There are some policy areas that should transcend the political divide and unite us in a common purpose. Welfare and housing are two such areas. In “Homes Fit for the 21st Century—The Scottish Government’s Strategy and Action Plan for Housing in the Next Decade: 2011-2020”, the Scottish Government articulated its commitment, which I welcome, to

“enhance the quality and sustainability of our existing housing stock”

and to ensure that everyone has

“a safe, warm home which they can afford”.

On the face of it, that is a laudable aim. However, I have some concerns, chiefly pertaining to the Government’s definitions of what is “sustainable” and what is “affordable”. In 2002, the then Scottish Executive set up the homelessness task force, which was a multi-agency forum that produced a draft of proposals to tackle homelessness. The key recommendation, which is now a legislative duty, was that there be a commitment that would require local authorities to assess all homelessness applications as a “priority” by 2012—the 2012 commitment. The progress that has been made by local authorities towards that target has been strong, if somewhat uneven.

In 2009-10, 85 per cent of homelessness applications were assessed as being priority applications, with a third of local authorities exceeding 90 per cent. However, some local authorities have made little progress. They—and therefore we as a country—face a real challenge in meeting the 2012 commitment. Clearly, the Scottish Government will want to do everything possible to support them.

If the priority needs test were to be abolished now, local authorities would have to secure settled accommodation for an additional 1,318 households—that is, those that are currently assessed as non-priority. Despite the action that has already been taken, homelessness applications have increased over the past 10 years, peaking at 60,500 in 2005-6, before dropping to 56,000 in 2010, which is still over 10,000 more than in the mid-1990s.

Concealed within that figure are a number of worrying trends. The fractured and roving nature of modern society has seen a massive increase in the number of single-person households—they

make up 62 per cent of the total—and 31 per cent of applications were from households with children, most of which were single-parent households. So what is the Scottish Government’s sustainable and affordable solution to the problem? The SNP manifesto promised to deliver “6000 new socially-rented houses” for every year of this session of Parliament. Leaving aside the obvious disparity between affordable homes and socially rented ones, I would like to establish whether the “affordable” homes really are affordable.

Residential social landlords will provide 850 new homes, which represents an overall increase of 1,550 in the social rented housing stock. Even with 1,000 houses approved for owner-occupiers—which self-evidently do not qualify as social rented housing—there is still a 3,450 shortfall. We must assume, therefore, that the shortfall will be made up by intermediate rented housing, which is a new form of housing procurement to be overseen by the national housing trust. Are those homes affordable for those who desperately require permanent housing? Do they constitute a sustainable long-term solution? Well—let us see.

The costs of development for those houses will be shared between local authorities and private developers. The interest on the loans that will be incurred will be covered by rental income. In order to see a return, private developers will require rents to be set at a level that will exclude the vast proportion of homeless applicants. Furthermore, the houses will remain on the social rental market for only five to 10 years, after which many will, in all likelihood, become private stock. Intermediate rented housing is not affordable for those who need help most, nor is it a sustainable solution to the lack of social rented housing.

In “Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas” the Scottish Government stresses the importance of distinguishing between different types of affordable housing, yet it simultaneously admits that the most deprived are those who are most reliant on social rented housing. That is quite correct: 53 per cent of social housing in Scotland is situated in the 15 per cent most deprived areas, with an additional 160,000 people on council house waiting lists.

I will finish by considering the circumstances of those who would benefit most from additional social housing. Of homeless people, 36 per cent are single adults under the age of 24; many are victims of violence or abuse, or suffer from mental health problems or from drug or alcohol addiction. I recently visited Barnardo’s Scotland’s North Lanarkshire youth housing support service, which provides crisis intervention and group-work support to young people aged 16 to 24. Their need for secure and supportive homes cannot be

overstated and too many are currently left in temporary accommodation. Even if they secure permanent accommodation, it is often poorly furnished. There is no sense of belonging and no sense of pride, respect or permanence. It is impossible to establish a stable and healthy lifestyle under such circumstances.

Under the Welfare Reform Bill, the community care grant will be devolved to Holyrood. That will provide the Scottish Government with an ideal opportunity to aid those vulnerable young people. I would like to see the following changes to the community care grant system: the grant should be replaced with a similar grant that supports people setting up and staying in homes; applicants should be able to apply for the grant prior to securing accommodation, which they are currently unable to do; and successful applicants should receive their grant on receipt of the keys to their accommodation. The application process should be reformed to prevent applications from being rejected unnecessarily, and the rules and criteria should be clear and consistently applied across Scotland. Finally, grant awards should be sufficient to allow applicants to furnish a home properly.

The Scottish Government has been justly critical of the Welfare Reform Bill; now it will have a chance to show how it would do things differently.

11:04

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): As John Mason did, I place the debate firmly in the context of the Government's strong record on housing. Between 2008 and 2011, a record £1.7 billion was invested in housing, which supported delivery of more than 27,000 affordable new-build starts between 2007 and 2011. That is the largest number in any comparable period since the early 1980s. Indeed, between 2009 and 2011, 3,295 council houses were approved, and in 2010 more than 1,000 of them were begun. Again, that is the highest figure recorded in 20 years. By comparison, as Dick Lyle reminded us, Labour completed six council houses in the 2003 to 2007 period, all of them in Shetland. It is shameful that none of them was in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth—not that a share of six council houses would have done us much good.

Lewis Macdonald: Jamie Hepburn mentioned that the funding was high in the previous session of the Parliament. Does he accept that the consequence of the announcements that have been made over the past two weeks is a cut of something in the order of £1 billion over this session?

Jamie Hepburn: In just about every debate that involves public expenditure, we have heard

carping and whining from Labour members about the Government's direction, but we hear no ideas, innovation or suggestions. Mr Macdonald has been invited several times to suggest where alternative funds could come from, but we have heard nothing but bluster from him; we have heard not one suggestion of where the money should come from. We all accept that circumstances are difficult and we have had severe cuts to the Scottish Government's budget, so we now require new and innovative ways to fund house building.

Jim Hume: Jamie Hepburn mentioned that there has been a cut to the Government's budget. There is no doubt about that: it is 12.3 per cent. However, we are talking about a cut of more than 40 per cent to the housing budget. Does he not understand that that is disproportionate?

Jamie Hepburn: Mr Hume demonstrates a singular unwillingness to recognise the difference between revenue and capital budgets. The cut to capital budgets is far more substantial than 12 per cent, and we should remember that his party in the Government south of the border is delivering that cut to the SNP Administration's budget.

We need innovation in house building and the Scottish Government is providing that. We have heard criticisms from Labour members about the size of the housing association grant, but they fail to recognise that we are in a different context, because houses are cheaper to build now. In that context, and given the budgetary pressures, it would have been wrong of the Government not to revisit the housing association grant. Even with the change in the benchmark figure for the grant—I think that the new figure is about £40,000—the sector is rising to the challenge. Every time we hear criticism of the availability of the grant, we hear housing associations being done down, because they are willing to meet the challenge and are rising to it.

Lewis Macdonald: It is generous of Jamie Hepburn to give way again. Does he accept that the criticism comes from the housing associations?

Jamie Hepburn: We all accept that housing associations will ask for more money, just as every sector will. However, they are also willing to accept the challenge that has been laid before them and they are rising to it. New houses are being brought online.

Alex Johnstone criticised the national housing trust, but he failed to recognise that the scheme has been welcomed by the sector. Gordon MacRae, the head of communications and policy at Shelter Scotland, said:

"Let's get one thing straight—the National Housing Trust is a good thing—a positive initiative which aims to facilitate

the building of new privately rented homes across Scotland."

Jonathan Fair, the chief executive of Homes for Scotland, said:

"The National Housing Trust is making a significant difference to the companies involved in delivering these much needed new homes for the people of Scotland".

I would rather listen to those individuals than to Alex Johnstone, who also demonstrates a singular unwillingness to provide any new ideas for housing.

I want to touch on the approach that we are seeing in Scotland and the different direction of travel south of the border, although I will probably not have time to say as much as I wanted. Maureen Watt was correct to identify that there is a clear divergence between what is happening here and what is happening south of the border. Here, we have seen a restriction of the right to buy, which has given councils the confidence to invest in council houses again, while the Prime Minister said on "The Andrew Marr Show" that he wants to reinvigorate the right to buy. That is entirely the wrong direction for the people of England, as are the reforms in housing benefit and the rent increases for social housing south of the border.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Mr Hepburn, I can give you some time back for the interventions that you took.

Jamie Hepburn: You are very generous, Presiding Officer. You are becoming my favourite—I don't know whether I should say that. *[Laughter.]* How much more time does that get me?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: One minute. *[Laughter.]*

Jamie Hepburn: I should conclude, in that case, by welcoming in particular the significant investment in social housing in my constituency. In the past few years under this Administration we have seen new houses in Carbrain, Seafar, Kildrum, Cumbernauld village, Westfield and Kilsyth. They are good-quality homes that have been provided to the people I represent, many of whom have languished on waiting lists for a long time. In the past few days, the Scottish Government has committed £2 million for the second phase of redevelopment of the Ainslie Maclehose scheme in the Kildrum area of Cumbernauld. I welcome that investment, and I look forward to welcoming Keith Brown or Alex Neil—or indeed both them—with or without hard hats when that scheme is open.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now come to the winding-up speeches. I call Ruth Davidson,

who has six minutes and some more time if she wishes to take interventions.

11:11

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): I am duly advised, Presiding Officer.

We have had a wonderfully lively clash today of claim and counterclaim of numbers of homes pledged and of social rented versus other affordable models, but as I sum up I would like to take a swift look at some of the facts. All house building in Scotland has slumped to its lowest level for almost 30 years. The number of houses that were sold between April and June was down by 10 per cent, according to Registers of Scotland, and mortgage lending is at a 30-year low. Nearly 200,000 households sit on council housing lists, and nearly 335,000 sit on housing association lists.

Against that backdrop, we would expect the Scottish Government to inject more money into the sector to boost new building and social supply and to create jobs—but, no; it has not done so. I welcome Keith Brown to his first debate in his new post, but I am dismayed that the figures that he brings to the chamber are not a boost to the sector that is under the cosh, or to the hundreds of thousands of families who are waiting months and years for a home, but a cut, and not just any cut: a 40 per cent cut.

Lewis Macdonald and Hugh Henry feigned surprise at the rolling back of the SNP's recent manifesto pledge to boost the sector by building more than 6,000 new social rented homes, revised down in the spending review, but I am not surprised. I remember in another SNP manifesto another promise that was designed to help the sector and to help people to get on the property ladder: the £2,000 grant to first-time buyers went the same way as the 6,000 new social rented homes.

I am pleased that Maureen Watt recognised the problems that first-time buyers face—first-time buyers perhaps like myself. In my early to mid-30s, I am still below the average age at which people can get a first-time mortgage: people are now 36 or 37 before they can get on the housing ladder because they need such a big deposit. Perhaps £2,000 could have helped me and hundreds of thousands of others like me, and perhaps Maureen Watt would like to see such a policy actually delivered to help the situation that she has identified.

Mr Henry also made the point that the £40,000 unit-cost grant rate that has been provided for in the innovation and investment fund may be unsustainable. It is not just Mr Henry who thinks that: the Chartered Institute of Housing says that a

number of successful bidders to the IIF will not be able to bid again at that level because the only way they could build units on the £40,000 rate would be when things are in play, such as their being able to draw down on bank accounts that they already have or free land being thrown into the bargain.

The institute further points out that the level of subsidy will squeeze specific sectors such as rural housing, wheelchair-accessible housing and specialist housing for older people. On that note, I welcome the minister's pledge to produce a national strategy on housing for older people and look forward to seeing the details thereof.

Alex Neil: With all due respect, I do not think that the member understands that the £40,000 is a benchmark figure. We have made it absolutely clear that, in remote rural areas or for disability housing, for example, the £40,000 figure is not a maximum and that if more is required it will be granted.

Ruth Davidson: The £40,000 benchmark figure still represents a reduction from the previous figure, which was slashed.

As in all debates on housing that we have in the chamber, there has been some knockabout stuff regarding the right to buy. The old myth of the right to buy taking housing stock out of the public sector was repeddled today by, among many others, Mike MacKenzie, Derek Mackay, Colin Keir and John Mason. Well, gentlemen, I am proud of the right to buy, which was the greatest passing of wealth from the state to the individual in a lifetime. It empowered hundreds of thousands of low-income families to enjoy or to aspire to home ownership for the first time.

Derek Mackay: Is the member not concerned that the remaining housing debt that was incurred in building those houses has been left with the remaining tenants, ever fewer in number and with an ever-increasing debt burden?

Ruth Davidson: No. My concern about the right to buy was the fact that, although we took the money that was made through the right to buy when people bought their homes and we reinvested it in building new homes, subsequent Labour Governments did not build new homes. We have heard much about the low level of house building that has gone on, which is the real scandal.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member take an intervention?

Ruth Davidson: No.

The SNP's doublethink on the issue is astonishing. It supports rent-to-buy schemes that, in my opinion, echo the aim that money that is already paid in rent should in some way contribute

to the lump sum that is paid for the purchase. I see some similarities and echoes there.

Mike MacKenzie attacked my stout and very capable colleague, Alex Johnstone, for talking of housing without having laid a brick, lifted a hod or tiled a roof. The indignation bristling to my left was palpable, so I must defend my colleague. He assures me that he has done all those things; however, as with much on his farm and in his life, Mrs Johnstone is much better at bricklaying.

Alex Johnstone: I just labour for her.

Ruth Davidson: Indeed.

SNP members have repeatedly challenged Opposition members' talk of budget borrowing to give more money to housing. I remind them that it is their finance minister who has delivered a 40 per cent cut to the sector, which is clearly disproportionate.

Jim Hume read a quote from the director of Shelter, Graeme Brown, which is worth listening to again. His response to the spending review was that it was a

"hammer-blow to the ... families and households across Scotland who have been waiting for months and years for a home of their own and it undermines our nation's commitments to badly housed and homeless people."

Other members have said that we need to suggest where the money would come from, but we have made suggestions already. I am sure that the Scottish Government has read the suggestion from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, which suggests that the £67 million of Barnett consequentials that are being passed to the Scottish Government from the English council tax freeze could be employed to help to plug the gap.

The Scottish Government has received exactly the settlement that it was promised in the comprehensive spending review. The SNP went into May's election knowing exactly what the money in the pot would be. During the election, it promised more than 6,000 new social rented homes for Scotland each year, so we now demand the 6,000 new social rented homes that were promised. I invite the minister, in closing, to give a cast-iron commitment to building 6,000 social rented homes a year and I demand that he answer for the Government on whether 6,000 new social rented homes should be built this year, next year and every year of this session of Parliament.

11:19

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I very much welcome the debate. Housing is arguably one of the most important issues that we deal with. It is a basic human right to have a warm, dry home to live in. Our housing affects our health

and wellbeing and, indeed, our future choices. Many members have talked about that. Jim Hume, in particular, talked about the effect on young children of being brought up in inadequate housing. Spending on that issue, above most others, would prevent future costs to our social services, our health service and many other services that have to pick up the pieces when children are failed at a young age.

The debate was interesting, and thoughtful in many places. There are genuine views and interest in the area and members made many good points. However, it was disappointing in some ways, because we heard the normal rhetoric as well. I cannot start my speech without going back to the SNP's manifesto pledge of 6,000 social rented houses a year. The SNP knew what the spending position was when it made that pledge to the Scottish people. We need it to confirm that it will stand by the pledge and indeed deliver 6,000 social rented houses per annum. It had the figures, so it cannot pull away from the pledge. We need to make a start for the benefit of the many people who need social rented housing.

As Margaret McCulloch said, the building of those houses will also kick-start our economy, giving a genuine boost to the small and medium-sized businesses that will build them. We also need to look at our economy and provide energy efficiency. Again, that will be a boost to SMEs and ensure that, while we are providing housing, we are boosting the economy as well as saving for the future.

First-time buyers are a huge concern, as are young people in all areas of the housing market. The Government previously said that it would commit to our first foot scheme and indemnify first-time buyers for part of their capital investment in the house—the up-front payment—but we have not heard any more detail on that. I would welcome some detail on the scheme. Young people tend not to have access to housing lists because they do not score enough points. We heard that the number of 18 to 24-year-olds who are assessed as priority homeless is increasing. Indeed, it increased by 40 per cent between 2007 and 2009. As Siobhan McMahon pointed out, the housing that is put in place for them is not permanent and it is not adequate. We need to look at that to ensure that young people have a good start in life.

Another issue that is hugely important when we are speaking about housing is fuel poverty. I agree with what members said about the energy companies and the hike in energy bills. The companies have a social responsibility to look after those who are in fuel poverty. However, it is also the Government's responsibility. The existing homes alliance Scotland points out that, in 2012-

13, the warm homes fund will have a meagre budget of £6.5 million, only part of which will go to initiatives to tackle fuel poverty. The alliance says that the budget falls short of the step change in investment that is necessary. It will not even meet emissions targets, far less eradicate fuel poverty.

I was concerned yesterday to hear that the Scottish Government intends to review the definition of fuel poverty. I seek a reassurance that the definition will not be watered down. We must not move the goalposts in order to meet the targets that have been set. I hope that the cabinet secretary will address that when he sums up. I also hope that he will answer the question that I asked yesterday, about whether carers will have access to the energy assistance package. He said that it would be those on carers allowance and that there will be a rolling programme of 7,000 carers a year, but there are almost 600,000 carers who do not qualify for carers allowance. Will they have access to the package as well? I would welcome any move to include them because they are extremely vulnerable. The fact that they do not get carers allowance means that they lose out on much funding that should be available to them.

A number of members mentioned housing association grant. The SFHA has said that the most serious issue facing housing associations and co-operatives is that the overall budget for housing supply is falling so steeply, and that the £40,000 subsidy will not fund affordable rented housing while keeping rents genuinely affordable to low-income households.

The cabinet secretary intervened earlier and said that the £40,000 is a benchmark. However, Keith Brown said a couple of weeks ago that the grant would be increased only when absolutely necessary. In the rural area that I cover, it would be almost impossible to plan and build a house from start to finish for £40,000. Indeed, for small units of two houses, the amount of money that is required is probably closer to £120,000. The minister has said in the past that bids will be looked at in the round, but housing associations are being asked to put in competitive bids, and if the benchmark is £40,000 I do not see how they can spend money on working up a bid for £120,000 and expect to get it.

There are 9,000 people on the Highland housing register. Those 9,000 people need homes, many of them in remote rural areas. I read recently in the papers that Albyn Housing Society has put in a bid for 50 properties but only 14 will be supported with funding. Albyn talked about its concerns about building in rural areas. Aileen McLeod said that the provision of affordable housing in rural areas has always been challenging. It is becoming even more challenging. We need to ensure that money is ring fenced for such areas, so that housing

associations do not have to bid competitively and so that we can provide much-needed housing.

Maureen Watt made clear the Government's policy towards housing associations when she confirmed our suspicions that the Government is looking to raid housing associations' reserves. Housing associations, for the most part, have charitable status, which depends on their having reserves that cover the cost of maintaining their houses in a good state of repair. If the SNP raids those budgets, its legacy will be poor-quality, dilapidated housing in Scotland and the demise of our charitable housing associations.

Maureen Watt: If housing associations have such reserves, as some do, is it not the case that they are not using those reserves for repairs? Should not the reserves be used on a rainy day like today?

Rhoda Grant: Housing associations' reserves are there to ensure that their houses remain in a fit and proper state, not just this week or this month but into the future. Associations must show the charity regulator that they can maintain the houses into the future.

There are 160,000 people on waiting lists and we need action. We need affordable, good-quality houses in the right places. The building of 6,000 social rented houses a year would be a start. Will the SNP keep its promise to the Scottish people and deliver those houses?

11:27

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): We have had a good debate, with excellent speeches from all parties—well, nearly all parties. The Government will take forward the points that have been raised. Siobhan McMahon, for example, made a number of suggestions, and we will look seriously at them to ascertain whether we can move them forward. We have never claimed that we have a totality of wisdom, although having listened to some parties' front-bench speakers I think that on this subject we have a monopoly.

Every politician and Government must be judged on their track record. It is not just what we say; it is what we do. I have been looking at the track record of Labour and the Liberal Democrats on housing in Scotland and I have found some interesting statistics—facts, Presiding Officer. Fact number 1: when Labour and the Liberal Democrats were running the Government of Scotland during the first eight years of the Scottish Parliament, they built a grand total of 346 council houses; during those eight years, there were three years in which they built no council houses at all.

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: Later. Sit doon the noo till you hear the facts.

We have heard a great deal this morning from Labour and the Liberal Democrats about the levels of subsidy. However, they did not mention the fact that they gave no subsidy whatsoever to councils—zilch. We are giving £30,000 a unit to councils to build houses.

Lewis Macdonald: I am always entertained to hear the minister rediscover in every housing debate statistics from previous terms of previous Governments. Of course, his responsibility is for his term in government and particularly, in this debate, for the plans that he has laid before us. Why does he plan to spend £1 billion less on affordable housing in this session than was spent in the previous session?

Alex Neil: I thought that that was meant to be an intervention, not a speech.

While Labour and the Liberal Democrats built an average of 45 council houses a year, we are building 13 times that. That is what we are doing here and now. Of course, they talk about the RSLs but, if we look at their record, we can see that, on average, they built 10 per cent fewer housing association houses than we have done. Even with the reduced subsidy to the housing associations, we have built more housing association houses, year after year for four years, than they did.

For six of the eight years of the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration, Mr Macdonald was a minister, as was Mr Henry. Indeed, Mr Chisholm—who is no longer in the chamber—had direct ministerial responsibility for housing for two years. I have checked how many council houses he built: zilch. I do not think that the Labour Party is in a good position to criticise others, especially when it was a Labour chancellor and a Labour Prime Minister who reduced capital spending for this Government and this Parliament by 36 per cent. I think that the Labour Party has a real cheek to demand more spending by us when it cut our budget by such an amount.

Rhoda Grant: Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: I will, later.

Despite that cut, two weeks ago we announced a programme for new house building that is unprecedented in Scotland in the past 30 years. *[Interruption.]* I say to Lewis Macdonald that he can fall off his chair telling fibs. Two weeks ago, we announced a total investment in new housing in Scotland of £459 million. Some £110 million of that comes from the investment in innovation fund and £340 million comes from other sources.

What matters is not the level of subsidy that we put in, but the quality and number of houses that we get out. For that investment of £459 million—

nearly half a billion—we will get more than 4,300 new homes built in Scotland. Just before you go, Presiding Officer, I can tell you that 70 per cent of them are for social rented housing. However, the other 30 per cent are very important as well. Labour derides anything that is not, strictly termed, social rented housing. However, that other 30 per cent is taking people off the waiting list and stopping people going on the waiting list. By putting money mainly into social renting but also helping the mid-market, engaging in shared equity and engaging in the reuse of empty properties—for example, by giving money to Tory-led South Ayrshire Council, which wanted to invest in an innovative idea that obviously did not come from Alex Johnstone—we are taking people off the waiting list and stopping them going on to the waiting list. That is extremely important.

We have a lot to be proud of in our record during the first four years of an SNP Government, and in our plans for the future. We are utterly committed to giving priority to building new houses.

A lot of members mentioned fuel poverty during the debate, and we heard a very good statement on that in Parliament yesterday. One of the most effective ways of dealing with fuel poverty is building new homes to the new building regulations. When I became Minister for Housing and Communities, one of my first visits was to the Lochside estate in Dumfries. I met a single mum who had three teenaged kids. She had moved from an old two-bedroom flat, where her weekly gas bill was £40, to a brand-new, two-storey, four-bedroom house with new levels of building standards, and her gas bill had gone down to £36 a month. That did not just take her out of fuel poverty; it took her out of poverty entirely. That should be the objective of the Parliament, and it is the objective of this Government.

I congratulate the Tories on fielding someone from the old Tory party alongside someone who wants to discard it and set up a new Tory party. I do not know whether its housing policy will be the same, but they will not need many pages to write it on because they do not seem to have a housing policy, except to moan and groan about the consequences of the cuts that are being made by their own party at Westminster.

The housing policy in totality cannot be judged by the level of subsidy alone, although that is important. The figure of £40,000 is interesting, but I emphasise that it is a benchmark figure and not a maximum. When we need to give more than £40,000 per unit, we will do so. Indeed, we have done so. Sometimes the subsidy can be more than £100,000 per unit, such as in remote communities on some of our islands.

We doubled the original amount for the investment in innovation fund because of the quality of the bids that we received. Many of those bids from housing associations show that they are building houses for a subsidy of far less than £40,000. For example, one of this Government's many innovations has been the introduction through the national housing trust initiative—it will come through other means as well—of giving a rental guarantee instead of giving a capital subsidy. That allows the developer and the housing association to raise the money to build houses under reasonable terms and conditions. The rental guarantee costs the Scottish Government £2,000 per house, compared with the capital subsidy that was £65,000 per house. For the same amount of money, we can build many more houses. What matters to the folk on the waiting list is not the level of subsidy, but whether a house is available for them to move into.

The Government south of the border is cutting social housing by 80 per cent. We are building houses for the people of Scotland. We are building high-quality houses—

Lewis Macdonald: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I am sorry; the cabinet secretary has no time.

Alex Neil: We have got the finance. We have already announced £459 million as a starter for 10, and we will continue to fulfil all our commitments to the people of Scotland by building homes fit for the 21st century.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:39

Procurement

1. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what actions it is taking to develop its procurement policy. (S4O-00238)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): The Scottish procurement policy handbook provides clear policy guidance to all public sector procurement organisations. As part of the procurement reform programme, policy is actively reviewed and supplemented by Scottish procurement policy notes.

John Park: Does the cabinet secretary agree that we should seek through public sector procurement to improve employment conditions for staff? I appreciate that the Scottish Government has introduced a living wage for its staff and staff in the national health service, but does he agree that we could use levers through public procurement to ensure that private sector employers, too, pay the living wage?

Alex Neil: I am not unsympathetic to John Park's point. At the construction industry summit that Mr Ewing and I recently held in Inverness, the industry made the point that it would be helpful to build into procurement practice a requirement for successful contractors to pay the going rate for trades, which is of course much higher than the living wage. We are considering these matters. I am happy to meet Mr Park and to see whether we can incorporate his ideas in our procurement policy.

Digital Infrastructure

2. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making on improving the digital infrastructure. (S4O-00239)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): We are committed to improving the digital infrastructure to ensure that next-generation broadband is available to all Scotland by 2020, with significant progress by 2015. We are making early progress. The Highlands and Islands project has entered procurement and will bring connectivity benefits to the region within 12 months, and the south of

Scotland project is expected to enter procurement shortly.

To accelerate improved digital infrastructure in rural areas, the Scottish Government announced as part of the spending review a £50 million next-generation digital fund, which we will enhance with up to £25 million of European funding and with public sector contributions from other sources. We will use that to lever in additional private sector investment.

Dennis Robertson: Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that priority must be given to remote and rural areas that have little connectivity or achieve speeds below 1Mbps? We have heard from the Federation of Small Businesses and the hospitality industry that it is essential to bring areas with no or limited connectivity up to a high speed.

Alex Neil: I agree with Dennis Robertson. When we roll out our strategy, it will show that our emphasis is on rural areas and on giving a high priority to areas that are poorly serviced by today's technology. It is no accident that the first two areas to get ahead are the Highlands and Islands and the south of Scotland, both of which have substantial rural hinterlands. However, I appreciate the urgency in other areas, including north-east Scotland.

Home Insulation

3. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that more homes receive improved insulation. (S4O-00240)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): We are supporting 31 local authorities with £12.5 million to lead delivery of the universal home insulation scheme over the next year. That will allow a range of free home insulation measures to be offered to about 200,000 homes across Scotland to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty. That will add to the 500,000 homes that were offered support through earlier area-based insulation schemes, which has resulted in the installation of about 57,000 free or discounted insulation measures since November 2009. Our energy assistance package has given energy advice to about 200,000 households and has referred more than 25,000 households for insulation measures since 2009.

Maureen Watt: I welcome the universal home insulation scheme to which the cabinet secretary referred. Strong efforts are being made to encourage the take-up of wall and roof insulation, but the benefits of underfloor insulation are promoted less often. Will the cabinet secretary

consider ways of promoting such measures better for the properties that could benefit most from their installation?

Alex Neil: As the member will be aware, yesterday I announced a review of fuel poverty policy, which will be carried out by the fuel poverty forum. One remit of the review is to consider extending the range of measures that are available through our various schemes. Obviously, consideration of the suggestion that the member makes will be incorporated in the review.

Roads (M74)

4. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the economic and congestion impacts have been on Glasgow and the west of Scotland since the opening of the M74 motorway extension. (S4O-00241)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): It is too early to assess the full benefits, but traffic volumes on the M8 between Ballieston and Charing Cross have already dropped by between 19,000 and 26,000 vehicles a day since the opening of the M74.

John Mason: Do the minister and the Government agree that, although investment in transport remains important, housing should be a top priority in the next five years?

Keith Brown: There is no question but that housing remains a priority, as we have just heard in the previous debate. We have made a commitment to build 30,000 affordable houses in the next five years, which is about 10 per cent more than we built in the previous session. That demonstrates that, in the teeth of a recession and the 36 per cent cut to our capital budget, we are committed to improving and expanding the housing stock in Scotland.

Bus Services

5. Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to ensure that local bus services are protected during the economic downturn. (S4O-00242)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government is committed to bus services in Scotland. In the past few years, overall bus funding has been maintained, and that will continue during the spending review period, despite the challenges of real-terms Westminster cuts to Scotland's budget.

Hanzala Malik: We have seen what happened down south in England when transport budgets were cut, with very vulnerable people being affected. I seek an assurance that that will not happen in Scotland.

Keith Brown: The member correctly describes the dramatic and sudden cuts to bus services in England. Obviously, that is obviously a matter for the authorities there, but we have no intention of having similar dramatic cuts here. Of course, we must live within the envelope of the money that is provided in the spending review, but that allows us to continue measures such as the concessionary travel scheme, which is deteriorating in England, and the bus service operators grant, which has been scrapped in England but which we continue to support. The strong support for the bus industry in Scotland will continue.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): Last year, the Government's independent budget review recommended immediate action to review the national concessionary travel scheme. When will the minister progress the recommendations from the review to avoid any further raiding of the support for bus services budget and any further threat to vital rural transport links?

Keith Brown: It is odd that we have just heard demands from Jim Hume for more money for housing, and now we hear demands for more money for transport. We will defend the budget that has been provided. We are reviewing how best to deploy not just the national concessionary travel scheme moneys but the bus service operators grant, which provides substantial subsidy and support for the bus industry in Scotland. As with every other budget, discussions continue on how we can use the money to best effect for people in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 6 has not been lodged by Joan McAlpine.

Town Centre Regeneration

7. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made on regenerating town centres. (S4O-00244)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): We are absolutely committed in our support for town centres and that will form a key strand in our wider regeneration strategy, which we aim to publish at the end of the year. However, as the results of the research that we published on 26 September indicated, town centre regeneration is a complex area and many factors are at play in determining the success or failure of individual towns and local high streets. We have a role to play alongside local government, which is responsible for local economic development and regeneration.

George Adam: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the inclusion in the process of support for local voluntary organisations such as the

Paisley Development Trust in my town is essential to ensure that our town centres flourish?

Alex Neil: Absolutely—I totally agree. When we had the town centre regeneration fund, which is one of the best initiatives that the Parliament has ever taken on a cross-party basis, it was noticeable that many of the projects were organised from the ground up by the kind of organisation to which the member refers. The quality of the projects, and even of the proposals that did not make it to become projects and receive funding, was excellent.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Will the minister join me in congratulating North Lanarkshire Council on its regeneration work, which, with the efforts of community volunteers, contributed to Coatbridge winning a bronze award at the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in bloom awards?

Alex Neil: I am always happy to congratulate North Lanarkshire Council when it performs well. Coatbridge has been one of the beneficiaries of the town centre regeneration fund. If I remember correctly, we gave financial support of around £80,000 to the mobility project there. That has been a first-class project, and it is essential to the regeneration of that part of Scotland.

Scottish Social Housing Charter

8. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what responses it has received to the consultation on the draft Scottish social housing charter. (S4O-00245)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The consultation on the first Scottish social housing charter opened on 1 August this year and it closes on 1 November. To date, we have received 16 responses.

Margaret McCulloch: East Kilbride housing forum has suggested that a standard probationary period should be built into tenancies to help to prevent antisocial behaviour and protect communities against problematic and antisocial tenants. That would build on the legislation that is already in place. Will the minister look into East Kilbride housing forum's representation? Will he ensure that the new charter balances the rights and responsibilities of tenants?

Keith Brown: That is a very sensible suggestion, which we will consider. We are looking at the general issue in any event, but it is only right that we consider all the responses in the consultation. I would not want to give a commitment before the consultation closes, but I reassure the member that we are looking seriously at the area.

Stevenson College and Jewel & Esk College

9. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of Stevenson College and Jewel & Esk College. (S4O-00246)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Ministers are in regular touch with representatives from all of Scotland's colleges. Representatives from both Stevenson College and Jewel & Esk College were present when I addressed Scotland's Colleges at one of the organisation's regular meetings of college principals on 15 August. The principal of Jewel & Esk College was also present at the breakfast that I hosted for the chief executive of Hong Kong on 15 September.

Sarah Boyack: Last week, the minister cited the terrific benefits that could come from college mergers. Is he aware of the survey of members of staff, at Stevenson College in particular, that highlighted their fear of job losses and their concern about the complete lack of detail in the proposals? Is he aware of the concerns of students who would face potentially significantly increased journey times and a lack of flexibility, and who are worried about the impact on drop-out rates and transport problems that could lead to childcare problems for many students who value their local colleges?

Michael Russell: To put it charitably, most of that question is mired in fantasy. There is no reason whatsoever why there should be any impact, except one that is beneficial, on learners and young people. [*Interruption.*] It is difficult to make way against a candidate for the Labour leadership who seems to regard shouting as the best way to get her point across. She is now muttering under her breath.

If Opposition members read the post-16 paper, they will realise that it focuses on the needs of the learner. To scaremonger about it at this stage is utterly irresponsible—it is simply opposing change for the reason of opposing change.

I receive many communications from people in the sector who realise that the regional model for the delivery of further education has considerable merit. A letter from the chair of one of the colleges says that there is tremendous potential in considering how colleges can do more and deliver more. Many staff are engaged in that task and it would be excellent if, instead of merely moaning, the Opposition was engaged in it, too.

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees with me— [*Interruption.*]

Members: He always agrees with you.

Stewart Maxwell: Thank you very much; I appreciate the thought.

I am sure that we agree that there is a history of successful mergers and co-operation between a number of higher and further education institutions throughout the country from which we can all learn. Does the cabinet secretary also agree that Stevenson College and Jewel & Esk College could learn much from the co-operation, co-ordination and mergers that have taken place between a number of colleges in the city of Glasgow, that lessons should be learned and that no doors should be closed to the future efficient management of the structures of our colleges?

Michael Russell: I am absolutely determined to put learners at the centre of education policy—not boards of management, principals or chairs, but learners. When we put learners at the centre of education policy, we begin to think about how best they could be served. Undoubtedly, the process of merger has been a constant within Scottish higher and further education over the past 30 to 40 years. We do not have a perfect model, but I want to enter into a genuinely collaborative process with the principals, boards, staff and students to ensure that we enhance the learning experience. If only members throughout the chamber would do that, too, we would make significant progress for the learners. I stress again that it is about learners. Learners are at the heart of it—that is who we should be serving.

Flood Defences (Grangemouth)

10. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in relation to Falkirk Council's bid for funding for Grangemouth's flood defences. (S4O-00247)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Local government has been provided with a fair settlement and the capital allocations, adjusted for the reprofiling of capital support, deliver on the Government's commitment to maintain local government's share of the total capital budget at 28 per cent. As part of our continuing partnership working, further meetings will be held with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss the detail of the settlement, including the allocation of provision for major flooding schemes.

Angus MacDonald: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the importance of Grangemouth to the national economy and of the need to protect the area from flooding. He will also be aware of the current tax increment finance bid from Falkirk Council which, if successful, would see part of the TIF funding being used to contribute to the £100 million cost of flood defences. Will he impress on

his ministerial colleagues the importance of the TIF bid in our attempts to protect Grangemouth's residents and nationally important industries from flooding?

John Swinney: I am familiar with the bid that Falkirk Council has made in relation to tax increment finance. The matter is within the ministerial responsibility of my colleague Mr Neil, and he and I have had a number of discussions about the different propositions that are coming forward. An assessment will be undertaken in due course to establish the TIF schemes that are supported in addition to the two that have already attracted Government support: at the waterfront in Edinburgh—or Leith, I should say—and the Ravenscraig development in North Lanarkshire. We will continue to consider those points before Mr Neil makes an announcement.

I should say to Mr MacDonald that the Government values enormously the work that is undertaken at the Grangemouth development. I was pleased to have the opportunity to welcome the investment and commitment given to Grangemouth by the PetroChina development, which was the subject of discussions between the company, the First Minister and me. We look forward to recognising the importance of the PetroChina development for the health and prosperity of the Scottish economy.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Given that unseasonal weather and high rainfall have led to increased flooding, will the Scottish Government track those patterns to make sure that other areas are not becoming flood areas, as they might need flood prevention schemes if those weather patterns continue?

John Swinney: The work that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency undertakes in assessing the flood risk is precise and focused. Indeed, SEPA presides over what I think is an excellent early warning system around many watercourses, which provides very clearly communicated information for householders, businesses and other interests.

When we establish from the experience of flooding the areas that are most at risk, that will contribute to the discussions on and assessment of the appropriate schemes to be supported.

The Government has of course given very substantial support to the developments in Elgin, which were recently approved, building on—I mean “in addition to”, rather than “on top of”—the very successful scheme at Rothes in the constituency of Moray. I am delighted that the Government has been able to give such focused support to those developments in partnership with our local authority colleagues.

First Minister's Question Time

Engagements

12:00

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-00183)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will publicly congratulate Universities Scotland on the achievement of recording five Scottish universities in the world's top 200. That is an extraordinary achievement, and means that Scotland has more world-class universities than any other nation on earth. It is something that everyone in the chamber should celebrate.

Iain Gray: Indeed, we should be proud of the performance of our universities, but I want to ask the First Minister about something of which I know that he and this country are not proud.

When the First Minister said that he would legislate against sectarianism, we supported that intention. In June, when he extended the timetable for his bill so that it could be improved, I welcomed that decision. On that basis, we supported his bill at stage 1 but, in all sincerity, I ask him now: in the intervening three months, what has changed in the proposed legislation to make it work?

The First Minister: The bill has been going through the committee process and, as I understand it, the Justice Committee will publish its report this afternoon. In that report, which will take account of all the evidence that has been considered, the committee will no doubt put forward recommendations, to which the Government will respond.

Iain Gray seems to misunderstand the parliamentary process. The complaint that we took on board was that there was insufficient time for people to put forward opinions, for the committee to respond to them and make recommendations, and for the Government to respond to the committee. That is the legislative process. The difference is that with emergency legislation, time is restricted, whereas on the current timetable, time has been allowed.

I am sure that Iain Gray can think of up 100 different reasons for opposing the bill, but there is only one reason for supporting it, which is that it is the right thing to do.

Iain Gray: It is absolutely true that to act against sectarianism is the right thing to do, but the question is whether the bill is the right legislation. The extra time for scrutiny that the First Minister rightly provided has not convinced the bill's critics. Yesterday, we saw the views of Bishop Tartaglia;

today, we see the concerns of Nil by Mouth. The First Minister cannot accuse them of not taking sectarianism seriously, but they are unable to support the proposed legislation. Does the First Minister not think that we are obliged to listen to them?

The First Minister: I had the advantage of speaking to Bishop Tartaglia the other evening, so I know exactly what his concerns are, and I am certain that those concerns can be allayed in the discussions that I will have with him tomorrow.

As far as Nil by Mouth is concerned, I was delighted to see in the press today that Dave Scott, Bill Butler's former research assistant, has found gainful employment—[*Interruption.*] I would be very disappointed if he had not found gainful employment in Scotland.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): That is beneath you.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Mr Henry, please do not shout in the chamber.

The First Minister: I say seriously to Iain Gray that we should remember that Nil by Mouth was established because, in 1995, Mark Scott was murdered. Over the past 15 years, Mark Scott's father, Niall Scott, has campaigned quietly through his own trust, which he set up to address problems in Scottish society. He very seldom gives interviews. However, he gave an interview to BBC Scotland on 12 September. Let me read the exact BBC Scotland report, which says:

"Lawyer Niall Scott, whose son Mark ... was killed ... because he was wearing a Celtic shirt, said yesterday that he is pleased about the new Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Bill, despite a backlash against the planned legislation.

Mr Scott told BBC Radio Scotland: 'We still do have a significant problem in Scotland in connection with sectarianism, and racism and territorialism as well. The old remedies don't appear to me to have properly addressed the problems that we've got, and I welcome a fresh initiative being taken.'"

I suppose that in these things we all have to make a choice: we are either part of the backlash or part of the solution. I truly hope that most people in this Parliament decide to be part of the solution.

Iain Gray: This is the second week in a row that the First Minister has cast aspersions on people who have commented on his political initiatives. He should be ashamed of himself.

Since June what we have seen is existing law being used successfully to fine and jail those who peddle bigotry on the internet and in sectarian songs. We have seen the arrest of a number of Hibernian supporters in a case that has still to come to trial. However, we have seen no clarity on how the proposed new law will actually work, what the definitions of crime are and how it will be

enforceable. The fact is that the minister, Roseanna Cunningham, returned to committee and again failed to answer those concerns. Of course we need and want fresh initiatives—legislation, even—on sectarianism. We argued for that for four years while the First Minister did not wish to act. However, does he not realise that passing bad law that does not work could do more harm than good?

The First Minister: As has been explained by a range of legal experts, the police and the prosecution authorities, the legislation fills obvious gaps in the law pertaining to breach of the peace. Iain Gray referred to the second part of the bill. Looking at the Justice Committee's proceedings, I understand that that part of the legislation seemed to carry general support, and I am really surprised to hear him now question the internet and threatening communications aspect of the bill.

The bill is designed to criminalise behaviour likely to lead to public disorder that expresses or incites hatred and which is threatening or otherwise offensive to a reasonable person. All the evidence that we have suggests that such behaviour connected to football has wider implications for public order. The nature of such legislation is not uncommon; it depends on fact and circumstance. Indeed, the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 contained the same criteria in establishing offences aggravated by religious prejudice and the United Kingdom Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 carries the same definitional aspects of fact and circumstance. It is not new.

With regard to such decisions, I say again to Iain Gray that, if this legislation had been easy to pass, people would no doubt have passed it many years ago. As we know, the problems that have manifested and attached themselves to our great game of football are not just a matter of the astonishing scenes that we saw last season but have been with us for a generation or more.

In that light, I was struck by comments made by my predecessor in 2009. Looking back over his time as First Minister, he said that his greatest regret was that he had not brought forward legislation on sectarianism. As Iain Gray has noted, he is not going to get the opportunity to be First Minister but I hope that when he looks back on his period as Opposition leader his greatest regret is not that when it came to the crunch and legislation was put forward in good faith to tackle an obvious perceived problem in Scottish society—legislation that was supported by the police and the prosecution authorities, which asked for the tools to do the job that we wished them to do—he was found wanting.

Iain Gray: I understand that it is not easy to “face down sectarianism”, which the First Minister

said last week we must do. However, he will not do that by facing down the critics of his specific legislation; he will do it by doing the work to build consensus and agreement.

When the First Minister has the support of the country, he will deserve the support of the whole Parliament and he will have the support of this party. I have made it clear that my party accepts the need to legislate on sectarianism. That does not mean that any legislation has to be supported. Legislation must garner the support of the country, and this legislation has not done that so far. Does the First Minister not recognise that, as it stands, the legislation cannot be supported?

The First Minister: In which case, we will all look forward to the amendments that, as the bill goes through the process, the Labour Party puts forward to make the legislation compatible with its support. What we have at present is evidence upon evidence from those whom we charge with responsibility—from the police and the prosecution authorities—pointing out the gaps in breach of the peace legislation and pointing the way forward.

In a statement today, Assistant Chief Constable Campbell Corrigan, makes the point that just saying that sectarianism exists elsewhere in society is no argument for not dealing with the clear, perceived problem that attaches itself to our game of football.

When that evidence is presented by the police and the prosecution authorities, when they ask for the tools to do an extraordinarily difficult job that we as a society want them to do, and when we are required as a Parliament to face down what has been accepted in this country for far, far too long, is it too much to expect everyone in Parliament to rise above the smoke of political battle and do what is right for this country's future?

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-00174)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the secretary of state in the near future.

Annabel Goldie: When will the level 4 figures—the really detailed figures for the Scottish budget—be published?

The First Minister: Some were published yesterday; more will be published shortly.

Annabel Goldie: That is a rather economic response. I think what the First Minister meant was that one out of seven departmental heads was published yesterday. At that rate, we might get the rest of the information by the middle of December.

Everyone is asking, "Why the delay? Why the secrecy?" The reality is that the budget is unravelling. Mr Swinney can whisper all the sweet nothings he likes into the First Minister's ear but he cannot deny the inescapable. The much-vaunted £750 million for capital remains shrouded in mystery. We do not know where it is coming from; we do not know what it is being applied to; and we do not know what is being cut to provide it. Is this not another example of the arrogance of this Government sitting back and saying, "We've got the majority. You can't touch us"?

Parliament and its committees are being denied proper and essential scrutiny of the budget. Surely even the First Minister can accept that that is totally unacceptable.

The First Minister: It is pretty clear from that long question that Ramsay Jones has been suspended. [Laughter.] After week upon week of Annabel Goldie asking me to make my answers brief, when I provide an answer that is succinct and to the point, she chooses to ignore it.

The detailed figures on agriculture and rural affairs were published before the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee met yesterday. All other detailed figures will be published before the relevant committees meet. That is the right way to respect the committees of the Parliament and to draw attention to what has been an excellent budget for Scotland, under the most difficult circumstances imposed from Westminster.

Whatever else we say about Mr Swinney's fantastic budget, he did not have to rewrite his budget speech before it was delivered.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I have a constituency question to ask the First Minister. Are the Commonwealth games facilities that are being built in the east end of Glasgow on time and on budget?

The First Minister: On time and on budget.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Is the First Minister aware of the report in yesterday's *Evening Times* highlighting the circumstances around a recent rape trial in which a woman who had reported that she had been raped expressed her distress at the way in which she was treated during the trial? That included—astonishingly—the woman being asked to hold up her underwear in court, which she described as humiliating and degrading treatment? Does the First Minister think that such cross-examination is acceptable? Will he as a matter of urgency instruct his Cabinet Secretary for Justice to review the sexual offences legislation that was meant to protect victims from inappropriate and aggressive interrogation in court in order to ensure that fear of the court process does not prevent victims from making a complaint

in the first place? Will he tackle the reason why rape convictions remain so scandalously low?

The First Minister: The issue of rape convictions is a preoccupation of this Government. I am sure that the member will acknowledge the work that has been done by the former Lord Advocate on the matter. I will examine the report in the newspaper and, of course, the report of the court proceedings, and I will ask the law officers and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to comment to see whether we can improve things.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): I was recently contacted by a constituent who has stage 4 melanoma that is unresponsive to traditional cancer therapies. There is, however a new immunotherapy drug called Yervoy, which could radically transform my constituent's prospects. Yervoy has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration and the European Medicines Agency, and was licensed for use in the United Kingdom this August. Is the First Minister aware that the manufacturer has not yet submitted an application to the Scottish Medicines Consortium for use of the drug in the national health service in Scotland, despite having applied to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence for its use in England and Wales? What steps can the Scottish Government take to encourage pharmaceutical companies to submit applications to the SMC and NICE simultaneously?

The First Minister: I am pleased to say that one of the advantages of the SMC process is that the SMC can proactively take the initiative and approach pharmaceutical companies near the time of the licensing of their medicines to confirm the submission date. I can tell the member that the SMC is in touch with Bristol-Myers Squibb regarding a submission to the SMC for that particular pharmaceutical innovation.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-00182)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister's treatment of Iain Gray today was, I thought, appalling. He raised genuine concerns and it demeans the First Minister constantly to impugn his motives. [Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister is planning £40 million of cuts to Scotland's colleges next year, but this week he has been given £67 million

of extra money by the Treasury. Surely what to do with that money is a no-brainer?

The First Minister: I do not know what question time the member was listening to, incidentally, but we will leave that to one side. Maybe we should just concentrate when occasionally the member raises a serious issue.

I would have thought that, rather than looking at the millions of pounds of consequentials that come from a council tax freeze that we have already implemented in Scotland, the member might wish to reflect on the billions—billions—of pounds of public spending that has been withdrawn from Scotland.

On what we are doing in the capital budgets to try to counteract the policies of the Government that the member supports, perhaps the member will acknowledge the £200 million of non-profit-distributing capital for building the new City of Glasgow College and the £100 million of NPD capital that will be devoted to colleges in Inverness and Kilmarnock. If he would prevail on his United Kingdom colleagues not to follow slavishly the Tory policy of dramatic early cuts in capital spending but to come to a new settlement, that would be to the benefit of us all.

Willie Rennie: So, no answer again—no answer.

Before the election, the First Minister worked with us and the other parties to increase support for colleges, providing extra places and more bursaries. It is a shame that when he gets a majority he changes his mind. Hundreds of thousands of people rely on colleges. The Government's promises on apprenticeships need colleges. His own guarantee to young people depends on them. There is a simple, sensible choice for the First Minister: will he or will he not use the extra money from the Treasury to train more young people?

The First Minister: The Scottish National Party's commitment on numbers in further and higher education will be maintained, as will its commitment on 25,000 apprenticeship places. I am not certain whether Willie Rennie is aware that a fifth of those places are delivered through the college structure. I have been concerned that people are not fully aware of the vital work that colleges and others do on delivering apprenticeships.

The outcomes are 25,000 apprenticeships and a guarantee that every 16 to 19-year-old in Scotland will have a training or educational opportunity if they are not in an apprenticeship, full-time education or a job. That will happen. That guarantee has been repeated by no one else in these islands. I would have thought that Willie Rennie would be able to welcome that.

I will make two final points. First, if Willie Rennie is going to argue that he knows exactly where the consequentials should be spent, perhaps he should have a wee discussion with his colleagues—after all, it would not take too long—because, this morning, Jim Hume argued for them to be spent on the housing budget. I am sure that, once Mr Rennie and Mr Hume get together, they will decide the Liberal or Democratic policy on housing and colleges and relay a consistent position to Mr Swinney.

Secondly, if Willie Rennie is so concerned about colleges, why does he not have a word with his colleagues at Westminster? The cut in college funding south of the border will be 25 per cent. Is it a case of one thing from Mr Hume, one thing from Mr Rennie, one thing in this Parliament and something else at Westminster?

Budget Settlement (Local Authorities)

4. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what progress has been made on reaching a budget settlement with local authorities. (S4F-00175)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Despite unprecedented Westminster cuts, local government has been offered a tough but fair settlement that maintains its share of the budget, which is above the share that the Government inherited when it came to office in 2007. It represents the best possible deal against the background of the tightest financial constraints for a generation. I am delighted to confirm to the Parliament that local authority leaders have agreed by a substantial majority to support in principle the Government's proposals for the local government settlement.

Maureen Watt: I am sure that Aberdeen City Council will be one of the most enthusiastic backers of the local government finance settlement because of the Scottish Government's pledge to introduce an 85 per cent funding floor. Will the settlement address the historical underfunding of Aberdeen and give the granite city a fairer deal?

The First Minister: In a statement earlier this week, the leader of Aberdeen City Council said that, in discussions with trade union colleagues, he had reaffirmed his position on compulsory redundancies, and that they will not happen at the council while he is the leader. He continued:

"Aberdeen City Council is set to benefit from the new 85% funding floor that is being introduced by the SNP."

That is an indication of how the funding floor will enable Aberdeen to cope with its substantial financial issues without resorting to compulsory redundancies.

It is interesting that that funding floor, which was proposed in our manifesto and which was backed by the people of Scotland, was not supported by the Labour Party anywhere—except, of course, in Aberdeen.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I ask the First Minister to note that, although he is pleased that the Scottish National Party-dominated Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has decided to back—[*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, order.

Michael McMahon: I repeat: will the First Minister note that, although the SNP-dominated COSLA has decided to back the SNP Government's local government cuts, Labour MSPs are proud that their Labour council colleagues rejected John Swinney's threats of financial sanctions and will not do his bidding? Will he acknowledge that only Labour councillors recognised the real-terms cuts in spending that will force councils, including Aberdeen City Council, to make unnecessary cuts in employment levels? Will he acknowledge that further service cuts will follow? Will he acknowledge that only Labour rejected his Government's capital spending plan, in which John Swinney had the nerve to ask local authorities to do his borrowing without committing to reimburse them for doing his dirty work—[*Interruption.*] Does he not recognise that—

Members: It is a speech!

The Presiding Officer: Order. There is too much noise.

Michael McMahon: Does the First Minister not recognise that this is a fraud conducted to blame councils for his failures?

The First Minister: It's the way he tells them.

Let us deal with the facts of the case. Let us first take out the health service budget, which this Government certainly believes should be ring fenced—I know that there was some doubt in the Labour Party's mind but, according to Labour members last week, the party wants to ring fence that budget, too. If we take out the health service budget from Scottish Government spending, the share that goes to local government spending from the rest of the Scottish Government's budget—the one handed down by Westminster; the one that the Labour Party was to cut with cuts that were to be deeper and tougher than those of Margaret Thatcher—will have increased from 64.3 per cent when we took office to 69.6 per cent at the end of this financial settlement. Given the pain that Michael McMahon may want to forget was first inflicted by the Labour Government at Westminster—by the chancellor Alistair Darling who now tells us that he wanted to go further and faster and that he felt that his budget lacked

credibility—that is a fair settlement in anyone's terms.

SNP-dominated COSLA has a Labour president. Mr Swinney's measures were supported by every other political group and carried a substantial majority in COSLA. Given that a few weeks ago we were talking about fortune tellers, perhaps when Michael McMahon is thinking about an SNP-dominated COSLA he is thinking not about now but about next year.

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill

5. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what changes the Scottish Government plans to make to the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill. (S4F-00187)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As I said earlier, we will look carefully at the Justice Committee's report when it is published this afternoon. I have no doubt that the committee, which James Kelly serves on, will bring to our attention key points from the evidence that was presented to it. The Government will respond to the committee's report, and we will start the legislative process in which all members have the opportunity—should they choose to take it—to bring forward the legislation that they would like to see and the key arguments that they would like to put. Then we as a Parliament can come to a conclusion in the normal fashion on legislation that I believe is long overdue.

James Kelly: The First Minister and the Lord Advocate have said that the new laws are required to address gaps in the existing legislation, but there have been numerous prosecutions and convictions under the present law, including an internet user facing a jail term for posting sectarian comments on Facebook and a fan fined £1,000 on Monday of this week for sectarian singing. Does the First Minister not agree that those convictions undermine the Government's case that there are gaps in the existing legislation?

The First Minister: First, James Kelly is on the Justice Committee, so I do not know where he was when Superintendent David Marshall of British Transport Police gave evidence and said:

"We welcome the bill. Breach of the peace, for example, is and has been repeatedly open to challenge. The bill ... puts into law offences that relate specifically to religious, racial and other forms of hate crime that are associated with football".—[*Official Report, Justice Committee, 13 September 2011; c 230.*]

A superintendent from British Transport Police has brought forward that evidence to the committee and pointed to the gaps in breach of the peace as an offence. Therefore, I am not certain why James

Kelly believes that he has some insight that is greater than that of those who have to practise the law as it stands and who are aware of prosecutions that were not successful because of the gaps in the legislation.

It is the easiest thing in the world for politicians to moan about the courts and about decisions that seem incredible to the ordinary person, but if a gap in the law has been identified the challenge for politicians is to do something about it. The bill is designed to do something about it.

Secondly, the proceedings of the Justice Committee indicate that the second part of the bill has received general support, so I am astonished that the thrust of James Kelly's question suggests that he is withdrawing Labour Party support from that part as well as questioning the first part of the bill. Is that where we have got to with the Labour Party's attitude to the bill? The legislation has been requested and supported by the police, the law officers and the Crown Office—those whom we charge with the responsibility of making our society better. For goodness' sake, let us give them the tools to do the job that we ask them to do.

Private Finance Initiative Projects (Cost)

6. Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the impact will be on the Scottish Government's budget of the reported £1 billion per annum to be paid to private firms for PFI projects. (S4F-00178)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Total public sector payments in respect of PFI contracts agreed by previous Administrations in Scotland will rise to more than £1 billion a year once all the projects inherited by us reach completion. Those payments must be made from public sector resource budgets, which we know are under pressure and are being slashed as a result of choices by the Tories and, previously, Labour at Westminster.

The lesson for the Scottish Parliament is that we must have access to full borrowing powers. That is why it is so important that the Scotland Bill is improved. Instead of the credit card level of repayments under PFI, we will be able to access the most cost-effective capital, meaning that we will be able to do more to boost Scotland's economy, create jobs and pay less over the term of the projects.

The Presiding Officer: You may ask a brief supplementary question, Mr Keir.

Colin Keir: PFI projects in Edinburgh will incur more than £3.5 billion in payments over time—five times the total value. Does the First Minister agree that PFI is a shameful drain on our public finances,

taking away money from local services? Does he agree—

The Presiding Officer: First Minister.

The First Minister: Yes, and I will give the chamber an example. Hairmyres hospital has generated a profit of £145 million from an initial investment of just £8.4 million. We should compare that PFI legacy with the Scottish Futures Trust, which has generated savings of more than £200 million in the past two years alone.

The Presiding Officer: That ends First Minister's question time.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In the First Minister's non-reply to one of Willie Rennie's questions, he stated that I asked for more money for the housing budget. That is completely incorrect. I requested information to see whether the SNP would stand by the commitment in its manifesto to build 6,000 social rented houses per year in this session of Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order, Mr Hume, but you have made your point.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Under the standing orders, MSPs are expected to show courtesy to one another. Although I fully accept that I am big and ugly enough to take the First Minister's swipes, in an earlier answer the First Minister impugned the integrity of a member of the public serving an organisation. Is it appropriate for the First Minister to be continually allowed to slander the integrity and character of individuals outside the Parliament?

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister is responsible for his own remarks.

12:33

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy

NHS Workforce Reduction (Patient Care)

1. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will maintain levels of patient care in the face of staff reductions across the national health service. (S4O-00248)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): As I have said in the chamber on many occasions, quality of care and patient safety are my top priorities and will always come first. Decisions that are being made by NHS boards are subject to on-going scrutiny by me and by local and national partnership bodies. I have made it clear to all boards that projected staff changes will happen only if boards can demonstrate, in partnership with staff, that they flow from service redesigns that do not compromise quality or safety.

Neil Findlay: NHS Lothian has confirmed to me that it lost 734 posts in 2010-11 and that it will lose a similar number in 2011-12, with half of those being nurses. That comes at a time when complaints about understaffed wards are increasing, the Royal College of Nursing has complained about stress levels among staff and the Edinburgh royal infirmary is yet again under criticism for problems with cleanliness. Does the cabinet secretary seriously expect the public to believe that front-line patient care will remain unaffected when more than 700 nursing posts have gone?

Nicola Sturgeon: My job as health secretary—it is one that I never shy away from—is to ensure that patient care is protected and that we deliver quality health services. For all the pressures on Scotland's health service and its staff—I do not underestimate them for a second—it is performing better than it has done at any time in its history. We have the lowest waiting times on record, radically reduced hospital infection rates and a patient safety programme that is delivering significant improvements. I will continue to support our NHS staff to deliver those improvements.

Patterns of patient healthcare are changing. We have shorter lengths of stay in hospital, higher rates of day surgery and improvements in patient safety, all of which mean that the shape and size of the NHS workforce will change. We must

ensure, however, that as it changes quality and safety remain the top priorities.

The chair of NHS Lothian wrote to the member after he put out a press release that was in a similar vein to his question. The letter pointed out that the figures that the member gave in the press release were inaccurate. Probably more interestingly, the chair said that, although the member claimed to get those figures from a meeting with NHS Lothian, the member actually left that meeting before the agenda item on workforce. It is one thing for the member to come to the chamber to raise issues, as he is perfectly entitled to do, but perhaps he should show more interest in the meetings with NHS Lothian.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): While we are talking about patient care in Edinburgh and elsewhere in Scotland, I want to raise the issue of cancer care. Surely our hard-working NHS staff are to be commended for their success in achieving the 62-day cancer waiting time target, a target that Labour failed to achieve when it was in power. Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that, in meeting the new 31-day target for the time from urgent referral to treatment, the NHS is ensuring that many more patients in Scotland receive the care that they are entitled to expect?

Nicola Sturgeon: I strongly agree. I never underestimate the pressure that our NHS staff work under. Being a doctor, nurse or any other member of the NHS team is a tough job in the best of times and it is even tougher in the challenging times that we face today. The achievements that I mentioned in my earlier answer and the specific achievements on cancer waiting times that Annabelle Ewing cites are testament to the hard work of our NHS staff. It is our duty to thank them for that and to support them in the work that they do.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The cabinet secretary will know that, in addition to the job reductions that have been referred to, newly qualified nurses and doctors are struggling to find employment. Before the election, the SNP promised that it would cut management costs in the NHS by 25 per cent to free up resources to spend on the front line, which is a welcome commitment. What progress is being made on that and what is the target date to complete the reduction?

Nicola Sturgeon: Not only can I tell Murdo Fraser about the progress that is being made; the progress was published just a couple of weeks ago. I will send him a link to that after question time.

The target was to cut the number of senior managers by 25 per cent over the parliamentary

session, and the most recent figures to be published show that we are more than on track to do that. That commitment is important, as it allows us to ensure that we get as much of the NHS budget as possible to the front line to support point-of-care services. I will continue to strive to do that.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

2. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy last met the chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. (S4O-00249)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Ministers and Government officials regularly meet senior management from national health service boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Duncan McNeil: When the cabinet secretary met managers last week, did she discuss NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's position on the prescribing of eculizumab? The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence recognises that drug for the treatment of severe blood disorders and it is widely available in England and Wales and, indeed, in health boards throughout Scotland.

The cabinet secretary will be aware of my representations on the fairness of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's policy on behalf of my constituent Mrs Joyce Juszczak, who is with us in the chamber. Mrs Juszczak has a life-threatening blood disorder and would greatly benefit from the prescription of that drug. It seems that only bureaucracy is preventing her from getting the treatment that she deserves. Could the cabinet secretary assist us to ensure that we get through that bureaucracy and that Mrs Juszczak is given the treatment for the benefit of her quality of life and, more important, for her life itself?

Nicola Sturgeon: I fully understand the sensitivity of the issue and the personal distress that has been caused to Mrs Juszczak as a result of the circumstances. I welcome her to the chamber and look forward to meeting her later this afternoon.

I am committed to improving the availability of and access to all drugs for all patients who would benefit from them. We debated that in the Parliament last week.

Decisions on what drugs are recommended for general use are taken by the Scottish Medicines Consortium independently of ministers. If a drug is not generally recommended, it can be considered on an individual patient basis on clinical grounds. I am sure that the member will understand that I cannot directly intervene in individual decisions

that are based on clinical reasons. However, I will meet the member and Mrs Juszczak later this afternoon and will be happy to discuss her case in general terms with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to satisfy myself that it has taken into account all the relevant factors in her case in reaching its decision.

There is another point that I would be happy to discuss with Mrs Juszczak later. Decisions to do with individual patient treatment requests are never once-and-for-all decisions. If any patient's condition changes or deteriorates, it is possible to ask for a decision to be looked at again. Perhaps we could usefully discuss that later this afternoon.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that the issue of increases in car parking charges at Glasgow royal infirmary has not yet been resolved and that it is still causing great financial hardship to staff. I have written to the various organisations concerned, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, but have not yet received a reply. Can the cabinet secretary give me an update or any information that she has received that may help to alleviate the hardship that the staff and people who visit the infirmary face?

Nicola Sturgeon: I understand and share the concerns of staff about the increase in car parking charges. As Sandra White is aware—and this is a matter of regret to me—the issue is not within NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's control, as we are talking about a private car park. It is one of the private finance initiative legacies that the previous Administration left to us. However, I am happy to discuss matters further with the member and with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to see whether we can bring to bear any further influence. That said, I want to be clear that the decision is not an NHS decision; it is a decision by the company that owns and runs the car park in question.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Further to the question from my colleague Duncan McNeil, the cabinet secretary will be aware that I have had two constituents who have suffered from PNH, one of whom, Mr Devine, has now died. I was delighted to hear that the cabinet secretary will meet Mrs Juszczak this afternoon. I believe that she will be aware of correspondence from me requesting a meeting with the PNH Alliance to discuss a way forward so that we can resolve the issue of access for patients to the most effective medicines and tackle the whole issue of a postcode lottery across Scotland with regard to this drug. Will she agree to such a meeting?

Nicola Sturgeon: I hope that the member will convey my condolences to the family of his constituent. I would be happy to consider such a meeting—the member should get in touch with my office. I hope that all members, regardless of their

genuine concerns and sincere representations on behalf of constituents on these issues, will understand that no health secretary of any party in this chamber can get directly involved in individual clinical decisions. However, we debated these issues only last week and we all have a desire to increase the availability of and access to clinically beneficial drugs. I would be happy to meet any interested group to discuss how we can build on the work that we have already done in conjunction with the Public Petitions Committee to further improve such access.

Myalgic Encephalitis-Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

3. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to raise public awareness of myalgic encephalitis or chronic fatigue syndrome. (S4O-00250)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): In September 2010, we published the “Scottish Good Practice Statement on ME-CFS” for use by general practitioners as part of the process of ensuring that people get better and more consistent standards of care, including quicker and more reliable diagnosis.

The good practice statement is accompanied by a patient guide that sets out what someone should know if they or their doctor think that they might have ME. The statement has been issued to GP practices and consultants across Scotland to help raise both public and professional awareness of the condition.

In addition, Action for M.E has been awarded some £42,000 from the self management fund to set up an online information and support hub for people living with ME, their carers and their families.

David Torrance: Constituents of mine suffering from ME often tell me that their condition can make the complex, drawn-out process of trying to access support from public services too daunting to complete. The United Kingdom Government’s Department for Work and Pensions is among the most frequently cited obstacles in that respect, but it is not the only one. Are there any measures under consideration to improve support for ME sufferers in that respect?

Michael Matheson: As I said in my previous answer, we as a Government are committed to ensuring that there is an improvement in the standard of care and services that people who suffer from ME receive. The member will appreciate that the DWP is a reserved area, although some of us feel that it would be better if it were responsible to this Parliament. However, I expect public agencies to be sympathetic to individuals who have conditions that might

compromise their ability to make claims for benefits, for example. I hope that, in recognition of that, the DWP will take action in order to ensure that Mr Torrance’s constituents are given the assistance that they require in order to make their relevant benefit claims.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): One of the fundamental problems relating to ME-CFS is that research funding still tends to be made available to those who believe that it is a psychological disorder, whereas the World Health Organization and other similarly highly respected organisations now recognise that it is a biological condition. What will the minister do to ensure that research is carried out into the biological rather than psychological causes?

Michael Matheson: The member might not be aware of this, but the chief scientist office in the Scottish Government has already provided some £400,000 for the promoting action on clinical excellence—PACE—project that looks at cognitive behavioural therapy alongside exercise therapy as a mechanism for treating people with ME.

The Medical Research Council has also indicated that it will provide some £1.5 million towards further research on ME and it expects bids from research practitioners in relation to how they can provide more treatment for people who suffer from ME.

Research is being undertaken and the PACE programme is already showing some very encouraging signs of the benefit that that approach can have. I have no doubt that as the programme goes forward we will be able to look at its results to see what further lessons can be learned about the treatment of ME sufferers in Scotland.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): In improving services for people with ME or chronic fatigue syndrome, will the minister encourage the NHS to implement the healthcare needs assessment that was carried out by the Scottish public health network so that health boards can further develop appropriate services for people with ME or chronic fatigue syndrome and thereby provide rapid and accurate diagnosis and assessment, supportive care and treatment, and access to wider support when that is appropriate, for people who have that debilitating condition?

Michael Matheson: We are generally supportive of the assessment of needs that was published last year. We recognise that it contains a number of recommendations that must be taken forward by individual health boards to ensure that they have the right service model at local level to meet the needs of those members of their population who suffer from ME.

It is important to recognise that progress is starting to be made in that area. I understand that Lothian NHS Board has reviewed the clinical pathway for people who are diagnosed with ME to ensure that they are referred back to their general practitioner at an early stage so that they receive the clinical and wider support that they require. I expect boards across the country to use the good practice statement that was issued to look at how they provide services for sufferers of ME with a view to improving the level of service at local level.

Defibrillators

4. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to extend the provision of defibrillators. (S4O-00251)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Making further cuts in the number of deaths from heart disease is a key theme of the "Better Heart Disease and Stroke Care Action Plan" that was published in June 2009. We have therefore provided some £7.5 million of funding to the Scottish Ambulance Service for state-of-the-art defibrillators for all its ambulances to ensure that they are properly equipped to deal with sudden cardiac events.

David Stewart: A defibrillator can literally mean the difference between life and death. Does the minister share my view that we need a comprehensive, cross-Government risk assessment of the placing of defibrillators in areas of high incidence of cardiac arrest and areas where ambulances cannot respond quickly, such as rural areas, as well as on long-distance trains, buses and ferries?

Michael Matheson: I know from the range of parliamentary questions that the member has asked in recent times that he has a particular interest in the provision of defibrillators. I am sympathetic to what he has proposed and am more than happy to go away and look at that option. I know that the Scottish Ambulance Service is working with organisations such as Scotmid to look at the location of defibrillators in shops and other premises in rural areas that could be used for that purpose. I will happily look at the initiative that the member has suggested to see whether there is more progress that we can make on the issue.

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

(SNP): Would the minister like to take the opportunity to congratulate the pupils of Portree high school and the people from the Lucky2BHere charity foundation who gave a demonstration of community defibrillators in the Parliament yesterday?

Michael Matheson: I am more than happy to congratulate them. The school environment provides a good opportunity to work with young people to provide them with some of the life-saving skills that may be of use to them and to people in their communities. We are working in partnership with the British Heart Foundation and Lucky2BHere to create a case-study resource that can be used in schools across Scotland. Last night's demonstration by Portree high school is a good example of how that resource can be used to the benefit of pupils across Scotland.

Monklands Hospital (Staffing)

5. Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to ensure that there are sufficient staffing levels at Monklands hospital. (S4O-00252)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS Lanarkshire has plans in place to ensure quality of care and patient safety across its board area. It is for each NHS board to decide how best to utilise funding and staff, taking account of national and local priorities, to meet local health needs.

Elaine Smith: As the cabinet secretary knows, I welcomed her decision to retain full accident and emergency services at Monklands, which I campaigned for, but A and E must be more than a name over the door. In light of the cabinet secretary's answer, is she aware of the worrying situation whereby there were only six consultants available in Monklands A and E department this August, when NHS Lanarkshire's aim is to have at least 10 consultants available there? Will she intervene so that our A and E department can operate at the safe level my constituents need and expect?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Elaine Smith for her question and note that, as she mentioned, she supported the retention of Monklands A and E service; in that regard, she was an honourable exception in her party.

She raises an important issue. NHS Lanarkshire has had recruitment challenges and is working to manage those and ensure the safety of services.

It is worth noting—I am sure that Elaine Smith is aware of these figures—that in NHS Lanarkshire more medical and dental staff and more consultants are in place than has previously been the case. There are 22 whole-time equivalent consultant vacancies across all specialties. Of those, five relate to emergency medicine, paediatrics and general medicine. There are no vacancies in anaesthetics. NHS Lanarkshire will continue to work to ensure the sustainability and

safety of care provided at Monklands A and E department.

Finally, I give Elaine Smith an assurance that Monklands A and E department, which would no longer exist if another party had been in charge, will not be only a name over the door; it will be a fully functioning accident and emergency department.

National Health Service Boards (Budgets)

6. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last wrote to national health service boards about their budget allocations for 2012-13. (S4O-00253)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): The acting director-general health and social care and chief executive of the NHS in Scotland wrote to NHS chief executives on 21 September 2011 about their budget allocations for 2012-13.

Jackie Baillie: The letter of 21 September to health boards showed that 80 per cent of the uplift allocated to them is, in fact, already committed to things such as waiting times and prison services, and is therefore not new money available for general use. Is it not therefore the case that, when the spin is stripped away, there is a real-terms cut in health spending?

Nicola Sturgeon: Let me spell it out in simple terms to Jackie Baillie, because that question demonstrates that she perhaps does not fully understand NHS board funding.

First, this Government is passing on all the consequential for health to the health service. That is £1 billion extra for health over the life of the spending review. We are prioritising front-line services. Budgets for health boards will increase, in real terms, in every year of the spending review.

It is important to note that that increase in funding would not have happened had Labour won the election in May. Jackie Baillie might like to forget about it, but the rest of us remember Iain Gray's "Newsnight Scotland" interview when he said that Labour would not protect the health budget. Jackie Baillie's hypocrisy is rather breathtaking.

Finally, on the specifics of Jackie Baillie's question, she demonstrates her lack of understanding of health board budgets, because the money that she talks about was previously ring fenced. In other words, it was previously earmarked but it is no longer ring fenced or earmarked, so it is available for general allocation by boards.

Let us take waiting times funding as an example. Because of the progress made by NHS

boards in reducing waiting times over the period of the last Government and this Government, that money can now be spent on other things, as long as the waiting times stay at the level that they are at.

That is what happens when there is success in the NHS such as we have had under this Government. This Government will continue to protect our national health service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): If we can have brief questions and answers, we will get more members in.

Health and Social Care (Integration)

7. Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to introduce an integrated system of health and social care, in light of the report by the commission on the future delivery of public services. (S4O-00254)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): We are committed to integrating adult health and social care during this session of parliament. Better integration can—and I believe does—improve outcomes, accountability and financial sustainability, which are all critical to patients, service users and carers. We have been engaging with a wide range of stakeholders from the national health service, local government and the third and independent sectors to inform our proposals. I intend to make a statement to Parliament later this year on our final proposals for consultation.

Aileen McLeod: In the light of that, does the cabinet secretary agree that preventative spending will be a major contributor to ensuring that public services can deal with the demographic challenges that lie ahead?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, I agree strongly. Preventative and anticipatory services, when they are coupled with effective support for rehabilitation and reablement and are supported by appropriately targeted spending, play a major role in ensuring the provision of quality services and care for older people. The change fund for older people's services provides financial support for reshaping care for older people. That is enabling partnerships to shift spending and activity into services that are focused on prevention, which is exactly what we need to do.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the progress that is being made in integrating health and social care services in Orkney, through Orkney health and care. I know that she is very much looking forward to visiting my constituency next week. Will she confirm her willingness to meet

representatives of Orkney health and care during her visit, to discuss how the model can be further developed to improve the service to patients, the vulnerable and indeed the wider community in Orkney?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am very much looking forward to my visit to the member's constituency next week for the annual review of NHS Orkney. My office is seeking to schedule that meeting. If it is humanly possible, that meeting will happen and we can discuss then the progress to date and how it can be built on in future.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Can the cabinet secretary give us a general update on her thinking on the integration of health and social care, particularly whether she still favours a lead commissioning model; whether she would prefer a reformed community health partnership, with or without dedicated budgets; whether she has some other model in mind; or whether she wishes to allow areas to have freedom and flexibility to develop their own arrangements?

Nicola Sturgeon: I referred earlier to a statement later in the year, which is when I will answer that question in detail. I appreciate that members, as well as people in the health service, local government and other sectors, are anxious for details of precisely how we will take forward our ambition to integrate health and social care. We are taking a bit of time to ensure that we get that right.

On lead commissioning, I would want to ensure that nothing that we do gets in the way of the very good work that has been undertaken in Highland at the instigation of the national health service and local authorities.

Desperate though members are for further details now, I have to keep them waiting a wee bit longer, until the statement later in the year.

Familial Hypercholesterolaemia

8. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in treating familial hypercholesterolaemia since the publication of the "Better Heart Disease and Stroke Care Action Plan" in 2009. (S4O-00255)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The genetic cascade testing of family members of people who are known to have FH is progressing well. Once people living with FH have been identified, NHS Scotland has an effective process in place to screen their relatives. To date, more than 1,000 people have been tested and 252 individuals with FH have been identified. However, we accept that more can be done in that area. We expect NHS boards to act on the findings of

Healthcare Improvement Scotland's heart disease report, which was published in September, to ensure that people living with FH are identified as soon as possible and treated appropriately in order to minimise the risk of complications. The national advisory committee on heart disease will monitor their progress closely.

Joe FitzPatrick: The minister will be aware that there are potentially huge savings to the NHS as a result of early detection of FH. Given the Scottish Government's moves towards preventative spending, does he agree that detection of FH should be considered as part of our preventative spending proposals? Is he willing to meet me and representatives in the field of FH to discuss how progress can be made in detecting and treating the condition?

Michael Matheson: Absolutely. Once FH is diagnosed, it is very treatable. That is a good example of where we can make progress in preventing people from developing the complications that may come from having FH. We expect NHS boards to recognise that investing in screening activity for FH can have a preventative spend aspect to it and can reduce the chances of someone developing heart disease or other associated complications.

Regarding the member's request for a meeting to discuss the matter in more detail with other parties, if he contacts my office, I will be more than happy to look at making arrangements for such a meeting.

Health Services (Rural Communities)

9. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what importance it attaches to the provision of health services to rural communities. (S4O-00256)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): We have made a significant commitment to the provision of health services to rural communities through the work of the remote and rural steering group, which was established to identify a strategy for sustainable healthcare in remote and rural Scotland. The steering group undertook the delivery of 63 commitments and 20 forward issues between 2007 and 2010. Although the steering group has completed its work, support continues to be given to all NHS boards to implement the actions and further recommendations that are contained in its final report, which was published in October 2010.

Graeme Dey: As the local MSP, I recently attended the 50th anniversary of the Queen Mother wing of Arbroath infirmary, which delivers a range of health services to the town. However, 12 miles or so from Arbroath lies the thriving village of

Letham which, by some historical quirk, has no on-site general practitioner provision. Will the cabinet secretary join me in encouraging the health authorities in Tayside to look favourably on the local campaign to address that situation and deliver appropriate locally based health cover for the village?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am aware of that issue and I know that NHS Tayside and Angus community health partnership are working together closely with a sub-group of Letham community council members to achieve a satisfactory solution, including testing the feasibility of running satellite clinics from the Academy medical practice in Forfar. I also understand that the member has asked for a meeting with the general manager of Angus CHP to discuss the issues in more depth. As talks are on-going, I do not want to comment in more detail, but I am pleased to say that a genuine attempt is being made by all parties concerned to find a solution. I am happy to keep in contact with the member as things progress.

East Ayrshire Community Hospital (Dental Facility)

10. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive when the dental facility at East Ayrshire community hospital will be built. (S4O-00257)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS Ayrshire and Arran has confirmed that, although the development of a new dental facility as a variation to the existing private finance initiative contract at East Ayrshire community hospital is no longer a viable option, it is fully committed to meeting the identified dental needs of Cumnock and the surrounding area. NHS Ayrshire and Arran is also examining alternative means for delivering the requirements of the local dental action plan in order to fully meet the dental needs of the population. The local general dental practitioner who was interested in participating in the development at the community hospital is already actively developing plans to increase surgery capacity in the area, as are other practitioners who have recently come forward with preliminary plans to develop their own facilities.

Graeme Pearson: As the cabinet secretary will know, it is estimated that more than £1 million has been spent on preparing the dental facility at East Ayrshire community hospital and rectifying the hospital now that that facility has been abandoned. Has the cabinet secretary a role to play in examining the lessons from this experience and will she share them with Parliament?

Nicola Sturgeon: The member will be fully aware of the background to the issue, so I will not

go into that in great detail here. The health board's own audit arrangements have the lead role to play in ensuring that the whole exercise is properly audited and goes through the normal governance processes. I am happy to have further discussion with the member and any other interested members in order that I can satisfy them that the health board has learned any lessons that there are to learn from the situation and—more important—that the steps that I indicated in my answer are being taken to ensure that the dental needs of the local population are fully met in the future.

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is a bit rich of Labour politicians to lay the responsibility at her doorstep for the consequences of a PFI contract that was signed 12 years ago, when Labour was forcing PFI on health boards and local authorities on the basis that it was—I think that this was the phrase—the only game in town? Can she investigate how health boards and others might be protected from such opportunistic behaviour by banks and other PFI funders claiming contract variation when improvements to existing facilities are being sought or services are being redesigned to better meet the needs of service users?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am happy to investigate the detail of Adam Ingram's question and discuss it further with them. The phrase

"it is a bit rich of Labour"

springs to my mind very often. Perhaps the best answer that I can give is that the best way to protect the Scottish public from the past follies of the Labour Government is not to re-elect a Labour Government in Scotland.

NHS Workforce Reduction (Newly Qualified Staff)

11. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how planned reductions in the national health service workforce will impact on newly qualified nurses and midwives. (S4O-00258)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): We continue to guarantee newly qualified nurses and midwives the offer of a job in the NHS and we have worked hard with boards and others to ensure that we continue to meet that commitment.

This year, we introduced the internship scheme with the support of both the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives. The scheme gives newly trained nurses and midwives the opportunity to consolidate their skills and gain additional experience in clinical practice through

the offer of a one-year, fixed-term, part-time employment opportunity that is linked to completion of the flying start programme. The scheme is not compulsory and newly registered nurses and midwives are still encouraged to seek employment through their own means.

Elaine Murray: The cabinet secretary may recall previous correspondence regarding a constituent of mine who is a recently graduated nurse who has experienced considerable difficulty in gaining employment, particularly in Dumfries and Galloway. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that the workforce reductions in Dumfries and Galloway—70 whole-time equivalent nurses and midwives this year, on top of the 57.7 that have been lost since 2009—will make it even more difficult for recent graduates to find full-time, permanent employment in nursing and midwifery? I hear what she says about internships and temporary ameliorations that she can introduce. How can we tackle the future for recent graduates who want to establish a career in nursing and midwifery but may find it more difficult as the workforce reduces?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will not repeat my earlier answer to Neil Findlay, who is no longer in the chamber, on workforce issues, so I will specifically address Elaine Murray's point about newly qualified nurses and midwives.

I understand the pressures and difficulties that newly qualified nurses and midwives face. That is why it is important that we offer the one-year internship scheme. However, we must also ensure that our workforce planning is correct—we have discussed that in the Parliament before—and that the number of people going into nursing and midwifery training is commensurate with the demand for nurses and midwives in the service. That is a continuing task. I annually approve the intake to our nursing and midwifery schools. It is important that we get that balance right so that people who want to be, and train to be, nurses or midwives and who have a great deal to offer do not find that they cannot achieve that ambition.

Royal Victoria Hospital (Edinburgh)

12. Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made with the building of the new Royal Victoria hospital in Edinburgh. (S4O-00259)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): I am very pleased to confirm that the project is on time and on budget and that the new facility will be operational in June 2012.

Colin Keir: The new hospital is publicly funded with no financial burden to the taxpayer, which is

to be welcomed. Does the cabinet secretary agree that providing patients with their own individual rooms will provide a higher-quality environment and more privacy, particularly for older people, and will help to reduce the chances of hospital-acquired infections?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, I agree. As Colin Keir is aware, all new hospitals are now required to provide 100 per cent single-room accommodation for patients; all refurbished hospitals must now provide at least 50 per cent single-room patient accommodation. That makes a significant contribution not only to patient dignity and privacy but to reducing the risk of infection.

On that point, I take the opportunity after the publication of yesterday's figures on HAs to pay tribute to national health service staff for the continued progress that is being made on reducing infections in our hospitals.

Alcohol (Minimum Price)

13. Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish its plans to introduce a minimum price for alcohol. (S4O-00260)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Given the clear link that exists between consumption and harm, and as affordability is one of the drivers of increased consumption, addressing price is a vital part of any long-term strategy to tackle alcohol misuse. For those reasons, we will reintroduce our minimum pricing bill very soon indeed.

Clare Adamson: Does the cabinet secretary agree with Professor Tim Stockwell from the centre for addictions research in British Columbia, who briefed MSPs last week on the impact of minimum pricing in Canada, where it led to a fall in levels of drinking, that Scotland is in a position to embrace a unique opportunity to transform its alcohol policy?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, I agree. Some people have used the fact that we are in a unique position to argue that we should not try minimum pricing, because nobody else has ever done it. That would be a recipe for doing nothing new about anything ever. We are aware of the work that Professor Stockwell has done. We are very interested in it and will carefully consider his full findings as they emerge. However, we already know that affordability is one of the key drivers of increased consumption. That is why addressing price is fundamental to any long-term strategy to tackle alcohol misuse.

Cities Strategy (Environment)

14. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Executive how its cities strategy will incorporate urban environmental issues such as sustainable transport and green spaces. (S4O-00261)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): The cities strategy will reflect the fact that cities will play a vital part in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Sustainability issues will be addressed at a strategic level.

Marco Biagi: I urge the cabinet secretary to understand the cities strategy remit broadly, as befits its place alongside health and wellbeing rather than in a narrowly economic portfolio. I also draw her attention to the study by Mitchell and Popham in *The Lancet* in 2008, which the Scottish Wildlife Trust drew to my attention. That study linked greener urban areas with better life expectancy and overall health outcomes.

Nicola Sturgeon: I endorse the thrust of Marco Biagi's question. In the cities strategy, we will cover at a strategic level the characteristics of a city that are essential for growth: connected cities; sustainable, low-carbon cities; knowledge cities; and creative cities. The one thing that runs through all the themes is quality of life, which will be central to our cities strategy as it is to so much of our other work.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Rest Breaks)

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon on Scottish Ambulance Service rest breaks.

Before we turn to it, I put on record my disappointment that important matters relating to the statement appear to have made their way into this morning's press. I have reviewed the coverage and I have sought and received assurances that the Scottish Government was not the source of the information. However, I stress that it is incumbent on the Government to do everything in its power to ensure that statements made to this Parliament are received in the Parliament first and not trailed in the media in advance.

The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, therefore there should be no interruptions or interventions.

14:56

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): I am grateful for the opportunity to update Parliament on the progress that has been made towards resolving the rest break issue within the Scottish Ambulance Service.

I want first to provide some of the background to the issue. The background is important because it explains why the Ambulance Service is in this situation and what it has done to address the issue over a number of years.

As members will be well aware, 2004 saw the introduction of the national health service agenda for change, a new pay system for staff employed by the NHS across the United Kingdom. Agenda for change harmonised the terms and conditions of service in relation to annual leave, working hours, sick pay and work done in unsocial hours for all non-medical staff in the NHS across the UK.

Prior to agenda for change, Scottish Ambulance Service staff were employed on a 40-hour week inclusive of meal breaks. Following the introduction of agenda for change, the arrangements were harmonised with the rest of the NHS, resulting in a change to a 37.5-hour working week exclusive of meal breaks.

At the time of implementation, it was not possible to agree a common approach across the UK on how ambulance services should handle the rest break issue. In order to fulfil the desire to continue to provide adequate emergency cover,

the Scottish Ambulance Service management and the trade unions reached an agreement in 2006 to introduce a voluntary arrangement.

The arrangement allows for front-line operational staff who volunteer to make themselves available to work during their unpaid break to be paid an annual allowance of £250. The allowance is paid on the basis that staff will continue to receive a rest break but will be prepared to be flexible about when it is taken and are willing to be disturbed in an emergency. In addition to the £250 annual payment, an activation payment of £5 is paid when a staff member is required to respond to a call during a rest break.

All staff are asked on an annual basis whether they wish to be available during rest breaks. Take-up of the voluntary scheme has remained fairly constant over the past five years at around 20 per cent of eligible staff. It is worth pointing out that the 540 staff who signed up in 2010-11 were disturbed in total 2,150 times during their rest breaks in that year. That is an average of fewer than four times per person over the course of a year.

Notwithstanding the voluntary scheme, the current arrangements can still lead to a situation in which a critically ill person is not attended to by a nearby ambulance crew. That is not an acceptable situation. Not only does it potentially compromise patient safety, but it is not in the interests of ambulance staff either. Staff in those circumstances are abiding by their contract of employment. As they are on a break, the command and control system used to deploy crews does not recognise them as an available resource. However, as a result of where they are when they take their rest break, the staff can subsequently find themselves the subject of public and media anger.

Two recent tragic cases in Tomintoul and Crieff have highlighted the degree of concern that the public and members of this Parliament have about the issue. The Scottish Ambulance Service management and trade unions therefore entered into extensive negotiations in an attempt to resolve the rest break issue in July this year. Negotiations concluded on 12 August, with an offer being put to staff in a ballot. The three trade unions involved recommended acceptance but, in spite of that recommendation, the offer was rejected by all three unions towards the end of September.

In the light of the ballot results, I met the unions on 29 September—last Thursday. I made it clear to the unions that I heard the message of the ballot results and reiterated my strong commitment to working with them in partnership to address concerns and, if at all possible, to find a longer-term solution that staff would feel able to support. Talks between management and trade unions will, therefore, continue.

However, while supporting those continuing talks, I and the Scottish Ambulance Service have a responsibility to ensure that patient safety is protected. In my judgment, simply leaving things as they are while those further talks take place is not consistent with fulfilling that patient safety responsibility. Therefore, I have decided, in agreement with the majority of the unions involved, that the terms of the offer will be implemented for an interim three-month period while talks continue. That interim arrangement will be in place from 6 am on Monday 10 October.

I will lay out the key elements of the interim arrangements, including who will be covered, what category of calls they will apply to and what the compensation for staff will be. I will also explain how the arrangements will be monitored.

It is fundamental that the Scottish Ambulance Service gives an absolute guarantee that rest breaks will be provided for staff. Any member of staff who is disturbed on a rest break will be able to take their rest break later in their shift. Nothing in the new arrangements will be allowed to compromise the health and wellbeing of our hard-working ambulance staff. Staff will be disturbed during a rest break only if it is to respond to a category A call or a major incident; in other words, the arrangements will be invoked only on rare occasions. The arrangements will apply to all accident and emergency operational vehicle crew staff, urgent tier staff, air wing staff and special operations response teams.

In return for requiring staff to be available during rest breaks, the Scottish Ambulance Service will pay an annual fee of £250 to all staff to whom the arrangements apply. Initially that will be paid on a pro rata basis for the next three months. In addition to the £250 annual payment, staff will receive an activation payment of £100 if they are disturbed during a rest break. That is a doubling of the £50 activation payment that was proposed in the offer that was put to staff last month. I stress that the purpose of the activation payment is twofold: it is designed to compensate staff for being disturbed during a rest break and to be a disincentive to the Scottish Ambulance Service to invoke the arrangements. I hope that it will give an assurance that the Ambulance Service will not disturb staff unless it is absolutely essential to do so.

As I have indicated, the arrangements will apply from 6 am on Monday 10 October and will remain in place for an interim three-month period, during which talks with the trade unions will continue.

The interim arrangements will be supported by a standard operating procedure, which will provide detailed guidance on when it is appropriate to interrupt a rest break. It will set out the dispatch protocols for control room staff and it will detail the

monitoring arrangements that will be put in place to ensure that staff are not being inappropriately or unnecessarily disturbed. The monitoring arrangements are particularly important, as they will allow the Scottish Ambulance Service to demonstrate to staff—and demonstrate to me—over the next three months that the arrangements are being used appropriately. They will include the nomination of a union steward in each control room to monitor the application of the rest break policy. A report will be sent from each control room on a weekly basis to the Ambulance Service's executive team, detailing the number of times that rest breaks have been disturbed and the reasons for that. Over the next three months, I will receive that weekly report and will discuss with the Ambulance Service and the unions any issues or concerns that arise from it.

These interim arrangements are in the interests of both patients and the staff who work so hard on our behalf in our ambulance service. However, the Scottish Government is committed to continuing to support the Ambulance Service in finding a longer-term, sustainable solution to the issue. I have, therefore, tasked my officials with working closely with management and unions over the next few months to consider any necessary redesign support to improve operational deployment and to ensure that, at the end of the interim period, we have a permanent solution to put in place.

The steps that I have outlined allow me to be assured and, more important, allow me to reassure the public that patient safety is paramount, that the views of the workforce are respected and that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Ambulance Service will continue to seek a way forward in partnership.

I am happy to answer any questions that members have.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow about 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement and thank her for an advance copy of it. We all agree that there should be no delay in responding to category A 999 calls, just as we all agree that ambulance staff deserve appropriate breaks. I note that negotiations are continuing and I hope that there will ultimately be a satisfactory outcome.

I have three questions for the cabinet secretary. First, can she assure me that the halving of the Scottish Ambulance Service overtime budget will not impact on response times? There are real concerns about that, given that the budget has

been relied on to provide the existing service and we know that the number of calls is growing.

Secondly, the cabinet secretary will recall that, over a year ago, she took a trip to Belfast. It took that trip to expose the problems with the control rooms in the Scottish Ambulance Service. Despite assurances to the Parliament, there appear to have been a further five breakdowns in the control room telephony, leading to a possible fatality due to the delay. Can she give an update—if not today, perhaps in the future—on the arrangements to ensure that the control rooms are working effectively?

Thirdly, members of the public, like me, will perhaps be surprised to learn that the Scottish Ambulance Service is not classed as an emergency service. That might make a difference to how rest breaks are considered. As part of the negotiations, will the cabinet secretary consider making appropriate parts of the Ambulance Service an emergency service?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will deal with the final question first. In my view, the Ambulance Service is an emergency service. I hear the distinction between emergency services and essential services. I do not think that that is borne out in some of the working time directive regulations, for example. If there is anything that we require to do in the negotiations to put that beyond doubt, I will certainly be happy to do it, because in my mind the Ambulance Service is an emergency service. That is how the public see it, it is how we should see it, and it is how the Ambulance Service and its staff should be able to see it. If something needs to be done on that, Jackie Baillie has my assurance that we will seek to do it.

As I started at the end, I will work backwards through the questions. On the telephony arrangements, the Ambulance Service is working closely with BT to seek to address some issues that have been experienced with its telephony systems, and I am kept closely informed of that work. I am sure that Jackie Baillie knows that robust contingency arrangements are in place, as we would expect, but any occasion on which the Ambulance Service's telephony or computer systems do not work as we would intend is a matter of concern and is taken seriously by me and the Ambulance Service.

On the overtime budget, Jackie Baillie is probably referring to my recent answer to a parliamentary question. I think that everybody would agree that overtime budgets should be kept to a minimum. However, response times are paramount, and the Scottish Ambulance Service is monitored closely and publicly in that regard. It is also important that staff feel that they are properly resourced to meet the response time targets that we set. I seem to be on a roll with giving

assurances, but I am happy to assure Jackie Baillie that I will continue to scrutinise, as I always do, the Ambulance Service to ensure that its staff are properly resourced and that it is meeting its obligations to the public, which is what this is all about.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I also welcome the statement and thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of it, although I did get advance sight of the announcement on the BBC website yesterday afternoon.

The subject of the statement is a serious issue that has needed resolution for some time. We have raised it on a number of occasions, including at First Minister's question time on 9 June, when Annabel Goldie raised the matter. There is concern that it has taken time to resolve it. That said, I welcome the interim solution that has been set out today.

The cabinet secretary said that the majority of the unions involved have accepted the interim offer. I understand that the GMB has not done so. Can the cabinet secretary tell us how many workers are not signed up to the interim offer and what impact that will have? What assurances can she give us that at the end of the three-month period there will be a permanent solution, given that there have been two failed attempts to reach a resolution?

Nicola Sturgeon: I acknowledge that Annabel Goldie raised the issue in Parliament. I think that we all wish that the situation had never arisen—it dates back to 2004—and that we had managed to find a solution to it more quickly. The lack of solution has not been for the want of trying; often such things have to be worked through. We have reached a good interim position and I am determined that a longer-term solution should be put in place at the end of the interim arrangements.

Murdo Fraser was right to say that at this stage the GMB has not agreed with us on the way forward—as is its right, which I do not question. Unite and Unison have agreed the way forward. I put on record my thanks to all the unions for the constructive way in which they have conducted themselves.

It is not a question of staff signing up or not signing up to the interim arrangements—they are not voluntary. What we have had in place up to now was a voluntary arrangement, but the interim arrangements over the next three months will apply to all staff in the categories that I set out in my statement.

The Presiding Officer: We move to back-bench questions to the minister. I remind members and the minister that questions and answers

should be brief, so that we get in as many people who want to ask a question as we can.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. No doubt she shares the widespread disbelief at the death of a 33-year-old woman 750m from an ambulance base because the ambulance man who could and should have driven to her rescue refused to do so because he was on a break. A life was at stake.

The Scottish Ambulance Service will now greatly enhance payments to ambulance crews on the very rare occasions on which they are called to provide emergency assistance during rest breaks. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, although rest breaks for crews are important, it is critical that the public know that in an emergency they will be the Ambulance Service's absolute first priority?

Nicola Sturgeon: Kenny Gibson can take from my statement that I agree that patient safety is paramount. However, I repeat what I said: staff on rest breaks are abiding by their contract of employment. It is important to say that. A lot of the commentary that has been directed towards ambulance staff recently has been unfair to staff, who have been abiding by their contract of employment. The problem is with the contract, not with the dedication or commitment of our ambulance staff. I wanted to put that on the record.

The second point that I want to put on record is that it is essential that we give rest breaks to ambulance staff. The health and wellbeing of our staff in any part of the health service and particularly in our emergency ambulance service are critical, not only for the staff but for the public. Members of the public want to be assured that the member of staff who attends to them in an incident not only will attend quickly but will be fit for the job. That is why rest breaks are important. A key part of what I am announcing today is a guarantee of continued rest breaks.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the good statement by the cabinet secretary. The case in Crieff to which she referred involved a constituent of mine and of Gordon Banks.

Will the cabinet secretary provide a guarantee that the standard operating procedure will not in any way involve a return to one-person-manned ambulances as a way of coping with the breaks issue? Will she also look at ensuring that all publicly accessible defibrillators are known to the Ambulance Service, so that if an appropriate event occurs SAS can tell the member of the public who called 999 where the nearest defibrillator is? Such an approach is taken in a number of areas but is not yet taken throughout Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: Richard Simpson's point about defibrillators was well made. Mapping work is being done and it is important that the Ambulance Service knows where publicly accessible defibrillators are. I cannot remember whether Richard Simpson was in the chamber earlier this afternoon when a question on defibrillators was asked—

Dr Simpson: I was.

Nicola Sturgeon: In that case, he will have heard Michael Matheson's answer.

I give Dr Simpson an absolute assurance on the single-manning issue. There will be no return to routine single manning in the Ambulance Service. I am proud that we worked to ensure that single manning was eradicated, and we will not go back on that.

I think that I saw Jackie Baillie look askance when I used the word "routine"—

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary is imagining things.

Nicola Sturgeon: Maybe I did not see her do so. Just in case, I should say that last-minute events will always crop up that will make certain arrangements unavoidable. However, single manning is not acceptable, and we will continue to work with the Scottish Ambulance Service to ensure that it does not happen.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the work that has been carried out by her, the Scottish Ambulance Service and others to deliver a retained ambulance service in Braemar?

Nicola Sturgeon: I know that the member has a great interest in Braemar. All members who represent the north-east of Scotland will be aware of on-going efforts by the Scottish Ambulance Service and the community of Braemar to establish a retained ambulance service, similar to the scheme that is in operation in Shetland.

Last October, I met local MSPs, the Scottish Ambulance Service and community representatives to facilitate discussion of how that could be pursued. Despite the considerable efforts of all involved and the enthusiasm of the community council, attracting the volunteers that are needed to support the scheme has been challenging. However, I have offered to convene a further meeting so that we can maintain momentum. My office is currently in the process of setting that up.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary recognise that ambulance crews in rural areas might deal with a dozen call-outs a week, while those in cities, such as Edinburgh, might deal with 10 call-outs in a shift? What

assurances can she give us, in light of the cuts to the overtime budget, that there are simply enough staff in Edinburgh to do the job?

Nicola Sturgeon: I think that most people would recognise that there is a significant difference between the demands that are placed on our ambulance services in rural areas and those that are placed on the ambulance services in the centre of Edinburgh, Glasgow or any city. In its operational approaches, the Scottish Ambulance Service has a duty to ensure that it takes those differences fully into account. We have just been talking about single manning, which was a particular challenge in rural Scotland, but there are other challenges in urban Scotland. I have already spoken about the overtime issue.

The Scottish Ambulance Service has an absolute responsibility to ensure that the ambulance services are resourced to meet their obligations to the public and their staff in delivering those services to the public, and I have an obligation to ensure that it does so.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I note the cabinet secretary's assurance that the new arrangement will be invoked on rare occasions only. The Scottish Ambulance Service has a duty of care to its staff and adequate resources must be set aside. Therefore, will the cabinet secretary guarantee that she will monitor the allocation of resources to relief crew staffing levels?

I would also like to point out that remote and rural crews face quite different pressures from those faced in urban areas, in terms of the distances that they need to travel. Can the cabinet secretary assure me that the monitoring that she will carry out will capture geographical differences?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, it will capture geographical differences. As I said in my statement, the weekly reports will come from every control room to the Scottish Ambulance Service, and I will see those reports.

On resources, I did not say this in my statement but it is worth pointing out to members that the additional resources that the interim arrangements necessitate will be provided as additional resources by the Government to the Scottish Ambulance Service. That is appropriate.

We will continue to take whatever steps we require to take to ensure that the Scottish Ambulance Service is resourced to do the job that it has to do.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that, in some cases, ambulances have struggled to locate properties, particularly in rural areas. Will the

cabinet secretary provide a bit more detail about how ambulances are matched with call-outs and what steps are being taken to improve that?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am aware of that issue and it was specifically raised with me by the family in Crieff whom I mentioned before.

There have been cases in which ambulances have struggled to locate properties. In light of that, the Scottish Ambulance Service has identified that there is room to improve the resilience of its mapping system. It is currently establishing a service-level agreement with the Improvement Service, which holds an address database made up of 32 individual local authority gazetteers. That will ensure that the service holds the most up-to-date address information possible. In addition to that, it is refreshing guidance to front-line staff, including staff in emergency medical dispatch centres, on the need to ensure that mapping systems are kept up to date at all times, using information from the Ordnance Survey, supplemented with information from less formal systems that can equip the staff with more local knowledge. The issue is very much on the radar screen.

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): Like my colleagues, I warmly welcome the cabinet secretary's efforts to resolve an issue that greatly concerns all members in the chamber. Given that we are moving from a voluntary system to a mandatory system, does the cabinet secretary have figures for the projected costs—based on historical costs—that she can share with members this afternoon? I recognise that, given the complexity, it is very much a demand-led budget, and as such it is difficult to make predictions.

Has comparative work been done on how Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland manage what is not an easy situation?

Nicola Sturgeon: The Welsh model has been held up as a possible solution, but on further examination I am not sure that it has found the magic solution that has evaded us. We will continue to look at that, and I am sure that the Ambulance Service management and the unions will continue to examine the experience in other parts of the country to see whether anything can be learned.

On the costs, I am happy to share details with Parliament in the fullness of time. However, I have announced today an interim arrangement and talks are on-going, so it is probably better to let those proceed and see where they take us without being definitive at this stage about the money that might or might not be available.

The Scottish Government is working with the Ambulance Service. We will fund the interim arrangements and continue to ensure that the

service is appropriately resourced to implement whatever long-term solution emerges from the on-going talks.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Given the cabinet secretary's detailed knowledge of the situation, how hopeful or confident is she that a sustainable solution—that the union membership buys into—will be reached in the next few months?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thought—and still think—that the offer that was put to staff in the summer was fair and reasonable, but I must recognise that significant majorities in all three unions took a different view. It is right that the talks continue, and I do not want to pre-empt them. We must find a solution that puts patient safety at the top of our list of concerns and recognises that the status quo before implementation of the interim arrangements was not in the interests of ambulance staff.

I am confident that with the co-operation of management, the Government and the unions, it is possible—indeed, it is essential—to find a way through the issue.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement, given the death in Tomintoul last year, which shocked the local community. If the number of ambulance service call-outs during rest breaks for the 540 staff who signed up to the voluntary scheme in 2010-11 is similar throughout Scotland, as is likely, is there any reason why the average figure—fewer than four times per individual per year—is likely to be an underestimate?

Nicola Sturgeon: I have asked to see the weekly reports partly to answer such questions. It will be important to see how the arrangements are implemented in practice and what the impact is. I cited the figures for the last year to give some context to the debate, and to add force to my point that I would expect the arrangements to be invoked only on rare occasions.

I repeat what I said earlier: staff are entitled to a rest break, and it is therefore important that the Ambulance Service does not abuse the arrangements or use them unnecessarily or inappropriately. The activation payment is an important part of that. It will not escape the notice of any member in the chamber that if the Ambulance Service has to pay £100 on too many occasions, financial pressures will be placed on it. The payment has deliberately been set at that level to ensure that the arrangements are invoked only on rare occasions.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): As a list MSP for Crieff and a resident of Comrie I am well aware of the very sad case of the Gray family, and I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. In order to ensure operational

efficiency and to maintain public confidence in our ambulance service, will she consider publishing the standard operating procedure that is to be introduced?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am certainly happy to discuss that with the Ambulance Service. I am not sure whether there is any reason why the document could not be published. The document is technical but, unless I am told of a good reason after this session why it cannot be published, I will be more than happy to ask the Ambulance Service to make it available.

Heritage (Digital Technology)

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01023, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the digital future of Scotland's heritage.

15:25

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Scotland's heritage is one of our greatest assets and it attracts many visitors from overseas. Scotland offers not only tremendous natural beauty but an incredibly rich history that can be observed in its iconic structures, such as Edinburgh castle and Maeshowe in Orkney; in its variety of traditionally constructed buildings, which give the country its character; and in the personal histories of its people over generations—their stories, endeavours and achievements, all of which have contributed to the nation in which we live today.

People across the world want to learn more about Scotland—about its history, places, people and culture and about how all that connects to them personally. Our heritage is vital to cultural tourism. Research shows that the historic environment contributes £2.3 billion to the Scottish economy and supports 60,000 jobs. Using the most modern technologies to enhance its presentation will be crucial to sustaining that contribution.

The relentless development of digital technology is fundamentally changing the world in which we live and such technology is becoming an increasingly common element in daily life. It is critical that Scotland not only keeps up with but pushes ahead of the field in that area. In September, Scotland hosted an international conference on digital documentation and visualisation and brought leading experts from all over the world to speak at that. Our world-leading technical expertise, coupled with the extraordinary wealth of our cultural heritage, places us in a stronger position than ever to lead in the digital documentation of heritage.

Scotland is also a world leader in the digitisation of archival records in relation to our people and family history. Digital technology provides tremendous potential not only for increasing access to sites, archives and information but for capturing the imagination and interest of young and old alike and encouraging more visitors to Scotland.

Information is ever more accessible as data becomes available online. Digitising archive collections has been pioneered by several bodies in Scotland, including the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland,

through Scrán and Canmore. By improving the quality of the information that is accessible online, we can encourage more people to benefit from the considerable resources that are available to them.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary appreciate that, in my region of the Highlands and Islands, a great many people cannot access broadband properly? What can be done about that?

Fiona Hyslop: One thing that can be done is to ensure that the United Kingdom Government invests. When I met Jeremy Hunt only a few weeks ago, we discussed the very point of improving broadband access. Scotland has 32 per cent of the UK's landmass, but that is not reflected in our funding from the reduced licence fee—one consequence of that cut is the job losses that the BBC has announced only today.

On our contribution, as Alex Neil has said, the Scottish Government announced as part of the spending review what I think was about £68 million for broadband development. I share Jamie McGrigor's concern, which is an agenda item that the Scottish Government will address. However, the UK Government has its responsibilities, too.

It is clear that digital technology can be applied in many ways. It can be applied to entire buildings, with incredible possibilities. Many of our most treasured heritage sites are vulnerable or difficult to access. For example, the internal spaces at neolithic Skara Brae in Orkney are not accessible to visitors but, thanks to recent digital survey work, we will be able to provide virtual access.

Historic Scotland's ambitious Scottish ten project uses 3D digital scanning. Over five years, it will record Scotland's five United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization world heritage sites alongside five outstanding international heritage sites for future generations. That project is a unique public sector partnership with Glasgow School of Art and is an example of effective collaboration to deliver something that is truly groundbreaking. I can announce that work on scanning the old and new towns of Edinburgh, which will reveal remarkable architecture in a new way, has started.

Our digital heritage work is helping to build international co-operation. By working closely with international partners, we are forging stronger international links for Scotland. We are working in partnership with the United States National Park Service at Mount Rushmore; with the Indian Government to record the remarkable Rani Ki Vav stepwell; and with the People's Republic of China on the eastern Qing tombs. Historic Scotland continues to work in partnership with the CyArk foundation, which was founded by the inventor of the terrestrial laser scanner, Ben Kacyra, and

discussions are under way to develop the next project.

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): The detailed spending plans show that the budget for Historic Scotland, which is doing a lot of the digital work to put archives on the internet, is being cut severely, by 24 per cent. Will that impact on Historic Scotland's work in the area?

Fiona Hyslop: No, it will not. The Labour Party's amendment raises concerns about the spend in the area. I reassure members that Historic Scotland's front-line services will not be impacted. It is driving through efficiencies in the organisation and, more important, it is growing income from other sources. The spending review does not contain information on how Historic Scotland is helping to support its continuing spend by growing its income from other areas.

We have made a commitment to digitally record not only the five international world heritage sites, but all of the 345 properties that are in the care of the Scottish ministers. That answers Ruth Davidson's point. The records can be used for conservation, education and interpretation. Scotland will be the first country in the world to digitally document its national collection of monuments in 3D.

The experience that will be delivered by the National Trust for Scotland and Historic Scotland at Bannockburn in time for the 700th anniversary of the battle in 2014 will push the boundaries of the technology. A digital survey of the battlefield will be combined with 3D motion capture and visualisation to bring the battle and participants to life. The team hopes to virtually investigate elements of the battle, such as what exactly happens when a mounted knight in full battle armour meets a tight schiltrons formation of Scots spearmen. That will certainly give a new insight and will bring alive something that people might have in their imagination.

In addition to our fabulous historic buildings, Scotland has an immense wealth of historic artefacts and archive materials. Our libraries, archives, museums and galleries are fully embracing the new digital age. The National Library of Scotland has already digitised more than 1 million pages, and has an impressive digital gallery of photographs and maps. The National Galleries of Scotland has a rolling programme of creating digital images of the national collection of fine art and publishing its artworks online; it has also developed mobile phone apps. National Museums Scotland has digitised more than 18,000 objects and images and is now delivering online records via its website. Museums Galleries Scotland has a digital advice service for its members, which offers free best practice advice on all aspects of digital activity.

The Labour Party has singled out three organisations by name in its amendment, but I have been able to protect cultural organisations from the worst excesses of the Westminster cuts, which were originally planned by Labour and which have now been implemented by the Conservatives. As RCAHMS is mentioned in the amendment, I assure members that it has no cash cut. The census activity of the National Records of Scotland is clearly not at previous levels, so it has a significant budget reduction. As I said, Historic Scotland is making substantial efficiencies and is growing its income from other sources and so is less reliant on Government, while commitments to grants for regeneration work will continue.

One of the most important uses of the resources is in support of teachers in their education of our children. In 2009, I launched Scotland's history, an online resource that is produced by Learning and Teaching Scotland with support from Historic Scotland and our national collections. Scotland's history, which is now called studying Scotland, charts 5,000 years of life in Scotland, which can be explored through images, text, audio, video, interactive documents and high-quality internet links, bringing history alive in the classroom.

The National Records of Scotland holds historical records that cover 900 years of Scottish history, from the 12th century up to the present. That is a unique resource for the study of family and social history in Scotland. We are exploiting digital technologies to make those records accessible throughout Scotland and the world.

ScotlandsPeople is a world-leading service that is provided by National Records of Scotland and which gives direct, paying access to a wide range of records for more than 80 million Scots. Digital technologies make that information available online at a must-visit centre in Edinburgh and through a growing number of local authorities throughout Scotland. The website currently has almost 1 million subscribers, and it had more than 4 million visits in 2010-11.

National Records of Scotland is working to expand the ScotlandsPeople service through encouraging local authorities to develop more local centres for family history and adding new material to the databases. By combining remote access to national datasets, local archives and the local knowledge of registrars, archivists, librarians and others, those centres can provide a resource to attract our diaspora visitors out of Edinburgh to visit other parts of Scotland.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary recognise the exciting work that the University of Dundee has done on its family history project in its digital archives and the digitisation of the immensely impressive Michael

Peto collection, which will celebrate its 40th anniversary next year?

Fiona Hyslop: I am more than happy to recognise the University of Dundee and, indeed, all the partners. Scotland really is world leading. We think nothing of debating the low-carbon economy, our world-leading legislation relating to that and its economic impact, but the digital work that is taking place in Scotland is also truly world leading.

Later this year, valuation rolls that detail every property in the country from 1855 onwards and contain tens of millions more names will be added to ScotlandsPeople. Members realise that paying rates was never popular, but the records that they have generated give a wealth of fascinating information. The related name index that we have created will allow searches of intercensus years and enhance the information that is already available in census records.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I am afraid that I will need to make progress.

From next year, digital access to 3 million images of the kirk session records will be made more widely available by subscription through ScotlandsPeople. Some kirk session records go back to the reformation, but most of them date from the late 17th century. As well as the sometimes unhealthy concentration on the sexual misdemeanours of parishioners, the session clerks reported on local events—for example, on witches in the Borders and the passing through of the Jacobite army. Those records are a priceless and unique resource for both family and social history.

National Records of Scotland makes available more than 50 million images of records that are held in a wide range of archive collections in its historical search room through the virtual volumes system. Those images act as surrogates for the original documents and allow researchers to view and copy information without retrieving original items. To give members some context, around 66,000 digital images were viewed in the search room in 2008; that number increased to nearly 121,000 in 2010. National Records of Scotland is investigating the wider use of those images.

National Records of Scotland works closely with RCAHMS and the National Library of Scotland on the ScotlandsPlaces website, which brings together data from the three organisations. Maps, plans, photographs of sites and buildings, archaeological reports on historic and prehistoric sites, tax rolls and other related records provide the user with a unique guide to places in Scotland over time.

As we know, digital history provides huge opportunities for education, and National Records of Scotland's education service provides fantastic opportunities for connections. We should be enthused about our digital heritage and its capacity for reaching out, connecting with people, and inspiring and attracting visitors. I completely agree with the sentiment that combining that with a tourism drive is important. Indeed, that will be reflected in the homecoming drive over the next few years, particularly to 2014.

As well as connecting people with past generations and places and linking up diaspora Scots, the digital services provide a real stimulus to ancestral and heritage tourism. That is a valuable and expanding market that attracts visitors who stay longer, return more often, travel more widely to see their ancestors' places, and ultimately spend more in support of our economy.

The digital future of our past is not just about conserving and recording; it is about telling our stories, and understanding more about ourselves and our people. Scotland has one of the most interesting stories in the world to tell, and our digital translation is leading the world. I am sure that colleagues agree that it is right that members should recognise and celebrate it.

I move,

That the Parliament celebrates Scotland's rich and varied heritage and the contribution that it makes to the lives of Scotland's people and to its economy; recognises the growing interest in exploring personal and family histories; welcomes steps to embrace the most modern technologies through initiatives such as the Scottish Ten, a project that uses 3D digital scanning to present and record Scotland's five iconic world heritage sites alongside five outstanding international heritage sites, and applauds the use of those technologies to engage young people, and people around the world, in their cultural heritage.

15:39

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn): From the early years of photography on Calton hill in the 1840s and the establishment of the camera obscura in Edinburgh during the 1850s, we have been fascinated by the way that technology allows us to see and capture the world around us. From those early efforts, we have looked for new and better ways of preserving the images of buildings, people, places and objects for our pleasure and study and to preserve images that might be in danger of being irretrievably lost.

The digitisation of our heritage is an important part of the work of recording and making accessible many aspects of our heritage, so the debate is a useful way of recognising the good work that is being done by many of our heritage and culture agencies.

However, if I may say this gently, the Government motion is a little bit limited and a little bit disappointing in its scope. The motion quite rightly recognises the work that is being done by Historic Scotland and the Glasgow School of Art, which are working together on an extremely interesting and innovative project that will allow them to capture in 3D 10 world heritage sites. The motion also recognises the work of the National Records of Scotland, particularly in making family records more readily available. However, our disappointment stems from the fact that there are so many other examples of groundbreaking, innovative and world-class projects happening here in Scotland, many of which are being undertaken by Government agencies and non-departmental public bodies, which are not recognised in the motion. I am genuinely very pleased that the cabinet secretary addressed more widely the issues raised in our amendment as well as those in her motion.

Fiona Hyslop: As the member will appreciate, given her colleague's remarks about the University of Dundee, had we named every organisation, the motion would perhaps have run to a page and a half. I am glad that she appreciates that such a wide range of organisations is involved. Given recent developments with the international conference, it was appropriate to recognise the start of the scanning of the old and new towns of Edinburgh. I completely agree that a wide range of organisations is involved and I am more than happy to have paid tribute to them all in my speech.

Patricia Ferguson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that explanation. I hope that it means that the Government will be able to support our amendment.

If we really want to celebrate and recognise the value of the digitisation of our heritage, we should celebrate the contribution of all those successful projects and all the agencies in a comprehensive way. As I said, that is what inspired our amendment. I hope that the Government understands that that is what we are trying to do and that it will support us in it.

Digitisation is an important tool and the quality of digitised images is improving all the time, providing access for research and study. It allows access over great distances and ensures that valuable or fragile documents are available to read or to see by anyone with a good broadband connection—my colleague Mark Griffin will say more about that later.

However, access to the original is also important and a digitised version can only—at least with current technology—be a substitute or a surrogate for the real thing. I was allowed access to some of the items in the Murray archive, which was

acquired by the National Library of Scotland. One of the many wonderful exhibits that it contained was a draft of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" by Byron. The document had the poet's handwritten notations and corrections in the margin and to be able to see it at close quarters was a moment that could not be replicated by the best of digital archives. Similarly, I am looking forward to seeing the Scottish ten project come to fruition, but having had the privilege of visiting St Kilda, which was one of the most amazing experiences of my life, I know that the digitised version, even in 3D, will not be able to capture the feeling of utter remoteness and the raw beauty of the island—or the strength of the wind that it experiences even on a beautiful summer's day.

Similarly, many of Scotland's museums and galleries are now digitising their collections, which can be an excellent tool for them and for education and study. However, in 2009-10 Titian's painting *Diana and Actaeon* moved from Edinburgh to Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen. Some 140,000 people took the opportunity to see that work in their own town or city. I am sure that some of those who went along to those exhibitions were already familiar with the painting, perhaps from illustrations in books or from postcards—and yes, perhaps from a digitised version—but at the end of the day 140,000 people took the time to go along to their local gallery to see the real thing. It seems that people prefer, where possible, to see the real thing and will make the effort to do so when they are given the opportunity. While we are on the subject, perhaps the cabinet secretary might like to indicate in closing when next we might see works from our national collections being made available in towns and cities outside Edinburgh.

As we look forward to the reopening of the Scottish national portrait gallery in December, perhaps we might see some of its collection go on tour in the new year, which would allow the celebration of its refurbishment to be shared by many more people. Frankly, I am disappointed that the Titian tour seems to have been a one-off. If we are to capitalise on the interest that was generated by that painting's exhibition around the country, it is important that we continue to provide opportunities for people to see our national collections in their local place.

If used properly, our digitised collections can also be part of our tourism strategy, by showing the best of Scotland in an easily accessible way. However, collaboration between our agencies is important so that, for example, VisitScotland knows what images are available on Scran and Scran knows the type of marketing campaign that VisitScotland has planned. That will enable us to think about how the two can be brought together. In talking of Scran, we should recognise that it is one of the largest online facilities in the UK. It has

some 360,000 digital resources, which support more than 4,000 schools, libraries and colleges, and it makes a significant contribution to the curriculum for excellence.

The contribution that the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland has made to the digitisation of our records is an early example of excellence. For a number of years now, through Canmore and PASTMAP, RCAHMS has led the way internationally in such work. Canmore is a searchable map-based database of buildings and archaeological sites, while PASTMAP is the point of entry for five separate databases that cover the built environment. The resource that they provide is envied by other countries, and the collaboration with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales that has been in place since 2003 is extremely successful.

The motion refers to the work of the National Records of Scotland in making family records more accessible, and there is no doubt in my mind about how valuable a resource it is. Like many others, I have used the records of Scotland to trace my family history. From time to time, it was an extremely frustrating exercise, but it allowed me to contact family members of whom I was not previously aware. It also allowed me to dispel a long-standing family myth about the origins of the man who was thought to be my great-great-grandfather. I say "thought to be" because it transpired that the man in question was not related to me at all. It remains a mystery how that connection was ever made. I am afraid that that is a story for another day, but one that is beyond even our national archives.

In order to do that work, I had to use the English records system, too, and to switch back and forth between the two sets of records. To trace my Irish heritage was even more difficult, as some of the Irish records were lost as a result of the burning of the Irish records office in 1922. However, suffice it to say that the digitised records of the archives that are held across these islands were of tremendous help, and I hope that it might be possible for the National Records of Scotland to follow the example of RCAHMS and to find a way to work with its neighbours to make the process even easier than it is now. It might even get yet another starring role on "Who Do You Think You Are?"—who knows?

I close by offering a word of praise for the many conservators, archaeologists, architects and information technology officers who make the important decisions about how to manage our heritage, what to manage and in what way, because we depend on them to get it right. In times of budget cuts, the work that they do in

backrooms up and down the country must not be overlooked.

I move amendment S4M-01023.1, to leave out from “growing interest” to end and insert:

“work being carried out by Historic Scotland and its partners on the Scottish Ten project to scan digitally and record both Scottish and international heritage sites; acknowledges that encouraging and investing in the digital future of Scotland’s heritage should go hand in hand with encouraging more visitors to internationally renowned heritage sites; recognises that the use of modern technologies should complement and interact with any tourism strategy, including genealogical tourism; applauds the ongoing work of Scran in digitising and increasing access to images and media from museums, galleries and archives, and the work of Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in digitising and increasing access to the built environment such as archaeological, industrial and maritime sites, ancient monuments and a wide range of architecture; understands that Scran works in partnership with over 300 cultural institutions in Scotland and the rest of the UK, and with this example in mind, calls on the Scottish Government to encourage a UK-wide approach to the digitisation of family and birth records, linking the Scottish national records with other UK records to further raise interest in the exploration of personal and family histories, and commends the work of Historic Scotland and the National Records of Scotland, estimated by SPICe to be facing a cut of approximately 30% and 35% respectively in the Spending Review period.”

15:48

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): Scotland’s heritage does not speak just of our past; it speaks of who we are. From crannog to castle to computer, there is much in the cultural, antiquity, visitor and tourism sector that not only advertises Scotland to the world, but brings our ancestry to the fore and speaks to who we are as a nation, the flesh of our flesh and the bone of our bone.

Although I am proud of the physical ancestry of place that we have—the museums, galleries, castles, libraries and collections—particularly in my region of Glasgow, where we see such truly inspiring centres as Kelvingrove, the Burrell collection, Scotland Street school, the new Riverside museum and St Mungo’s, which have fired the imaginations of generations of Scots and visitors alike to see the times before them and the world around them, I think that it is right that we try to widen the appeal of such centres and others to those who perhaps cannot cross a sea, but who can click a mouse.

I am slightly old-fashioned and I love to see the physical depth and texture, and to smell the musty years, of an exhibit, but I recognise that there are many exhibits that neither I nor anyone else will be able to see as they are lost to fragility and decay. In those cases, a digital representation, rather than being a poor proxy is, in fact, the only way to bring an object, manuscript or artefact to a wider audience.

The cabinet secretary and Ms Ferguson have, rightly, said much about the Scottish ten project. It is building a fine body of work and it brings together the best of the world with the finest that Scotland has to offer.

However, I will use my six minutes to focus on a slightly different project. It is certainly lower profile and less flash in terms of spiffy graphics and multimedia presentation, but it is no less important in preserving our heritage. It is the intangible cultural heritage in Scotland site, which is run by a team from Edinburgh Napier University and does not focus on swords and spears, ruined dwellings or burial fragments. Indeed, it does not focus on things at all. As the name suggests, the intangible cultural heritage site looks to the traditions, practices, knowledge and skills that are also an expression of a community’s culture. A Borders common riding is therefore as valued as a fisherman’s folk tale, and a local festival is as relevant as the manner of making an Arbroath smokie.

When we look at the living examples of human creativity that have persisted down the years, it truly is incumbent on us to preserve and promote those echoes of our forefathers for the generations to come. I am delighted to see that UNESCO supports the work that ICH carries out and I very much hope that the resource can gain a wider audience in the future.

Fiona Hyslop: I am equally enthusiastic about the site. Unfortunately, when I have had meetings with the UK Government, the Conservative minister John Penrose has indicated that the UK Government does not want to recognise intangible heritage in the way that other European and international bodies do. Will the member join me in trying to persuade the UK Government that it is a fantastic resource and a very important part of our heritage?

Ruth Davidson: As I have said for several minutes, I think that the site is a fantastic resource. I support ICH’s work and I support any investment and help that can be given to it, whether it comes from Government at UK or Scottish level, from private sources or from supranational bodies such as UNESCO, which already supports the site. I point out the site to the chamber and I hope to see it continue into the future.

ICH is only one of many digital initiatives that we can be proud of. I acknowledge the attention that has been brought to Scran, ScotlandsPlaces and ScotlandsPeople and I praise the work that has been done by the National Library of Scotland and the National Galleries of Scotland to put their collections online.

Much of the main funding for digital initiatives is derived from Historic Scotland. As I said in my

intervention, Historic Scotland is one of the organisations that is hardest hit in the whole culture portfolio, with a real-terms cut of 24 per cent. I acknowledge the cabinet secretary's assurance that that 24 per cent decrease will be met by efficiencies and subsequent further income, but I ask her to monitor the situation in case such offsetting does not occur.

I have a second worry, which is not on the supply side of the equation—we are seeing a huge push to get Scotland's heritage into the digital realm—but on the demand side. Research shows that there are issues regarding the take-up of broadband in Scotland; I have raised that matter in the chamber before. Broadband is important in ensuring the accessibility of the large data packets that are needed to convey properly the details that are needed to appreciate an object.

Following my colleague Jamie McGrigor's intervention, the availability of broadband was discussed but the issue is not just availability, but uptake. Uptake in Scotland trails far behind the rest of the UK at 61 per cent, in comparison with the national rate of 74 per cent. My own area of Glasgow has high levels of broadband availability but very low levels of uptake. That has been raised in the chamber before.

I see much to applaud in the motion, which I will support. However, I remind the cabinet secretary gently that putting digital collections online requires funding and Historic Scotland is a vital provider of such funding. As well as putting more of our heritage online, we ask the Scottish Government to do more to promote broadband uptake, so that more people have access to the good work that is being done.

15:55

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I am delighted to contribute to this debate on the digital future of Scotland's heritage.

From my perspective, as a computer science graduate from the University of Strathclyde—in the 1980s, let us say—I can tell Parliament that the technological advances in hardware and software in the past few decades have been incredible and have brought us to the rich place in which we find ourselves today.

Thirty or so years ago there were no PCs, no laptops, no internet and no mobiles, and few, if any, digitised resources. The microcomputer revolution was just about to start and the capabilities of the early machines were pretty limited.

I recall bringing a microcomputer home from work one day. It took both me and my brother to lift it out of the car into the house. When I plugged

it in, all it could do was run an old word processor, the name of which I have long since forgotten. Graphics? A graphics circuit board was needed for that, and it did not work.

Back then, using that kind of technology to provide resource material for our schools was a challenge for the creative skills of the talented software engineers of the day, and for the teachers, who were all a bit bemused by the microcomputer revolution.

However, as far as I am concerned that was the start of the technology revolution that has delivered so many benefits to us now and has provided such an incredible library of digitised resources.

I visited the Parliament's education centre yesterday and saw the amazing resources there. When I saw the scanner equipment that is used to digitise our heritage sites, I was reminded of its ancient equivalent dating back to the 1970s. Picture a book about Rome, with colour pictures of the ruins showing the Colosseum, the Forum and so on. To see those buildings as they were, we had to flip a laminated page with illustrations of the missing bits of the buildings drawn on it and then superimpose that over the original page to see the buildings in their former glory. That was a popular way of illustrating ancient sites, and I suppose it was the best technology of its day. I still have the book.

I was wondering why the staff from the Scottish ten were showing the cover of Deep Purple's "In Rock" album from 1970, until I realised that, as the minister mentioned, Mount Rushmore had been digitised, too. I am sure that my colleagues will tell us more about the Scottish ten during the debate, and I look forward to that.

One of the other jewels in our digital crown is the advances that have been made in providing access to ScotlandsPeople's records. Anyone who has seen "Who Do You Think You Are?", which was mentioned by Patricia Ferguson, cannot fail to have been impressed by the stories of those who have embarked on a journey to discover their family history and origins. I am no different.

I had the great pleasure of visiting the Burns monument centre in Kilmarnock, which has a fantastic genealogy centre where I was able to track down my own ancestors, with the help of the centre staff and my colleague Councillor Hugh Ross, an acknowledged expert in that field. Even within the current limitations of the service being provided to my local authority at the moment, it was a great joy to discover that my great-great-great-grandfather was one Timothy Coffey, born circa 1815 in County Tipperary in Ireland.

The potential is incredible. The fact that there are so many ScotlandsPeople's records—of births,

baptisms, marriages, wills and testaments, deaths and indeed poor law records—is astonishing. I am told that there are about 80 million records online now. Our new body, the National Records of Scotland, is in the privileged position of being the custodian of the history of our people. Immediately, our past becomes our present and we can, in a real sense, bring our ancestors back with us to discover who they were—and who we are.

It is estimated that between 28 million and 40 million people around the world claim direct Scottish ancestry. In America alone, in the 2000 census almost 5 million people reported having Scottish ancestors. Incredibly, that figure rose to 20 million when people cited partial Scottish descent.

The huge potential of that resource for tourism in Scotland is there for all to see. With careful planning, and by opening up visitor opportunities at our genealogy archives, we can plan to develop a new industry from the culture and heritage that our ancestors have left behind for us.

However, we have to ensure that all our data is available, at an affordable price, to all our genealogy centres. I suggest that the recent proposal by the National Records of Scotland to charge about £1,000 per computer to access our own data is unreasonable. I hope that the minister will review that proposal, given the level of investment already made in places such as Kilmarnock.

We have come a long way from the early days that I described, when I was fortunate enough to be involved in the development of digital technologies and resources. Scotland has a mass of data and knowledge about our country and people, and we must share that resource with the world for everyone's benefit. It may well be a long, long way to Tipperary, but from the genealogy centre in Kilmarnock, it was only a short journey for me—and a few clicks on a PC—to discover my own family's origins.

I commend the Scottish Government's initiatives in this area and all the digital innovations that we are about to see. I am delighted to support the Government's motion.

16:00

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in the debate. My experience is similar to Willie Coffey's, in that I had a 20-year career in the IT industry prior to entering politics in 2003. I confess to being a bit of a geek and, yes, I do dream of electric sheep. I cannot express how excited I am at the prospect of laser technology and computer imaging. When I embarked on my career in computing, my vision

was for technological revolution, animatronics, the realisation of the Star Trek holodeck and a sci-fi vision of a future fuelled by the imagination of HG Wells and Philip K Dick.

I take this opportunity to express my great sadness at the news that Steve Jobs has passed away. He was a true pioneer of the computing age and brought so many innovations under his Apple brand and advanced digital animation through his work with Pixar.

In the 1980s, history and archaeology were for me the very antithesis of what the computing revolution would be about. I therefore find it very exciting that in the early years of our new century our history, archaeology and heritage have become intertwined with our computing innovation and excellence. Heritage sites throughout the world are in constant danger from the effects of the natural environment, from seemingly benign sources such as the sun, wind and rain to dramatic earthquakes and fire—as we saw in Windsor castle a few years ago—and, regrettably, from human aggression. Who can forget the dismay that was felt around the world when the sixth century Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan were destroyed in a matter of weeks by the Taliban?

It was that incident that prompted the developer of the laser technology used in the Scottish ten, Iraqi-born Ben Kacyra, to establish the CyArk not-for-profit, non-commercial project, which is dedicated to the application of new technology in the documentation of archaeological and cultural heritage resources—particularly threatened architecture—throughout the world. CyArk and the centre for digital documentation and visualisation, which was formed in partnership with the Scottish Government, Historic Scotland and Glasgow School of Art, have worked collaboratively with Scottish Heritage's Scottish ten project to contribute to the groundbreaking work that has been carried out in capturing and documenting archaeological and cultural heritage throughout the world.

I am delighted that at the inception of the project in 2009 the decision was taken not just to document Scotland's five UNESCO world heritage sites, but to capture five sites throughout the world. The good will towards, interest in and recognition of Scotland's expertise in this area generated by the Scottish ten project cannot be overestimated. A *New York Times* article in 2009 described the technology not as new or unique but as Scotland's team being on the cultural front line.

When thinking about my speech today, I mused about whether to share, as a Lanarkshire lass, my memories of my experiences of visiting New Lanark. It is the individual interaction and relationship with our heritage that is so vital and

important. As a primary 5 pupil, I was lucky enough to visit New Lanark as part of a project to examine the work of David Dale and Robert Owen. New Lanark was very different in those days: there was no visitor centre, and many of the now occupied mills were derelict. However, I was welcomed, along with my classmates, into the home of an elderly resident who had worked in the mills and had lived in the same house her entire life. That personal interaction had a profound effect on me and brought to life the project that I had been working on. It was a unique experience that was of its time and a snapshot that is now gone but for my memory and that of my classmates.

However, digital heritage is of this time, and the work that is being done will ensure that people of all ages throughout the world can share, enjoy and learn from our heritage in digital media form over and over again.

Yesterday evening, I hosted a drop-in event for the National Records of Scotland, featuring the Scottish ten, the genealogy support website ScotlandsPeople and the geographical website ScotlandsPlaces. It was amazing to see not only the work that has already been undertaken in the Scottish ten project—I was particularly interested in the New Lanark stage of the project, which is most familiar to me—but the technology in action as a digital scan of the room was prepared, which we were able to browse on screen. Seeing ourselves in that format presented challenges for some of us who were scanned.

I said at the start of my speech that I am a creature of science fiction and fascinated by the future. However, last night, I was moved by, and interested in, the ScotlandsPeople website, where I was able to trace through birth certificates my maternal great-grandparents and see the record of their marriage in the parish registers. I was also able to see that three generations of my family lived together at the time of one of the censuses from the 1800s. It quickly became apparent to me why genealogy is such a popular hobby or pursuit. Scotland's economy can certainly benefit from it.

Homecoming Scotland 2009 was one of the largest collaborative tourism initiatives that Scotland has ever staged. The year delivered additional tourist visits from the Scottish diaspora and our indigenous population. It is estimated that £53.7 million of additional tourism revenue was generated for Scotland. As we prepare for a second homecoming in 2014, there is no doubt that Scotland is well placed to meet the expectations of our visitors and to inspire them with its digital heritage.

16:07

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

A cynical observer, reading that we were to discuss the digital future of Scotland's heritage, could easily dismiss our proceedings as dry, irrelevant or out of touch. As people say in the Highlands and Islands with heavy irony, "Aye, they talk about little else in Fochabers."

However, cynics should look at the Scottish ten project, which uses cutting-edge technology to create digital models of Scotland's five UNESCO world heritage sites and five international sites, and think again. They should look at the 3D scan of the Mount Rushmore national memorial, which has been developed into a photorealistic 3D animation for public education and information, and think again. They should also look at the stunning point cloud format of 3D New Lanark, and think again.

Cynics should also look at the breathtaking work that is being carried out on Skara Brae. As members know, it is one of the most impressive prehistoric sites in Europe and has been well preserved for more than 5,000 years. The scanning will allow preservation and conservation. It will also digitally reproduce what the original site once looked like.

I am sure that we all remember the dusty, traditional and—to be frank—boring museums and libraries of our childhood. Things are different now with our state-of-the-art 3D scanning, which can be used in 3D animation and prints. As we have heard, it has a wide range of uses, such as virtual reality interpretations and interactive education.

Ruth Davidson: Does David Stewart acknowledge that some of us like dusty libraries and museums, that using a computer could direct more people to go and see things in the flesh and that both approaches have equal prominence and importance?

David Stewart: I am happy to share memories of dusty museums with the member.

The scanning technology can also be used for mobile applications and remote access to inaccessible sites. Yesterday, at the excellent presentation that Clare Adamson mentioned, I met Ruth Parsons, the chief executive of Historic Scotland. She told me that, in the near future—indeed, probably very soon—it will be possible to use an iPhone app that uses satellite tracking to provide a personalised tour around New Lanark, for example.

I will give another example. I recently visited Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic college in Skye that is part of the new University of the Highlands and Islands, which is in a stunning location. I was shown the well of heritage development, which is

a major collaboration involving UHI, the school of Scottish studies at the University of Edinburgh, the National Trust for Scotland and the BBC. The project committee is chaired by the former Runrig star Donnie Munro.

The project, which was launched on 9 December 2010, has taken a wealth of Gaelic and Scots songs, stories, radio programmes, instrumental music and folklore and delivered it live to people all over the world. The aim of the team running the project is to preserve, digitise and make available online thousands of hours of Gaelic and Scots recordings from the 1930s onwards. The team has done five years of intensive work, and I was told that it has 11,500 hours of material that it wants to catalogue—a great task.

The website is a major resource for musicians, researchers and learners of all levels, and it is enjoyed and commonly used by community groups and individuals. The project includes both Gaelic and Scots languages and contributes to economic development. When I visited it, I was given a small gift—which of course I duly declared, Presiding Officer—that included the songs and stories of the oral tradition of Skye and Lochalsh. One of the recordings was of the famous Sorley MacLean, the internationally renowned Gaelic poet and—interestingly enough—an ex-headteacher of Plockton high school. I certainly recommend it to all members.

Such projects are not just a source of information and a portal for our cultural heritage; they are important for employment all over Scotland, from South Uist and Skye to Edinburgh. It is vital that we retain the skills of the people who work on those great projects and use them for the long term.

It is also important to involve everyone in digital projects in the future. Several members, not least Jamie McGrigor and Ruth Davidson, have mentioned the importance of the roll-out of broadband. The cross-party group on digital participation has also mentioned that issue. I will be positive because I believe that the Highlands and Islands Enterprise pilot, which gained funding from broadband delivery UK, is vital. We still have to get the exact locations, but I understand that around 50 villages and towns across the Highlands and Islands will be part of the pilot.

We have to be flexible because we know that there are huge barriers to broadband. It is often slow and expensive, and sometimes the service is intermittent. We need a flexible approach—we have to look at fibre optic, ADSL, wireless and satellite technologies—but I believe that by using all the different technologies we can have much greater access to broadband across the whole of Scotland, particularly in the Highlands and Islands.

I believe that this has been an important debate on which there is a lot of consensus across the chamber. The models that we have discussed, particularly the Scottish ten, are fantastic models for the future. I am personally excited about some of the developments that are happening, and I warmly support the Labour amendment.

16:12

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Like many others in the chamber, I welcome the debate. There has been a learning curve for a number of members. There has certainly been support for, as well as some focused concern from, different agencies that are charged with maintaining—if that is the right word—or managing our heritage. The debate highlights the asset that Scotland's heritage undoubtedly is, but we must acknowledge the not inconsiderable barriers that will, if they remain unaddressed, restrict the access that the Scottish Government recognises should be comprehensive.

Last week, we debated the introduction of Scottish studies into the curricula of both primary and secondary school education. The programme should and must give all our pupils access to our history, geography and culture. It would be passing strange if the work of Historic Scotland, the national library and museum, the Scottish Council on Archives, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Built Environment Forum Scotland and others was not central to their learning.

When Patricia Ferguson made a plea for every organisation to be acknowledged, I had sympathy for the cabinet secretary because there are so many—each of us could mention many just in our own constituencies. They perhaps do not make the same investment in digital evidence as the example that we saw last night, but they provide the book of first entry, if you like, in recording social history at home.

The place of heritage in education is therefore not questioned, and indeed is not new. All the organisations have declared their commitment to their educational programmes in their manifestos and business plans.

My hope for the Scottish studies programme is that all those organisations and agencies become household names in Scotland and that we do not have to see a list of them because they are—as I think they should be—completely integral to life in this country. No one should be in any doubt about their existence, their purpose or their ambitions.

Patricia Ferguson raised a point that focused on the challenge to the Government. She gave the example of the Titian that was toured around Scotland. As somebody who lives in what is

considered to be remote and rural Scotland, I know that there is nothing better than getting to come to Glasgow and Edinburgh. For a lot of people—schoolchildren and youngsters, among others—it is no longer unrealistic to find time to visit the central belt and Scotland's museums. There is a limit to what can be toured around. Such tours should be part of a programme—outreach work is important—but we should not forget that people want to come to the palaces of art and the museums to see the artefacts, too.

I congratulate Clare Adamson on hosting the event in the Parliament last night at which a number of members were introduced to the wonders of the digital age. Being taken on a digital tour of a royal palace such as Stirling castle and the archipelago of St Kilda, which has been mentioned, and then, at the press of a button, zooming in on Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, was amazing—and that is just the start. The Scottish ten project is one of a number of fantastic projects and, if we do our job properly, no one in Scotland will be unaware of it.

In addition, at the event we had ScotlandsPeople and ScotlandsPlaces making tracing ancestry accessible—and making it look easy, if only at the time. I think that we all found, among others, our great-grandfathers or great-great-grandfathers last night. Genealogy is a fairly recent tourist attraction and it is attracting ever-growing numbers. The tourism industry is always looking for new attractions, and this one is sure to run and run. The Scottish diaspora are still looking homeward, and they seem more determined than ever to search for family roots, which brings them back to find the tenements or crofts of their forefathers and foremothers. In Highland, we opened a multimillion pound archive centre in 2008. It is based in Inverness but has links and outreach to Caithness, Lochaber and Skye—all areas of clearance and depopulation at various times. It is well placed to attract our people back and help them to trace their roots.

So, both education and tourism could benefit enormously from the digital developments in our heritage industries, if I can give them such an unappealing generic title. However, there are barriers, about which concerns have been expressed elsewhere by the agencies. The biggest barrier in remote and rural Scotland is the lack of broadband, which has been mentioned by David Stewart and Jamie McGrigor. That is a potential barrier to a great deal and must be a consideration. I am not an expert on information technology—quite the opposite, in fact—but I know that, increasingly, education, tourism, business development and growth, cultural expansion, innovation and creativity are all moving onwards in digital time.

Jean Urquhart: I am nearly there.

This is where our ambitions for the digital future of Scotland's heritage may take some time to be realised. Although we have made the investment and have received the investment from Westminster, as has been mentioned, the Barnett formula rules seem not to apply on this occasion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I am afraid that you are going to have to finish now, please.

Jean Urquhart: I will finish on an optimistic note. I applaud the work of all the agencies whose work is concerned with our living history. That work is sustaining our natural environment and helping us to understand who we are, where we came from and where we are going.

16:19

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): We have all mentioned various projects in our areas. If the cabinet secretary had to put them all in a motion, she would probably need a digital archive of her own to hold them all.

The preservation of heritage is extremely important. In Paisley, we have the historic "Arbuthnott Missal", which is a Catholic prayer service book that survived the reformation. It is the only one of its kind in existence. Many people have not been able to get access to it or see it because it is so precious and so old, but it is now available online. If the Presiding Officer will indulge me, I will read some information about it.

"The Missal, which is locked in a vault at Paisley Library, has only been seen by a handful of people in the past century because of the damage it could suffer through being handled and being exposed to artificial light. Now everyone can flick through its pages".

However, the next part is a comment on the technology.

"Not quite everyone ... the Missal can only be seen in Internet Explorer using an additional ponderous Microsoft plug-in."

There are clearly some problems with making things available digitally.

I attended last night's event; the Scottish ten project brings many things alive again because it enables us to see history. One of the things I found fascinating is that a teacher can walk his or her class through the construction of Stirling castle, demonstrate how it was built and the materials that were used, then dismantle it again, all using the computer technology. In the long term, it could be a wonderful resource.

Fountain Gardens in Paisley has also been used in the project. It is one of the oldest parts of the town and it is named after a fountain in the

gardens, ironically. It was used as the template to check the equipment. The old statue that has been there for some time was created by John Love, after whom, incidentally, Love Street is named. That is a place close to my heart because I used to go and see St Mirren play there. I do not think that the gentleman would have thought that, for years to come, people would be saying, "I'll not be going to that Love Street in two weeks' time, after that." However, the friends of Fountain Gardens are looking at investment to improve the statue in the gardens.

For too long, our greatest landmarks have been left in disrepair. Another perfect example—I make no apologies for being parochial—is that we used to have a jail in the county buildings in Paisley, where there is now a 1960s and 1970s modernistic shopping centre. We are the only people with a river running through our town who actually built over it. That was the vision in the past. Alexander Stoddart, the great Paisley sculptor, told me that if we had the vision and the money he could take down that modernist piece of nonsense and rebuild the jail brick by brick. People always talk about these old buildings and the heritage of which they are an important part. With the right technology, we can go into Paisley schools and show pupils what was there in the past. The project is a wonderful step forward.

The ScotlandsPeople family history thing is quite good. I remember when Councillor Jim Mitchell way back in the 1990s decided that Elvis's family had come from Paisley, and he and I had to go all the way to Edinburgh to research the project. I will not tell members what happened. It was quite a tenuous link. I do not think that he did come from Paisley, but Jim managed to bring the council meeting to a standstill as he serenaded the provost with some Elvis numbers in the five or 10 minutes he was given to speak for.

Willie Coffey is right. So many people are interested in shows such as "Who Do You Think You Are?" It is about tourism and bringing people into industrial towns, or post-industrial towns such as Paisley. Although those towns are not top of the list for people to visit, people want to see the mill that their great-great-granny worked in and hear about the mill lassies and their heritage. These things are important.

Paisley recently had the dubious honour of featuring in "Who Do You Think You Are?" because the Bee Gees come from the town. I apologise for that. It cannot all be good. We have Paolo Nutini and Gerry Rafferty to balance that. I also remember an episode with David Tennant. Like Clare Adamson, I am a bit of a sci-fi geek. I always found it strange that Doctor Who needed to use a TV show to investigate his past when he has a time machine, but nevertheless it was an

interesting show. People want to go and see things from their past.

It is interesting that we can show people all over the world Paisley abbey and Paisley's history. We can sell the town to people who are abroad, to encourage them to come back and see what is available. That goes for other places in Scotland, too; everyone can do it.

As with any nation, if we are to move forward it is important to understand who we are and where we came from—the good and the bad. It is our duty to ensure that we record everything that I talked about for future generations and encourage the hundreds of thousands of Scots who are scattered across the globe to investigate their heritage and come back to Scotland.

16:25

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): It is good to have the opportunity to speak in the debate and to acknowledge the work that Historic Scotland is doing in partnership with others through the Scottish ten project to digitally record important heritage sites and open up access. The work will assist in the preservation of our important cultural heritage, because changes to sites over the years will be tracked in detail and it will be possible to take appropriate measures to prevent lasting damage or loss.

Education plays an important role in getting children interested in our heritage. By using the digital resources on websites such as Scran and PASTMAP to illustrate the past, we can get children excited about the history of Scotland. We have an opportunity to get schoolkids interested in their heritage by using technology in the classroom, rather than showing them pictures and text from dusty textbooks. Pupils should be able to explore important heritage sites interactively and learn in ways that excite and challenge them.

However, the use of digital material in schools should be not the end of the educational experience but the first phase of learning. The obvious follow-up to exploring a site electronically is a class visit to the site.

In central Scotland, the Antonine wall runs for 60km from Old Kilpatrick on the north bank of the Clyde to Bo'ness on the Firth of Forth. It was designated a UNESCO world heritage site in 2008. The wall cuts across the council ward that I represent, and I grew up in the shadow of Bar hill, where the remains of a Roman fort and bathhouse can easily be found. When I was at school, there was a strong focus on our cultural heritage, and the wall and the Romans often came up in projects, but it was only when we visited the sites that real interest was generated in the history and heritage behind the projects.

With that in mind, the Government should put in place a programme that runs alongside the storing of images, to ensure that the digital students become real-time students who appreciate the range of heritage and culture that Scotland has to offer.

The same can be said for digital tourists. Although it is important to acknowledge the work that Historic Scotland and National Records of Scotland do to digitise collections for future generations, thereby opening up access to their collections for a much wider audience, we must do more to encourage people to visit sites in person. In a recent briefing, the British Hospitality Association said that more than 23,000 people are directly employed in the hospitality sector in central Scotland, which contributes massively to the regional economy. Those employees depend on visitors to the region. More must be done to raise the profile of our world heritage sites through the digital archives.

Third sector organisations are involved. The Croy Historical Society has researched and collated material that relates to the Romans and the Antonine wall and regularly hosts exhibitions to do with local history and heritage. Such voluntary organisations should be applauded for, and supported in, their work to preserve and promote local history. If they could be linked into the project to digitise heritage sites, they might be able to expand and enhance the online experience and perhaps provide a local point of contact for people who want to visit the sites and explore them in more detail.

Fiona Hyslop: Mark Griffin might be aware that there was a conference recently on the frontiers of the Roman empire, which was attended by visitors from Germany and elsewhere in Europe. I had the pleasure of meeting a number of people, who must be the member's constituents, who talked about the wonderful collections. The member is right; there is an international dimension to the issue, but there can also be a very local dimension. It was a privilege to host a conference at which international visitors could discuss and visit the Antonine wall.

Mark Griffin: I am sure that those people will have been members of the Croy Historical Society. They display massive passion for their local history and heritage and for the Antonine wall, with its links to the rest of Europe. That is exactly the range of local knowledge that we could feed into the national project.

Although I entirely agree that we should be storing the records of such sites digitally and promoting online access to archives of Scotland's heritage, we have to take on board the fact that not everyone has access to reliable broadband

services, as a number of speakers have mentioned.

Bill Walker (Dunfermline) (SNP): Does Mark Griffin agree that the problems with broadband exist not only in the Highlands and that there are broadband problems in the central belt, due to the distance along the copper wires to the exchange? Does he agree that everyone in this chamber should back the Scottish Government in pressuring the UK Government to roll out broadband?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): You are in your last few seconds, Mr Griffin.

Mark Griffin: I promise that I did not speak to Bill Walker before, but he has led me on nicely to exactly what I wanted to say. In Cumbernauld, which is an urban area, we have massive problems with access to broadband. It is slow and unreliable and, at peak times, it is non-existent. In a recent written answer, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment assured me that the funding that had been awarded to the Scottish Government by Westminster for broadband would be invested to provide next-generation broadband in areas that had not been provided for by the market. Given the market failure to deliver reliable broadband services in Cumbernauld, I look forward to the Government investment that will allow my constituents to access the online digital heritage that we have spoken about today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must come to a conclusion.

Mark Griffin: As I said earlier, it is important that we recognise the work that is being done. However, it is of equal importance that we encourage people to visit sites in person. I therefore support the amendment in the name of Patricia Ferguson.

16:32

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): While researching this topic on the National Library of Scotland's website, I came across a piece of work by William Topaz McGonagall of Dundee, who is unkindly remembered as the worst poet in the English language. It was entitled, "The Burial of Mr Gladstone, the Great Political Hero". It was 1898, and Liberals were quite popular in Scotland in those days—I can say that because none of them is here. The poem begins:

"Alas! the people now do sigh and moan
For the loss of Wm Ewart Gladstone,
Who was a very great politician and a moral man,
And to gainsay it there's few people can."

I am sure that—political affiliations aside—any of us would be proud to have that verse as an epitaph.

The poem was published as a broadside; broadsides were simple, cheap sheets of paper that were sold on the street for a penny or less by pedlars and chapmen. They were enormously popular in Scotland because of the high rates of literacy here, and they give us a valuable insight into the lives of plain folk. The National Library of Scotland holds a quarter of a million broadsides, and some of them can be read in its digital archive, in a section called, “The Word on the Street”. The collection can be browsed by subject, and it quickly becomes apparent that what sold papers 200 years ago is not all that different from what sells papers today—indeed, the term “gutter press” has its origins in this street literature. Broadsides predated newspapers, which were taxed by the Government and were, therefore, out of the reach of ordinary people.

Media studies is often maligned, which I believe is wrong, because it records and interprets our society. The ability to read broadsides online is a wonderful addition to media education and social history. For example, a modern student looking at those broadsides would realise that taste—especially bad taste—stays fairly constant over the centuries. The National Library’s collection reveals an obsession with ghoulish subjects, such as body snatching, and a morbid market for the last words of condemned men and women as they stepped up to the gallows, as well as an obsession with sex and sentimentality. A real obsession with the sex life of Robert Burns comes through in the collection.

As well as feeding salacious appetites, the broadsides served a serious purpose. They were the principal means of exchanging ideas and, in many ways, they were the internet of the day. They featured a wide-ranging mix of the academic and the scandalous. There was titillation, but they were also an agent for social change and gave the mass of the population a way to challenge the powerful elite. The National Library has digitised 135 political broadsides through its learning zone, which will be really useful in the classroom. One broadside called “Caledonia’s Determination”, from an anonymous radical poet, quite tickled me. It comes from the 1830s, around the time of the Chartist movement, and it reads:

“Caledonia no more shall by Tories be school’d,
Too long by the knaves she’s already been ruin’d:
And the Whig’s but a Tory in sheep-skin disguise,
On the loaves and the fishes each fixes his eyes”.

The library notes that the broadside may well

“strike a chord with modern-day readers.”

There is much more similar material in public and private collections around Scotland, and it is essential that Scotland has a national strategy for digitising it and linking up cultures throughout the country. The National Library plays a leading role in promoting that, but many other projects have been mentioned today. It is important in putting content online that users can share and use it on sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Flickr and Twitter without—as George Adam said—needing a complicated Microsoft plug-in to access it.

In that spirit, I highlight David Stewart’s praise for Tobar an Dualchais—or Kist o Riches in Scots—which is a digitised archive of thousands of hours of ordinary people singing and telling stories about their working and family lives. It is based on many of the recordings that Hamish Henderson collected for the school of Scottish studies, which were originally recorded on reel-to-reel tape recorders and wax cylinders. Donnie Munro is the chairman of the project, as David Stewart mentioned, and I spoke to him about the project just before it was launched. He mentioned that when he wanted to access an old song or check some facts during his days in Runrig, he would have to go from wherever he was—Skye, or Lochaber—to the school of Scottish studies. Once there, he would go into the archive, make notes and take them away.

The Tobar an Dualchais website allows young musicians to download thousands of hours of really rare work on their iPods; it is a real inspiration. They can cross-reference different subjects throughout Scotland and click on a map of Scotland’s regions to pull out stories of people’s working lives.

Last week, as Jean Urquhart said, we debated Scottish studies in schools. I think that today’s debate is an extension of that, but it is important for us to remember that heritage is not just about homework. We need a sense of ownership of our culture as a living thing. We have made a lot of progress in getting stuff online, but it is not enough just to create a digital museum.

One big phenomenon on the internet is the mash-up, in which people take pieces of film and music and change them. Millions of teenagers have created their own mash-up versions of scenes from the Harry Potter films and “Star Wars”, for example—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms McAlpine, I would be grateful if you could come to a conclusion.

Joan McAlpine: Okay. One of the most-viewed pieces of Scots language on YouTube is a film of the actor Dustin Hoffman looking out over the Manhattan skyline as he praises the culinary delights of stovies in a strong Aberdeenshire

Doric. It is comedy, of course, but if our culture and language are to remain vibrant and engaging, we must allow people the freedom to mess around and have fun with them, even if it offends professional sensibilities.

We must remember that the popular culture of the past could be crass and earthy, too. If our digital heritage is to be preserved, it must not be precious. It should be easy and enjoyable to share it and change it—just as easy as it was to buy a broadside from a pedlar in the streets of Edinburgh, Haddington or Dumfries 200 years ago.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to closing speeches. I am afraid that I have no extra time to give for interventions.

16:39

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The debate has been good, and I have enjoyed it. There have been some good contributions, including that from my colleague Ruth Davidson. She rightly extolled the virtues of the Arbroath smokie—a true triumph of taste—and Joan McAlpine rightly mentioned stovies, which are another Scottish icon.

I associate myself with the very positive comments about the Scottish ten, and I am delighted that two of the three Scottish UNESCO world heritage sites—neolithic Orkney and St Kilda—are in my region. I expect that, like Patricia Ferguson, I am one of the few MSPs to have set foot on St Kilda. I will never forget that when I arrived at the islands on a June morning, the sky went black with the many thousands of seabirds that rose to greet us. That was a breathtaking sight. I climbed to the top of Hirta—the edge of the world. At the top of the 1,300ft cliffs, I peered over and marvelled at how the St Kilda people had surefootedly hopped from one crag to another and had risked life and limb to eke a living from the flesh, oil and feathers of the seabirds that surrounded them. St Kilda had its own biodiversity then—it also had its own Parliament and mail service. Those are the great stories of our heritage.

Anyone who has—like me—been to the Neolithic village of Skara Brae, which the cabinet secretary mentioned, and to the immense stone circle of Brodgar, which are both in Orkney, will know that we in Scotland have one of the most interesting historical and archaeological heritages of anywhere in the world. The images that are available on the Scottish ten website are indeed stunning.

Members have emphasised the importance of Scotland's heritage to culture and the economy. Genealogical tourism is economically important

and has huge potential for growth, given the Scottish diaspora's size and the ever-growing interest in family history. Today, I had a meeting with the convener of the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs, who told me what clan societies are doing to encourage tourism and said that they would like to do more. He made the point that Jean Urquhart raised about the importance of Scottish history and said that many people who live abroad seem to know more about it than we do.

When people come to Scotland, they like to find their ancestors. People like to find their roots—especially their roots in Scotland. People come to Scotland to find those roots and most of them return. They also pass on the message, which is wonderful.

I came across a website called findagraveinScotland.com. That is nothing to do with "Taggart" or Inspector Rebus; it is run by an organisation that aims to create one central online facility for all Scotland's burial and cremation records, which must be a good thing.

Like others, I commend the work of the team at the National Records of Scotland—under the outstanding leadership of my friend George MacKenzie—on the ScotlandsPeople website, which is a world-class resource. I also thank him and his colleagues for their excellent work in setting up the "Scottish Register of Tartans" database—a digital masterpiece that was established as a result of my member's bill in the previous parliamentary session. Members might be pleased to learn that, since the tartan register came into existence in February 2009, 480 new tartans have been added to it, which is more than double the expected 100 per year. The register is, of course, a permanent, accessible and sustainable record of all our existing historic tartans, in addition to the new tartans. That is another example of a first-class digital heritage resource of which we can be proud. I am proud to have introduced the bill for that.

The National Library of Scotland holds many documents that are fundamental to our heritage. The NLS has a very good digital gallery with a vast array of material that covers subjects as diverse as Churchill's career as a Dundee MP, the medical history of British India and golf in Scotland from 1457 to 1744. Many of the NLS's sources can be used by schools.

That takes one back to that glorious moment in Scotland's history that followed the act of union—Scotland's great enlightenment and our influence in creating the western society in which we now live. In that respect, we stand on the shoulders of giants. We must strive to maintain the legacy and to improve on it. The importance of libraries and

museums to education and improvement is enormous.

On a negative note, I mention again that, although broadband take-up across the UK has increased to 74 per cent, Scotland has the lowest take-up, at only 61 per cent. Others have mentioned that.

The Scottish Conservatives stand ready to support the good and incredibly important work that is being done to digitise our heritage. We will be positive about further initiatives—especially those that are geared to exploiting the economic opportunities that arise from our heritage. At the same time, we recognise the budgetary pressure that public sector organisations face. Historic Scotland's budget will be cut by 24 per cent in real terms—from £47 million this year to £33 million in 2014-15. The challenge will therefore be to protect key projects that are of the highest quality.

16:45

Patricia Ferguson: The debate has been thoughtful and we have heard from members about their enthusiasm for Scotland's heritage, digitised or otherwise.

Mark Griffin, Jamie McGrigor and others made an important point about the availability of broadband. We tend to take it for granted that everyone has a computer with broadband access and knows how to use it. However, as we have heard, that is not always the case. To echo Bill Walker's point, I live in Glasgow and have working farms on my doorstep but, although it is not a particularly remote or even rural area, the broadband service to my and my neighbours' homes is at best intermittent.

Jamie McGrigor: I came across one lady who was a farmer and who was using her Avanti dish to feed her chickens.

Patricia Ferguson: I am not sure whether Mr McGrigor is recommending that as a way of getting a better connection but, personally, I do not think that I will try it.

I was taken with the cabinet secretary's enthusiasm for the work at Bannockburn. I, too, look forward to seeing the new centre, as I think that it will be absolutely tremendous. A number of years ago I was in a situation similar to hers and I remember waxing equally lyrical about the tremendous work that was being done at Culloden to make the facilities there much more interactive and interpretive. It occurred to me that, by the time that the new Bannockburn centre opens, the Culloden facilities will be almost 10 years old. I wonder how we ensure that the technology keeps up to date and is constantly refreshed, so that

Culloden does not somehow become second fiddle to Bannockburn.

Willie Coffey talked about the number of people of Scots descent who live in America. I was once there in an official capacity and did a morning radio interview, during which I was told confidently by the interviewer that 5 million people in America could trace direct ancestry to Scotland. I then had another interview at 5pm that evening and was told equally confidently by another interviewer that there were 15 million such people—I did not like to claim credit for the increase on the basis of my broadcast. However, it is always worth making that point. I agree with Willie Coffey that the Robert Burns monument in Kilmarnock is a fitting location for the genealogy and other records of the town of Kilmarnock. It is a beautiful and fitting place for that.

Clare Adamson rightly mentioned the unfortunate passing of Steve Jobs. We should pause to think about the opportunities that he made available to so many people and we should be encouraged by the fact that he was someone who broke rules and boundaries and who, frankly, did not take no for an answer.

Like Ruth Davidson, I was intrigued by David Stewart's comments about dusty libraries and museums, because I quite like dusty libraries and museums, too. Then I realised that, as I am sure Ruth Davidson will agree, perhaps the issue is just that we had the benefit of Kelvingrove and Mr Stewart did not.

I take issue with Jean Urquhart, but only slightly. It was not my intention that every organisation that is involved in the digitisation of our heritage should somehow be listed and recorded. I just felt that the Government motion singled out a couple of organisations but that many more needed to be mentioned and recognised. The debate has borne out that point.

With regard to Jean Urquhart's point about the Titian, I agree that many people want to visit the national galleries in Edinburgh, or the Kelvingrove museum or the Burrell collection in Glasgow, but the fact remains that 140,000 people turned out to see that one painting. That tells us something about the iconic status of some works of art and items in our national collections and we should not underestimate that. We should recognise that there are a variety of approaches.

Jean Urquhart: Will the member take an intervention?

Patricia Ferguson: I am sorry, but I am quite pushed for time.

I always forgive George Adam for being parochial. That is always very interesting, and I am partial to that kind of attitude. I am genuinely sorry

that Paisley has lost its historic court and prison, but if George Adam wants to wait a month or two, he would be welcome to visit Maryhill burgh halls with me when they reopen. Maryhill was originally a police burgh. We never had a court, but we still have our cells.

Like Mark Griffin, I live quite close to the Antonine wall. The area that I live in has less obvious remnants of the wall, but we must remember that it is incredibly important to the people who live around it. I am delighted that the Antonine wall has been recognised as part of a world heritage site with all the other walls of the Roman empire around Europe. That is a wonderful example of work across countries that can be done and is done to make something significant and worth while.

I got a bit worried again by Jamie McGrigor's speech. He talked about Arbroath smokies and stovies. I had visions of us having to try to work up a sniff-and-taste digitised facility to get things right, but I am sure that he did not mean that.

Today, I hosted a visit to the Parliament by pupils of Balornock primary school and their visitors from Greece, Spain and Portugal. They asked me questions about my work and what it is like to speak in the chamber. I explained to them that I would be speaking this afternoon, and they naturally wanted to know what I would be speaking about. That made me pause because what we are discussing is not the easiest concept to explain to a bunch of 10-year-olds. I admit that they got the digitisation bit no problem, but I think that they struggled a little bit with the idea of heritage to begin with. Those young people came to the Parliament to experience the atmosphere and scale of the building and, when they go back to their school, they will look up online some of the things that we have discussed. Their generation moves freely between one medium and another, and I hope that they do not think that our deliberations were dry or dusty; I hope that they think that they are relevant.

Today is national poetry day. In closing, I want to praise the Government. I do not do that very often, but I genuinely want to do it today. The fact that the Government now has a Robert Burns app online shows that technology and art working together can really make a difference.

16:52

Fiona Hyslop: The debate has been very good and extremely interesting. It is right and proper that we have had the opportunity to recognise the work of all the organisations—there are many of them—that are involved in digital heritage in Scotland.

George Adam never fails to get Love Street into debates. A neat connection was made between John Love, the Fountain Gardens and the Scottish ten.

I was particularly intrigued by Jamie McGrigor talking about findagraveinScotland.com. I understand that we were sent an e-mail that said that it had gone live.

I was fascinated by Ruth Davidson's subtle reference to her love of dusty museums. I thought that that was a reference to what the Conservative Party headquarters might be under Murdo Fraser.

I want to address some of the issues that have been raised. Our motion does not refer to any organisation. We could not reasonably do that, as many members have said. Therefore, we will not support the amendment in Patricia Ferguson's name. However, I commend all the contributions that have been made around the chamber. We have had an opportunity to air and celebrate much of our culture.

For those who are not familiar with the Tobar an Dualchais or Kist o Riches project, which David Stewart and Joan McAlpine mentioned, I had the pleasure of officially launching it. To click on a map and hear not just the songs, but the voices and accents of people from different parts of the country was fascinating.

Patricia Ferguson: I am genuinely disappointed that the cabinet secretary said that the Government party will not support our very reasonable amendment, not least because if we had stuck to speaking to the Government's motion, we would, in strict terms, have spoken about only the Scottish ten and family records. Our amendment has given members the opportunity to range much further and wider across Scotland's heritage. That is a good thing, and I thought that the Government would have applauded that.

Fiona Hyslop: I was going to address some of the points that Patricia Ferguson made. I genuinely think that the debate covered all the areas. In recognising that the use of technology in relation to the Scottish ten is only one example of many, we can celebrate the National Library of Scotland, the National Records of Scotland, RCAHMS and a number of other organisations.

Patricia Ferguson asked about collections. She will be familiar with the artist rooms project that works with the Anthony d'Offay collection to make sure that there are exhibitions across Scotland. I am delighted that Linlithgow Burgh Halls will be hosting artist rooms shortly.

Ruth Davidson asked about monitoring Historic Scotland's budget, which I am more than happy to do. That is why I tried to give some reassurance that although the figures look quite severe, there

are mitigations, particularly for the census work of the National Records of Scotland and for Historic Scotland.

Willie Coffey mentioned Kilmarnock. The family history element at the Burns Monument Centre is an example of what can be done, from which other people can learn.

An interesting point in the debate was about the pace of change of the digital agenda. Who knows where we might be in a few years' time? Indeed, at the conference that I mentioned reference was made to the fact that in only a few years' time, we could have contact lenses that could provide digitally scanned images to take people through Stirling castle or wherever else.

Clare Adamson was absolutely right to refer to the passing of Steve Jobs, because his vision and his drive to develop the digital agenda have made a major contribution to the world. That must be recognised and it was right that we had an opportunity to do so in the debate.

I reassure Jean Urquhart that Historic Scotland is already involved in the Scottish studies qualification.

A number of people made important points about broadband. Yes, it is about infrastructure—I referred to Alex Neil's forthcoming announcement—but it is also about participation, because, as Ruth Davidson said, places such as Glasgow do have broadband. Surely all the wonderful examples, whether song, writing, pictures or culture, would help create demand, particularly from older members of society and those—perhaps in Glasgow—who are not accessing such things now. Family history is fascinating, particularly at certain points in people's lives.

The celebration of what we have has been fantastic. I thank those who have praised the Scottish ten, which is making international as well as local links.

Jamie McGrigor and Patricia Ferguson are among the few people in this chamber who have visited St Kilda. Alasdair Allan might have visited it—he is telling me that he represents it. It is a dual UNESCO world heritage site, which is managed by the National Trust for Scotland and is home to the wonderful seabird colony to which Jamie McGrigor referred, but very few people will ever have the opportunity to visit it. Is it not fantastic that the Historic Scotland Scottish ten project has digitally recorded it? The National Records of Scotland has managed to work with Hebridean Archives to conserve and digitise the last school log book for St Kilda, which provides a schoolteacher's account of life on the island from 1901 to its evacuation and therefore documents a wonderful legacy.

We have an opportunity to celebrate technology and we have great opportunities to take it forward. This is not just about culture, the economy and tourism; it is about shaping and using a technology that will offer boundless opportunities as we go forward.

I thank everybody for their contributions to the debate. The passion, energy and enthusiasm that members have shown will stand Scotland in very good stead as we develop a digital future for Scotland's heritage.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-01022.3, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01022, in the name of Keith Brown, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 43, Against 75, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01022.2, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01022, in the name of Keith Brown, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 106, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01022, in the name of Keith Brown, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 96, Against 22, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the difficulties that the current economic climate presents for those in need of affordable housing; believes, in light of the severe constraints on public expenditure, that this challenge can

be addressed only through the development of innovative and creative measures to provide a range of high-quality sustainable homes that people can afford and that meet their needs; notes with approval initiatives such as the National Housing Trust and the Investment and Innovation Fund; welcomes the willingness of local authorities, registered social landlords and developers to participate in these initiatives, and congratulates them on working together innovatively to deliver the maximum number of affordable homes in these testing circumstances.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01023.1, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01023, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the digital future of Scotland's heritage, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 53, Against 64, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01023, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the digital future of Scotland's heritage, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament celebrates Scotland's rich and varied heritage and the contribution that it makes to the lives of Scotland's people and to its economy; recognises the growing interest in exploring personal and family histories; welcomes steps to embrace the most modern technologies through initiatives such as the Scottish Ten, a project that uses 3D digital scanning to present and record Scotland's five iconic world heritage sites alongside five outstanding international heritage sites, and applauds the use of those technologies to engage young people, and people around the world, in their cultural heritage.

Broadcasting (Scottish Borders)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-00630, in the name of Christine Grahame, on Jeremy Hunt doesn't get the picture, so neither does the Borders. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses its disappointment that the Scottish Borders has been omitted from a list of locations eligible to bid for a local broadcasting licence; notes that Jeremy Hunt, the UK minister responsible for broadcasting has stated "I want people to be able to watch television that's truly relevant to them, about what's happening where they live and featuring people they know"; therefore is astonished that he seems to have failed to consider the Scottish Borders and towns such as Galashiels as a location in spite of the fact that the Scottish Borders is served not by STV but by Border TV, broadcasting from Gateshead and covering also the north of England and the Isle of Man, thus depriving Borderers of both national and local coverage; considers that this is further evidence supporting devolution of broadcasting, and, in the meantime and until such time as Scotland establishes its own digital network, would welcome the Scottish Borders being included on the list of possible sites.

17:06

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I apologise for the long title. I thank all the members who have stayed behind, whether or not they take part.

In representing Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale, and in my previous capacity as a South of Scotland member, I am acutely aware of the deficit in national and local commercial television coverage, as a substantial area of my constituency and beyond is unable to receive STV—although when I went recently to a presentation by Jeremy Hunt and the Office of Communications about local TV, the Ofcom mannie actually debated with me that Selkirk received STV. That is news to me and to Selkirk.

Worthy though ITV Borders is, as it broadcasts from Gateshead and covers the north of England and the south of Scotland, it cannot provide a satisfactory service to my constituents, who regularly complain that they are left out.

The deficit exists not only in relation to local and national news and sport but to coverage of Scottish elections. For example, the leaders debates earlier this year were broadcast at or around midnight. Someone would have to be a political devotee, an insomniac or, indeed, both to stay awake for that. Some would say that it was a good time to put it on.

Therefore, I was more than disappointed when I examined Jeremy Hunt's list of potential sites for

local TV delivered via digital terrestrial television, otherwise known as Freeview, to find that the south of Scotland—I exclude Ayr—did not appear.

In Jeremy Hunt's own words:

"These new local services will be a fundamental change in how people get information about their own communities and how they hold their representatives to account".

As far as my constituents are concerned, and as I explained above, they meet that test better than any other area in the United Kingdom.

In correspondence with Jeremy Hunt—the responses have been, how shall I put it, perfunctory—the apparent problem is the technical capabilities across the region.

I am certainly no techie buff but others are and I have sought expert opinion, which challenges the UK minister's assertion. Indeed, in exchanges with Ofcom that I have seen, it states:

"Our assessment was carried out on a subset of the UK's transmitters and given limited time and resources we prioritised those that might serve the largest number of people."

Without getting too deep into the techie stuff, I understand that the transmitter at Selkirk has the capability to provide local TV but is not on the eligibility list. The Ofcom test of technical capabilities therefore does not stand up.

Are we then left with population? If we add together the population of Dumfries and Galloway and of the Borders, according to the most recent figures that amounts to 260,000. Even if a critical viewing mass is not met, surely that is counterbalanced by the democratic deficit argument. I have put all these points to Jeremy Hunt and, frankly, I have been stonewalled.

I compliment the South of Scotland Alliance, which I know is pursuing the case vigorously. I continue to campaign—I hope, with other members—to at least give the south of Scotland an opportunity to bid for funding.

In the meantime, in parallel, I have been impressed by the operation of URTV in Helensburgh. People can watch it online, which would be a foot in the local TV door.

Let me explain, with an example of an online TV service that might cover the south of Scotland. I have chosen the regional name "Southern Television".

If we go online to that site, we get a whole host of content. Let us say that I live in Peebles. I click on the Peebles image on the left-hand side of the screen and I get Peebles news, sport and information. I live in Gala, so I click on the Gala image, and so on.

All that is provided on one site that gives regional and local information in one place.

Televisions are already on sale, for example in Tesco, that allow us to call up online services on our TV screen in the living room. That is what is called convergence—see, I have been doing my homework. The term has been used many times before but now it is taking useful shape.

Therefore, I could call up Southern Television on my laptop, personal computer or smart phone. I could call it up on my television at home, while I sit on the sofa. That example of local television could become a key player in the sector.

How does that get funded? Perhaps as a pilot with Government funding? Perhaps, then, a local television network could help to deliver the basis of a new digital network.

I am enthused by that prospect and I hope that the minister will be equally enthused and will not only press the case with Jeremy Hunt but examine the Helensburgh example and perhaps—if I could put in a bid—commission a pilot in, say, Peebles or Gala.

Of course, it is nonsense that broadcasting is not devolved to this Parliament. I welcome the fact that the Scotland Bill Committee will be taking evidence—after the recess, I think—in that regard. I will provide the committee with a link to this debate.

I hope that progress can be made on all the fronts that I have described. What better place to start than where Scotland is worse served. I look forward to contributions from colleagues.

17:12

Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate. Jeremy Hunt's quote in the motion goes to the crux of the matter.

However, we must also have one eye on the proposed Scottish digital network and the need to ensure the capacity of the sector locally to contribute to that network. I am hopeful that the debate will register a cross-party desire for a change of heart on the part of the UK Government. The UK Government's current proposals will leave a gaping hole in local TV coverage in a region that, as Christine Grahame said, most needs such coverage.

In February 2009, as a result of the merger with Tyne Tees Television, some 51 of the 64 staff at Border TV were made redundant, which drastically reduced capacity to cover local news and current affairs and created the gaping hole to which I referred. I do not want to imply criticism of the quality or professionalism of the remaining ITV Borders staff—the quality of what they do is high, but there is simply too little of it and they are underresourced.

There is no doubt that the amount of content of relevance to the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway has fallen substantially, so much so that a recent broadcast of "Lookaround" focused almost entirely on findings from the inquiry into the death of Raoul Moat—admittedly an important issue for the Tyne Tees part of the catchment but of little relevance to the Borders, and still less to Dumfries and Galloway.

The recent election debates debacle to which Christine Grahame referred showed that our needs in the south are subsidiary to those of the majority in north-east England and Cumbria. It adds insult to injury that an England international football friendly was shown instead. As members can imagine, that was not too popular in Selkirk.

The argument that the later screening, at quarter to midnight, had a similar market share of the audience, at around 7 per cent, ignores a huge drop in audience between peak viewing and midnight. Christine Grahame was right to highlight that.

My discussion with executives at ITV Tyne Tees and Border at the time revealed that due to the digital switchover, the ability to broadcast different programmes simultaneously had been lost and that to restore it would require significant investment. The loss of that functionality is simply not good enough.

We regularly suffer broadcasts of irrelevant current affairs content, without sufficient clarification that England-only policies do not apply here. The need for change is compelling. I strongly support Christine Grahame's motion. However, I also strongly urge the UK culture secretary and Ofcom to create a Scottish national channel 3 licence when the current licence runs out in 2014.

Based on discussion with STV executives, I am confident that such a licence would see STV or its successor investing in enhanced local output. As Mr Hunt put it, viewers would have television that is

"about what's happening where they live and featuring people they know".

It might also, for example, allow Scotland's rugby heartland to watch STV's coverage of Scottish rugby, which is of course a big gap in current provision.

I will quote a statement from 2009 that I think is relevant to this issue:

"Watering down the coverage in this way will mean far less local news for viewers in the Borders, not least because the resources are likely to be located in Gateshead. This decision could only have been made by people stuck in London offices who fail to understand the importance of regional news and diversity."

That was said by Michael Moore MP. Given that he expressed that view to Andy Burnham when in opposition, I hope that we will have a response from Michael Moore on the current situation, because he obviously made a very good case for devolving broadcast powers to Scotland in that statement. However, I hope that he would support not only the initiative for a local TV licence to cover the south of Scotland to address the gap in local news coverage but an all-Scotland channel 3 licence.

17:16

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I congratulate Christine Grahame on getting her motion debated in Parliament. I apologise for the state of my voice and because I may have to leave before the end of the debate to catch a train. I apologise to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs if I have to do that.

I did not actually sign Christine Grahame's motion, because my constituents would probably look askance if I signed a motion suggesting that I support Galashiels as one of the licence locations: there is a strong feeling in Dumfries and Galloway that there should be such a location there.

I used to be quite happy with Border Television from Carlisle, which is the local city for most of my constituents. People were perfectly happy to hear what is going on in Carlisle, and we use its services and facilities quite a lot. Indeed, if minimum unit pricing for alcohol is introduced in Scotland, I suspect that my constituents will use Carlisle's facilities considerably more than they do now—but that is a debate for another time.

The local opt-outs on Border Television ensured that Dumfries and Galloway issues were regularly highlighted and, indeed, politicians of all Scottish parties were often interviewed in that regard. I am sure that Alex and Christine can remember the times when we were brought together to talk about the Scottish budget or whatever, and we had coverage from local television that was envied by many of our colleagues in other parts of Scotland. The general issues in our areas also got a lot of coverage. Unfortunately, since the merger with Tyne Tees in 2009, the situation has gradually deteriorated. We sometimes get good coverage, but mostly the news is local to north-east England and is of little relevance to people living in south-west Scotland.

We now get a sort of Newcastle news. I used to resist the notion that the Border Television area in Scotland should be taken over by STV, because I felt that, like the BBC, it would tend to offer Scottish city news. It is not surprising that that happens, because most people in Scotland live in and around the cities. My constituents would

rather hear what is going on locally, but in fact they are not hearing that. As I said, they are hearing Newcastle news now rather than Glasgow news or Edinburgh news, and it is not particularly relevant. There is therefore now a pressing need for a local television channel.

I was quite hopeful in that regard, because the previous UK Government proposed to use some of the remaining digital switchover funding to develop local opt-outs on channel 3. Several strong bids were being developed in Dumfries and Galloway, including one that was headed up by one of the local newspapers. However, the current Government had a different policy, and Jeremy Hunt's proposals are probably now the alternative to using the switchover funding in that way.

On 25 August, Dumfries and Galloway Council agreed to make a submission to the consultation calling on the Government to include Dumfries and Galloway in its list of potential areas. There was a counter-proposal from a Conservative council to support the Carlisle bid. That would have helped many of my constituents, but only 50 per cent of Dumfries and Galloway would be covered from Carlisle because only 50 per cent of the area gets the direct signal from the Caldbeck transmitter, and there was no proposal in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport framework to include relays.

There is the potential, through the south of Scotland broadband delivery bid, for us to do exactly what Christine Grahame described and develop a local TV channel through broadband. That is but one alternative among others, but I am sorry that the Government does not have an option at the moment that is suitable for south-west Scotland. However, there is potential if we go forward with superfast broadband.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Murray, I ask you to confirm for the record that, when you said "Alex and Christine", you were referring to Alex Fergusson and Christine Grahame.

Elaine Murray: Yes, I was.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much.

17:20

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank Christine Grahame for securing the debate. It revolves around a single fundamental problem that has already been well rehearsed: neither the Scottish Borders nor Dumfries and Galloway is currently well served by local or national TV coverage. Christine Grahame has already eloquently explained the nature of the deficit, but the point cannot be made firmly enough.

I ask members to consider this scenario: what if, instead of seeing the first of the ground-breaking prime ministerial debates that were broadcast during the previous Westminster general election, the inhabitants of Cumbria had been offered a Scotland friendly international football match? Border TV viewers in Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders were expected to tolerate the direct equivalent: instead of the Scottish election leaders debates, they were offered an England friendly.

Not only that, but the level of local news coverage that is devoted to either area is paltry. If there was ever an area of Scotland that was crying out for local TV, it is the south. It cries out for such a service not least to redress a historical imbalance in reporting that neglects to transmit many important local and national stories to viewers in the region.

At this point, only Ayr and Carlisle have been offered the chance to bid. It is true that broadcasts from a Carlisle local TV service would reach a proportion of viewers in Dumfries and Galloway, but they would not cover Wigtownshire. In any case, I must remind colleagues that Wigtownshire was historically accustomed to getting clearer transmissions from Ulster, at least in some remoter parts of the county. Of course, the Borders simply drops off the map.

Jeremy Hunt's decision is particularly disappointing because a good deal of work has been done through the south of Scotland alliance to make the case for local TV for the south of Scotland. The Border TV region was the first to go through the digital switchover process. Back then, the alliance recognised that the switchover presented an opportunity to do things differently.

There is now spectrum capacity throughout Scotland to allow for the creation of the Scottish digital network that the Scottish Broadcasting Commission proposed. That would offer a pan-Scotland service as a single national channel or as a federal channel of more localised services. Such a strategic approach would give the service the critical mass to have a commercially credible business model, especially if it were treated in a similar manner to S4C in Wales or MG Alba in Scotland and awarded funding support under the public service broadcasting principles that underpin those services.

Therefore, it is especially disappointing that the UK minister has come down in favour of the simplistic view of commercially viable, large-scale local TV operations, by and large in the main urban centres, rather than the more enlightened dialogue for which he was responsible beforehand, which actively encouraged consideration of alternative models to re-invigorate local press businesses. A federal approach to a

Scottish digital network would be predicated on that kind of thinking. Local organisations could gather and produce local interest content and would be able to distribute it across print, internet, radio and TV channels, providing employment and skills enhancement where they are needed most, as well as fulfilling the audience appetite for local content in news and other entertainment genres.

In short, the approach on which Jeremy Hunt has settled in no way fits the needs of the south of Scotland, but I contend that, however inadvertently, he has made the case for a Scottish digital network with a strong local focus even more clear cut than it was before.

I want Mr Hunt to reconsider and to make the same offer to the south of Scotland that he has made to other areas, but I am also under no illusion that the only long-term solution is a Scottish digital network that has the capacity better to reflect the rich and varied life and culture of the region that I represent and of Scotland as a whole.

17:24

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am pleased to speak in the debate on the important issue of local broadcasting. Christine Grahame deserves congratulations for bringing it before Parliament.

The story of broadcasting in the Borders has been mixed in recent years. I will explore some of the background to the debate and consider how we have to get to where we are.

For almost 50 years, ITV's Border Television provided local news and programming to the Scottish Borders, south-west Scotland, north Northumberland, Cumbria and the Isle of Man. It had the second-largest geographical region in the ITV network. Despite the difficulties in catering for such a wide and differing audience, the flagship daily news programme "Lookaround" had one of the highest ratings of any BBC or ITV regional news programme in the United Kingdom. Indeed, one survey in 2005 found that, while "Scotland Today" and "North Tonight" drew a 26 per cent audience share and "London Tonight" took a 28 per cent share, Border's "Lookaround" was watched by a whopping 42 per cent of the population at 6 pm on a weekday evening.

The affection in which "Lookaround" was held by Borderers was further made clear when, in 2007, ITV announced plans to merge Border with Tyne Tees. I remember well in my first few months as a member of this Parliament the volume of correspondence from constituents who were concerned about losing such an important service. Nevertheless, ITV pressed ahead with the merger and, since then, many Borderers have expressed

to me their frustration at the reduction of a local service.

In August, the UK Government announced 65 locations across Britain that could be in the running to run local television services, including nine in Scotland. According to the Government, the locations have been selected because they have appropriate transmitter coverage, and the list will be whittled down further before the final decisions are made. Despite that, I am disappointed that the Borders and the wider south of Scotland are not included for consideration. The roll-out of the new scheme by the UK Government is to be welcomed, but I have made it clear that ideally the proposals should be modified to allow our region to benefit from a genuinely local TV service. My colleague Alex Fergusson and I have made a written submission to the culture secretary Jeremy Hunt on the issue and to ask why the region appears to have been left out.

The Borders and the wider south of Scotland region are already at a disadvantage due to the poor broadband service in many areas. There are also some concerns about the lack of coverage by STV and the recent decision by Freeview to include the BBC Alba channel at the expense of a number of Scottish digital radio channels, on which many of my constituents relied as their only means of local radio reception.

I think that we all want local TV to work, but we must also ensure that any local television service is not only local but sufficiently good quality, relevant local TV. I have made clear my disappointment at the Borders being excluded from the list of potential locations for the UK Government's proposals, and in my final moments I want to bring to the debate a point that some of the local broadcasters in my constituency have raised with me.

A number of local reporters have expressed the concern—which we should all bear in mind—that there may be a trade-off between scale and quality when it comes to providing relevant local output. When we talk about local news services, we often hear about local television in a United States context, but those examples often cover significant areas of population consisting of several million people. That is clearly not comparable with the situation in the Borders, in Dumfries and Galloway or in other parts in the south. We should therefore be realistic about what we can expect from a local TV news service, and we should bear in mind the advice from the professionals who deal with the work on a day-to-day basis. We have to strike the right balance between scale and quality if we are to move forward effectively.

I congratulate Christine Grahame again on securing the debate.

17:28

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate. I am disappointed that Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders have been left out of the list of proposed locations for local TV licences. The decision once again leaves the areas unsatisfactorily provided for.

Notwithstanding the issues of quality that have correctly been raised, local TV has the potential if properly funded to enrich a community with a number of services. Its benefits include economic activity and the provision of local jobs, as well as the opportunity to provide a platform for local advertising and boost commercial activity in rural areas.

Jeremy Hunt's plans bring nothing of the benefits to a region that is, as we have heard, already deprived of media and insufficiently provided for in Scottish news, current affairs and cultural programming. Aileen McLeod and Christine Grahame highlighted that, during the elections, many viewers in the south of Scotland were insufficiently informed of the real issues at stake in May.

If provision for local TV were based on need, our area would surely be the first in the queue, as 250,000 viewers in the south of Scotland fail to receive adequate programming on a daily basis and are, therefore, cut out of the democratic debate. Although the region receives BBC Scotland, the reception of Radio Scotland is very poor. I am sure that members have had the experience of driving down the M74 and, on reaching the Lowther Hills, having to switch to Radio 4. It is absolutely ridiculous that people across the south of Scotland can hear Radio 4 as clear as a bell but they cannot hear Radio Scotland. For example, even when Radio Scotland broadcast a debate from Dumfries during the election, people could not hear it.

I submitted a response to Mr Hunt's consultation because, given the unique need in the south of Scotland, I would have thought that we were deserving of the local TV licence. Unfortunately, the proposals from the UK Government and Ofcom address areas that are already well served by the media. The parameters that have been set out to identify proposed locations may be open to challenge on public interest grounds, given the fact that they are designed to identify only transmitters that serve the largest number of people in the UK and are weighted in favour of urban conurbations.

In my consultation response, I stated that I believed that rolling out superfast broadband to southern Scotland was an absolute prerequisite and that only its introduction can truly meet the

aspirations of the people who live there. It is plain silly that, at the moment, the south of Scotland is considered less Scottish for broadcasting purposes. It is, after all, the place that gave us James Hogg and Walter Scott, and Robert Burns produced his best work there. It is also the birthplace of the rugby sevens and home to Queen of the South and dozens of other Scottish football clubs.

Mr Hunt's belief that, in the future, all local TV should be made available through something called internet protocol TV again highlights the fact that he does not get the picture. In order to make IPTV available to viewers in the south of Scotland, the UK Government would have to fund superfast broadband adequately, and a number of organisations throughout the south of Scotland have indicated that £68 million for the whole of Scotland simply is not enough to fund broadband. As the cabinet secretary pointed out earlier, we have 32 per cent of the UK's geographic area, and we are already behind the curve when it comes to access.

Mr Hunt's energy should be focused on that and on the issue of an all-Scotland licence for television. I accept the argument that has been made about STV being too focused on central Scotland's cities. I have had talks with STV executives, who have assured me that an all-Scotland licence would adequately serve the rural areas in southern Scotland. However, we should not wait until 2014 to get that coverage. Although the licence will be renewed in 2014, we can put pressure on to have Scottish news provided for the south of Scotland before then. For that reason, I will write to Jeremy Hunt, Ofcom in England and ITV, urging them to act to make that happen as soon as possible, to address the unique interests of the area.

17:33

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I, too, congratulate the member on raising this matter and securing this evening's debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate.

I share the member's disappointment that no pioneer location was to be found in the Borders when the list of 65 towns was published recently. I have no doubt that Galashiels would have made a fine location, as would Dumfries—which Elaine Murray mentioned—in serving the interests of the good people of Dumfries and Galloway. However, I understand that technical reasons may be behind the omission of a station in the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway rather than a deliberate oversight, as members may believe. Locations such as Falkirk, Greenock and Dundee do not have to contend with the same topographical issues as many communities in the south.

Members can take my word for it, as an amateur radio operator who lives in a deep valley, that it is an unfortunate fact that part of the spectrum to be utilised to make the stations possible suffers from inherent gaps and can be undone in hilly regions.

However, despite the unfortunate omission of large parts of the south, I welcomed the inclusion of Ayr on the list. I trust that the people of Ayrshire will embrace such a local TV station, and I was pleased to hear of the reports from the BBC last month that one company was “certain” to bid for the Ayrshire licence. I also welcome assurances that

“the Government is clear that it would one day like everywhere in the UK to have access to a local TV service”.

I will certainly campaign for that.

Ofcom’s statistics show that significantly more people in Scotland cite television as their main source of news and information on what is going on locally. The figure is 62 per cent, compared with 52 per cent in the UK as a whole. That would suggest something of an appetite for local TV stations, and I do not doubt that such an appetite exists throughout the south of Scotland. I agree with the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, who said:

“Local TV services have the potential to bring benefits to viewers across Scotland.”

An obvious example is the ability for small, local businesses to target advertising to their customer base. In an age when there are so many media platforms and we can receive news at the most local level in print and on radio, the television proposal would seem to be just an extension along those lines.

I understand that the local TV initiative will be rolled out in two stages, the second of which involves the eventual introduction of internet TV. That will benefit the 40 per cent of the UK that cannot receive the spectrum, so it is obviously relevant to the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. Clearly, that development is a few years down the line and it will necessitate the roll-out of superfast broadband. I look forward to that coinciding with the south of Scotland broadband project, which has been approved by Dumfries and Galloway and Borders Councils. I am glad that Galashiels has already been earmarked for superfast broadband, and I trust that the Scottish Government will be equal to the task when the time comes to deliver the service more widely across the south of Scotland.

17:36

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I have an interest to declare. Some years ago, in the 1990s, in my role as a company troubleshooter, I

was asked by the owners of a troubled local television company in Dundee, Channel 6, to join the board to see whether we could change its fortunes. We failed not just because of the inherent skills of the team but because of poor transmission opportunities, a shortage of incentives to succeed, capital costs and a lack of access to local and national frameworks. Happily, most of those things are now surmountable.

Before talking about local television in the Borders and parts of Ayrshire, which are not covered by the Hunt list, let me consider the wider framework of television services in the area. As Paul Wheelhouse pointed out, Jeremy Hunt said that he wants people to be able to watch television that is truly relevant to them, to have information about what is happening locally, and to see programmes featuring people they know. It might surprise Mr Hunt to hear that what is relevant to Scots people in the Borders and parts of Ayrshire and what is happening to Scotland, its people and its governance at this moment in its constitutional history are not what is currently broadcast from Gateshead.

I am disturbed by the comments and e-mails that I have received, particularly from the rural areas that I represent, complaining about the lack of, the timing of, and the high-definition needs of TV programmes, be they sport, news or drama programmes. As Joan said, it is critical that Ofcom, ITV plc and the minister, Jeremy Hunt, act before 2014 to have STV replace Border Television in servicing customers in the south of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brodie, will you clarify that you were referring to Joan McAlpine?

Chic Brodie: I was. I beg your pardon.

The Borders and Ayrshire are Scottish and the main provider should be STV. That would permit one quality provider to talk to the many, but in today’s world of multifaceted communications, we need to have more and many people talking to the many, with a network built across not just the south of Scotland but all of Scotland.

People in Scotland spend an average of four and a half hours per day watching television, which is the highest figure in the UK. According to Ofcom, nine out of 10 adults consume some form of local news and 75 per cent rate local news and weather as important types of media. That local communication is unquestionably an integral part of overcoming any democratic deficit.

The London Government has selected 65 areas of the UK, nine of which are in Scotland, that are eligible—not chosen—for local television. It said that it engaged in a detailed analysis of the technical issues, but also that it considered the

costs, timings, feasibility and the testing of commercial viability and interest in the marketplace. If that is so, we shall seek that data in detail, to help us to understand why a large swathe of Scotland has been neglected on such an important issue. If it is argued that the spectrum of local television does not allow provision on digital terrestrial television, the answer is to secure the Scottish digital network as soon as possible and, until that can be done, to accelerate the more-to-many provision of a network through internet protocol television.

17:40

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome the debate that Christine Grahame has initiated on television services in the south of Scotland, and I welcome all the speeches that have been made.

The Scottish Government has long been concerned about the inadequate coverage that viewers receive in the south of Scotland and we have frequently raised the matter with the UK Government. I recently met Jeremy Hunt in Glasgow and raised the matter with him again. I can tell Paul Wheelhouse and other members that I also raised channel 3 licensing.

We responded to the local television consultation, we have written to UK Government ministers about the issue and other broadcasting matters, and I have established on-going dialogue with my counterparts in Westminster about the future for broadcasting in Scotland.

We also publish today the third and final progress report on implementation of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission's recommendations. Indeed, in this time of historic change for broadcasting, one of the reasons why I established the Scottish digital network panel was to enable us to be fully involved in providing constructive solutions, not least of which is the Scottish digital network, which members mentioned.

The Scottish Parliament has long and unanimously supported a Scottish digital network. The Scottish Government has made it clear that the Scottish digital network would be the best option for providing the host or spine broadcaster for local television services in Scotland. Christine Grahame's vision of a southern television service would fit well into such a model. Through the work of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission and the Scottish digital network panel, we have presented plans that were rigorously researched and developed. However, it is apparent that the UK Government has not given proper consideration to that important work.

Local television offers the potential for improving television services for south of Scotland viewers by locating a station there. In our response to the UK Government's local television consultation, we stressed the importance of including the south of Scotland in the list of potential locations for a local television service. In addition, in our recent response to the UK Government's communications review we highlighted the clear need for better news provision in the south of Scotland on channel 3.

I was therefore astonished that the anomalous situation in the south of Scotland was not addressed in the UK Government's most recent announcement. However, I am aware that Jeremy Hunt said at the recent local television event in Glasgow that the current list of possible locations for local television is not definitive. I hope that that is the case.

The UK Government is intent on making local television a purely commercial prospect, with very limited public funding, other than a contribution of £40 million from the BBC's share of the licence fee up to 2014. In that context, the question is how we make local television commercially viable and ensure that there is quality provision—John Lamont made the point well. The Shott review, which Jeremy Hunt set up to investigate the commercial viability of local television, found that commercial viability would be difficult to achieve and most likely would result in only larger cities getting a local television service.

The UK Government's latest announcement confirmed that and suggested that only Glasgow would be a suitable option in the context of commercially viable local television. The Scottish digital network panel arrived at much the same conclusion and commented that it would be ironic if the only public support—from licence fee payers and taxpayers—to be offered to local television in Scotland was for a service in Glasgow, which it can be argued is the most media-rich location in Scotland. Potentially, local television will not reach where it is most needed. There must be a south of Scotland test when we consider local television.

Jeremy Hunt has placed great store on the roll-out of superfast broadband as a way of promoting local television. He has suggested that that is the solution in relation to the Scottish digital network. The Scottish Government fully appreciates the importance of ensuring the availability of superfast broadband across our nation. That is why we announced in the spending review that the Scottish Government will at least match the £69 million of television licence fee revenue that is allocated to Scotland by the UK Government. However, we doubt that superfast broadband can address the significant deficit in public service broadcasting content for Scotland. The deficit is

experienced by viewers everywhere in Scotland. Superfast broadband offers, at best, only a partial means of distributing local television across Scotland, whether that be in the south of Scotland or elsewhere. There will need to be additional provision for local television.

The UK Government admits that it cannot definitely work out a timeframe for getting local television on the internet. It also concedes that a television platform is still better suited than the internet for broadcasting. Basically, people prefer to watch television in their living rooms, rather than viewing something on a computer screen. However, as Christine Grahame points out, that might change—behaviour patterns can and should change.

At the moment, the position of the UK Government represents a missed opportunity to meet the needs of viewers in Scotland.

Christine Grahame referred to another important aspect of broadcasting in Scotland: broadcasting responsibilities for the Scottish ministers. We made it clear in our Scotland Bill broadcasting paper that there is a set of quite sensible and workable broadcasting powers that could be devolved to the Scottish ministers. The matters that we have discussed this afternoon underscore the importance of those powers, which include the right to establish public service broadcasting institutions, such as the Scottish digital network; the right to be involved in future licence fee setting arrangements, because of the consequences of the rapid imposition of the licence fee arrangement, which has, as we have heard today, had consequences for jobs in the BBC; and the right to have responsibility for approving licensing decisions that are made by the UK Government for local television within Scotland.

I thank Christine Grahame for raising the matter. The Scottish Government supports local television if it is able to deliver greater choice for viewers in Scotland. As it stands, the initiative presents more of a missed opportunity than anything else. The UK Government has not considered the option of establishing a Scottish digital network. It also has not addressed the increasingly urgent need of viewers in the south of Scotland to have access to a comprehensive Scottish news service on channel 3—points made by Joan McAlpine and others. If local television is to work, it has to work in the south of Scotland. I commend the south of Scotland alliance for continuing to argue that rational and pragmatic case, and note the cross-party support that has been expressed in this chamber.

I do not think that this is the last that we have heard of the matter, but I thank Christine Grahame, again, for bringing it to the chamber.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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