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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 5 October 2011

Session 4

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Wednesday 5 October 2011

CONTENTS

	Col.
TIME FOR REFLECTION	2433
BUSINESS MOTION	2435
<i>Motion moved—[Bruce Crawford]—and agreed to.</i>	
FUEL POVERTY	2436
<i>Statement—[Alex Neil].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil)	2436
WELFARE REFORM	2446
<i>Motion moved—[Nicola Sturgeon].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jackie Baillie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Mary Scanlon].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liam McArthur].</i>	
The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon).....	2446
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	2451
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	2455
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	2458
Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP).....	2461
Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab).....	2463
Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)	2465
Margaret Burgess (Cunninghame South) (SNP)	2467
Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	2469
Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)	2472
Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP).....	2473
Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab).....	2475
Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)	2477
Liam McArthur	2479
David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con).....	2481
Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab)	2483
The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil)	2486
LONDON OLYMPIC GAMES AND PARALYMPIC GAMES (AMENDMENT) BILL	2490
<i>Motion moved—[Shona Robison].</i>	
BUSINESS MOTION	2491
<i>Motion moved—[Bruce Crawford]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	2493
<i>Motions moved—[Bruce Crawford].</i>	
DECISION TIME	2494
NUCLEAR ENERGY (GERMANY)	2503
<i>Motion debated—[Rob Gibson].</i>	
Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP).....	2503
David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)	2505
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	2507
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP).....	2508
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	2510
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	2511
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green).....	2513
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)	2514
The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing)	2516

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 5 October 2011

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Helen Cook, from Kingussie parish church.

The Rev Helen Cook (Kingussie Parish Church): Presiding Officer, thank you for the invitation. It is a privilege to share thought for the day.

Good afternoon. In my work as a chaplain at the local hospital, I have come across a rather astonishing book. It is called “Reflections of Life: Words of Comfort and Encouragement”. It is beautifully illustrated by a Lewis girl—a beautiful artist—and was produced by NHS Education for Scotland. It is the result of a collaboration between 13 different belief groups, some who have faith in God and others whose belief is in humanity or nature.

Why do I call this an astonishing book and consider it worthy of your attention? There are two reasons. First, it is based on the belief that we are all spiritual and that when we face times of stress and difficulty for reasons of illness, loss and bereavement, we need spiritual care. The book will be held in hospitals and other places to comfort and encourage people who are in difficult times—not replacing but adding to the work of their own belief communities. The book is based on the premise that we are all spiritual beings.

Secondly, the book is the result of a unique collaboration between 13 belief groups, which was facilitated by a former surgeon from the Belford hospital. Everything that is written in the book was agreed to by all 13 belief groups before it went in, which is an amazing achievement.

Like those for whom the book was written, we all have times of stress and anxiety when we are very vulnerable and need words of comfort and encouragement. So I will share with you three brief excerpts from the book. Maybe one of them will speak to you. I will not tell you which group donated the words.

On anxiety:

“We become very weak and unsettled when something unexpected happens, but we must be strong and accept God’s way.”

On peace:

“May quietness descend upon my limbs,
my speech, my breath, my eyes, my ears;
may all my senses wax clear and strong
as I hear your voice
within that void
of your loving presence and peace.”

Finally, on hope:

“What is true of the individual will be tomorrow true of the whole nation if individuals will but refuse to lose heart and hope.”

May we all find comfort and encouragement for our spirits. [*Applause.*]

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-01018, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to this week's business programme.

The Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Business and Government Strategy (Bruce Crawford): The purpose of the revised business motion is to insert a short debate at the close of play today on the legislative consent motion on the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Amendment) Bill and to insert a ministerial statement on Scottish Ambulance Service rest breaks into tomorrow afternoon's business, at 2.55 pm.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 5 October 2011—

after

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Welfare Reform

insert

followed by Legislative Consent Motion – London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Amendment) Bill – UK Legislation

(b) the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 6 October 2011—

delete

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Digital Future of Scotland's Heritage

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business: S4M-00630
Christine Grahame: Jeremy Hunt
Doesn't Get the Picture so Neither Does the Borders

and insert

2.55 pm Ministerial Statement: Scottish Ambulance Service Rest Breaks

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Digital Future of Scotland's Heritage

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business: S4M-00630
Christine Grahame: Jeremy Hunt
Doesn't Get the Picture so Neither Does the Borders

Motion agreed to.

Fuel Poverty

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, Alex Neil, on fuel poverty. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement and there should be no interruptions or interventions.

14:35

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): I thank the Presiding Officer for allowing me to update members on fuel poverty in Scotland. Fuel poverty is a problem that currently affects one third of Scottish households. It is caused by high fuel prices, energy-inefficient housing and low household incomes. It is a complex issue: although it is a subset of general poverty, it can affect those on a higher income who would not consider themselves to be poor.

We are emerging from the worst economic recession since the second world war and we face severe restraint in public expenditure. Scottish households are under severe pressure and, at the same time, energy prices continue to increase due to movements in the wholesale markets and other factors.

I am sure that all members in the chamber are concerned by the latest round of price increases by the big six energy suppliers. Despite significant energy efficiency improvements in Scotland's housing stock, increases in fuel prices are undoing that good work and making the basic right to a warm home seem out of reach for many. Indeed, campaigning groups are highlighting stark choices for households between heating and eating. I, along with other members in the chamber, have a long-standing commitment to the issue and many of us support organisations, such as Energy Action Scotland, that work on fuel poverty matters. The issue has cross-party support in Scotland and I wish that to continue.

Members will be aware that the First Minister has called on the energy suppliers to meet us and stakeholder groups, such as Consumer Focus Scotland, at a summit to discuss the situation. Consumer Focus Scotland has highlighted that the companies have a major role to play, alongside us all, in helping to make Scotland's housing as energy efficient as possible. It described the initiative as having the potential to lead to an innovative response. I trust that we have the support of all members in the chamber for the summit, and I anticipate a positive outcome.

The Scottish fuel poverty forum was reconvened in 2008 to advise ministers on tackling fuel poverty

and it played a major role in the establishment of the energy assistance package. I have considered ways in which the forum could be strengthened and how it could play a greater role in connecting its work with our commitments on climate change. I am pleased to confirm that Professor David Sigsworth will be the new chair of the Scottish fuel poverty forum. He brings a breadth of knowledge and experience in the energy sector and a commitment to tackling fuel poverty. I am also pleased to announce that Norman Kerr of Energy Action Scotland will support David Sigsworth in his new role by acting as vice-chair.

We are boosting the forum's strategic reach by establishing links between it and the recently established sustainable housing strategy group, which will ensure joint action on fuel poverty, energy efficiency and housing quality. We have made excellent progress on energy efficiency through our energy assistance package. It has given energy advice to more than 200,000 households in Scotland, helped to reduce annual fuel bills by almost £12 million since 2009 and delivered heating measures for more than 21,000 homes—complete systems and boilers.

The programme continues to help older people, but it also provides valuable help to families. Since it was introduced, we have listened to stakeholders and extended to families with children the help that the programme offers. In March, we made help available to people with severe disabilities and those who are, sadly, terminally ill.

This week, we have laid regulations that extend assistance under the programme to people on carers allowance. That will provide much-needed help, and it recognises the pressures on family budgets as a result of higher fuel costs. It is estimated that up to 7,000 households throughout Scotland could benefit from the change.

I recently announced the allocation of £12.5 million of funding this year to 31 local authorities through the universal home insulation scheme. We wish to build on our strong relationship with councils throughout Scotland and put that at the heart of our future programmes for tackling fuel poverty.

Despite that, more needs to be done. The dramatic increases in fuel prices that were announced this summer could push up to 170,000 additional households in Scotland into fuel poverty, taking the total to nearly 1 million. We must consider how our programmes can work alongside the new green deal and energy company obligation when they come to fruition next year. For those reasons, I am instigating a review of our fuel poverty strategy to ensure that we are best able to assist fuel poor households. The Scottish fuel poverty forum will be integral to

the success of that review and will lead it. There will be three strands to the review: a review of the nature of fuel poverty and its drivers; future options for our fuel poverty programmes and how we can maximise the leverage of external funds; and an examination of engagement on reserved matters. I will report back to the Parliament early next year with a statement of policy and an action plan resulting from the review.

The spending review this year confirmed that the Government is determined to tackle fuel poverty head on and made increased funds available to enable it to do so. I am very pleased to announce that funding for Scottish Government fuel poverty and energy efficiency programmes will be £65 million in 2012-13 and 2013-14, rising to £66.25 million in 2014-15. That is a 35 per cent increase on the £48 million that is being provided in 2011-12 and illustrates clearly the importance that we attach to supporting households that are affected by fuel poverty. More generally, that funding will also enable us to fund the domestic energy efficiency commitments in the report on policies and proposals under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

The spending review also provided additional funding to establish the warm homes fund. That fund of £50 million over the course of this parliamentary session will assist those living in communities that are affected by fuel poverty. The fund will focus on the potential of renewable energy to provide a long-term, sustainable means to address fuel poverty. Development of the fund will be considered alongside the fuel poverty strategy review.

Finally, I am also pleased to announce an additional £5 million for this year, taking the total spend this year to £53 million. The extra £5 million will be for insulation and heating systems targeted at the most vulnerable and fuel poor people in our society.

We are proud of the action that we are taking and we are determined to do everything within our power to reduce and eventually eliminate fuel poverty in Scotland.

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

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of his statement. I congratulate David Sigsworth on his appointment as the new chair of the fuel poverty forum and Norman Kerr on his appointment as its vice chair.

Mr Neil will recall the commitment and hard work of the previous chair of the fuel poverty

forum, the Rev Graham Blount. Does he also recall the reasons for Mr Blount's resignation earlier this year? Does he accept that an advisory group can fulfil its remit to advise only if it is fully informed of the thinking and policy intentions of ministers? Has he offered Professor Sigsworth the assurance that his predecessor sought, that ministers will take the advice of the fuel poverty forum in advance of making decisions rather than tell it about those decisions only after the event? If so, it would be good for ministers to start as they mean to go on.

I welcome Mr Neil's announcement that he is to restore—at least in part—the funding to tackle fuel poverty that was cut in the current year, although greater transparency would be welcome. He mentioned that he has found an additional £5 million for the current year and said that £65 million will be allocated in the next two years and slightly more than that in the year following. Will he confirm that those welcome increases will still not return the funding to its position in 2010-11? Will he discuss that further with colleagues in the months that are ahead?

Alex Neil: I, too, pay tribute—as I have done many times—to the work of the Rev Graham Blount as the fuel poverty forum's chair. His resignation is now history, but I do not accept the record of events that Lewis Macdonald relayed to us.

We are making available as much funding as we can to tackle fuel poverty against a background of very substantial cuts from Westminster. Mr Macdonald might remember that his colleague Mr Darling cut capital spending by 36 per cent in real terms over four years in his last budget before the United Kingdom election. It is a bit rich of the Labour Party to complain if budgets are cut.

We can look at the totality of the money that we are spending not just directly on fuel poverty programmes but on our housing programme. Two weeks ago, we announced that 4,300 new warm homes would be built in the next two years. That is many more than were ever built in any one period under the Labour-Liberal Administration.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement. I welcome many of the measures in it. I draw attention to the extension of the energy assistance package to people who receive carers allowance. When limited resource is available, that small and inexpensive change will make a big difference to a significant number of people and I welcome it most sincerely. I also welcome the review of the fuel poverty strategy in Scotland, which is a major step forward.

However, Lewis Macdonald pointed out a trend in the statement—a fluctuation in support for many

measures. What we have heard today is in effect a reversal of some previous cuts. The fluctuation in funding for practical measures to assist fuel poverty is beginning to deliver a problem with skills. In some areas, a failure to maintain the workforce requires to be compensated through making resources available to increase the number of people who have the necessary skills to achieve much of the work that must be done on Scotland's housing stock to alleviate fuel poverty. Is the cabinet secretary confident that other Government departments will have the resource to ensure that Scotland has the skills—particularly in areas that have skill shortages—to deliver the changes that his funding is designed to provide?

Alex Neil: I thank Alex Johnstone for his remarks welcoming the statement. I will assure him about skills. He raises a fair point of which we are conscious. I am sure that he will be glad to hear that ensuring that the skills are available is the job of not just the Government, but the private sector. Scottish Gas—the contractor that delivers the energy assistance package—has invested heavily in new skills and in establishing green academies in different parts of Scotland. We have supported Scottish Gas in its training and skills programme.

In working with local authorities and third sector organisations across the board on delivering programmes to relieve fuel poverty, we are keen to ensure that they make maximum use of the facilities for apprenticeships and other training places that are made available through Skills Development Scotland and other Government agencies.

As part of our contract for the EAP, we are also extracting from providers community benefit clauses that relate to training and apprenticeships.

The Presiding Officer: I open the meeting to back-bench members to question the cabinet secretary. I remind members to keep their questions brief and I ask the cabinet secretary to keep his answers brief, too. In that way, we will get through everybody who wants to ask a question.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement. Given the importance of fuel poverty to households across Scotland, what recent engagement has the cabinet secretary had with the UK Government on such key energy matters and particularly on ensuring that we have a fair deal on energy for consumers in Scotland?

Alex Neil: Last Wednesday I was in London, where I talked to a number of UK Cabinet ministers, one of whom was the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne. The main point of our discussion was the final stage in the passage of the Energy Bill, which provides

new measures relating to the green deal programme and introduces the energy company obligation, which will replace the carbon emissions reduction target programme within the next 18 months to two years. The meeting was productive, and I pay tribute to Chris Huhne for his co-operation with the Scottish Government in developing the proposals and during the passage of the bill. Members will be glad to know that he accepted and endorsed every major proposal that I put to him regarding amendments to the bill to ensure that Scotland gets the maximum flexibility in its application when it becomes law.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, welcome the extension of the energy assistance package to people who receive the carers allowance. The minister said in his statement that around 7,000 households would benefit. In 2008, 94,760 people received the carers allowance. How was the 7,000 figure reached? Will the minister consider assisting those who do not qualify for the carers allowance—the hundreds of thousands of people who will not benefit from the package?

Alex Neil: The figure relates to the 7,000 who will be assisted every year by the programme. There is a capacity issue for the programme. Around £5 million of the programme has been specifically allocated for people on the carers allowance. That is a permanent feature of the programme. Over a number of years we hope to get through as many carers as possible who require, in particular, stage 4 assistance, which is central heating and insulation assistance.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I, too, welcome the cabinet secretary's statement, which represents real progress.

I am sure that the cabinet secretary knows that there is a particular problem in rural areas, where people who are off-grid cannot take advantage of gas, for instance. Such people often have very low incomes, poor insulation in their houses, and very high heating costs for oil and other things. We are awaiting an Office of Fair Trading report—

The Presiding Officer: Will you get to the question, Mr Thompson?

Dave Thompson: Yes. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that the review that is to take place will pay particular attention to consumers in rural areas who are off-grid?

Alex Neil: I am very conscious of that problem. Indeed, over the past couple of years we have implemented a number of measures to ensure that, as far as possible, we do everything that we can to address the issue. It can be quite difficult to deal with rural areas, and in particular, with older properties in those areas. Loft insulation is a major

problem in some houses of a certain age, for example. Alternatives and alternative technologies therefore have to be available. We have made alternatives available where we have been able to; whether we have done enough will be considered in the fuel poverty review. If we have not, we are prepared to do more.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): According to figures obtained from the Scottish Government today, there was an underspend of £6.9 million in the cabinet secretary's fuel poverty budget in 2010-11. Given that families in this country are choosing between heating and eating, where has that underspend of almost £7 million gone? Why was it not spent on tackling fuel poverty?

Alex Neil: The money has been invested in tackling fuel poverty and recycled into the programmes.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for his generous remarks about my colleague Chris Huhne and for advance sight of his statement. Not all of his statement was a complete surprise to those who listened carefully to "Good Morning Scotland" this morning, but I welcome much of what he said, particularly in relation to the EAP extension to carers, the fuel poverty strategy review and the proposed summit.

Can the cabinet secretary confirm that Professor Sigsworth and his team will have full access to all the figures relating to the various fuel poverty initiatives? That was a source of some concern to the Rev Graham Blount.

Can the cabinet secretary update members on the regulation of minimum energy performance standards for houses in the private sector?

Alex Neil: I give a complete assurance that Professor Sigsworth will have all the information that he requests and needs to do his job and that of the fuel poverty forum. In particular, we will be more than happy during the review to supply any information that they request. It is important for us to have a good, close working relationship with the fuel poverty forum and to allow it to do its work, not just in the review but more permanently.

On the standards in the private housing sector, one of the issues I discussed with Chris Huhne last week was the measures that are being taken down south, particularly in relation to the private rented sector, whereby it will become illegal for houses that are graded as an F or a G to be newly rented out to tenants. We are considering whether we need to do more in that respect in our housing bill next year. The issue will be included in the consultation on the bill at the turn of the year.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. Has

he considered reviewing the fuel poverty targets previously set by the Parliament? Also, what discussions has the cabinet secretary had with his UK counterparts regarding the winter heating allowance, in light of the fuel price hikes?

Alex Neil: That is relevant to the debate that will follow this statement. We are continually lobbying our colleagues in London for more assistance for those who are vulnerable and who are in fuel poverty.

The fuel poverty targets, including the definition of fuel poverty, will be visited by the review. Luckily, our review can be informed by the conclusion of a similar review that has been taking place down south, which, according to Chris Huhne, is due to report within the next few weeks. That review has been considering the definition of fuel poverty and whether it needs to be updated. Obviously, any targets are contingent upon the definition of fuel poverty. The current definition in Scotland is that anyone spending more than 10 per cent of their disposable income on fuel is deemed to be living in fuel poverty.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Energy conservation is one element. Another element is renewables. Photovoltaic panels and other household renewables are a way of alleviating fuel poverty, but the problem is that the people most in need are those who can least afford the up-front payments to install the kit. Third sector organisations and councils are in a perfect position to do that. Will there be any money from the Government for such activity?

Alex Neil: I hope that the review will consider that and make recommendations. It is not intended that the review will be a long review—I hope that it will report fairly timeously so that the Government can take any action recommended by it.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): A large part of the problem faced by people up and down the country is high energy prices. That was recently highlighted by the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets, which accused the big six of price fixing. Was that discussed at the cabinet secretary's recent meeting with the UK Government? What steps can we take to ensure that unfair energy pricing does not place more households in fuel poverty?

Alex Neil: I did indeed discuss that in some detail with Chris Huhne. As the member will know, Ofgem has been undertaking an energy market review of the retail market and has been considering the relationship in pricing between the retail market and the wholesale market. That review has been done in stages and it should be completed by the turn of the year.

I hope that, as a result of the review, we will see action by Ofgem to deal with excessive fuel prices

and excessive increases in fuel prices where they are not justified. There is a dispute between the energy companies and Ofgem and others in relation to the justification for the massive increases, which allegedly—if we listen to the fuel companies—are on the back of massive increases in wholesale prices. However, as many people point out, when the wholesale price goes down, the retail price does not seem to go down simultaneously or by the same amount.

I hope that the Ofgem retail market review report, due in January, will help us to resolve that issue.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The partial reversal of this year's fuel poverty cut will bring the level next year back up to something slightly less than the equivalent of half a mile of urban motorway. There is still a question about priorities.

Will the minister tell us who will conduct the fuel poverty review? If it concludes, as countless cross-party committee reports in this Parliament have already concluded, that what is required is a step change in the level of public investment in our housing stock, will that money be made available?

Alex Neil: The fuel poverty forum will carry out the review. It will report to the Government and, indeed, to the Parliament. I will have to see its recommendations before I will be in a position to decide whether we have the money to implement them all. It would certainly be more helpful if we did not have to suffer a 36 per cent cut in our capital allocation during the next three years.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. My question complements Dave Thompson's question about rural households, which are twice as likely to be in extreme fuel poverty as urban ones. Taking into account the high cost of alternative energy sources for off-grid households, what actions will be taken in the context of the sustainable housing strategy group to encourage the development of cheaper new technologies, such as solar water-heating panels and heat pumps, which will reduce household expenditure on fuel?

Alex Neil: Some of those technologies, such as air-source pumps, which are installed quite regularly, are available under the energy assistance package. We are conscious, however, of the need to ensure that the range of technologies that are really only useable for rural communities is made available through our various programmes. The first meeting of the sustainable housing group took place yesterday. We are looking at the kind of issues that the member highlighted.

I welcome the recent significant reduction in the price of solar electricity panels. Two years ago, the

average price per unit was running at roughly £8,000; it is now down to £6,000 and is forecast to go down to £4,000. That means that the payback period is substantially reduced and, therefore, that the use of those panels is a much more economic measure now than it was perhaps four or five years ago.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary take the opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Energy Saving Trust in Scotland for the work that it undertakes in administering projects that have a direct bearing on alleviating fuel poverty, particularly in the areas of home insulation and energy efficiency? Will he give an assurance that he will continue to work with the trust to reduce and alleviate the fuel poverty burden on Scottish families and households?

Alex Neil: I am happy to pay tribute to the work of the Energy Saving Trust and its energy advice centres. The trust runs the energy assistance package helpline and is also involved in marketing the package. It provides a very good service, particularly during stages 1, 2 and 3 of the package, which are more about advice, information, referral and counselling, but also about ensuring that those who deserve it get to stage 4. I am happy to endorse Jim Eadie's comments.

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): What additional funding will the Government provide for training on fuel poverty for individuals and organisations that work closely with the general public and, specifically, with vulnerable groups?

Alex Neil: We are very keen to work with third-party organisations, because they are particularly helpful in identifying the most vulnerable people in our community—that happens through such organisations and local authorities. One of the areas that I want the review to look at is how we can better penetrate local communities, because one of the problems that we face is that people are often not aware of the variety of programmes that are available. Regardless of how much you might spend on television or press advertising, I find that by far the best advert is word of mouth in those communities. I encourage every member to do everything they can to spread the word about the suite of fuel poverty programmes that the Government administers.

Welfare Reform

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01008, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare reform. I will allow a few seconds for members to change places. I call Nicola Sturgeon to speak to and move the motion. You have 13 minutes, Ms Sturgeon.

15:04

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): I welcome the opportunity to open the debate this afternoon. I think that we all agree on what we want from our welfare system—a system that works well and is fair to all—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Could you sit down for a moment, please, cabinet secretary? Can we clear the gallery as quickly as possible, please, as there is a debate going on?

My apologies, cabinet secretary. Perhaps you would like to resume.

Nicola Sturgeon: As I said, I welcome the opportunity to open the debate. We all agree that we want a welfare system that works well and is fair to all. However, that is not what we have now.

Members know from their postbags and local surgeries that our welfare system is complicated, is unfair and disconnects people from the prospect of making a meaningful economic contribution. The stated aim of the Welfare Reform Bill is to simplify the system, make it more accessible and—most important—make work pay. The Scottish Government and, I suspect, many members of the Parliament support those principles; the key question is how they translate into practice.

I thank the many organisations that sent briefings in advance of the debate. In particular, I mention the paper from the Scottish campaign on welfare reform, which represents around 60 organisations. We will give careful consideration to the five key points that are directed to the Scottish Government in that briefing, but I will address specifically the legislative consent motion that will come before the Parliament in due course.

First, it is important to point out that welfare is a reserved matter. Let me be clear that that is not the choice of Scottish National Party members. Our view is that the Scottish Parliament, not the United Kingdom Parliament, should decide on welfare policy for Scotland; our view is that Scotland should be independent. However, the fact is that welfare is reserved. That means that, unfortunately, the UK Government does not need

this Parliament's consent for the substance of its proposals and that an LCM on the universal credit and the personal independence payment would be largely technical.

However, welfare policy has a huge impact on a range of devolved responsibilities, such as health, social care, employability and services for vulnerable people. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that, when we lodge the LCM and the supplementary memorandum that will accompany it, we are able to advise the Parliament what the impact of the reforms will be. We do not yet have that detail and, as the bill is largely an enabling bill, members should make no mistake that the devil will be in the detail of the regulations.

Therefore, we have asked for an amendment to be made to the bill to require the Scottish Government's consent to regulations that will apply in Scotland. That would help to ensure that the reforms are consistent with good governance, are sensitive to Scotland's delivery environment and align with our devolved policies and services. We have not yet had the UK Government's response to that request.

We have sought to work constructively with the UK Government and will continue to do so, but we feel increasingly frustrated in our duties to this Parliament by the lack of detail. Therefore, I wrote to Iain Duncan Smith again today asking for additional details and for an amendment to be made to the bill to require our consent to regulations.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Is the cabinet secretary saying that, if the UK Government does not agree to such an amendment, the Scottish Government will oppose the bill and not lodge an LCM?

Nicola Sturgeon: I was coming on to that point, so that was a timely intervention from Patrick Harvie.

I have made it clear that our final position on an LCM will take account of the UK Government's response to those requests. It will also, of course, be informed by parliamentary scrutiny in this Parliament. However, I have also made it clear that, as things stand, I could not recommend that the Parliament support a legislative consent motion. For that reason, we will support Jackie Baillie's amendment.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): This week, the bill is in the House of Lords. It still faces more amendment in the House of Commons and must come back for a third reading, so we are at the beginning of the process. I hope that it will not be judged on its current form, rather on the one that we have in the end.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is a fair point and it is why I said that, as things stand, I could not recommend to Parliament that it support an LCM. I cannot answer many of the questions that many of the organisations that will be represented in the public gallery are asking about the impact of the bill.

Many organisations with an interest in welfare have been encouraging us to look beyond the specific and very narrow matters relevant to legislative consent. Yesterday, at the Scotland Bill Committee, we heard evidence from Citizens Advice Scotland, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Wise Group and the Poverty Alliance, all of which gave us the same message: the reforms, as proposed, will have a significant impact on many aspects of devolved policy, on services that are provided by our local authorities and the third sector and on the most vulnerable in our society.

The committee heard about some of the opportunities that a change in our constitutional arrangements could provide. There is a growing sense that we could, here in Scotland, take a different approach. I have already mentioned this Government's commitment to further devolution in this area, particularly in respect of housing benefit and the administrative functions of Jobcentre Plus.

Although some of the principles behind the current reforms are to be welcomed—I think that we could agree on that across the chamber—the deep and damaging cuts to welfare spending that were announced by the chancellor in both June and October last year will hurt the poorest.

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): Given that, in an independent Scotland, our share of the current deficit would be at least £12 billion per annum, how does the cabinet secretary propose, in her wonderful welfare system, to sustain even the current level of expenditure on welfare benefits?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thought that the Tories were meant to be moving away from the position that "We're too poor, too wee and too weak to be independent." As David McLetchie well knows, we contribute more to the UK Treasury than we get in return. Perhaps it is not a change of name that the Scottish Conservatives need but a change of attitude towards Scotland.

What is being billed as a progressive reform programme is being undermined by a Treasury-determined starting point that attacks the vulnerable. First, the change from the retail prices index to the consumer prices index for the uprating of benefits hits the poorest: it takes money out of their pockets, out of our communities and out of our economy at a time when we need it most. It

also hits them for the long term and does damage that will not be undone when times get better.

Another issue is housing costs, to which Alex Neil will no doubt return in his summing up. We will see an ever-increasing gap between the rents that are charged and the benefits that are paid to cover them. We estimate that 60,000 tenants in Scotland face the prospect of losing an average of £40 per month through changes introduced this year.

Mary Scanlon: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: This is the last intervention that I will take.

Mary Scanlon: The highest rate of housing benefit is currently £2,000 per week and the proposal is to reduce it to £500 per week. I think that that is reasonable.

Nicola Sturgeon: Mary Scanlon should listen to what I am saying. Penalties imposed from 2013 onwards will mean that working-age people living in larger families will be hit to the tune of £11 per week. The changes will have an adverse impact on our Government's efforts to meet the 2012 homelessness target and to sustain the momentum that we need to sustain. Historically, we have been doing much to reduce the need for people to be unintentionally homeless.

Lastly, we need to consider the plight of the disabled under the reforms. Members will be aware of the significant anxiety felt by many disabled people and their carers who, fresh from the experience of migration from incapacity benefit on to employment and support allowance, now face further reassessments following the abolition of disability living allowance and the introduction of personal independence payments. That comes at a cost, too: a 20 per cent cut in funding for disabled people's support.

The constituency mailbag of every member in this chamber will, like mine, be full and getting fuller with letters and e-mails from distressed and seriously ill benefit claimants who have been found fit for work under the ESA changes. Those people will need further attention as the changes take effect. We believe in supporting all those with a health condition who are able to work into work, but we must recognise that, for some, that is not an option and they should be entitled to an acceptable quality of life on benefits. That is also the case for those who have caring responsibilities in the home.

We are concerned about the implications of the new conditionality regime for single parents, who will be faced with the prospect of losing benefit or being forced into low-paid employment with the associated childcare costs.

We know that there will be winners and losers under the universal credit. Modelling by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that couples who have children will benefit more than couples who do not. Lone parents will be, on average, worse off in the long term under universal credit. The freezing of universal child benefit affects all families, but the greatest impact will be felt by those who are on the lowest incomes as benefit falls as a proportion of income.

Successive Scottish Governments have been committed to eradicating poverty, and child poverty in particular, from our very vocabulary. Poverty has fallen substantially in Scotland in relative terms since 1994.

Although welfare is a reserved matter, the reform programme will impact on the nature and scale of demand for devolved services. The reforms have an underpinning principle of localism that is attractive to this Government, but there are fears that it will come at a cost to the Scottish block and that the Scottish Government and other agencies in Scotland will be left to deal with the consequences of any damage that is done. Such down-the-line pressures on childcare, skills and health budgets will come about as a result not of measures that have been introduced here, but of those that have been introduced elsewhere.

The third sector plays a strong and significant part in supporting vulnerable people. Some of that is Government funded, but much is driven by voluntary effort and a commitment to community. We know that service users are experiencing a great deal of worry at the prospect of reducing incomes and uncertainty as their circumstances change, and we recognise that the third sector will often be the first port of call.

It is a huge frustration to know that the impact of the reforms will be felt at a time of significant reductions in the resources that are available to the Parliament. Their impact on local services and budgets is difficult to measure because the UK Government has so far been silent about much of the detail that will guide the final operating arrangements of its programme. It has been silent on the regulations, on the assessment criteria and on the costs.

The Parliament cannot be silent on the issue. We have a responsibility to speak up for the vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our society. We all recognise that the system is broken but we need to ensure that it is reformed in a fundamentally fair way that does not simply pass responsibility on to somewhere else in the system. I look forward to the debate and, in the meantime, I have much pleasure in moving the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Welfare Reform Bill that is currently being considered by the UK Parliament; regrets that the far-reaching proposals contained in the bill are being pursued against the backdrop of substantial cuts to welfare benefits announced in the June and October 2010 UK budgets; further regrets the impact that these cuts will have on some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in society and on the local authority and third-sector organisations committed to supporting vulnerable people, and calls on the UK Government to pursue a welfare system that is properly financed, simple to understand, lifts people out of poverty and makes work pay.

15:18

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate welfare reform and I congratulate the Government on finally bringing the matter to the chamber. Given the significance of the issues that are at stake, I am slightly surprised that it took so long for the Government to act, but I do not want to be churlish to start off.

We in the Labour Party support the simplification of the welfare system and the use of benefits to ensure a smooth transition to employment. However, what we are currently witnessing has little to do with that or, for that matter, with fairness or social justice. It amounts to the single most significant attack on the welfare state in my generation; it is nothing short of a cover for cuts. A total of £18 billion has already been cut from out-of-work benefits and tax credits. In Scotland, the Fraser of Allander Institute suggests that the benefit cuts will amount to £2 billion, which will have a direct impact on household spend and growth.

"It's fair those with broader shoulders should bear a greater load".

So said David Cameron to the Tory conference last year. Yet, in October 2010 the coalition Government announced public sector cuts of £81 billion, including £18 billion cuts to benefits. While the most affluent avoid paying £120 billion in taxes and bankers continue to award themselves huge bonuses, disabled people are facing the biggest attack on their rights in my lifetime.

In the reality of the new Tory Britain, the broadest shouldered are the poor, the disabled, the sick and the elderly.

David McLetchie: Are these tax avoiders who Jackie Baillie mentions the same people who avoided taxes during the 13 years of Labour Government and whom, I presume, Gordon Brown did nothing about?

Jackie Baillie: That is a very weak justification for continuing to consider tax avoidance as somehow acceptable. Clearly, this is the new brand of Conservative compassion combined with Liberal love. Beveridge would be ashamed to see the modern-day Liberal Democrat party cosying up

with the Tories to attack the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.

With regard to the practical effects of the new Welfare Reform Bill, I note, first of all, that there will be a new universal credit encompassing a myriad other benefits including income support, jobseekers allowance, child tax credit and working tax credit. However, what is unclear is the amount of benefit that will be paid; how childcare costs will be included; and the taper for withdrawing benefit as earnings increase. All that will be left to secondary legislation, so we are unable to scrutinise the detail. However, we know that eligibility will tighten, which means that fewer people will qualify. Will there be more or fewer people in income poverty as a consequence of the bill? The answer is less than clear.

Secondly, disability living allowance will be replaced by a PIP—or personal independence payment. It all sounds good and empowering, but the reality is very different. Given that PIPs will start life with a 20 per cent cut in budget, it is perhaps more a case of empowering people to manage with less.

I have warned the chamber many times of the perfect storm that we face in charging for social care. If local authorities are charging for services based on disability benefits, what happens if those disability benefits are reduced? Who will pay? Are people to be abandoned and left to struggle at home when their care service is withdrawn? What estimates have been made of the costs that local authorities might now have to pick up?

There will be an impact on devolved policies and devolved services across the board—and nowhere is that more evident than in the proposed changes to council tax benefit and housing benefit. Yes, council tax benefit is to be devolved, but—guess what—with a 10 per cent cut. How will local authorities, with their increasingly constrained resources and with demand rising, cope with that?

Housing benefit will be centralised, but it will be subject to a range of new conditions that directly interfere with our housing and homelessness policy direction in Scotland. If that is not bad enough, it will also have practical adverse consequences for tenants. Changes to housing benefit for private sector tenants that have already been introduced have resulted in reductions in allowances and have forced tenants out of their homes as they can no longer afford the rent.

Now we have the proposed changes to housing benefit for those in the social rented sector. The removal of direct payments to social landlords—in the name of choice—will increase rent arrears and in many cases will lead to court action. It is difficult to manage budgets at the best of times, but people who are on low incomes often make

immediate choices that might be more important than keeping money for the rent. Because they are unable to cope, more people might well fall into debt and consequently end up homeless. The criterion for underoccupation also needs urgent revision because we simply do not have the housing stock to allow people to move into smaller accommodation.

I must confess that I am left wondering what dialogue or consultation has taken place between the two Governments. How often has the UK Government spoken to the cabinet secretary and how often has the cabinet secretary met her counterpart to push Scotland's case?

The Scottish Government is not known for its reticence. However, I am slightly troubled. The Government has been remarkably slow in coming forward with this debate, never mind lodging a legislative consent motion that would afford time for scrutiny. We are in danger of sleepwalking through this bill. I am told that there has been a lot of analysis of the scale of the problem—which is indeed helpful—but little has been done about the solutions that are fast becoming urgent. We on these benches stand ready to help with the process in any way we can. It is appropriate for the chamber to ask about the posture that will be adopted by the Scottish Government in its negotiations with the UK Government. Are we suggesting a compromise—and, if so, what is it? Are we seeking changes—and if so, what are they? What will the deal breaker be? I would welcome it if, in his summing up, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment could say something about the approach that is being taken.

There has been little indication—

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I am sorry—I need to make progress.

There has been little indication of what the SNP wants to do about council tax benefits, which are soon to be devolved. Moreover, there has been little, if any, indication of what will happen to community care grants and crisis loans, both of which, too, will be devolved. Who will run the scheme of grants and loans in the future? Who will benefit? Will there be national eligibility criteria and will they have statutory underpinning? The SNP has not yet provided any answers, and I encourage it to do so.

What about entitlement to passported benefits, such as free school meals, clothing grants and the energy assistance package, all of which will be affected by the changes? We have no indication of what will happen in Scotland. I have lodged numerous parliamentary questions, none of which has received a substantive response, even though

those are decisions for the Scottish Government and the Parliament.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: No, I cannot. I do not have sufficient time.

Members: Aw.

Jackie Baillie: Listen, the cabinet secretary has had months to answer questions and bring forward proposals, but she has not done so. Some of this is devolved to the Scottish Government and it has to assume responsibility.

If people who are on lower rate DLA lose their benefit, as they will, will the SNP continue to make them eligible for concessionary transport?

I have a confession to make—I am sad enough to have read all 500-odd pages of the budget document. I could not find a single line, figure, word or reference to the welfare reform proposals that we are discussing today, but they have huge financial implications for the Parliament.

Nicola Sturgeon *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): The member is in her final minute.

Jackie Baillie: Just as there is little detail from the SNP, there is little detail underpinning the Welfare Reform Bill at Westminster. Too much is unknown; too much is consigned to secondary legislation. We should resist attempts to railroad this through without being able to see all the detail, either in draft regulations or—preferably—on the face of the bill. We should demand that of the UK Government.

I will stand shoulder to shoulder with any party or group to challenge the UK Government's welfare reform agenda, which attacks the very poorest members of our society but, equally, I will challenge the SNP to meet its responsibilities, too. Nicola Sturgeon talked about the SNP's aspirations for independence. For a party that believes in independence and wants control over the welfare state not to have a view on how that would be organised, when key aspects are to be devolved to Scotland, is simply baffling.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie, you need to finish.

Jackie Baillie: This is my final sentence, Presiding Officer.

Others more cynical than I might suggest that that is so that the SNP can blame Westminster or local government if things go wrong.

I urge members to support the Labour amendment. Let us leave the UK Government in no doubt about the views of the Scottish

Parliament. We will oppose the legislative consent motion if substantial changes are not made to the Welfare Reform Bill.

I move amendment S4M-01008.1, to insert at end:

“and is otherwise minded, subject to consideration by the appropriate committees, to oppose the forthcoming legislative consent motion pertaining to the Welfare Reform Bill.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mary Scanlon to speak to and move amendment S4M-01008.2. You have a very tight six minutes.

15:27

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Welfare Reform Bill is an extensive piece of legislation that cannot be fully covered in the tight six minutes that I have.

Our amendment recognises the need to reform the welfare system, become a fairer society and bring an end to the penalising of hard-working families. Although we can all disagree on the detail, I would have thought that every responsible parliamentarian would support the bill's general principles.

It is worth mentioning that the legislative consent motion will come to the Health and Sport Committee only in seven weeks' time, before going to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee and another committee, so we are at the start of the process.

I cannot understand why the Labour Party is opposed to the reforms, given that spending on working-age welfare rocketed by 50 per cent in real terms under Labour before the recession. A system that was originally designed to support the poorest in society is now trapping them in the very condition that it was supposed to alleviate. In Scotland, almost 500,000 people of working age are on out-of-work benefits.

The former Labour pensions secretary Lord John Hutton pointed out, when he undertook his review, that

“nine out of 10 people who come on to incapacity benefit expect to get back into work. Yet ... if they have been on incapacity benefit for more than two years, they are more likely to retire or die than ever to get another job.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 24 July 2006; Vol 449, c 621.]

The former Labour welfare minister Frank Field is quoted as saying that Labour's flagship welfare policy was an expensive failure and that it had to be acknowledged that the Government's new deal and making work pay strategies had failed to get many unemployed people back into work, even at the height of the boom.

In *The Times* on 9 November 2010, James Purnell, Labour's former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions stated:

“the plan to merge many current benefits into one ... is a good reform ... Before I resigned from the Cabinet, I proposed a similar plan to Mr Brown.”

I find it astonishing that Labour here in Scotland is opposed to helping people get back to work.

The universal credit will be introduced in 2013 with full migration by 2017. The credit combines into one payment jobseekers allowance, housing benefit, child tax credit, working tax credit, income support, and employment and support allowance, making it easier for people to see that they will be consistently and transparently better off for each hour they work and every pound they earn. Surely simplifying the system, removing the bureaucracy and making it easier for people to receive the support that they need has to be a good thing.

The personal independence allowance will replace DLA and will introduce a new assessment system to assess individuals more accurately and consistently to determine who will benefit most from additional support. More than two thirds of people on disability living allowance have an indefinite award and are left for years with no reassessment.

The current system is a mess of multiple benefits paid at varying rates and is open to widespread abuse. The result of massive error and fraud costs the taxpayer more than £5 billion every year.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: I am sorry; I have a very tight six minutes.

Given that the maximum housing benefit award has now reached £2,000 a week—I do not think that even any of us here could afford to spend £2,000 a week on accommodation—it is not unreasonable to cap the benefit at £500 a week for couples and £350 for single adults. Most hard-working families could not even dream of renting a property at £2,000 a week.

According to the Department for Work and Pensions, on the introduction of the new work capability assessment 36 per cent of people withdrew their claim, deciding themselves that they no longer needed to claim benefits. [*Interruption.*] Some members may laugh, but this is a responsible debate and I would have hoped that the SNP would take it seriously. Some 39 per cent were considered fit for work, 17 per cent were placed in work-related activity, and 7 per cent were rated unfit to work and given the highest rate of support. Some 37 per cent of claimants appealed, of which 39 per cent were successful,

resulting in an overall 14 per cent success rate for appeals.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way on that point?

Mary Scanlon: The member will have his chance; I have just a very short time.

Those were the figures on 26 July this year. Following that, the Harrington review was brought forward and many changes are being made to the system, including to take account of fluctuating conditions such as ME, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's and mental health issues. It will no longer be acceptable for the national health service to ignore the 47 per cent of claimants for incapacity benefit who have a mental health problem—everyone who spoke in the debate last week made that point.

Another important point is that, under previous work programmes, providers were given 53 per cent of the fee up front to get people into work. Now they get 5 per cent of the fee, and the rest is paid over two years to ensure that the support continues.

How can it be right that we ask the unemployed to move from benefit into work when they face losing more than 95p for every additional £1 they earn? As a result of that poverty trap, the poor are being taxed at a rate that far exceeds the wealthy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Scanlon, you need to come to a conclusion.

Mary Scanlon: I am just finishing.

The Welfare Reform Bill is halfway through the Lords. It will then go back to the Commons to be amended. I hope that this Parliament will play a positive role in scrutinising it. I move the amendment in my name, and we also support the very sensible Lib Dem amendment.

I move amendment S4M-01008.2, to leave out from first "regrets" to end and insert:

"recognises the requirement to reform the welfare system to meet the demand for a fairer society and to bring to an end a system that penalises hard-working families and rewards those who refuse to take on paid employment despite being able to do so; commends the UK Government's aims to simplify the entire benefits system through the introduction of the universal credit system; commends the UK Government for placing work at the heart of the reforms and for providing ongoing support for those in paid employment, and supports the UK Government in its pursuit of a fairer welfare system."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liam McArthur to speak to and move amendment S4M-01008.3. He has a strict six minutes.

15:34

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate this afternoon. Welfare reform is clearly an area of policy that arouses considerable interest and about which there are strongly held views, as evidenced—as the cabinet secretary suggested—by the sheer volume of briefings that members have received in recent days.

In many instances, I have no difficulty with the concerns that have been raised with respect to the Welfare Reform Bill or the way in which they have been conveyed. In some cases, however, the assertions depart from reality by quite some distance. I simply do not accept, for instance, that the bill represents the "dismantling" of the welfare state, as some have suggested.

That is not to say that there will not be profound implications in what I fully accept is set to be the most radical overhaul of the benefits system in a generation, but it is now widely accepted—certainly, it was by the previous UK Labour Government, and it is implicit in the SNP Government's otherwise unrevealing motion—that the current system is in need of reform.

The cabinet secretary spoke of a need for a system that is simple to understand, and she is right to point to the problems that are created by the bewildering complexity of the current welfare arrangements. That is why proposals have been brought forward to simplify and streamline the welfare benefits under the universal credit—an approach that has, in the past, enjoyed cross-party support, but which I agree will not be straightforward to achieve.

Another driver for reform is to ensure that work always pays, by removing barriers and disincentives to moving off benefits and into employment.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: I do not have time. I am sorry.

Nicola Sturgeon and Jackie Baillie seemed to support that aim, although both are disappointingly vague about how they would achieve it, if not through the proposals in the bill.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: I cannot—I am sorry.

I hope that the principle of ensuring that changes in circumstances are reflected in benefits levels in real time—in order to tackle the problem of overpayments and rebates while encouraging job-market participation—also commands widespread support. The delivery of a system that incentivises work for all and which addresses the

shameful numbers of people who are trapped on out-of-work benefits; of a system that is simpler, fairer and more transparent; and of a system that maintains a genuine safety net for the most vulnerable people in our society, is a prize that is worth pursuing. Far from representing a dismantling of the welfare state, I think that that is an approach that is in keeping with Beveridge's original reforms.

The reality is that the current system too often provides the wrong incentives and acts for too many people as an obstacle to work. That is unfair to claimants, but is also unfair to working families on low incomes, who have to pay for a system that is not working.

Over the past decade, for most of which time there was relentless growth in our economy, the welfare budget rose by more than 40 per cent in real terms. That makes no sense and shows that although a strategy for job creation is essential, it is simply not the whole answer.

In the UK, we have five million people trapped on out-of-work benefits, one of the highest rates of workless households in Europe and almost two million children living in homes in which no one has a job. In those circumstances, I cannot see how another exercise in tinkering around the edges would suffice.

I appreciate that there are concerns about the impacts on specific groups, about the way in which the reforms might play out alongside areas of devolved policy responsibility, such as health and housing, and about the roles of local government and the voluntary sector. I certainly do not underestimate the potential complexity of trying to address those concerns, but does that not simply make the case for direct, detailed and sustained engagement between governments and others north and south of the border? As I understand it, the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities are members of the senior stakeholder board that is overseeing the universal credit programme. There is also on-going dialogue between the UCP and the Scottish Government-led welfare reform scrutiny group. Other for a exist and one imagines that part of the purpose of today's debate is to give members an opportunity to put on the record concerns that they wish to be addressed.

Already changes have been made to initially poorly thought out proposals in relation to the treatment of people who have disabilities. I am pleased that the recommendations by Professor Harrington have been accepted. Likewise, as COSLA has pointed out, amendments are being proposed in relation to the housing provisions, including some that have been suggested by my colleague Lord Kirkwood, and those seem to make considerable sense.

However, I struggle with the notion that has been posited by some witnesses to the Scotland Bill Committee this week and by the Labour amendment today, that we should somehow remove ourselves from the debate, as if the need for welfare reform does not exist in Scotland. That cannot be what the SNP or Labour is arguing, but we have seen little detail of changes that either would propose in order to manage a budget that, as I pointed out, ballooned during what have largely been good times, and which quite demonstrably provides perverse disincentives to encourage and support people into work. To say, "We are in favour of reforms—just not these reforms", is an unsatisfactory defence, and is as vacuous as the slogan, "Too deep and too fast".

We were told this week that any reform of the welfare system would need to await the outcome of the SNP's referendum on independence, but that that does not mean that the First Minister is under any obligation to consider holding his referendum before 2014. We cannot simply go on talking about the need for creating a welfare system that is simple to understand, that lifts people out of poverty, that makes work pay and that provides a proper and effective safety net for those who need it. We need to take action.

It is right that we continue to press for appropriate safeguards and assurances, beyond those that have already been given. However, claiming to be in favour of reform but holding the view that any cuts to any benefits or any tightening of any of the demands that are placed on recipients are automatically unfair is no longer credible.

I urge the Government, members across this chamber and the people who have e-mailed us in large numbers over recent days to continue making the case for changes, where it is felt that they are needed, and not to lose sight of the pressing need for a radical overhaul of the current system.

I move amendment S4M-01008.3, to leave out from first "regrets" to end and insert:

"recognises that these fundamental reforms will deliver a system that incentivises work, is simplified and streamlined and maintains a safety net for those vulnerable individuals who cannot work; further recognises that there are almost half a million people on out-of-work benefits in Scotland and that approximately 15% of Scottish children live in workless households, and believes that this radical reform of the current welfare system is required in order to support people back into work and ensure that work always pays."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate, with speeches of six minutes, but if members could make their points in less time, that would be helpful.

15:39

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): Unfortunately, that is not normally how I conduct myself, Presiding Officer, but I shall do my best.

This debate is a vital one in which we all have a moral duty to speak out, even if this Parliament does not yet have the full legislative power to act on the issue. A legislative consent motion will come to the Health and Sport Committee—of which I am deputy convener—as lead committee on the bill. I very much welcome the cabinet secretary's view that the Welfare Reform Bill is not fit for purpose and would be rejected.

I want to highlight some of the potentially devastating harmful consequences of the benefit reforms that the UK Government is bringing to Scotland. In doing so, I thank the many voluntary sector organisations whose excellent briefings have been helpful. The Citizens Advice Bureaux Scotland briefing provided case studies, one of which is the example of a 40-year-old man in Glasgow who is claiming incapacity benefit and disability living allowance at the lower rate and is in receipt of housing benefit for a social tenancy. If that man is considered fit for work following reassessment and is also affected by housing benefit cuts, he could lose anywhere between £60 and £120 every week, which is not small change in any one's book.

The reforms will have absolutely horrific consequences if they go through as they stand. There are over 190,000 incapacity benefit recipients in Scotland, who have every right to be worried by the reforms. The UK Government is introducing a cocktail of cuts with its Welfare Reform Bill, and its ingredients amount to a savage attack on many of the most vulnerable groups in our society. We must do all that we can as a Parliament to fend off those cuts in Scotland, although in reality this Parliament is not fully equipped to do so. The Welfare Reform Bill started from a UK Government position of cutting cash at any cost, and the attack on the most vulnerable in our society was a price worth paying for it. Let me be clear: it is not a price worth paying for the SNP or for Scotland.

To base any reform of disability benefit on a view that there should be an automatic cut of 20 per cent in that budget is not even a remotely subtle way of disguising the cuts as reforms—it just does not wash. As disability benefit is changed to personal independence payments, a combination of a 20 per cent cut and the removal of entitlement from those on lower-rate DLA is estimated to mean that 75,000 people—one in three working-age claimants—will lose their entitlement. That figure was provided by Inclusion Scotland, which is particularly worried about the damage—

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: I am sorry, but we are tight for time.

Another aspect of the reforms that worries me greatly is the reform of housing benefit. The under-occupancy penalty that is proposed for someone renting in the social rented sector and which will mean a cut in their housing benefit if they have an empty bedroom will affect as many as 95,000 households in Scotland and see between £27 and £65 a month lost to them. Some may say that an unoccupied bedroom is not an efficient use of resources, and that reducing housing benefit is a way to encourage tenants to find a more suitable home, but I fundamentally disagree with that. That imposed benefit cut from Westminster takes no account, for instance, of the fact that 44 per cent of tenants in the social rented sector require a one-bedroom house but only 24 per cent stay in one because the housing stock does not actually exist. The figures just do not stack up.

The proposed reforms could, for example, force a long-standing tenant in Springburn with a disability to move out of their home and seek a smaller property, perhaps in Castlemilk at the other end of Glasgow. That is just not satisfactory. They would lose their spare room, in which perhaps a carer would stay to provide support. They would also lose their entire support network of family and friends and would face social isolation. That is, of course, if alternative accommodation even existed. As has been clearly stated, it just does not.

Housing benefit reforms will mean that disabled people and others will have to use a greater chunk of shrinking benefits to pay for rent—that is not an acceptable choice. It will leave social housing providers in the invidious and horrible position of either dropping their rents, which they would not be able to afford to do, or pursuing vulnerable tenants for rent arrears, which is not a position that anyone should be in. However, the UK welfare reforms will bring that position to Scotland. We must prevent that.

I am delighted that we will give robust scrutiny to the LCM at the Health and Sport Committee, although I wish that we did not have to do so. Such is the detail of scrutiny that is needed that perhaps, as voluntary sector organisations have suggested, we need an ad hoc committee of the Scottish Parliament to be set up, in order that we have an adequate vehicle for scrutiny of the devastating proposals. We will have to wait and see, but we certainly have a moral duty to speak out against the UK benefit reforms and the direct impact on Scotland of changes to housing benefit, council tax benefit, the social fund and the use of passported benefits to gain access to devolved

entitlements. The matter is complex and should be dealt with by the Scottish Parliament.

My heart sinks when I think that however much Scottish Parliament committees scrutinise the proposals and say how wrong they are, we will have no power to stand against them. That is something that we must change. We can do so only through Scottish independence.

15:45

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): Members of all parties can agree on the value of work and on the importance of the welfare state to people who are out of work or are unable to work, for whatever reason.

As the Department for Work and Pensions takes forward its programme of reform, it must bear in mind that a comprehensive system of benefits and entitlements is not a sign of weakness, a failed economy and a broken Britain, but is an essential component of a caring, compassionate and civilised society. The welfare system in this country is by no means perfect, but we should all take time to remember that the welfare state has great capacity to change lives and support people who are in need.

I am concerned about the UK Government's anti-welfare tone. It is deeply misguided to suggest that the cause of unemployment is unemployment benefit, or that the cause of incapacity is incapacity benefit. I am more than willing to support welfare reforms that are fair, balanced and evidence based, but the scale of the claimant count in the UK is symptomatic of, and not the cause of, the problems in our society. Many of our social ills are products of the mass inequality of the 1980s, from which we have yet to recover. Because inequality is intergenerational, so too are unemployment, poverty and poor public health. That is a lesson that every Government in every part of the United Kingdom should bear in mind before embarking on a series of reforms that will affect many people, especially people who are among the most excluded and vulnerable groups in society.

I hope that the UK Government can be made to realise the profound ramifications of the Welfare Reform Bill. I hope that it will acknowledge the need for safeguards to protect people who play by the rules and who seek nothing more from the state than help to support themselves and their dependants in a time of need.

The bill will hit families by reducing overall entitlement. It will hit the sick and the disabled. It will hit job seekers by dampening incentives to work and it will hit savers by capping payments to the people who save the most.

The universal credit system, which the bill will introduce, will condense a range of gateway benefits into a single benefit, but it is not clear what the new gateway will be. How will the Scottish Government or local authorities determine who is eligible for tax concessions or money off their council tax? How will it decide which families are entitled to extra help with childcare? How will it support families who fall through the cracks? We should remember that after four years of an SNP Government we still use the UK benefits system to decide which children are eligible for free school meals.

If council tax benefit is to be replaced by grants to local authorities, what will the implications be for the Scottish budget and for Scottish councils? There is no reference to the proposals in the draft budget and I fear that the Scottish Government might have produced its spending review without taking account of the serious financial consequences of welfare reform.

Those concerns are shared by the Scottish campaign on welfare reform. It notes that the UK Government's green paper and the bill contain proposals on childcare and skills support, but the Scottish Government has not indicated how it will respond. The finance secretary knew that the Welfare Reform Bill was going through the UK Parliament when he planned his draft budget, and he has known about the content of the UK Government's spending review for months. Where in the budget does he set out his response to welfare reforms or welfare cuts?

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Margaret McCulloch: No. I am sorry, but I have no time.

When the Government lodged its draft memorandum for the as yet unpublished LCM earlier this year, it accepted that there would be financial implications, but it has yet to publish its assessment of the costs and to budget for them. The UK Government is making transitional funding available, but as the Scottish Government has said in a memorandum, it is not clear what costs the DWP will cover. There has been no obvious consideration of the impact that changes might have on childcare, training and public services as a direct—or even indirect—consequence of the Welfare Reform Bill. The Scottish Government will have to respond to those points.

Our immediate concern is that the Welfare Reform Bill could receive royal assent in a matter of weeks, and it appears that the Scottish Government is unprepared. We must stand up now for the people who will be affected, and we as a Parliament must speak with one voice against the bill, the motion and the cuts.

We may not agree with the UK Government's welfare reforms, but change is coming. We must do all that we can to ensure that no one in Scotland falls through the cracks. Labour's amendment, in the name of Jackie Baillie, sets us on the right track and I urge members to give it their full support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Mark McDonald, I reiterate the need for speeches of a maximum of six minutes, otherwise members will fall out of the debate.

15:52

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): I will do what I can to assist the Presiding Officer in that regard. I declare an interest as a member of Aberdeen City Council.

The notion appears to be that reform is needed and that we must therefore back these reforms, as it is not good enough simply to say that they are not suitable. In the past few days, however, we have had a range of briefings from a variety of organisations throughout the voluntary sector, which have made sensible suggestions for ways in which the bill could be changed to better reflect the needs of vulnerable people in society. I suggest that it might be worth the UK Government's while to take the time to reflect on those submissions and to take on board some of the sensible suggestions that voluntary groups and organisations—which are dealing directly with the very people who will be affected by the changes—have made.

It is unfortunate that Liam McArthur tried to insinuate that there is not a different way to do this. There is always a different way to do things; the question is whether one has the political will to do it. It might be worth the Liberal Democrats' while to choose this moment to exercise the much talked-about, but little-seen, civilising influence that they claim to have over their Conservative counterparts. Now is the time and now is the hour, Mr McArthur: let us have some of it.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: No. I want to get through my speech as quickly as possible to assist the Presiding Officer.

Let us consider the impact on local authority budgets. Aberdeen City Council has received a range of reports to its social care and wellbeing committee and its housing and environment committee that focus on the impact that the reforms would have. Those reports clearly show that there would be a reduction in housing benefit because of the change to the excess, and they highlight the potential for increased council tax and

rent arrears, which would impact directly on local authority budgets.

Beyond that, the stresses and strains that are placed on people who find themselves in detrimental positions will likely lead to the outcome of increased demand on social care services resulting from the impact on individuals' mental health and wellbeing as they go through the process.

Mary Scanlon did not accept my interventions, but I fully accept that she was pushed for time, so I will use my speech as an opportunity to retort to some of her points. She said that 40 per cent of ESA decisions that were made under the work capability assessment and which were challenged were overturned. That is correct, but when the appellants were represented at their appeals, the figure rose to more than 60 per cent. To me, the entire process appears to be starting from the wrong position, if more than 60 per cent of appeals are being overturned when appropriate representation is given to appellants. I suggest that that needs to be looked at and thought through.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: Mary Scanlon is pushing it in asking me to accept an intervention when she did not accept any of mine.

Mary Scanlon also spoke about error. I looked this up. At the moment, £3.3 billion is lost annually through fraud and error—one third through fraud, one third through claimant error and one third through official error. What does the UK Government propose to do about it? It proposes to introduce a £50 fine for claimant error but has no proposal to increase official accountability. Beyond that, it proposes to remove the right of appeal against clawback of overpayments due to official error. So, the mantra is that if it is the individual's mistake, the individual will be punished and, if it is the UK Government's mistake, the individual will be punished. Frankly, Sir Humphrey Appleby could not have made that policy up, and it is abhorrent that it is even being considered in the legislation. That is one change that the UK Government could make that would make a positive difference.

We must do all that we can to ensure that the bill does not impact detrimentally on the most vulnerable people in society.

Neil Findlay: I am glad that Mark McDonald has come to that conclusion. However, I cannot help but observe—and, this time, welcome—the rank hypocrisy in the SNP. Why has the SNP decided to oppose the legislative consent motion only when Jackie Baillie has lodged an amendment?

Mark McDonald: It is good that the Labour Party welcomes the consensual approach that we are taking in accepting the Labour amendment. I worry about the tone that would have been struck had we said that we were not going to support the amendment. If ever the phrase “grudging support” needed definition, we just heard it. I say gently to Mr Findlay that he is treading on shaky ground in talking about “rank hypocrisy” after the Labour Party had 13 years in which to make appropriate reforms to the welfare system and to introduce something better than what we have—there is general acceptance across the chamber that what we currently have is not fit for purpose—which would have prevented the wrack and ruin that the Conservative Party is seeking to be brought upon the poorest people in society. I am sorry, but Labour left the door open for the Conservative Party to drive a coach and horses through it, so Mr Findlay must accept his party’s culpability.

We must ensure that the reforms are tailored to prevent hardship from being brought on the poorest and most vulnerable in society. That is why, at decision time, we should support the motion in the name of the cabinet secretary as amended by the Labour Party. I give you 30 seconds, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. It is much appreciated.

15:57

Margaret Burgess (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Like other members, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Welfare Reform Bill. It may be a devolved matter, but it will have lasting and detrimental consequences for many individuals, services and families throughout Scotland. It is therefore important that we discuss it today.

A lot has been said about people not wanting to work, deliberately not working and faking illness. However, I worked in the advice sector for 25 years and rarely saw that. Most people want to work, but the programmes were not put together to allow them to do so by successive Labour and Conservative Governments, which did not create an environment for job creation or help those who needed support into work—that support did not exist. Now, the UK Government is saying that people simply do not want to work, but that is not true.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Margaret Burgess: No, I will not, because Mary Scanlon refused to give way when she spoke.

We must recognise that many of our citizens are unable to work and need to be protected on an income that keeps them out of poverty and gives

them a reasonable standard of living. That is fundamental to any welfare system, and that should remain in any system. However, there is no clarity about how the Westminster bill will contribute to making work pay, to reducing child poverty or to protecting vulnerable groups. As some of my colleagues have said, the bill is simply about saving money: that was the starting point. The Tory-Lib Dem Government looked at Labour’s proposed welfare reforms and thought, “Gosh! We can go even further.” It took Labour’s proposals and added its ideology of giving up the welfare state.

Drew Smith: Given Margaret Burgess’s strong view that the Welfare Reform Bill has been awful from the start, was she surprised that the Scottish Government did not mention the legislative consent motion in its motion for the debate?

Margaret Burgess: No, I was not because, as the Government said today, the proposals will be discussed and scrutinised in committee and we will consider every way in which they could suit Scotland. It was said that dialogue has taken place to try to secure the best deal for Scotland. I tell members that if I have to choose who will get the best deal for Scotland, I will go with the Scottish Government.

The bill will increase unemployment. The former Labour Government introduced employment and support allowance and the work capability assessment, which has never been fit for purpose. We have taken people off that allowance and put them on the unemployed register without any support, or assistance to obtain support. It is reckoned that the number of people who look for every job will increase by five in North Ayrshire, where 23 people already apply for every job.

Labour wanted a reduction to three in the child’s age at which lone parents would come off income support and register for work, but it did not get away with that. It cannot turn around and blame all that on the Tories. The maintenance reforms that are to be introduced will increase child poverty, as will benefit caps.

My colleague Bob Doris spoke well about how the proposed housing benefit changes will increase homelessness and affect the housing strategies of many local authorities up and down the country.

The most vulnerable and disadvantaged are the people who are sick and unable to work; they feel that they are being persecuted. That happens every time welfare benefits change. The view is, “Let’s get the most vulnerable.” DLA will be removed and replaced by the personal independence payment. We have no idea how that will be assessed, but we know that 20 per cent fewer people will receive that payment,

whether or not 20 per cent fewer people will need it. That is wrong.

In the mental health debate last week, I talked about the impact of benefits changes on people who are mentally ill. I have seen that—I have seen people being driven back into hospital simply because of how the benefits system has treated them. The work capability assessment was not designed for people with mental health problems and some people have been pushed from pillar to post. I have seen people being taken off employment and support allowance and told to claim jobseekers allowance. When they claim JSA, they are told that they are not fit to work and that they should go back to claim ESA. People go round and round in that circle—it is still happening—and they receive no money. That affects people's mental health, so that must be examined.

It is clear that demand for the services of local authorities and voluntary organisations will increase, and we must deal with that. Exceptional pressure will be put on organisations that provide advice and assistance to the vulnerable groups and we must ensure that they are properly funded to deliver the service that is asked of them.

I make a plea for a separate committee to scrutinise welfare reform, because of its importance. The reforms will affect people in all our constituencies, so I hope that such a committee will be considered.

16:03

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

If members type my name into Google—which I am sure they all do daily—they will see that the second most popular search response is “Siobhan McMahon disability”. That gives some insight into the curiosity that disability arouses.

I will set the record straight. I have spastic hemiparesis, which is a form of cerebral palsy. I have lived with that disability all my life and I take many of its consequences for granted. Every so often, however, I pause to consider its implications. I cannot drive a car without adaptation. I cannot tie my own shoelaces. I cannot chop an onion unsupervised.

It is surprising how easy it is to forget one's inability to perform such basic tasks, but I am thankful for that ease. My problems are nothing to what many disabled people are forced to contend with. On their behalf, I passionately object to the Welfare Reform Bill's contents.

The Scottish campaign on welfare reform argues that we should make respect for human rights and dignity the cornerstone of our new welfare system. I would go further than that. I

believe that the welfare system should be based on four pillars: respect for human rights, dignity, compassion and trust.

We all remember the Tories' commitment to creating a compassionate society. The Welfare Reform Bill makes it perfectly clear that that commitment was not worth the Michelin-starred napkin it was scribbled on. With the full impact of the UK Government's economic policy beginning to take hold, the Tories are desperate to root out the so-called cheats and benefits scroungers who haunt their dreams like so many sprites and goblins. In their eyes, and under the UK Government, the compassionate society has morphed into the suspicious society—full of dishonest, unscrupulous and lazy people who will fake disability at the drop of a hat and who would rather break their own arms than do an honest day's work. That is not my experience. In my experience, disabled people are honest, hard working and a great deal more determined than most.

Those who live without a disability find it impossible to imagine a life without the free and total use of their mental and physical faculties, but that inability to imagine the constraints that are imposed on disabled people does not prevent us as a society from treating them with the courtesy, respect and compassion that they deserve. They are of equal worth and value. Unfortunately, judging by the contents of the bill, the Westminster Government does not share that belief.

In outlining its plans to replace the disability living allowance with the personal independence payment, the Tory-led coalition invoked the sacred political cows of efficiency and simplification. It talks about creating a welfare system that is affordable and sustainable. It may be affordable and sustainable for those people, but it will not be for the many disabled people who are plunged into poverty because of the Government's determination to cut the disability living allowance by 20 per cent. A cut of 20 per cent will eventually amount to an annual sum of £2.1 billion being taken directly out of the pockets of disabled people. I do not know where that money will end up, but I doubt that it will go to more deserving people. It will most likely go to servicing the debt that is, thanks to the UK Government's perverse economic policy, rapidly increasing.

What worries me most about the new proposals is that, at their core, there is a fundamental lack of trust and respect for the dignity of disabled people, who will be required to jump through even more bureaucratic hoops and will be subjected to ever-more humiliating and intrusive eligibility checks in order to receive money to which they are entitled. The new checks will operate as a process of exclusion. The 20 per cent cut to the disability

living allowance will not be achieved without a significant cut in the number of claimants. Given that there are already more disabled people in the UK than the number who are currently claiming benefits, that is very worrying.

The Government hopes to save £1.45 billion of annual disability living allowance expenditure by 2014-15. The Scottish campaign on welfare reform has said:

"To put this figure in context; annual expenditure on all those currently in receipt of lowest rate care is approximately £900m".

Therefore, in order to reach the target figure, all those people—along with a significant number of those on higher rates—would have to lose their care. It is telling that the personal independence payment makes no allowance for those who are currently on lower-rate care, as Bob Doris said. In Scotland, it has been estimated that in order to reduce the disability living allowance by 20 per cent, a fifth of the current 340,510 claimants will lose their entitlement in its entirety. That is 68,000 people. The combined annual loss of benefits would amount to £260 million. Moreover, if the new assessment tests are restricted to people who are of working age, a staggering one in three disabled people aged from 16 to 65 will lose all their current entitlement.

I have spent hours wading through the numerous briefings that I have been sent by charities and external organisations that are dismayed by the proposals. I know that the Scottish Government has received similar briefings, so I would be grateful if it responded to them and outlined its strategy for dealing with the increased financial and administrative burdens that will be placed on Scottish local authorities, social services and the NHS. Scotland will suffer disproportionately from the cuts, as we have more people with disabilities and long-term health issues.

There is already a lack of clarity in the bill. The SNP's reluctance to state how it plans to deal with the proposals will only add to the anxiety and stress that are being felt by the thousands of disabled people who will feel the bill's full and devastating impact. The SNP Government is justly critical of many Westminster policies and is forever eager to remind us that things would be different if more powers were devolved. I strongly oppose the bill, but at least it gives the Scottish Government a chance to show its mettle in the full gaze of the public eye. Does it have the courage of its convictions?

Scottish Labour stands for social justice. The bill is not just, but constitutes a vicious and unprecedented attack on the rights of disabled people. I call on members to reject the legislative consent motion when it comes before Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Fiona McLeod has a tight six minutes.

16:09

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): It is gratifying that most members are showing their concern about the draconian measures contained in the Welfare Reform Bill. It is not just members who have concerns; it is voluntary organisations and, above all, as we know from our postbags, it is the individuals who will be affected by the reforms. I am delighted and proud that my Government has been working long and hard with a coalition of experts and has been lobbying the UK Government to ensure that the worst effects of the reforms are mitigated in Scotland.

I will concentrate on the drastic effects that the reforms will have on those with mental health problems and those with developmental disorders such as Asperger's. I thank the Scottish Association for Mental Health and Act Now for giving me the following figures: 42 per cent of those in Scotland who claim ESA do so because they have a mental illness; and 43 per cent of the decisions in Atos fitness-to-work assessments relating to those with mental health or developmental problems are overturned on appeal. Many members have already mentioned the fact that the Atos fitness-to-work assessment is completely inappropriate for those with mental health problems or developmental disorders.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Fiona McLeod: No. I am sorry, but I will not.

When we talk about the idea that those who are on ESA or incapacity benefit should be out working, we should remember that only 12 per cent of adults with an Asperger's syndrome diagnosis are in full-time employment. An issue for folk with Asperger's is that it is almost impossible for them to achieve employment without a huge amount of support and preparation.

The position is made even worse when we consider that less than 40 per cent of employers in Scotland would employ someone with a mental illness. We cannot say that we are going to move folk from benefits into work unless we first provide them with the support that they need in order to meet the requirements of work. We cannot move into work those who are on ESA because they have a mental illness or a developmental disorder when employers are not offering them jobs.

No one says that the welfare system is perfect. However, the reform process seems to be driven by the sole objective of reducing costs—such as the 20 per cent reduction to be achieved in DLA and the removal of the lowest level of DLA

completely, whether or not someone needs it. Like other members, I believe that all that such a reform process will do is undermine the effectiveness of the support that the current welfare system provides for the most vulnerable in our society.

As a member of the Health and Sport Committee, I look forward to scrutinising the LCM in the coming weeks. I also look forward to receiving more support and evidence from those in society who can inform us so much better. We cannot always make judgments based on our personal experiences or what we as MSPs get in our mailbags, although that helps to inform us. What we need is evidence to ensure that when we speak to Westminster we can tell it with a clear voice why we think that the Welfare Reform Bill is attacking the most vulnerable in our society.

I cannot help but reflect that it would be hard to envisage a Parliament in an independent Scotland ever putting so many people into such a state of fear and alarm. Many of us agree that the bill before Westminster is inappropriate and ineffective, and I hope that many of us also agree that it is with the devolution of responsibility for welfare support and, ultimately, with independence that we will be able to ensure that the most vulnerable in Scotland are truly and properly supported.

16:14

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this important debate on welfare reform. As we have heard from other members, although the UK Government's proposals are to be welcomed as far as the improvement of work incentives is concerned—particularly the universal credit approach—there are nonetheless significant concerns about the impact that the measures in the UK Government's bill will have on the most vulnerable members of our society. In many important respects, the impact of the bill in Scotland will be devastating and disproportionate.

Significant concerns have been raised this afternoon about the UK Government's failure to take into account the situation on the ground in Scotland as regards a number of devolved areas that will be affected by the bill. We have heard about housing benefit and the potential impact on passported benefits. There is also the role that mediation plays in our system of family law, the position of kinship carers and the position of social care policy in general. Many of those issues have been explored and they will require to be explored in great detail in the committee scrutiny that is to come.

In light of the time constraints in the debate, I will focus on the bill's likely impact on the disabled. In looking at the bill, it is instructive to remind ourselves of what appears to be the main driver of the changes to disability benefit and support: the UK Government's stated intention to reduce the costs of DLA by 20 per cent by 2013. That is the real agenda; it is not about any meaningful desire to make the system better for those who are entitled to some help and support as a result of their disability. I stress the word "entitled" in relation to disability support, because it is not a question of giving a handout to the workshy or a payment to those who seek to defraud the system; the payment of benefit is to assist with a disability, which is an entitlement in a civilised society.

What do we see when we look at the so-called reforms in the bill? We see that the lower-rate care component of DLA is to be taken away—a proposal that was made initially by the previous Labour Government at Westminster but was withdrawn ultimately because of the public backlash at the time. We also see that the mobility component is to be taken away from people in residential homes. Questions arise, not least about how the additional cost of transport is to be met to allow those people to participate in social life, educational and learning trips, day services and so forth. Surely not even the Tory-Liberal coalition in London is suggesting that those people should somehow be denuded of those opportunities and should remain indoors, with no other aspect to their lives. We need to hear more about that from the UK Government.

We also hear that new assessment tests are to be introduced for the new personal independence payment. There is very little optimism indeed that the lessons of the deeply flawed work capability assessment will be learned—another measure that was introduced by the previous Labour Government. It is important that we remember the 13-year record of the previous Labour Government on disability support.

Is the UK Government really saying that as far as the new assessment is concerned, general practitioners and specialists cannot be trusted to provide professional medical services? What about the Hippocratic oath, which members of the medical profession take? What staggering disrespect of the medical profession on the part of the UK Government.

We have also heard about the somewhat interesting underoccupancy rules. Disabled families might require extra rooms so that a carer has somewhere to stay overnight or for storage for medical equipment, such as oxygen tanks.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I will not give way, because the member refused to take any interventions in her opening speech.

What kind of debate are we having in this, the 21st century? I find the basic foundation of the debate, certainly as far as disabled people are concerned, highly distasteful. That is not a comment on members' speeches; rather, I am ashamed that disabled people are being put in an invidious position as a result of these so-called welfare reforms and feel that they are being treated as second-class citizens by the London Government. I say to the Liberal Democrats that there is no safety net in the proposals.

I stress that Scotland wishes to have a welfare system that is suitable for Scotland and, to achieve that, we need the powers to deliver it. To tackle Scotland's social problems and ensure that the most vulnerable members of our society are treated fairly and with respect, we need to combine our economic, health and social policy objectives. We can do that only when we stop operating with one hand tied behind our backs. We need to reclaim the powers of a normal, independent country to ensure that we have a welfare system that is suitable for our citizens' welfare.

16:20

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Presiding Officer, there is

"no doubt that no other piece of UK legislation will have such a direct and indirect effect on the people of Scotland, particularly some of the poorest and most vulnerable families in our society, and on our capacity to run our own affairs in those areas which are devolved to Scottish control. It is vital that the Scottish Parliament devotes considerable energy and resources to considering and addressing this."

Those are not my words; they are the words of five of Scotland's biggest children's charities. I welcome the fact that we are debating them.

Alongside Marco Biagi, I have taken on the role of convening the cross-party group on children and young people. We had a very productive meeting last week that focused specifically on welfare reform. A number of members who are in the chamber attended that meeting.

I will focus on the impacts of the Welfare Reform Bill on children and young people. I will list a few of them first and then focus on one aspect: child maintenance, on which Annabelle Ewing touched.

I welcome the opportunity to put to the ministers four key issues that came up at the cross-party group meeting. Action for Children Scotland expressed concerns that, under the bill, claimants with dependent children would face sanctions if they could not access appropriate childcare. One

Parent Families Scotland highlighted the concern that lone parents with children over five years old would have problems seeking employment because of a rule change. Children in Scotland highlighted the point that childcare costs mean that, contrary to popular belief, work does not pay for most families in Scotland.

The Scottish Child Law centre also made an interesting point. It highlighted the possible impact of the reforms on the minute of agreement for separating couples, which is unique to Scotland. It is a formal, signed agreement on the division of assets and custody. The bill seems to threaten it.

One of the most important aspects of the bill is the proposed changes to the child maintenance system. I have worked closely on that issue with Sheila Gilmore, the member of Parliament for Edinburgh East. She is also the chair of the all-party group on welfare reform at Westminster and is in the gallery listening to the debate so that she can use it in her work in Westminster.

With its child maintenance proposals, the Tory-led Government is trying to encourage people to make their own arrangements with their ex-partner for the care of their child. If the lone parent needs the state to intervene, they will have to pay for it. That is about the Tory Government putting the taxpayer's welfare before the child's, and it is absolutely disgusting.

There will be a one-off fee of £100 for the use of the state system, although the fee will be £50 for someone on benefits—a small concession. The state will also charge the non-caring parent an additional 15 to 20 per cent of each monthly maintenance sum. As if that was not enough, for the privilege of state intervention, the caring parent will also have to surrender to the Government between 7 and 12 per cent of the money that they receive monthly.

If the Tory Government cares about the big picture, why on earth does it seek to profit from broken marriages? It must realise that, if parenting is everything, the environment that it creates to help families to stay together and to cope when they do not is critical.

There is a specifically Scottish dimension to the matter as well: the bill requires the new child maintenance system to be implemented through sure start centres, which simply do not exist in Scotland. Therefore, the Scottish Government will have to come up with an alternative way of dealing with implementation.

In June, I lodged a parliamentary question to ask whether any work was being done to assess the impact of the changes on child maintenance. In her answer, Roseanna Cunningham said that no work had been done. I then wrote to her to ask whether she would model the impact on Scotland

to decide what could be done to address it. She wrote back saying that she had no plans to model the impact of the changes.

What does that tell us? I suggest that it tells us that the Scottish Government is taking a very relaxed, perhaps even complacent, approach to the distinct areas that it has the power to address now. That view is shared by One Parent Families Scotland, which was, in its words, “very disappointed” with the response that Roseanna Cunningham gave me, which, naturally, I shared with it.

I am pleased that the Government will back Labour’s amendment to vote down the forthcoming legislative consent motion, recognising that much more scrutiny needs to take place.

I will give the Presiding Officer a minute of his time back, but I will first focus on the issue of child poverty for a second. Nicola Sturgeon made a comment in her opening speech about how child poverty in Scotland had come down since 1994. However, she will also be aware that little or no progress has been made since 2005, on her watch and on the SNP Government’s watch. I refer her to her own child poverty strategy, which states:

“The Scottish Government will encourage individuals and organisations to share emerging analysis of local and national impacts as they become known. This analysis will help to inform Scottish Ministers as well as other organisations seeking to secure positive change in the lives of the people of Scotland.”

In the light of that reference to welfare reform in her child poverty strategy, will she back Save the Children’s call today to publish information about the impact of the bill on tackling child poverty and take steps to mitigate the impact of the changes on child poverty in Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank the member for finishing early. I regret that Christina McKelvie has just over four minutes.

16:26

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Sometimes more is not better, Presiding Officer. I will try my best.

As the cabinet secretary has pointed out, the SNP is certainly not opposed to welfare reform in principle—far from it. The UK benefits system is needlessly complex and has for years failed the key tests: does it lift individuals out of poverty, and does it ensure that people are better off in work than out of it?

Now that the Tory-led coalition is embarking on its version of welfare reform, it is right to say that the system needs to be overhauled. This is something that I do not say often, but it was hard

to disagree with Iain Duncan Smith when he told the Tory conference earlier this week that the system as it is now stands “treats symptoms, not causes” and leaves too many people “entrenched” within it.

As Mary Scanlon would not take my intervention, I will ask a question of David McLetchie, who will—I hope—answer it in his summing up. If work is really at the heart of these reforms, why has the Wise Group—a Scottish social enterprise with a proven record of getting vulnerable people into employment—been shut out of the employability programme in Scotland in favour of a profit-making private company whose director came straight from the Department for Work and Pensions? How is that prioritising work for jobless Scots?

As usual, the Tories are reverting to type. Any impressive rhetoric is immediately cancelled out by a reality of harsh cuts, which will punish individuals and families on the lowest incomes and hit the most vulnerable the hardest. Instead of lifting people out of poverty, the Tories will—as they have before—plunge many into it, so deeply and immovably that it could have a generations-long impact. That the Liberal Democrats are their cheerleaders for that agenda—in the Scottish Parliament as well as in Westminster—should be a source of shame.

There is, of course, an alternative approach to welfare, and it is the one that the Scottish Government is taking: protecting the incomes not only of the poorest households, but of those who, as a result of the economic crisis, are at risk of dropping into the poorer income brackets. Even if the drops in income are not huge, they can prove to be catastrophic for some families.

The difference between struggling and getting by on one hand and tipping into real poverty on the other is very narrow. That is why measures such as the council tax freeze, the living wage, free personal care, free prescription charges and the maintenance of the concessionary travel scheme are so important. Those measures make the crucial difference to the incomes of many households that might otherwise find themselves in real trouble.

With the proper devolution of powers, Scotland’s Government could and would do even more to protect the vulnerable in this country than it is able to do at present. Instead of cutting and scrapping benefits, we could be genuine reformers by aligning the welfare system to match our policies to protect household incomes, create jobs, tackle inequalities and grow Scotland’s economy and to fit with the values of the social contract that the Scottish Government has pledged to the Scottish people.

I welcome Jackie Baillie's comment that Labour stands "ready to help" the Scottish Government to find solutions. I make a plea to all members on the Labour benches to join the SNP in arguing for real powers over the welfare system to be included in the Scotland Bill. Martin Sime of SCVO was right when he told the Scotland Bill Committee yesterday that the Welfare Reform Bill renders much of the Scotland Bill virtually meaningless.

Let us not waste that opportunity. Let us give it some meaning. I urge all members to join us and fight for Scotland. Even if they stand opposed to the principle of greater sovereign powers for the Parliament, surely, faced with the Westminster Welfare Reform Bill, we can agree with the SCVO and Citizens Advice Scotland that vulnerable people who live in Scotland will be better protected and social justice will be better served if our benefits system is our own and is held in the nation of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, and thank you for finishing so timeously.

16:30

Liam McArthur: This has been an interesting debate, but it is difficult to know what it has achieved. At the outset, Nicola Sturgeon talked very eloquently about general principles that we would all support, but in the rest of the time that was available to her, she said absolutely nothing about how those principles would be achieved.

We then had an array of SNP back benchers talking about more powers for Scotland, but not even the most ardent supporter of independence would be able to identify what a proposal for welfare reform in Scotland would look like in an independent Scotland. If the cabinet secretary is to be believed, we would not even see a reduction in the budget.

Jackie Baillie then condemned the cabinet secretary for the lack of detail about what the Government is doing, and I join her in her hope that there will be a bit more detail in the winding-up speech. However, there was precious little detail in Jackie Baillie's speech. Although welfare budget reductions would not be in Nicola Sturgeon's proposals, we must assume that they would have at least been part of Labour's solution, partly because of the proposals that Labour made when it was in government prior to May 2010—Mary Scanlon quoted James Purnell—but also because Douglas Alexander has been arguing that welfare must make its contribution to reducing the deficit.

Bob Doris gave us an entertaining cocktail of claims for more powers and responsibilities but was light on information about what those powers would be used to do. Indeed, it was not until

Annabelle Ewing's speech three quarters of the way through the debate that we heard confirmation that the SNP broadly welcomes the universal credit proposals.

Margaret McCulloch was quite right to say—she probably understated this—that the current system is by no means perfect. She was also right to say that unemployment and incapacity are not the result of unemployment and incapacity benefits. However, the need for welfare reform and for savings to be made has been accepted by Labour peers, MPs and former ministers.

It was then the turn of Mark McDonald to treat us to his usual fare. I do not think that anyone could ever accuse him of making a civilising contribution. He trumpeted

"Now is the time and now is the hour"

and went on to cite all the things that he and others do not like about the proposals. He said nothing about what he would like to see or whether he supports a budget reduction.

Annabelle Ewing: It would be instructive if, having failed to do so in his opening remarks, the member could explain in his closing remarks exactly where the safety net is that he is talking about, particularly where disability benefits are concerned.

Liam McArthur: I will come to the disability issue in a second.

We have heard a series of speeches from SNP and Labour members, all of whom castigated the current proposals and none of whom set out in detail what they envisage achieving.

There have also been some passionate and considered speeches. Fiona McLeod's speech on mental health was—typically—very considered. However, I do not think that the proposals are driven by the desire to reduce budgets, even though budget reductions are to be achieved.

Siobhan McMahon exemplified some of the passion in the debate and I have sympathy for a lot of what she had to say. I have personal experience of the concern that has been caused around the specific DLA proposals, but as many of her colleagues at Westminster freely acknowledge, that is not an argument against reform; it is simply an argument about the way in which it is implemented.

Christina McKelvie gave us examples of how the Scottish Government is giving households a helping hand. I presume that she would include within that the council tax freeze, which David Bell, the adviser to the Finance Committee, has already pointed out benefits those who live in larger houses and are presumably rather better off than those who are on lower incomes.

The debate has been interesting. I can well understand why emotions have, at times, been riding high, although I think that some of the allegations and assertions that have been made are simply not true. There is an absolutely critical consensus with regard to on-going engagement and effective scrutiny of the proposals in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr McDonald was right to say that being against the proposals did not mean being against any reform of the system. However, those who are against them must outline their alternatives. Everyone who spoke in the debate has to some extent lent their support to the need for a system that incentivises work for all; that addresses the shameful number of people trapped on out-of-work benefits; that is simpler, fairer and more transparent; and that maintains a genuine safety net for the most vulnerable in our society. There has been fairly robust disagreement over the way in which that is achieved but, nevertheless, I have pleasure in pressing my amendment.

16:36

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): In what is the biggest shake-up of the UK's welfare system in 60 years, the Welfare Reform Bill has at its core the key principle that work should always pay and that individual responsibility should be at the heart of our benefit system. Across Britain, 5 million people are trapped on out-of-work benefits and almost 2 million children are growing up in homes where nobody works; our own country accounts for at least 10 per cent of those figures. As Liam McArthur quite properly pointed out, tinkering around the edges of the system is not going to do the job. Only the root-and-branch reform that Her Majesty's Government is endeavouring to put in place will suffice. If nothing else, I thank those members who were at least brave enough to give a general welcome to the principles of the universal credit and other principles behind the bill—even if that was the only element of consensus in the debate.

Worklessness and benefit dependency are costing us a fortune at a time when the country can least afford it and, thanks to the profligacy of a Labour Government, the benefits bill has in recent years been allowed to soar to unsustainable levels. Labour's failed policies have served only to erect even bigger barriers to those who genuinely wish to escape from a life on benefits and enter the world of work. The entrenched poverty and worklessness that we see in far too many parts of our country are bad for people, bad for communities and bad for society because with them come high levels of debt, family breakdown, alcohol and drug addiction and crime.

Neil Findlay: I assume that Mr McLetchie will argue that the benefits system has to encourage people back into work. As we reach 3 million unemployed, can he advise us where these jobs might be found?

David McLetchie: I have just heard Scottish Government statistics for the last quarter that show that unemployment fell. Perhaps Mr Findlay missed those figures or he is simply unaware of them. Indeed, over the past 13 years and before we got into the financial crisis that was engendered in part by Mr Findlay's Government, there were many employment opportunities that people in this country failed to take up.

Unfortunately, what we have seen in today's debate is Labour and the SNP's grand alliance of deficit denial. They complain that we are attempting to reform the system against a backdrop of cuts to benefits but have nothing to say about the structural deficits in public spending that have given rise to this situation.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

David McLetchie: No—I have only six minutes.

From both parties, we hear the mantra of, "Too far, too fast," but when they have been asked time and again in the chamber what is not too far or too fast, they have consistently failed to tell us.

I find it astonishing that the SNP which, in a few years' time, expects us to vote for independence, has nothing to say about how it would handle our £12 billion per annum share of revenue deficit and nothing to say about what a welfare system in an independent Scotland would look like or how it would sustain even the present level of expenditure on benefits without significant reform of the type that is bravely being undertaken by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats at Westminster.

The fact of the matter is that Labour's attempts at reform have failed miserably, as Mary Scanlon pointed out when she referred to the comments of Mr Blair—yes, he was once quite a successful Labour Prime Minister—Mr Purnell and Frank Field. Over the past 10 years, literally hundreds of thousands of people have come to Scotland and Britain from other European Union countries to work and have found work here, while far too many of our own people, who have had the same opportunities to work, have failed to take them, either through a lack of inclination or because, for them, work does not pay. That is not acceptable.

The proposal in Jackie Baillie's amendment that the Parliament should decline to give its consent to the Welfare Reform Bill in so far as it impacts on matters within the Scottish Government's competence is, frankly, political grandstanding of the most pathetic type, which ought to be treated

with contempt; it should certainly not be supported by any responsible Government.

Kevin Stewart: Will Mr McLetchie give way on that point?

David McLetchie: No.

Let me give one illustration of that. Listen to these words:

“Our goal is to make responsibility the cornerstone of our welfare state. Housing Benefit will be reformed to ensure that we do not subsidise people to live in the private sector on rents that other ordinary working families could not afford. And we will continue to crack down on those who try to cheat the benefit system.”

Do they sound familiar to Ms Baillie and the rest? Well, they should, because they are from Labour’s 2010 general election manifesto. The Government at Westminster is implementing exactly what the Labour Party said it wanted to do, and would have done, had it been re-elected.

Far from rejecting a legislative consent motion, a responsible Government and Parliament should be focusing its attention on issues such as the localisation of council tax benefit, which the UK Government has said it wants to devolve—indeed, it awaits proposals from the Scottish Government on the subject. The Scottish Government should be engaging in discussion on the social fund and on the future of housing benefit, along with COSLA, as Her Majesty’s Government has invited it to do. It should be doing all those things.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you would close now, please.

David McLetchie: I agree with at least some of the SNP motion. I agree that the UK Government should endeavour to sustain

“a welfare system that is properly financed, simple to understand, lifts people out of poverty and makes work pay.”

That is exactly what the UK Government is doing.

16:42

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): The debate has provided a welcome opportunity for us to begin discussing our attitude towards the UK Government’s Welfare Reform Bill, although it has taken the SNP some five months to bring the issue to Parliament and its motion makes no mention of the legislative consent motion that will allow the bill to affect devolved powers, budgets and services. Because of Labour’s amendment, the LCM is the key issue that the Parliament faces; from what I understand, it might have been the key issue at this afternoon’s SNP group meeting. When she opened for Labour, Jackie Baillie made it clear that Scottish Labour was supportive of many of the aims of welfare reform. It was interesting that Government front benchers said the same,

whereas its back benchers seemed to have no desire for welfare reform at all.

We saw merit in simplifying the system of support that is available to those who are not able to work and started to ensure that those who could work were supported to do so. Universal credit could have been an opportunity to improve the welfare state rather than to threaten it.

In her intervention on Nicola Sturgeon at the beginning of the debate, Mary Scanlon pleaded with us not to judge the bill by what it says now. She felt that we were being premature. However, she offered no suggestion as to how the bill might be improved.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Drew Smith: Sure.

Mary Scanlon: That is very kind of you.

The LCM does not even come to the Health and Sport Committee, which is the lead committee, for another seven weeks. Members will have the opportunity to scrutinise and change things then.

Drew Smith: That is the choice of the Scottish Government. I am happy to have taken Mary Scanlon’s intervention, as she has been so keen to get in for so long.

I see that Liam McArthur is back. It is interesting that there has been only one Lib Dem in the chamber for the entire debate. I do not know whether that is an indication of the Liberals’ lack of interest in welfare reform or their support for the UK Government’s welfare reform proposals.

We have heard very serious concerns about what the bill will do. Universal credit and the myriad reforms and cuts on which the whole agenda is predicated undermine many of the coalition’s stated objectives. As it is drafted, the bill will fail to incentivise many to work and will throw others into deep poverty and despair.

Many members have addressed various elements of the reforms and highlighted a number of reasons why they are wrong-headed. I pay particular tribute to Margaret McCulloch, who spoke eloquently, to Mark McDonald, who made an excellent contribution—at least for the first half of it—and to Siobhan McMahon, who spoke passionately. Labour as a UK party has scrutinised and highlighted many of the same inconsistencies, anomalies and downright unfairnesses.

Scotland has a higher proportion of claimants for every one of the benefits that will become the universal credit. The impact will be severe and long lasting and will result in a disproportionate hit on our economy. The reduction in spending power will devastate efforts to regrow the economy and will place demand on already overpressed and

underfunded services such as housing and money advice.

The Scottish Government has rightly acknowledged—in the debate but not in the wording of its motion—the impact that the changes will have on many devolved benefits, where UK benefits are used as passports to particular services. Many members have highlighted those services, and I am thinking in particular of clothing grants, free school meals, childcare and concessionary bus travel.

The coalition is leaving too many of the most important details for secondary legislation, which is something that even I, a member of the Subordinate Legislation Committee, would agree results in inadequate scrutiny of major changes. We could not accept an LCM that did the same for the devolved aspects of the bill.

I appreciate that the Scottish Government has been as frustrated by the coalition's approach as Labour at Westminster has been but, as Jackie Baillie said, the SNP approach has been uncharacteristically quiet—quieter than we would expect on issues that are perhaps closer to its political interests.

The finance secretary has set out his budget, and we are now engaged in scrutinising his proposals and assumptions. It would be foolhardy and short-sighted to continue to do that without much more debate and detail and much less denial about what is coming down the line on welfare reform.

Bob Doris mentioned changes to housing benefit. Those changes will have a greater impact on Scottish housing policy in this generation than any manifesto commitment that we could have on house building or on homelessness, which both Nicola Sturgeon and Jackie Baillie were in unusual agreement about today.

We are not attacking the SNP for a calamity that is being created by the coalition parties, but it has not listened enough to the welfare organisations, disability groups and anti-poverty campaigners who have been telling anyone who will listen that the Scottish Government is sleepwalking through the bill.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member give way on that point?

Drew Smith: Sorry, I want to make a bit of progress.

It is only as a result of Labour's amendment that we have an opportunity to state a view on legislative consent. The final decision on an LCM will follow committee examination, but the Government must return to the chamber with more information and more ideas about what it intends to do to mitigate the impact on services for which it

is already responsible. The SNP does not need a new constitution or a new country to do that. It is the SNP's challenge to identify the opportunities in the devolution that is already inherent in the bill to ensure that moneys that are transferred to Scotland are not used to plug gaps in its own budget, as has happened before.

We accept that the Scottish Government faces a tough challenge, but it is the self-same ability to rise to the challenges that we face for which my party fought the SNP in the election. Scottish Labour, with the convention partners, created this Parliament, and we argued in May that it could be used to protect people from unfair and unsound coalition policy. It was the SNP that won the election, and it must now face up to what is happening and propose its way forward. Jackie Baillie invited the Government to answer a number of specific questions in closing, which I hope Nicola Sturgeon takes the opportunity to do.

If the SNP engages with welfare reform in a way that meets the fairness test, which the bill itself has clearly failed to do, it will have our support. However, if the SNP members duck it—if they simply blame London and sit on their hands—they deserve to be hit by the train that is already hurtling towards them.

The bill will paralyse our Parliament on many issues on which we already have consensus. For devolved services, for local councils, for social landlords, for Scots who are unable to work, for those who want to work, for those who provide money advice services and for cancer patients who will lose their benefits before their treatment has even been given the chance to save their lives, the implications are stark and brutal.

We have made our position clear, and I understand that the SNP in local government is putting pressure on the Government to agree with us, too. It is up to the SNP to decide whether it wishes to stop the Tory train or to get on board.

16:49

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): This debate is about welfare to work. In my experience, the best way to get people off welfare is to put them into work, so that they are not reliant on benefits. Speakers from all sides of the chamber have bandied about the figure of 2 million people who are trapped on out-of-work benefits. The reason why they are trapped on out-of-work benefits is not because the bulk of them are work-shy and do not want a job; it is because the jobs ain't there. The reason why the jobs ain't there is that capital spending was slashed under Alistair Darling and Gordon Brown, and is being slashed now by

George Osborne and all the Tories' Liberal Democrat poodles.

It is true: the best way to get people out of welfare and into work is to keep the capital spending budget going, create jobs and save money. For every individual who gets out of welfare and into work, we save £10,000 a year from the deficit in benefit savings and additional tax revenue. There is no other way to get people off welfare than putting them into work. That is why this Government is all about creating the conditions in Scotland for getting people into work. As the figures show, our strategy in Scotland, even with our limited resources and our very limited powers, is beginning to pay off.

David McLetchie: I agree entirely that the best way to get people off welfare is to get them into work, but Mr Neil tries to tell us that the jobs were not there. How come the jobs were there for the 50,000 Poles who have come to live in Scotland in the past few years? What jobs are they doing that were not available to our people?

Alex Neil: I think that that says it all about the modern, compassionate Conservatives. They are not modern; they are not compassionate; they are just conservative.

David McLetchie: Come on—answer. What are they doing?

Alex Neil: Mr McLetchie asks what the alternative strategy is. I will tell him. To reduce the deficit and get people off welfare and into work at the same time, we should stop wasting billions every year on Trident and other nuclear weapons and put that money to good use. We should collect the £35 billion in uncollected tax revenue, mainly due from the rich pals of Mr McLetchie and the others throughout the country. If the Conservatives want to help Scotland, they should give us our fossil fuel levy, so that we can use it to get people off welfare and into work.

It would be extremely unfair of me to pour all the blame on to the Tories. I notice that, when the Labour Party is in government, Labour members argue for Tory policies but, when they go into opposition, they argue against the same policies that they introduced. As Margaret Burgess said, and many others have pointed out, this right-wing welfare agenda was started under Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling. Remember the 75p rise for the pensioners. Remember when poor Malcolm Chisholm, who is not in the chamber, resigned after five minutes in the Scottish Office, because of what the Labour Government did to single parents. Remember the introduction of the employment support allowance, which Margaret Burgess mentioned, and the other measures that Labour took to do down disabled people in this country. Remember also the fiasco over the

introduction of the 10p cut in tax for the low paid. We will not be taking any lessons from the Labour Party. It followed the Tory agenda and it is only now that it is in opposition that it opposes it.

I will say a word or two about the Liberals—*[Laughter.]* I apologise; I should have said the Liberal, as there is only one in the chamber. As we would expect, he is from the northern isles, a very great part of the country. When Mr Balfour was the Tory Prime Minister in an age that Mr McLetchie might remember but I do not, they used to describe the House of Lords, to where no doubt Mr McLetchie aspires, as Mr Balfour's poodle. Here we are, over 100 years later and Mr Cameron now has a poodle called the Liberal Democrat Party and the chief poodle is Danny Alexander. We will not take any lessons from the Labour Party, the Tory party, the Liberal Democrat party or any other unionist organisation about the welfare system.

In a statement yesterday, Mr Cameron, who heads a coalition Cabinet of millionaires, told everybody that he wanted them to pay off their credit cards as soon as possible. Well, if you are a Tory toff from Oxford, you may have the money to pay off your credit card, but if you are a poor soul who has been made unemployed as a result of the Tory cuts, you cannot afford to pay off your credit card—in fact, the chances are that you may rely on a credit card to get by next week and the week after that.

I think that what most of us in the chamber are particularly critical of are the specifics of some of the welfare reforms. Nobody has said that they are opposed in principle to welfare reform. Of course there is a case for reforming the welfare system, but the purpose in reforming it is not to do down the people who are the most vulnerable members of our society. As Margaret Burgess said, the purpose of reform should be to make this a fairer society, not a more unequal society. The attack on disability living allowance is therefore particularly abhorrent and the housing benefit changes can be described only as inhumane.

Let me say right away—

Mary Scanlon: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

Let me say right away—*[Interruption.]* I hate my peroration being interrupted.

Let me say right away that, even though housing is a devolved matter, at no time has the Scottish Government been consulted about the changes to housing benefit or the impact that those changes will have. As the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy spelled out, the changes will be devastating for people.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Cabinet secretary, your peroration has got one more minute.

Alex Neil: The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations says that one in five tenants will be adversely affected by the changes. The reality is that in 2013, when the rule about underoccupation comes in, an old body who has lived in a house for 40 or 50 years and who depends on housing benefit could be forced out of her lifetime home as a result of the inhumane measures that are being taken by the Tories.

The only people who can hold their heads up high when it comes to welfare to work are in the SNP Government and party because, unlike the unionist parties, we promote the welfare of the people and do not cut the welfare of the people, and our policies are putting people into work and not taking work away from them.

London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Amendment) Bill

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-01017, in the name of Shona Robison, on the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Amendment) Bill, which is UK legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Amendment) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 16 March 2011, relating to the advertising, street trading and ticket touting provisions, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—
[Shona Robison.]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Business Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-01019, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 26 October 2011

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Winter Resilience

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 27 October 2011

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Raising Attainment and Ambition for all Scotland's Young People

11.40 am General Question Time

12.00 pm First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Culture and External Affairs;
Infrastructure and Capital Investment

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Ensuring the Integrity of Scots Criminal Law

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 2 November 2011

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 3 November 2011

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12.00 pm First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm

Themed Question Time
Education and Lifelong Learning

2.55 pm

Scottish Government Business

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S4M-01020, on the approval of the Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2011, and motion S4M-01021, on the approval of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 (Consequential Modifications) (No 2) Order 2011.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2011 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 (Consequential Modifications) (No.2) Order 2011 be approved.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. In relation to the debate on welfare reform, I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Mary Scanlon is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-01008.1, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01008, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare reform, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 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, 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)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)

Against

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 104, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01008.2, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01008, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare reform, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 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, 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)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (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)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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 12, Against 108, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01008.3, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01008, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare reform, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 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, 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)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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 16, Against 104, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01008, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare reform, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 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, 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)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)

Against

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 104, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Welfare Reform Bill that is currently being considered by the UK Parliament; regrets that the far-reaching proposals contained in the bill are being pursued against the backdrop of substantial cuts to welfare benefits announced in the June and October 2010 UK budgets; further regrets the impact that these cuts will have on some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in society and on the local authority and third-sector organisations committed to supporting vulnerable people, and calls on the UK Government to pursue a welfare system that is properly financed, simple to understand, lifts people out of poverty and makes work pay, and is otherwise minded, subject to consideration by the appropriate committees, to oppose the forthcoming legislative consent motion pertaining to the Welfare Reform Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01017, in the name of Shona Robison, on the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Amendment) Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Amendment) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 16 March 2011, relating to the advertising, street trading and ticket touting provisions, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01020, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2011, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Climate Change (Annual Targets) (Scotland) Order 2011 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01021, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 (Consequential Modifications) (No 2) Order 2011, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 (Consequential Modifications) (No.2) Order 2011 be approved.

Nuclear Energy (Germany)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-00155, in the name of Rob Gibson, on Germany exits nuclear energy. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the decision by the German Government to take its nuclear power plants offline by 2022, thus joining Switzerland, which recently announced its intention to be nuclear free by 2034; considers that this implies the provision of electricity from more renewable sources and compliments the German Government on its ambition, and considers that the Scottish Government target of 100% electricity produced from renewable sources is entirely achievable and can help reindustrialise many parts of Scotland, including renewable energy hubs in Caithness, Sutherland and Ross.

17:07

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Germany has taken some bold, brave and important steps over the past year. In a world in which Governments such the United Kingdom and France continue to cling to nuclear as a fait accompli, Germany is taking steps from which we could all learn to build a cleaner and more sustainable energy market. I do not want to focus on the disaster at Fukushima or the tragedy at Chernobyl, but those incidents have encouraged German and Japanese voters to demand change. The grave dangers of nuclear energy are well known, and those who describe nuclear as safe would have a hard time making their case to a family affected by those disasters.

Some up-to-date news from Japan is pertinent. Last month, nuclear plant usage fell to a record low of 20.6 per cent, down from 66.7 per cent a year earlier, and 60 per cent of Japanese have little or no confidence in nuclear power. Radiation levels 20 times higher than normal have been found 60km from Fukushima, whose decommissioning could cost \$15 billion, with a possible compensation bill of \$59 billion. Energy-saving measures in Japan have led to a drop in electricity demand, and a new law has recently been passed to promote the use of renewable power in the Japanese grid.

Instead of looking backwards to those awful events, I would like members to think about our future and whether we are prepared to take bold and decisive action to power it in a clean, safe and sustainable way. Some may describe Germany's move to phase out nuclear energy in 10 years as drastic, and some will cry, "How will they fill their energy gap?" and "How will they stay competitive in a European and global energy market?" The German federal Government is not daft, and it has

outlined a three-pronged approach to maintain Germany's status as an energy hub. It is important for members on all sides to hear exactly how a major world economy can still thrive without the crutch of nuclear power.

The first and most beautifully simple of those measures is to drive energy efficiency as never before. In Scotland, the Scottish National Party Government has worked to boost energy efficiency in our homes and workplaces, and it can do a lot more. Moving on from that big step, the second prong to Germany's nuclear-free survival guide is to drive carbon-free energy across all sectors. The German Government will make a fast and early national transition from coal and gas to renewables and will require all sectors to follow suit. Last month, for the first time, renewable energy crossed the 20 per cent mark in Germany, according to the German Association of Energy and Water Industries. The figure is now 20 per cent in Germany, but it is 30 per cent in Scotland.

In the past, some people have argued that withdrawing from nuclear energy production will lead only to a heavier reliance on fossil fuels; others doubt the readiness of clean renewables to fill the energy gap. The German Government thinks that that is tosh and, thankfully, so does the Scottish Government. The buy-in to our renewables potential will boost economic growth and substantially reduce our carbon emissions. Some Labour members have described our renewables target as a fairy story, pie in the sky and unworkable. Well, the people of Germany think that those Labour members are talking tosh and, judging by the election result in May, I think that so do the people of Scotland.

In placing faith in renewables, the German Government is encouraging innovation as never before. It aims to produce and use 6 million electric cars by 2030, and it aims to lead the world in renewables research and development. In Scotland, the SNP has big plans for our research and development and manufacturing sectors to make the most of our world-class facilities and opportunities. German utilities companies such as Siemens, E.ON and npower can collaborate with Scottish know-how, as Mitsubishi, Gamesa and others are already doing, to perfect more efficient turbine blades. We expect large companies from Europe and other parts of the world to work with us here.

The third and final step that the Germans will take in preparing to move towards a nuclear-free system is to develop the infrastructure that is needed in the long term to maintain a renewables system. In Scotland, we have seen Scottish and Southern Energy pull out of a consortium to build a new nuclear power station in Cumbria. It, too, is taking the Scottish way. Ian Marchant, the SSE

chief executive, says that SSE's strategic objective is to have

"more than our fair share of renewables and less than our fair share of nuclear".

He adds that SSE has

"no experience in running a nuclear plant, so we would inevitably be the junior partner of a consortium, whereas in renewables, we could be leading a consortium"—

and it is.

The new German planning process should also create the basis for regulators to license related investments and thus provide certainty around the future of the grid. Special efforts will be made to adjust and roll out the necessary infrastructure, including the transmission networks that will transport wind power from the northern parts of the country to the south; smart distribution networks that can manage large numbers of electric cars; and power production from decentralised sources as well as sufficient storage options to deal with large shares of variable power sources. However, in Scotland, access to the fossil fuel levy, the acceleration of the work of the green investment bank and the time that it will take for the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets to sort out the transmission charging regime in favour of the renewables sector all rely on a UK Government that shows far too much interest in nuclear power and too little interest in the potential of renewables to work in our favour.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: No. Not at this moment.

In the time I have left, I will state the Scottish Government's position, which Jim Mather gave to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee in 2009, during its inquiry into determining Scotland's energy future:

"While nuclear energy will continue to play a part meeting service demand for electricity for the lifetime of the current nuclear power stations, the Scottish Government is also very clear that Scotland neither needs nor wants new nuclear power generating capability in Scotland, and no replacement nuclear power capability will be developed in Scotland."

That is smart thinking, creative thinking, world-changing thinking and thinking that some in the nuclear debate have proved themselves incapable of understanding. It is the thinking that the SNP Government is championing in Scotland.

17:15

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I congratulate Rob Gibson on securing the debate, which is important because it highlights a fundamental energy policy decision by fellow

European countries that sets a positive example for Scotland.

Although the decision to exit nuclear energy was made by a reluctant conservative-liberal democrat German Government, the true victors are the German people. The political foundations were laid in the late 1990s by the red-green coalition, which settled in 2002 on an exit in 2021, after a maximum reactor running time of 32 years. The current German Government tried to prolong running times for 12 additional years, but it had to bow to intense public opposition after the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima plant in Japan this March. In June 2011, an exit by 2022 was written into German law.

According to representative polls in June, 75 per cent of Germans support phasing out nuclear energy by 2022 and nearly half would prefer an earlier date. In Switzerland, 67 per cent support the exit and 65 per cent are prepared to pay more for an energy mix that relies heavily on renewable energy. We can conclude that the majority of Germans and Swiss have seen through the persistent myths that nuclear energy supporters trot out.

The first myth is that nuclear energy is cheap. If nuclear power seems comparatively cheap, that is because it is heavily subsidised. Despite the protestations of safety, no insurance company will cover the risks and costs that are associated with a potential major accident. The immense cost of decommissioning nuclear plants—it is £62 billion in the UK, with more to come—is also offloaded on the taxpayer. That does not yet include the cost of treating and disposing of nuclear waste.

The second myth is that nuclear energy is clean. On the surface, nuclear power stations seem relatively low carbon. However, if the carbon footprint of uranium mining, enrichment and transport is added, the situation looks different. Uranium mining is a massive environmental and health hazard to workers and local communities. If we include the unsolved problem of safely disposing of nuclear waste—some long-lived fission products have a half-life of several million years—"clean energy" is the least appropriate term to describe nuclear power. How responsible is any Government that is, as Westminster is, considering building more reactors without having a working policy, and even less a safe storage facility, for existing waste?

The third myth is that nuclear energy is safe. After Chernobyl in 1986, Fukushima in 2011 and a variety of lesser incidents at nuclear plants, such as Sellafield in 2005, it is clear that nuclear power is anything but safe. I do not suggest that Scotland's reactors are likely to be hit by a tsunami any time soon, but no nuclear power station is immune from natural disasters or human

error. No installation is immune from that, but a major disaster at a nuclear reactor has dire long-term consequences for human life and health and for the environment. As was evidenced by the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986, radioactive contamination spreads across borders and leads to soaring cancer rates and environmental poisoning. Even in 2009, 369 sheep farms in upland areas in the UK were still under inspection for contamination that arose from the accident 23 years previously.

To sum up, nuclear power is unsustainable, dangerous, polluting and prohibitively expensive, and we do not need it. We do not need it because Scotland is well suited for a variety of green renewable energy supplies. In the Scottish Government's debate on the low-carbon economy two weeks ago, I highlighted the advances that have been made in renewables technologies and the economic advantages that are being reaped even now in and around my Kirkcaldy constituency.

Scotland's potential renewables resource amounts to 60GW, which is 10 times the current peak Scottish demand. The Scottish Government is pursuing energy conservation and has set out an energy efficiency plan.

I am greatly encouraged by the Scottish Government's principled opposition to nuclear power and all the short-term and long-term risks and costs that it entails. I congratulate the Swiss and German people on making a far-sighted decision about their energy future.

17:19

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Rob Gibson on securing this important debate, which we welcome, on the future of energy production in Scotland.

I reassure Rob Gibson that we share the Scottish Government's enthusiasm for increasing renewable energy production in Scotland, and we welcome the ambition of its electricity target. We have made that clear in previous debates in the chamber; indeed, we have had quite convivial debates on the issue with the minister. We think that expanding our use and production of renewable energy in Scotland is an environmental necessity for our country if we want a sustainable energy policy for the future. There is also a huge economic opportunity for Scotland, particularly for the north—Rob Gibson highlighted that in his motion—but also for the north-east. There are many skills in our oil and gas sector that we hope will transfer into a growing renewable energy sector.

I quibble with parts of the motion. Germany's energy policy is a matter for it. Our party's position

has not been to rule in new nuclear power for the future of Scotland's energy production and consumption, but neither have we ruled it out. Our focus has been on ensuring that we have the base-load and security of supply that we need. The history of nuclear power in Scotland has been very different from its history in other countries—Mr Gibson described international incidents that have occurred.

However, we recognise that the Scottish Government's focus is clearly on meeting the renewables target, and we hope that the goal of meeting 100 per cent of our electricity needs from renewables by 2020 is achievable and realised. We have made that clear but, as a constructive Opposition, we think that questions need to be asked about how the target will be achieved, how the policy can be properly scrutinised and how the Government is progressing to meeting the 2020 target. That is why we again call for the Government to set out clear interim targets on the way to achieving the 2020 target to allow us to monitor progress.

Rob Gibson rightly mentioned the issue of investing in infrastructure for renewable energy production. We have welcomed a £70 million fund in Scotland, but investment in infrastructure in Germany outstrips what we are putting in here. We understand that these are difficult times for public spending but, if we all agree that such infrastructure needs to be a priority, we need to prioritise investment in it.

Rob Gibson also mentioned the important issue of energy efficiency. We have previously expressed concern about reductions in the fuel poverty budget, which have been somewhat but not entirely redeemed in the budget and the spending review. We are all rightly concerned about the rising fuel costs, which threaten to increase fuel poverty. Renewable energy is welcome, but there are cost issues, and we must keep driving down fuel poverty. That means that we must address the issues of costs and consumption and tackle energy efficiency. We must ensure that homes are energy efficient and insulated. Reducing consumption is also crucial.

We welcome the Scottish Government's ambition on renewables as outlined in the motion, but we look forward to the details about how its ambition will be achieved so that we can be confident that we have a sustainable energy policy that will meet Scotland's needs.

17:23

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I join David Torrance and Richard Baker in congratulating Rob Gibson on securing the debate, which is pertinent, given that we are

constantly discussing the future of Scotland's energy supply. It is clear that this discussion is an important part of that debate.

I welcome Germany's decision to phase out its nuclear power plants by 2022. That decision was provoked or inspired by the tragedy at Fukushima in Japan not long ago, but the direction of travel in Germany somewhat predates that, of course. As David Torrance correctly pointed out, the former green-red coalition in Germany set Germany on that course. Its target was to shut down Germany's nuclear power stations by 2021, but the Christian Democrats altered that decision. There has, of course, been a U-turn in light of Fukushima.

I welcome that U-turn. Richard Baker is correct to say that Germany's energy policy is a matter for Germany. However, it is right that we should take an interest in the issue of nuclear energy in particular, given the ramifications across boundaries if a nuclear incident occurs.

There is, of course, a history of incidents at nuclear power stations, the most well known being Chernobyl in 1986. The massive impact of that incident on Ukraine, Belarus and the surrounding area cannot be denied. Huge numbers of individuals—up to 600,000—were involved in the clean-up operation. It has been reported that some 100,000 of them have since died or are badly affected by radiation poisoning. That is to say nothing of the evacuation and relocation of the people who lived in the area, and the stigmatisation and the infection that occurred.

As an aside, I commend my constituent Jim Gillies in the Abronhill area of Cumbernauld, who undertakes a vigil each year to commemorate the tragedy of Chernobyl and has raised money for many children affected by radiation poisoning in Ukraine.

Lest we fall back on the complacency that standards in the UK's nuclear industry are much higher than they were in the former Soviet Union, which is undeniably true, and we believe that there is no danger in the perpetuation of the nuclear industry here in Scotland and the UK, I remind members that there have been incidents in more developed countries than the Soviet Union. Fukushima is a recent example. It was described by Arnold Gunderson, a former nuclear industry senior vice-president, as

"the biggest industrial catastrophe in the history of mankind".

That is a rather stark warning from someone who was involved in the nuclear industry.

Lest we become complacent and say that Fukushima was a one-off because of a natural disaster that could never occur here in Scotland,

we need only look at what happened more recently at Marcoule in France, where one person was killed and four injured in a blast at the Marcoule nuclear site. That demonstrates that we should not be complacent about the higher standards of safety here in the UK.

I want to deal with the myths of nuclear power. David Torrance made the point well that we are told that it is environmentally friendly, yet the mining of uranium scars the landscape and contaminates the area mined. Another myth is that it is safe. Uranium is mined from some unstable parts of the world, and there are health concerns for workers involved. There is the myth that uranium is sustainable, yet it is a finite resource.

We have to ditch the nuclear obsession and follow the German example. Let us have no nuclear power stations and let us invest in a renewable future.

17:28

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Members new and old will be fully aware that I am an outspoken supporter of the nuclear energy industry in this country and have spoken on the subject many times. I hope that I can take that as read and talk about something else in relation to the motion.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No. I will carry on and finish what I was going to say.

Rob Gibson started by saying that Germany has taken some bold steps over the years and that this decision is another such step. If I were mischievous, I am sure that I could name a number of bold steps that Germany has taken. However, we need only look into the relatively recent history, and decisions that Germany has made with its currency, for example, to see that it is a country that is big and wealthy enough to make bold decisions. When the chickens come home to roost and neighbours such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland hit economic disaster, Germany has all the money and can continue to hold all the values while those around it experience the difficulties.

Germany is one of those European countries that has relied heavily on nuclear energy over a significant number of years. Its decision to phase out its nuclear plants by 2022, which is more than 10 years away, is radical and one that it is fully entitled to make. However, the truth is that its decision will be based largely on the fact that it is able to source nuclear-generated electricity from its neighbours in France indefinitely into the future.

We in Scotland are in exactly the same position. On our capacity to regenerate renewable energy, we need only look back as recently as the last six weeks of 2010 to realise that there can be a catastrophic failure of the elements on which we rely to generate that power. Recently published figures for total production of renewable energy from Scotland for the whole of 2010 indicate that, in spite of the fact that there were very large increases in capacity, the amount of electricity generated fell. That should be a lesson to us all.

The truth is that we here in Scotland can afford to make the commitments that this Government has made to the renewable energy industry and our dependence on it in the future only because we know that we have a near neighbour that can work as a partner by buying that energy when we have a surplus to sell and supplying us, through the grid, with nuclear-generated electricity on days when the wind does not blow. As we discovered last year, those days come and they come for long periods.

I will close by saying a few words about our nuclear industry. In Hunterston and Torness we have two of the most efficient nuclear plants in this country, which have been run safely and efficiently for a large number of years. The staff at those plants are extremely professional and we as an economy have been able to rely on them for a long time. The decision of this Government to rely on those plants and allow their management to seek extensions of their lifespan is commendable, but it could be said to be hypocritical.

We have an exceptionally high-quality nuclear industry in this country and our Scottish plants are an example of that. When they close, as unfortunately they will, Scotland will not be free of its reliance on nuclear energy—no more than Germany will be free of its in 2022. We will simply have exported our nuclear plants to a near neighbour and we will rely on their presence to ensure that we have continuity of supply.

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

Alex Johnstone: We should be more honest about that and we should accept that these decisions influence our neighbours and are being made on a very one-sided and selfish basis.

17:32

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank Rob Gibson for bringing this very important debate to the chamber.

We know the havoc that was wreaked by the tragic events in Japan with the earthquake and tsunami and their effect on the nuclear plant there, which prompted several countries to review their

position. Indeed, the European Union declared that plants should be examined under stress tests to ensure their safety.

We have heard about the positions of the Swiss Government and the German Government. The significant thing about the German Government's plans to abandon any use of nuclear power by 2022 was the political decision of the Christian Democratic Union and the position of Angela Merkel.

It is important to note that Italy had a referendum in June on whether to continue with nuclear power plants. There was a turnout of 57 per cent, with an overwhelming 94 per cent rejecting plans for the continued use of nuclear power in Italy.

All of Germany's 17 nuclear plants were built by Siemens, which, as members will know, announced on 18 September that it would no longer be involved in nuclear plant projects. Indeed, its chief executive, Peter Löscher said that the move was an answer to

"the clear positioning of German society and politics for a pull-out from nuclear energy."

He added:

"The chapter for us is closed."

Shortly after that announcement, as Rob Gibson said, Scottish and Southern Energy announced that it was selling its 25 per cent stake in the nuclear conglomerate NuGeneration. Regrettably, however, it did not say that it would rule out a return to nuclear energy provision. Significantly—this refers to something in the motion—it also said that its

"core investment in generation should be in renewable energy."

The position in Belgium and Austria follows that line.

Regrettably, the UK Government's position has always been one of strong support for nuclear energy, albeit that the industry relies on a heavy public subsidy, as David Torrance said.

I turn to one of many magazines that arrived today: *Insight into nuclear decommissioning* from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. That organisation has a budget of £12 million and responsibility for

"decommissioning and cleaning up ... civil nuclear facilities ... ensuring that all the waste products, both radioactive and non-radioactive, are safely managed"

and

"implementing Government policy on the long-term management of nuclear waste".

The situation at Dounreay in the north of Scotland is highlighted in the magazine, with the site engineer saying:

“radiation levels are still very high”

with

“residual traces of liquid metal coolant”.

Decommissioning started in 1983 and stalled for 30 years, but we are told that the reactor has been

“declared ... a major environmental hazard”.

Although £12 billion may go some way towards addressing that, it will not be sufficient.

I agree that

“the Scottish Government target of 100% electricity produced from renewable sources”

is not only achievable but vital, as is reindustrialisation, particularly in the north of Scotland to replace the big part that Dounreay played in the economy there.

It is important that the Scottish Government has invested in Scrabster harbour. There is potential connected to Nigg. Renewable energy should deliver something for the people of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross because of the contribution that they have made to getting us this far.

Germany has taken a great decision for the planet.

17:36

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Rob Gibson raises important issues in this members’ business debate, and I thank him for bringing it to the chamber.

The Lothians, too, are well placed to contribute to, and benefit from, a real commitment to renewably produced electricity. Here in Edinburgh, we have world-leading educational establishments and local community groups such as PEDAL—Portobello Transition Town, which is highlighting the practical benefits with a proposal for a community wind turbine.

We all welcome the progress that is being made on renewable energy production. We can and must complement that with an increase in renewable heat and by growing the community-owned and small-scale renewables sector. Of course, such technologies will bring optimal benefit only when they are located within well-insulated buildings.

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism told Parliament that there was a rational case for extending the life of Scotland’s two nuclear power plants and that the SNP was “perfectly open” to the continued use of the Hunterston and Torness power stations. I am sure that the minister realises

that new nuclear is an unnecessary choice and that, instead of dangerous and expensive energy production being given yet more time in Scotland, the time is now right for the Government to commit to producing a nuclear shutdown timeline.

Germany has shown us all the way. We have also heard that Switzerland intends to be offline by 2034 and that Italy has cancelled all new nuclear plants in a legally binding referendum. Some of the reactors that those countries are shutting down are younger than Hunterston B, but we are extending its life. The lifetime extension of old plants carries greater safety concerns. That is part of the concern that I raise. The events at Fukushima should be taken as a warning about keeping crumbling plants with patchy safety records going.

I will not go over all the points that members have made and with which I agree entirely. I ask the minister to write to the UK Government opposing any lifespan extension at Hunterston on the ground of safety concerns. I also ask him to commit to producing a timeline for nuclear shutdown in Scotland.

17:39

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate Rob Gibson on securing the debate.

It is a sure sign of the changing world view on nuclear energy that Germany—a manufacturing giant with a population of 81 million—has turned its back on nuclear energy as a viable source of new generating power. Its decision to build no more nuclear power stations is a landmark moment and, I hope, points to an eventually nuclear-free world.

Once upon a time, nuclear power was viewed as the answer to all the world’s problems, with many people predicting that it would result in world peace and electricity that would be “too cheap to meter.” That period of nuclear naivety did not last long. Following accidents and disasters at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl in the late 1970s and 1980s, public opinion shifted away from nuclear power. Unfortunately, it has taken the incident at Fukushima to galvanise opposition and—I hope—to put to rest future developments.

I will take issue with a couple of points that Alex Johnstone made. Unfortunately, he did not allow me to intervene. If he had, I would have pointed out that nuclear power is not always reliable. In 2006-07, Hunterston B shut down for 10 months. Reactor 3 at Hunterston B came back online only yesterday after having been shut down last week following a leak. Nuclear power is not as reliable as he suggested. Alex Johnstone also referred to buying electricity from England. In fact, England

plans to produce a maximum of only 8 per cent of its energy supply from nuclear power. Of course, England gets the benefits of our oil and gas.

Although widespread trepidation is an integral part of Germany's decision, it has been influenced by numerous other factors, including finance. During this economically challenging time, it would be reckless to sign away billions of euros of taxpayers' money to fund the construction, maintenance and decommissioning of new plant. It must be remembered that there has never been a nuclear power station built without massive subsidy; I believe that there never will be. That is why the USA has not built a new nuclear power station since 1972. Other forms of energy are simply more cost-effective.

The UK Government has proposed that a new fleet of nuclear stations be built by Areva Group. The company has already attempted to build a plant in Finland. Its estimated cost was £2.5 billion, but there it is now expected that there will be a 100 per cent overrun, and the project is three years late after 1,500 safety flaws were identified. Unfortunately, after a series of costly subsidies and tax breaks, the fun is just beginning. As colleagues have indicated, the real monetary cost of nuclear power is in decommissioning. It is pretty shocking that Sellafield will now cost £1.5 billion to decommission and will not be cleaned up for three centuries.

In my constituency, Hunterston A was open from 1964 to 1989, so there were 25 years of electricity production, but the site will not be cleared until 2080. That process will be paid for by the grandchildren of those who benefited from the electricity. The cost will be at least £671 million; it cost £41.8 million this year, 22 years after the plant's closure.

The only truly sustainable and environmentally friendly method of producing energy is to embrace the sun, wind, tides and waves. Whether it is nuclear or fossil fuel, ultimately all those sources of energy are finite. If we do not want our descendants centuries from now to live as if they were in the middle ages, we have to develop renewable technologies. If Scotland wants not to be surpassed by China, South Korea and the United States in developing those technologies, we have to be at the forefront in their development. Scotland is well placed to become completely energy self-sufficient in the coming decades and I believe that we can certainly enjoy the benefits of renewable energy.

Claudia Beamish: I want to highlight something that everyone in the chamber and everyone in Scotland knows, which is that the waste issue is still unresolved.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the member for that helpful intervention.

It will take 91 years for Hunterston A to be cleaned up and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority tells me that it will take anything between 25 and 125 years to clean up Hunterston B.

I do not agree with what Alison Johnstone said about closing the plants now: we have to wait until new sources of energy come on stream. The plants will close when they have fulfilled their useful life expectancy and I believe that they will never be replaced.

17:44

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): It is right that, in this Parliament, we turn our eyes furth of Scotland. I was therefore not disappointed by Rob Gibson's comments in that regard, as he is a true internationalist. I thank him for securing the debate, for raising this important issue and for allowing all members to have the opportunity to take part.

Decisions about the energy mix and the pressing need to deliver a low-carbon, secure and sustainable energy future are obviously among the most important decisions that we take at this time. As many members have said, Scotland is extremely well placed to make the transition to a low-carbon economy, and that is because we are blessed with a large quantity of extremely bad weather. We have one quarter of Europe's offshore wind and tidal energy and 10 per cent of its wave power. It is perhaps only recently that we have become aware of the huge potential of natural phenomena that were previously regarded with gloom all round. We have among the best energy resources in Europe. All members would give credit—to varying degrees, I suspect—to the First Minister for galvanising the mood of the nation to do what we can to take advantage of the natural elements with which our country has been blessed.

Claudia Beamish: In the spirit of cross-party solidarity in the debate, I highlight the fact that it was the Scottish Labour Executive that brought in the first renewables target.

Fergus Ewing: I am happy to accept that point of information. We are working together with the Labour Party on achieving the objectives and I fully understand Mr Baker's remarks about the duty of the Opposition to challenge and probe; he is perfectly correct to do so.

The leadership that we have provided was recognised at the conference last week that was sponsored by the Scottish Government, Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and Scottish Enterprise. Al

Gore spoke for two hours, without notes. I would happily do that this evening if I could get away with it.

Alex Johnstone: No!

Fergus Ewing: His speech was inspirational. The former US vice president said:

"I admire and applaud the First Minister's leadership in promoting the development of renewable energy, efficiency and sharp reductions in CO₂ emissions. His government and private companies based in Scotland are providing inspiration to others in many parts of the world."

We are on a journey—one on which we are travelling together with various degrees of enthusiasm. Rob Gibson highlighted Germany's decisions to turn away from nuclear power, which it is phasing out by 2022, to massively increase use of renewable energy by doubling it, and to make the 10 per cent energy efficiency cut to which many members have quite rightly alluded. I agree with most of the comments on that that have been made by most members in the debate.

It would be correct for me to point out that Scotland might face some problems arising from Germany's decision to expand drastically its renewable generation. It will now resolutely dedicate itself to that task, and it will continue to seek with great determination to lead—or perhaps even to dominate—the supply chain for turbines, high-voltage direct-current cables and vessel leasings. Germany's drive must be seen as a challenge to Scotland, which makes it all the more important that Ofgem and the UK Government quickly end regulatory uncertainty and deliver an effective framework of support for renewables. Whether it is oil and gas or renewables, the one thing in which we need investment on a substantial scale is certainty. Uncertainty and the hiatus that has been caused by matters that are under discussion, and which members have rightly highlighted, is the enemy of investment.

I therefore make a simple plea to the UK Government. We need to make rapid progress with the difficult decision that we face on electricity market reform, with project transmit, with location of the green investment bank in Edinburgh—the case for that is unanswerable—and with the return of the fossil fuel levy, which has been languishing in an Ofgem account for far too long.

I pay tribute to decisions that have been taken elsewhere. It is, as has been pointed out, for other countries to make their own decisions, but is it not interesting that the three countries in the world that are moving in that direction along with Scotland—Germany, Japan and Switzerland—are associated with being the foremost countries in the world in giving a lead to technology? That seems to me to be neither accident nor coincidence.

Of course we accept the need for a balance in meeting our energy needs so I am grateful for this opportunity to reiterate that, alongside meeting our renewables targets, we will continue to produce the necessary conventional energy. That is why in the past day or so I was pleased to announce that I have approved the application for Cockenzie power station to move from coal to gas. In that respect, our policy is realistic. We will continue to need conventional thermal generation during the transition to a low-carbon economy for the reasons that Alex Johnstone—and, in a different vein, Alison Johnstone—outlined, and we will consider applications to extend the lives of existing nuclear stations based on their merits and on safety, economic and environmental grounds, in respect of the matters that fall to us for decision making.

Although we are proud that our vision of a low-carbon economy for Scotland has made a mark throughout the world, we should in the transition to achieving that objective recognise, value and praise those who work in the world's conventional power stations. I thank Rob Gibson for securing this interesting debate, and all those who have participated in it.

Meeting closed at 17:51.

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