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Thursday 10 November 2011

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Thursday 10 November 2011

CONTENTS

	Col.
PROTECTING SCOTLAND'S NHS	3257
<i>Motion moved—[Jackie Baillie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Nicola Sturgeon].</i>	
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	3257
The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon).....	3261
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	3264
Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP).....	3266
Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)	3267
Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP).....	3269
Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP)	3270
Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)	3271
Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP)	3273
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	3274
Nicola Sturgeon	3275
Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab).....	3277
KEEPING COMMUNITIES SAFE	3281
<i>Motion moved—[Johann Lamont].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Kenny MacAskill].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Lamont].</i>	
Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)	3281
The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill)	3285
John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)	3287
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	3290
Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab)	3292
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)	3293
Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD).....	3295
Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)	3297
Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP).....	3299
Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	3300
John Lamont	3302
Kenny MacAskill	3303
James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab)	3306
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE QUESTION TIME	3310
GENERAL QUESTIONS	3310
Cities (Community Rejuvenation)	3310
Road Safety (Young Drivers).....	3310
National Health Service (Advocacy Services)	3312
Disabled Students Allowance	3313
A9 (Berriedale Braes Improvements)	3314
Factors (Accountability)	3315
Social Rented Housing (Environmental Sustainability)	3315
Same-sex Marriage	3316
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	3319
Engagements.....	3319
Prime Minister (Meetings).....	3322
Cabinet (Meetings)	3326
First Ministerial Visits (Qatar and United Arab Emirates)	3327
Junior Doctors (Working Hours)	3328
Public Health Levy	3329
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE QUESTION TIME	3331
FINANCE, EMPLOYMENT AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH	3331
Employment and Regeneration (Cunninghame South)	3331
Social Economy	3332

Welfare Reform.....	3333
Small Business Start-ups	3335
Non-domestic Rates	3336
Non-domestic Rates	3337
Local Authorities and Enterprise Agencies (Meetings).....	3339
Economy (Highlands)	3340
Employment (Glasgow)	3340
Third Sector	3341
Longannet Power Station (Carbon Capture Project).....	3342
Credit Unions (Bank Charges).....	3343
Non-domestic Rates	3343
Crown Estate (Finances 2010-11).....	3344
Council Tax Freeze	3345
Non-domestic Rates (Impact on Post Offices)	3346
ECONOMY (ARCHITECTURE AND PLACE MAKING).....	3347
<i>Motion moved—[Fiona Hyslop].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Patricia Ferguson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jamie McGrigor].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop).....	3347
Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)	3353
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	3357
Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP).....	3360
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)	3362
Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	3364
Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)	3366
Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab).....	3368
Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	3370
Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP).....	3373
Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab)	3375
Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP).....	3378
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)	3380
Jamie McGrigor	3382
Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab).....	3384
The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell)	3387
DECISION TIME	3392
AIR DISCOUNT SCHEME	3405
<i>Motion debated—[Liam McArthur].</i>	
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	3405
Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	3408
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	3409
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	3412
The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown)	3413

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 10 November 2011

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

Protecting Scotland's NHS

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01275, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting Scotland's national health service.

09:15

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am very pleased to lead the debate on protecting the NHS. It is true to say that the NHS is probably one of our most-valued public institutions. We are all very grateful to the staff who care for us and our relatives daily, contributing to the NHS that we know and love: the doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, porters, cleaners, occupational therapists and so many more besides. All of them play a critical role in the patient journey and are central to the quality of healthcare and the experience of patients. I think that that view will be shared across the chamber.

I say at the outset that I regret the tone of the Scottish National Party amendment. It is inaccurate, but what is perhaps more worrying is that it reflects a degree of complacency about how wonderful things are that is absolutely not mirrored by the experience of health service workers on the ground. It is incumbent on politicians of all parties to be honest. People understand that times are tough. They understand that budgets are tight—for goodness' sake, it is happening to families across Scotland, too—yet they are treated to spin, fudge and dissembling. I recognise the tactic in the SNP amendment: in a tight corner, blame somebody else. In fact, SNP members are masters at playing the blame game; they excel in the it-wisnae-me school of politics. However, the NHS is just too important to play those kinds of games with.

I want to shatter two myths that the Scottish Government is fond of peddling. The first is that it protects health service spending and the second is that there are more staff in the NHS now under the SNP than there were under Labour when we were last in office. Let me start by talking about resources. The SNP makes great play of protecting the NHS. It promised increased spending and promised to pass on the Barnett consequential. It added up all the money and stuck a figure up on a billboard, which the First Minister unveiled during the election. There was a veritable plethora of promises, one surpassing the other—promises, promises, promises.

Perhaps someone can explain to me why, when health funding was rising under the previous United Kingdom Labour Government, the SNP failed to pass those increases on. Let me see, the rises in England were an average of almost 6.7 per cent year on year, yet the SNP passed on an average of only 4.1 per cent. Historically, the SNP has not passed on the extra money for health, leaving the NHS in a weaker position to deal with the cuts.

Perhaps someone can also explain to me why there is a real-terms cut in funding. There is a cut of some £319 million over the spending review period. Those are not my figures but independent analysis by the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I am grateful to my critical friend for giving way, but does she not understand that the failure to pass on all the Barnett health consequential, as Labour proposed in May, would have meant that there would be less money, not more money? When will she acknowledge that fact?

Jackie Baillie: We did, indeed, agree that all the Barnett consequential should have been passed on. I made that commitment in the chamber—the member can check the *Official Report*.

However, what the SNP provided was not an increase, as promised, but a cut. When we consider that health service inflation runs at more than 4 per cent, we begin to understand the scale of the challenge ahead. It will be tough for health boards. They are faced with ever-increasing demand on services and a declining budget. It does not take a rocket scientist to work out that it will be difficult for them to spread their resources even more thinly without that having an impact on patient care. Rather than acknowledging that openly, the SNP simply changes its mantra from, "We are protecting health," to, "We are protecting health boards." Yet, is the SNP doing that?

The briefing from the Royal College of Nursing prior to this debate is instructive. Again, we see that some of the so-called new money passed on to health boards is not that at all: it is in effect money that has already been committed. The briefing points to the £76 million of waiting times funding that has simply been transferred from one health directorate budget heading to another—from non-recurring funding in 2011-12 to health boards core recurring funding allocations for 2012-13. Removing the impact of that money, which the RCN points out is not new funding, on health boards means that their combined cash uplift drops to 1.6 per cent. If we look again, we see that, for the first time, the cost of delivering healthcare in the prison service is being transferred from justice to health without the

corresponding transfer of resource. That will cost the health service an additional £20 million a year. Strip that out and we are left with an uplift of 1.4 per cent set against inflation pressures of more than 4 per cent. Even a primary school child can understand that arithmetic.

Simply transferring already committed money from one heading to another and pointing like a conjurer at what you want people to see does not hide the reductions elsewhere. The alcohol treatment and tobacco control budget lines have reduced by £3 million in real terms, the mental health budget line is down in real terms, the budget for specialist children's services is down in real terms, and the clean hospitals and MRSA line is down in real terms, too. Let us have an honest debate about what our priorities in health should be, because the money is not there. Demand is increasing, resources are decreasing and we cannot just stick our heads in the sand.

The second substantive issue that I want to raise is staffing. It is truly astonishing and breathtaking that the SNP expects us to believe that, while there are unprecedented cuts to staffing levels, it is still somehow protecting the NHS. Since 2009, 4,000 staff have been cut from the NHS. Some 1,700 of those are nurses and a further 1,000 nurses will be out by the end of the year. However, it is not just nurses. There are fewer occupational therapists, fewer speech and language therapists and fewer physiotherapists. Numbers have declined across many staff groups, and the situation is worse than the figures suggest because they include posts that are frozen and unfilled. The staff left behind are having to shoulder the burden, pick up the pieces and cope with the increasing workload. It is interesting that staff reporting of safety concerns has risen in the same period. The Government cannot remove that level of staffing without having an impact on front-line patient care.

I know that, in the modern world and in the Parliament, too, we like to talk about outcomes, but let me talk about some old measurements that should give us an early warning of the problems that lie ahead. The number of operations cancelled by health boards is up. Bed numbers are being reduced, which is not in itself a bad thing except that the data show that readmissions are going up in cases where people have to go back into hospital because they were discharged too early.

If members are not convinced by any of that, let me tell them about the RCN survey of employment and morale. Less than a third of nurses felt that nursing will continue to offer them a secure job. Two years ago, the figure was 82 per cent. Some 74 per cent reported increased stress at work and

66 per cent were more worried about job cuts than they were a year ago.

Members will remember that the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy is fond of telling us that there are more nurses in the NHS than there were when Labour left office. She has repeated that mantra time and again, and her boss, the one and only Alex Salmond, who was keen to get in on the act, said in the chamber on the day before the summer recess began:

"The protection of the health budget has meant that, even in these difficult times, health"

unemployment—sorry, I mean employment; that was a Freudian slip—

"in every single category—through medical consultants, general practitioners, dentists and nurses to allied health professionals—is substantially up today on the level that we inherited in 2007."—[*Official Report*, 30 June 2011; c 1270.]

That is simply not the case. The First Minister and his Government are coming to believe their own propaganda. His statement is a complete fantasy and has no basis in fact. The Government's own statistics on workforce numbers demonstrate that one has to go back to before 2006 to find fewer nurses and midwives in our hospital wards and communities. The SNP has taken us back almost six years and there are even more cuts in nurse numbers to come.

The SNP promised to protect the health budget and promised that there would be no compulsory redundancies, but we are seeing a real-terms cut in the health budget and thousands of staff are being shown the door. Those are real cuts that are happening to our health service right now. The SNP's promises on the NHS are sounding hollow to me.

Back in 2010, the SNP had an election slogan, "More nats, fewer cuts", to which Scottish Labour replied, "More nats, fewer nurses", a claim that the SNP vigorously denied. I take no comfort in being right but, today, there are more nationalists in the chamber and, regrettably, fewer nurses in Scotland's hospitals.

I believe that we are on the brink of a crisis in the NHS, but do not take my word for it. This is what the RCN had to say about the workload and morale of staff: It is "at breaking point".

It is time that we had an honest debate about the challenges that the health service faces. The SNP must stop spinning and wake up to the reality of staff struggling to cope in hospital wards, health centres and communities across the country.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern that, since 2009, almost 4,000 whole-time-equivalent NHS staff have left their jobs, including more than 1,700 nurses and midwives,

leaving the number of nursing and midwifery posts in Scotland's NHS at its lowest point since 2006; further notes that the latest NHS workforce statistics also show a decline in other workforce categories, including consultants and allied health professionals; notes that the declining trend in Scotland's NHS workforce began prior to 2011-12, at a time when the overall Scottish budget was rising; believes that the proposed £319 million real-terms cut to the overall health budget over the spending review period threatens further frontline job losses, including the reduction of nearly 1,000 whole-time-equivalent nurses and midwifery posts that have already been projected by NHS boards in the current financial year; further believes that such a rapid and disproportionate reduction cannot be explained by changes to service delivery and that it will impact adversely on the care of patients as well as the workloads and morale of remaining staff described as being at "breaking point" by the Royal College of Nursing in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to take responsibility for its own cuts and to accept that such a deep and disproportionate loss of frontline healthcare professionals is not compatible with protecting Scotland's NHS.

09:26

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): I begin by congratulating the Edinburgh-based Veterans First Point medical team for its outstanding success in winning two awards at this year's military and civilian health partnership awards ceremony, which is a tremendous achievement for a team that does tremendous work.

I also take this opportunity to welcome the news that Jackson Carlaw is returning to the Tory front bench as health spokesperson. I wish him a quick recovery from his recent illness and thank Murdo Fraser and Mary Scanlon for the contribution that they have made to the health portfolio in this Parliament. I hope that we will see them in future health debates.

Protecting the NHS is my job. It is my responsibility as health secretary, which I take extremely seriously. It is what I spend every waking hour striving to do. It is, of course, for others to judge the success of that but, for my part, I am incredibly proud of our NHS. I am proud of the quality of care that it provides and—particularly this morning, as we hear of the first NHS hospital in England to be handed over to the private sector—I am proud that, in Scotland, under the SNP Government, we have an NHS that is true to its founding principles and which Nye Bevan would recognise.

It is because I care so deeply and so passionately about our NHS that I agree with Jackie Baillie that honesty in this debate is paramount. I therefore make no apology for starting by pointing out the hard reality that Labour's motion tries to gloss over, which is that, if Labour were in power today, the NHS would have

less money in its budget than it currently does. I will give two quotes that demonstrate that.

Before the 2007 election, Jack McConnell said that, if Labour were re-elected, every extra penny would go to education and that that would mean

"other budgets having to cut their cloth".

In simple terms, that means that, if Jackie Baillie or one of her colleagues had been health secretary, the extra £1 billion that the NHS got in the previous session, under the SNP Government, would instead have gone to education. The NHS budget would have been £1 billion less. That is a fact.

Secondly, in September 2010, Iain Gray said:

"Labour would not ring fence the health budget."

That presumably means that at least some of the extra £1 billion that we will give to the NHS during this session would have gone elsewhere, too. Based on either of those quotes, the inescapable conclusion—the hard reality that Jackie Baillie and Richard Simpson do not like to recognise—is that, if they were standing where I am now, the NHS would have significantly less money in its budget than it currently does.

Jackie Baillie: Nonsense. Not true.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is a fact. That is true.

Jackie Baillie: The Scottish Labour Party manifesto might not be bedtime reading for the cabinet secretary, but would she accept that it contains an absolute commitment to pass on all the Barnett consequential to protect health spending?

Nicola Sturgeon: It is not bedtime reading for anyone.

If Jackie Baillie is correct, those Barnett consequential, given what Jack McConnell said, would have been applied to an NHS budget that was already £1 billion smaller than it was under this Government. Also, if she is correct, the best that we can say about Labour's position is that it promises to provide not a single penny more for the NHS than the Government has. Let us have some honesty. The issues in the motion are serious, but Labour's position on them does not have a shred of credibility. That is no doubt part of the reason why, despite all Labour's rhetoric before the election and the snazzy campaign slogans that Jackie Baillie has reprised today, in overwhelming numbers the people of Scotland trusted the SNP with the future of their national health service.

I will talk about the Government's record on health, of which I am proud. More important, I will talk about the achievements of the NHS, of which I am also proud. It is shameful that they do not rate

a mention in Labour's motion. Every penny of the Barnett consequential has been passed on—£1 billion of extra cash that has been deployed to protect front-line services. In each of the next three years, NHS board budgets will rise in real terms. When Jackie Baillie talks about a real-terms cut, she is being economical with the truth, as that reflects the cut in traditional capital spending, which in turn reflects the 36 per cent cut in the Scottish Government's capital budget—a cut that was implemented by the Tory-Liberal Government but planned to the very last penny by the previous Labour Government. In short, I will take no lessons from Labour on NHS funding.

In true, age-old Opposition style, Jackie Baillie wants to talk down the NHS to get at the Government. In doing so, she does a great disservice to the women and men who are delivering a first-class NHS in tough times. The reality of the health service today is that it is treating more patients than ever before and more quickly than ever before. Waiting times are at a record low. In seven out of the 11 most common hospital procedures, our NHS has the lowest waiting times in the entire UK. Scotland is the only part of the UK where waiting times continue to fall. Infection rates are also at a record low, and there are more day cases than ever before. That is the reality of our NHS.

The issue of staff numbers is hugely important. There are 4,850 more staff working in the NHS today than there were when Labour left office. There are also no compulsory redundancies in the NHS—something that I am not sure could be said about the NHS in England when Labour was last in office. Yes, the shape and size of the NHS workforce is changing; I recognise the challenges of that and the anxieties that it can cause. However, it is my job to work with staff and NHS boards to make sure that those changes happen at an appropriate pace, reflect service redesign and do not compromise the quality of care. That is my job and I take it very seriously.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am concluding, Presiding Officer.

In my view, there is no more sacred duty of any Government than the duty to provide free universal high-quality healthcare for the people and to protect our national health service. That is what I will always strive to do, and it is what the SNP Government will always do. From the bottom of my heart, I thank all those who work so hard in our NHS to deliver those high-quality services.

I move amendment S4M-01275.1, to leave out from “with concern” to end and insert:

“that despite real-terms cuts in the Scottish block grant

by the UK Government and the previous UK Labour administration, NHS resource spending in Scotland has been protected; further notes that, over the next three years, NHS boards' resource budgets will increase by £740 million and in real terms, ensuring that resources are directed to frontline services; recognises that, under the SNP administration, cancer waiting times targets have been met for the first time, waiting times are at record lows, MRSA and Clostridium difficile rates have been cut substantially, day case rates are at an all-time high and length of stay in hospitals at a record low, and welcomes the fact that the SNP administration has rejected the NHS privatisation agenda pursued by both the UK Government and the previous UK Labour administration.”

09:33

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in the debate on what will be my last outing—at least, for the time being—as the Conservative health spokesman. I say to the cabinet secretary, to Jackie Baillie and to others how much I have enjoyed debating with them over the past couple of years. They will shortly have a new face, or perhaps a returning face, to contend with when someone else fills my current role as I move on to pastures new. It is fair to say that those are not the pastures that I had originally intended to move on to, but I am sure that the grass will be just as green.

Jackie Baillie's motion makes some fair points about the decline in NHS staff numbers over recent years. Indeed, the statistics that have been cited this morning have been raised frequently in the chamber over recent months. However, the motion, which I read in great detail when it was published yesterday, refers to a real-terms reduction in the overall health budget, and, on scrutinising the figures, it becomes apparent that the situation is not quite so clear cut.

Revenue spend on the NHS remains more or less constant in real terms, in line with the commitment by the UK coalition Government to ring-fence NHS spending and the subsequent commitment by the Scottish Government to pass the Barnett consequential of that on to the NHS in Scotland. The reduction in funding referred to in Jackie Baillie's motion is, as the cabinet secretary said, in the capital budget. It is not entirely correct to say, as the motion states, that the reduction threatens further front-line job losses. Indeed, I would have to say to Jackie Baillie that there is more than a little whiff of Labour opportunism about the motion as I cannot see anywhere what the Labour Party is proposing as an alternative.

We all know that the public finances are in a horrendous situation, and that that is a legacy of Jackie Baillie's colleagues in the previous UK Labour Government. We also know that, with a fixed Scottish budget, if the Labour Party proposes to increase spending on the NHS, it has to tell us

what other area of the budget it would cut. We have heard nothing from the Labour Party this morning about how much it would increase health spending or how it would afford to do that in the current budget round. Perhaps later contributions from Labour will set out in detail whether it thinks that the NHS in Scotland is underfunded and by how much, how much extra it would spend, and where that money would come from.

That said, there are serious issues affecting the NHS because of the standstill budget and continually rising costs, more expensive treatments and—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie and Ms Sturgeon, please stop having a conversation across the chamber. Mr Fraser, please continue.

Murdo Fraser: I am not used to such disruptive womenfolk, Presiding Officer. I am glad that you are keeping them in order.

We know that costs are rising in the NHS and that the population is ageing. I am sure that we have all met people working in the NHS who have extreme concerns about workforce cuts. The RCN briefing for the debate highlights the fact that the number of nursing staff who are in post is at its lowest since 2006. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, which held an event in Parliament just a couple of weeks ago, also raised concerns about vacancies not being filled and about that having a knock-on effect on patient care. That is particularly concerning, given that we are all supposed to be investing more in preventative spending. If the problems that such therapists deal with are not dealt with early, they will cause greater problems and incur more costs further down the line.

Service redesign and change are always going to be a part of the NHS, with treatments that used to take weeks in hospital now being reduced to a day or two, and workforce reductions in themselves are not always a bad thing, nor do they always mean poorer services. However, we need to be careful that we are not impacting adversely on patient care.

We remain of the view that it was an error to take more than £50 million out of the health budget to give free prescriptions to all, including members of the Scottish Parliament who can well afford to pay for their prescriptions. If given the choice, I am sure that the public would rather make a small contribution towards the cost of their medicine than see cuts in NHS services. I am delighted that our new leader, Ruth Davidson, is maintaining our opposition to the policy of free prescriptions for all, and I hope that, in time, other parties will realise that the policy is a good example of a wrong choice with serious and negative consequences for our public services.

We have some sympathy with the terms of the Labour motion, which raises some serious issues. However, it would have been better if Labour had offered an alternative rather than simply being on the attack. These are serious issues and they deserve more than a superficial treatment.

09:38

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I begin by telling the Labour Party a few home truths about this morning's debate, if the cabinet secretary has left me any to give following her opening speech.

I hope that by the end of my speech I will, unlike the Labour Party, have made a few constructive suggestions on the NHS. The Labour motion alleges:

"the declining trend in Scotland's NHS workforce began prior to 2011-12, at a time when the overall Scottish budget was rising".

Labour does not tell us that the budget settlement from the UK Labour Government at the time the motion refers to was the worst ever settlement to Scotland since devolution. Labour fails to tell us that fact. I also acknowledge that Labour's fellow London-based colleagues have since given increasingly damaging cuts to Scotland.

I am disappointed that the Lib Dems are not here this morning to share the blame.

That point is vital for a number of reasons. First, at the last election, the Labour Party in Scotland refused to commit one additional penny to Scotland's NHS, despite being asked repeatedly and directly to do so in interviews with Iain Gray, the party leader. I thought that he, and not Jackie Baillie, spoke for that party. Perhaps she is making a belated leadership bid—who knows? The SNP Government, however, promised to give NHS boards a real-terms increase and to pass on future Barnett cash consequentials in full. That is why the NHS has seen a 2.5 per cent increase in cash terms and a 0.5 per cent increase in real terms. I shall return to NHS inflation later in my speech, if I have time.

I appreciate the challenges faced by the NHS, including nurses. My wife is a nurse and she leaves me in no doubt about the challenges that she faces daily. Let the message go out loud and clear, however, that despite the continuing pressures and challenges facing the NHS in the years ahead, the position would have been significantly worse had Labour been re-elected. That is simply a fact. More nats, less cuts. Woe betide us if Jackie Baillie's party was in power and she was in charge of the health department, as who knows how many fewer nurses there would be. Do not take my word for it, take Iain Gray's, as he refused to pledge any extra cash.

The same element of Labour's motion highlights a second deficiency in Labour's thought processes as it focuses on the NHS head count before 2011-12 without giving any thought to the reconfiguration of NHS services. The staff reduction will have been due at least in part to forms of service reconfiguration. That shows that there is an underlying and complete misunderstanding of the workforce management complexities that are at play when we move NHS provision away from acute service delivery into community delivery.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: I wish I had longer than four minutes, but I do not, so I will continue.

In effect, we are talking about NHS staffing levels that are roughly comparable with those when Labour left office in 2007. Does the Labour Party believe that, when it left office with staffing levels unsustainably low, the NHS was in crisis? Labour presided over eight years of failure of the NHS—thank you, Jackie Baillie, for putting that on the record—[*Interruption.*] I know that Ms Baillie does not like the truth, but she should put her listening ears on.

Let me try to highlight a couple of positive elements. NHS inflation is notoriously difficult to calculate, and the problem that the Scottish Government has is that the Barnett consequential from London do not take it into account. I wish that they did. I wish that Labour was saying that they should, so that we could build a consensus to challenge the UK cuts, but whenever the Scottish Government challenges the UK's spending commitments, Labour runs feart and terrified that that will open up more powers for this Parliament. Labour would rather put—

The Presiding Officer: You need to wind up now, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: That is why I cannot support the motion this morning.

09:43

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Let me start by picking up on a point that the cabinet secretary made. It is both outrageous and offensive to say that if anybody in this chamber tries to point out some of the inadequacies of the present Administration they are, as Nicola Sturgeon asserted about Jackie Baillie, trying to talk down the NHS. We are not trying to talk down the NHS or those who work for it if we express genuinely felt concerns. If we try to express the concerns articulated to us by our constituents who work in the NHS, how can we possibly be trying to talk it down? We are simply repeating what they

are telling us. Surely those SNP members who represent constituencies must have some constituents expressing concerns to them—it cannot be the case that they are not receiving any complaints about what is going on in the NHS. Nurses are probably the biggest source of complaints to me about the NHS. I cannot be talking down the NHS if I say what nurses are telling me.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): The member mentioned constituencies and nurses. My case load from nurses is to do with the car parking charges at Glasgow royal infirmary, which the Labour Government implemented under a private finance initiative. That is my biggest case load.

Hugh Henry: There may be a specific issue in Glasgow, but across Scotland, nurses, who are overworked, stretched and concerned, are the biggest source of complaints about the NHS. They are caring professionals who are concerned about impacts on their patients. They are worried and scared about what will happen not only to their jobs, but to the future of the NHS.

We have heard a lot of talk about the SNP wanting honesty. Bob Doris and the cabinet secretary mentioned that. The SNP's manifesto said:

"We have increased the number of ... nurses".

Fair enough. It went on to say:

"In the next Parliament"—

that is, in this session—

"an SNP Government will ensure that we continue the progress that has been made."

Fair enough. From September 2009 to January 2011, nearly 2,000 nurses lost their jobs. That is 2,000 fewer nurses. How is the SNP ensuring progress and maintaining the increase in the number of nurses? Something does not stack up.

If we are going to have some honesty, let us forget the rhetoric from all the parties in the run-up to the election, and the SNP should tell us whether there are fewer nurses now than there were in September 2009 and how that squares with the promise that it made. The SNP owes it not to members who support the motion or to other MSPs, but to the nurses and doctors who deliver the services and, more than that, to patients to say that they will be safe and secure in a health service in which there is an adequate number of nurses.

It is surely not beyond the wit and capacity of members to have a debate at some point about what is happening. Surely we can reach an agreement, leave aside election rhetoric and all the posturing, do the right thing, and ensure that we have nurses who can deliver.

09:47

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): After Jackie Baillie's track record last year, when she combined the housing budget with the NHS budget to claim wrongly that health spending was going down, I thought that she might be a bit more circumspect in her selective use of figures, but it seems not. She might wish to choose 2009 as her starting point for employment figures, but it is far more illustrative to compare the current situation with the situation when Labour was in power. Even with the recent changes to staffing levels, there are still significantly more whole-time equivalent staff than there were when the SNP first entered government.

Unlike what happened in the dark days of Labour control, the NHS is meeting its targets and improving the incredible service that it provides to the people of Scotland. Before the 2007 election, there were 32,000 out-patients waiting for more than 12 weeks. Last year, there were just 150. Before the SNP Government, Labour utterly failed to meet its 62-day waiting time target for cancer patients. Under the SNP Government, we have not only met that target; we have halved it to 31 days and met that, too.

The NHS budget is going up in absolute terms, from the £10.2 billion that it stood at under Labour to a record £11.9 billion in 2014-15. That is an increase of £1.7 billion under the SNP Government. The NHS's share of the devolved budget is going up, from 42.4 per cent of the resource budget this year to 44.2 per cent by the 2014-15 financial year. As promised, the Scottish Government has passed on the full consequential from Department of Health spending south of the border and, as promised, it has protected the NHS budget at a time when UK Government decisions have led to savage cuts to the Scottish budget.

Labour motions usually contain demands for infinitely more resources, but there are never any indications of where those resources should come from. Is Labour suggesting that the proportion of the budget that goes to the NHS should be even higher than it already is? If so, what cuts to the rest of the budget is it asking for?

The Scots have seen through the Labour Party, as was clearly demonstrated in May. It thought that, if it kept throwing money at the organisation and taxing Scots more highly in the process, things would only get better. That is not true. This is about how we make best use of the money and the tremendous talents of all in our health service to achieve the best outcomes for patients.

It is the nature of the NHS that, as Bob Doris said, it needs ever-increasing resources to maintain its position as new treatments and drugs

are developed. The biggest threat to the NHS is clearly not the actions of the Scottish Government, which is straining every sinew to protect Scotland's health budget; the real danger is the rampant rate of inflation in the health service, which drives up costs while budgets are falling.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): How does Maureen Watt square the fact that the Government repeatedly says that there is a real-terms increase with what she has just said?

Maureen Watt: I have just given the Parliament all the figures. Dr Simpson obviously was not listening earlier.

Why else does the Royal College of Nursing say:

"the NHS settlement is as good as we could have expected in the current climate"?

As long as we are tied to the dead hand of Westminster's failed economic policy, we will continue to face those challenges. That makes the need for preventative spending more important than ever before. It must be at the heart of future plans for the NHS, and the money identified for that purpose in the spending review is perhaps the most significant part of the Scottish Government's budget plans.

I support the amendment in the name of Nicola Sturgeon.

09:51

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): As I have only four minutes, I do not plan to take any interventions.

The motion is about one of our most respected institutions, and it must be—I put this in the best way possible—the most breathtaking piece of hypocrisy ever. Even Dick Turpin could not have hijacked 60 minutes of parliamentary time like the motion does.

A week ago, the motion might have won a Hallowe'en prize. We are bewitched. It is a trick, not a treat. It is full of doom and gloom, gripe and groan and hypocrisy. It is a melange or a cauldron of distortive numbers and an attempt at sorcery over our memories.

The Labour Party is waving its wand, hoping that we will forget that, when it was in power, it tried to close the accident and emergency departments at Ayr and Monklands and then had a Damascene conversion just before an election. For the record, Ayr accident and emergency department treated nearly 20,000 people over the summer.

A party whose London leadership called for cuts a little deeper and tougher than Thatcher's is asking the Scottish Government to take

responsibility for its own cuts. They are not our own cuts. In what school of wizardry is £11.03 billion—the Government's proposed resource spending in 2012-13—less than the £10.8 billion planned for 2011-12? What magic compels a rich country that is desirous of creating a caring, compassionate and concerned society for its sick, elderly and ill to be Hogwarted because it is reliant on handouts from another Government?

Ms Baillie and the Labour Party in Scotland again focus on the wrong target. She and her party may find it acceptable, even desirable, to go down the road to Damascus, following her English colleagues, who changed their views just before the previous election. What did they call for? "Our health, our care, our say". However, unless she can clearly tell us where she would find cuts to fund her unexplained, mythical aspirations, we might end up with an NHS like the one in England, where people do not know whether it is new year or New York.

The NHS in Scotland has 25.3 members of staff per thousand head of population, compared to 20 in England. Ms Baillie uses her mythical numerical powers to move her baseline conveniently to 2009. However, she knows that, since 2007, NHS staffing has gone up by 1.4 per cent, support services staffing has gone up by 0.4 per cent and the number of allied health professionals has gone up by 5.2 per cent.

We do not deny that times are tough, but even the RCN briefing that Jackie Baillie quotes acknowledges that health is in a relatively strong position in the proposed 2012-13 budget. The RCN and the British Medical Association say that the demographics and financial constraints are challenging, but they accept that challenge.

I have been going round to meet boards and staff in the NHS in the south of Scotland, who are focused on achieving better clinical outcomes and results and on long-term restructuring, buttressed by quality care, and who are targeting increased participation and consultation locally, to marry clinical service with efficiency.

The challenge for Ms Baillie is to leave aside the gripe and groan and the doom and gloom. Let us—the Government, the Opposition and participants in the national health service—work together to provide a health service and health workers with international distinction. I support the amendment.

09:55

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning. I will be a little different today. I am new to the game of politics in the Scottish Parliament, so I will try not to criticise anybody.

It is important to find a solution. We have a tremendous service, of which I am a customer—I have been so since birth. I continue to enjoy the services in our hotels—I call hospitals that because the only time that I get a rest is when I am in hospital. As a patient in hospital, I have noticed the tremendous work that all the people there do. Every one of our staff does tremendous work for us in what we accept are extremely difficult circumstances. I know for a fact that no member would disagree with that.

The important issue is how we retain and develop that service. I have reams of figures for all the cuts that departments face. Cuts are a reality. I have been in politics for 17 years and I have not experienced a year in which a cut has not been made. I have seen cuts and cuts. A lot of times, I have wondered when the cuts would stop. I do not see the light at the end of the tunnel—the tunnel is circular and there is no light at the end of it.

We need to start thinking outside the box and to ask how we deal with the situation. One way of dealing with it is to develop the service. We are proud that the national health service is one of the best health services in the world. We are also proud that we work with people overseas, but we have done so through token gestures and not seriously. We do not invite patients from overseas to come here, as is done in other countries. Australia, India, China and now Malaysia all sell facilities. We should look at encouraging such trade, if we are looking for new input to inject cash into our hospitals and our service. If we do not have money at home, we must look for it elsewhere. The market is global and we must compete.

At home, we have a lot of issues. We have people from 140 communities who travel all over the world and return with all sorts of challenges for us with diseases. Recently, I was in Lahore in Pakistan. It is a twin city of Glasgow, which has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Punjab Government. The Chief Minister there sent a message to the Scottish Parliament in which he asked the Parliament for assistance in dealing with dengue fever, as people out there have been challenged by a new outbreak. At a meeting there, I realised how fortunate we are to be protected by so much. However, we are also vulnerable. Developing our international links and encouraging such trade would be helpful.

I plead with the cabinet secretary—although I know that I do not have to, as I am pushing at an open door—to save the service. I am keen for the Government to develop opportunities for fresh input into the service that is not just from Government funding. We need a new injection of resource into the service, for which we need to look outside the box for once.

09:59

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): The debate has been somewhat disappointing so far—apart from Hanzala Malik's speech. We have heard the usual scaremongering from Labour about the state of the NHS in Scotland. I for one do not recognise the image that it presents of an organisation on its knees; I recognise an organisation that is delivering for the people of Scotland.

I do not think that the NHS is perfect—I do not have a blinkered view on that. The NHS needs to change, and reducing its senior management by 25 per cent over this session of Parliament will be a welcome change. It will certainly make the organisation more efficient and I am sure that the public will be happy with that, too.

Jackie Baillie spoke about the SNP playing the blame game—I think she used the phrase “it wisnae me”. I know that there are financial difficulties across the UK. This Parliament received a £500 million cut to the budget from the previous Labour Government and a £1.3 billion cut to the budget from the current Tory-Lib Dem UK Government. So, with less money coming to Scotland, the funding allocated to the NHS in Scotland by this SNP Government is actually a good deal.

I know that Labour does not appreciate the issue of balancing the books. The situation that the UK Government—and the whole of the UK—is in is not all the fault of the banks, but Labour does not understand that. At least Alistair Darling had the decency towards the end of his term in ministerial office to be honest by telling us that the cuts that he would initiate would be tougher and deeper than those of Thatcher. Labour members might not want to hear that unfortunate truth about Alistair Darling. I hope that they are not proud, but ashamed, about what we have heard this morning about the NHS in England.

The cabinet secretary spoke about the first moves to privatise NHS facilities down south. Unfortunately, there is no Lib Dem in the chamber this morning, which just shows what they think about the NHS. Labour needs to accept that the Tories and the Lib Dems are moving on, at pace, the project of privatising the NHS, which was started by the previous Labour Government.

I firmly believe that the NHS should remain free at the point of need. Of the range of public services over which this Parliament has control, our NHS is, for me, the jewel in the crown. Every member should be proud of what the men and women in the NHS deliver for us on a daily basis.

Some of their achievements need to be highlighted again. Waiting times are at record lows; cancer waiting times are being met for the

first time; day case rates are at an all-time record high; and the length of stay in hospitals is at a record low.

I said at the beginning of my speech that the NHS is not perfect—no organisation is. The NHS can still improve, because there is always room for improvement. Unfortunately, in their speeches today Labour members provided no suggestions for how to improve the NHS, apart from the usual mantra of “more money”. I mentioned Hanzala Malik's speech in my opening comments; his was the exception.

Every person in Scotland and the UK is now suffering on a daily basis as a result of the profligacy of Labour colleagues in the previous Government in London. Throwing money at an organisation is not always the answer. I know that the NHS in Scotland is safe in the hands of Nicola Sturgeon. I also know that the population in Scotland trust Nicola Sturgeon to safeguard the NHS. Yes there are challenges, but nobody outside this Parliament wants to go back to the dark days of Labour in control not delivering for the benefit of Scotland and not delivering the NHS that Scotland needs.

10:03

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank the health secretary for her kind words. I know that Jackson Carlaw will be a great asset to the health debate in Scotland and I am sure that he is looking forward to coming back to health. Although I am leaving health, I certainly do not intend to leave some issues, such as mental health and care of the elderly. I am not quite sure whether I will feel as passionate about carbon capture in my new role, but I certainly do not intend to leave the issue of mental health.

I thank the Labour Party for using its time to discuss the NHS workforce. Plenty of figures have been mentioned this morning, but the one that I cannot forget—and which should be at the back of our mind in everything we do—is the £120 million of interest that this country pays each day on its national debt. Given that, we should all be committed to better-quality and more efficient and effective healthcare that provides the best value for taxpayers' money.

Although, like others, I acknowledge the value, commitment and dedication of our NHS staff, I must recognise a very good point that Hugh Henry made. I, too, find that the complaints that I am getting are coming not just from patients but from the workforce—and from nurses in particular. The Government needs to explain why, of the 3,910 staff that have been lost in the past 21 months as a result of efficiency savings, 1,747 have been nurses and 1,100 administrators.

Jackie Baillie also made a good point about the NHS providing services in prisons. That work has only just started, but we need to know what impact it will have on existing NHS service provision. After all, as the prison population amounts to more than 7,000, the move represents a huge increase in responsibility for the health service.

We should also consider areas such as mental health, where more staff might be needed. A first-class example of preventative spending, early diagnosis and treatment can, as we know, prevent mild depression from becoming severe, chronic and enduring. That is why I was so shocked and disappointed by the response to a recent freedom of information request that I submitted recently, which revealed that children seeking mental health treatment can wait up to 182 weeks—or more than three years—in Tayside and 56 weeks in Glasgow and that, in adult mental health, an individual might have to wait more than two years in Grampian, Tayside and Highland for psychological services. Moreover, many health boards simply did not have the data. Given the increased demand on the mental health workforce to meet waiting times in future, which I welcome, I ask the cabinet secretary to look at whether retraining and redeployment opportunities are being offered to existing staff where appropriate.

No one has yet pointed out that, compared with levels when the Parliament was established, the percentage of procedures carried out as day cases has risen by 10 per cent and the number of nurses by 5,000. As a result, we should be concentrating not just on the workforce itself but on what it is doing.

In conclusion, I want to quote from the RCN. I do not wish to be flippant but I have to say that I do not remember a time in the past 13 years when the RCN has said that morale is good. Nevertheless, I accept that, as Jackie Baillie pointed out, it is making a comparison with the situation two years ago; indeed, I was going to make the same point in my speech. In its briefing for this debate, the RCN says:

“a decision to close a hospital ward may be sound in the context of shifting more care to community settings. However, if the nursing posts from that ward are simply cut, rather than transferred to the community, the capacity to deliver increased preventative interventions is lost.”

We need more honesty and accuracy with regard to current and future workforce planning in the NHS.

10:08

Nicola Sturgeon: In summing up, I will make three points, the first of which concerns—to use Murdo Fraser’s rather polite terminology—Labour’s opportunism. I recognise the importance of the issues that have been raised in the debate;

indeed, I spend every day dealing with them. I say very directly to Hugh Henry that I know that staff have anxieties and concerns. In a time of change such as the one we are living through, that is only understandable and it is for me as health secretary and indeed for the Parliament to respond to such concerns. However, it is simply not good enough for Labour to come to the chamber simply to criticise and not offer any alternative.

The key moment in the debate was when Murdo Fraser asked Jackie Baillie the crucial question: how much more money would Labour spend on the NHS and where would it take that money from? Jackie Baillie blushed a wee bit at that moment, but she stayed firmly in her seat—“No answer” was the very loud reply. Jackie Baillie tried to clarify Labour’s position on NHS funding by saying that Labour would have passed on all the Barnett consequentials. If that is true, the most charitable thing that we can say about Labour’s position is that it would have spent exactly the same on the NHS as the SNP is spending and not a single penny more.

However, the reality is different. The positions of Jack McConnell in the 2007 to 2011 session of Parliament and Iain Gray in the current session show that, had Labour been in power during those years, the NHS budget would be smaller today. Labour members do not like the reality to be pointed out, but either Jack McConnell and Iain Gray were not being honest then, or Labour is not being honest now. They cannot have it both ways.

My second point is about the changing shape and size of the NHS workforce. Those changes are the reality, and I recognise the challenges that they pose and the anxieties that they cause. I laid out clearly in my opening remarks my responsibility in that respect, which I take incredibly seriously. Let us look at some facts. The fact is that more NHS staff are in post today than when Labour left office. I will give Jackie Baillie the precise numbers: between September 2006 and June 2011, the NHS workforce grew by 4,850 whole-time equivalent posts. That is more staff in every single professional group, with, I accept, the exception of nurses and midwives. The number of nurses and midwives has reduced by 0.2 per cent from the level that we inherited. Of course, that figure does not take account of the increased number of nurses working in primary care. If we add that in, the number of nurses has increased from the level that we inherited from Labour, as with every other professional group. In Scotland, we have more nurses per head of population than in any other part of the UK.

None of that means that it is easy out there. I know that it is not easy and that nurses and other members of the NHS workforce are finding this time of change tough. They are finding it incredibly

tough to be faced with the prospect of increases in their pension contributions at a time of a wage freeze. I put on record the Government's opposition to that cash grab on the pension schemes of NHS workers. I know that things are tough, but I have set out the reality of the NHS workforce, and it would do Labour good to recognise that reality.

My third and final point has already been made by other members, particularly Maureen Watt, Chic Brodie, Bob Doris and Stuart McMillan. What matters most about the NHS is what it delivers for patients, but that is the bit that Labour members do not want to talk about. The hard reality is that the NHS today is performing better than at any time in its entire history. Hanzala Malik made a good speech in which he recognised the quality of service in our NHS. Waiting times and infection rates are lower than they have ever been. Thanks to our world-leading quality strategy and patient safety programme, which is admired throughout the world, we have higher quality and safer care than ever before in the NHS. Jackie Baillie calls all that a crisis, but I call it a fantastic achievement on the part of the people who work in our national health service and, again, I thank them for that.

I have been where Jackie Baillie is, so I know what it is like—her job is to criticise from the sidelines. I understand that that is in the nature of opposition. However, my job is to preserve the progress that we have made on our national health service, to build on that progress and to do everything in my power to protect it. That is what I will do, because I am proud of our national health service and of every single member of staff who works in it.

10:15

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I hope that we all agree that the debate is extremely important, even if it has been fractious. It centres on the fact that there is a denial of the reality of what is happening on the part of the SNP. It is not that Labour is saying that budgets are not tight—we know that budgets are tight—but let me add to the facts that have been read out so far. In 2007-08, the gap between expenditure on the health service in England and expenditure on the health service in Scotland was £216. In the coming year, it will be £26 and, in 2013, it will be a negative balance. That is the reality.

Nicola Sturgeon: I simply want to ask Richard Simpson the question that Jackie Baillie did not answer when Murdo Fraser posed it: how much more money does Labour propose to spend on the NHS and where in the Scottish budget would that extra money come from?

Dr Simpson: That is the reality of the per capita spend.

Regardless of what we said or what the SNP purported to say, the reality is that, year on year, the cash increase in the SNP's budgets in the times that were good was 2.4 per cent less than the increase in England. *[Interruption.]* You can shout from a sedentary position as often as you like, but the reality is that we had an advantage in health service spend, which you have taken away during the good years.

Nicola Sturgeon: Richard Simpson did not answer my question. It is not good enough to come here and criticise. How much more would Labour spend and where would it take it from?

Dr Simpson: I am sorry; I am trying to make it clear—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Dr Simpson, could you speak through the chair, please?

Dr Simpson: Labour spent considerably more when it was in government in England and Labour would have spent more if it had been in government in Scotland, so we would not have been at the same starting point.

I say to the cabinet secretary that the issue is not the amounts of money that are spent. We know that budgets are tight; we also know—every speaker has said this—that in Scotland, unlike in England, productivity has been going up. The fact that our staff are doing a fantastic job is reflected in parts of the SNP amendment. I accept that things have improved—I am not saying that they have not—but that is down to the fact that staff are working extremely hard.

We are asking the SNP to join us in starting from a position of reality. The SNP's complacency in saying that all the cuts are due to change is breathtaking. The reality is that, as of June 2011, the number of nurses, who are critical to front-line delivery, was lower than it was in 2006. *[Interruption.]* The figures from ISD Scotland show that the number of nurses is down. If ISD is wrong, the cabinet secretary should correct it, but she should not come to the chamber and tell us that the figures that she has published are not correct.

Nicola Sturgeon: I read out the figures for the period between September 2006 and June 2011. Did Richard Simpson not hear me when I said that the nursing and midwifery workforce had reduced by 0.2 per cent, not taking account of the increase in the number of nurses working in primary care?

Dr Simpson: So the numbers are down. You said that the numbers would be up, but they are down.

As Hugh Henry and others said, the reality is that NHS staff are coming to our surgeries to tell us their concerns—perhaps it is because we are the Opposition that they have more to tell us than just complaints about car parking charges, which is what the SNP's back benchers are getting. My postbag is increasingly full of worries and expressions of distress from staff. In the short time that remains, I will deal with some of those.

I will start with the position that we are trying to get to: everyone wants us to increase prevention. If we are to improve prevention, we need the number of specialist nurses to increase rather than decrease. The number of specialist nurses who deal with heart failure, whose work prevents readmissions, reduces costs and improves patient quality, has gone down since 2008. The number was 50.5 and it is down to 46. The cabinet secretary might say that that is a reduction of only four, but it is a reduction of 9 per cent. The cabinet secretary can play with figures all day, but the fact remains that, instead of increasing, the number of specialist nurses is decreasing.

There have been cuts of 20 per cent in speech and language therapy for adults with learning disabilities. Jim Eadie referred to that yesterday and that is a concern that we share. Argyll and Bute is planning cuts of 50 per cent in its speech and language budget, and there are other cuts. According to a report from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, there is a reduction in service, a reduction in budgets and a reducing workforce. Is that not a reality? Are we being fed misinformation? Are we being told the wrong thing? I do not know.

The statistics are difficult. We know that the ISD statistics on speech and language do not count frozen posts, maternity leave or family-related leave. They do not reflect the changes in skill mix and they do not expose the long-standing gaps in provision, which go against national guidelines. We have a dearth of good statistics, but those that we have tell a clear story.

The Government's response to Harry Burns's concern about early years is interesting. The Government's response is against the background of an increase from 54,000 to 58,000 in the number of births and of prenatal, antenatal and immediately postnatal stages being recognised as crucial to the development of children. It is against the background of increasing recognition of the problems of drug and alcohol misuse and of the recognition by midwives that they do far more child protection work than ever before. It is against the background that twin births are rising and that more older women are having children. Against that background, and with a static neonatal death rate, what has the Government done? It has cut the midwifery intake by 40 per cent.

I am sure that the cabinet secretary would say, if she got in, that the Royal College of Nursing agreed to that. To be frank, the RCN did not look at the wider picture. Since I raised the issue in a parliamentary question, midwives have been coming to me. I am getting a lot of mail saying, "We are in real difficulty." All that we ask is that the Government recognises that.

There is a problem. Take the example of radiography, which is one area where there has been a substantial increase, where we have improved things and have improved the skill mix considerably. However, in my own area, NHS Forth Valley, only one radiographer is qualified to read plain films. What happens if she is off sick or goes on holiday? The responsibility goes back to the doctors, but are they not doing other things? Of course they are. They are doing other things, because the skill mix has changed.

We are not saying that things are not tight, that things are not difficult and that there are not problems, but we are saying two things. First, in the good years this Government spent less on health, as a proportion, than it received. The reality is that England, which was always behind us in per capita spend, will have a per capita spend greater than Scotland's in 2013-14.

That must be down to the decisions of the SNP Government. No matter what the cabinet secretary says that Labour said or did not say, or would have done or could have done, the SNP is the Government, not us. The reality is that the cabinet secretary has eliminated the per capita spend difference, that there are 1,700 fewer nurses today than there were two years ago and that there are 230 fewer allied health professionals than there were two years ago. That is the reality that she must face up to. She is simply in denial and that should stop, now.

Keeping Communities Safe

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01285, in the name of Johann Lamont, on keeping communities safe.

I call Johann Lamont to speak to and move the motion. Ms Lamont, you have 10 minutes.

10:25

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): That is slightly longer than I expected.

This is an important issue. It is about community safety, confidence in the justice system and securing justice for victims of crime. I am sure that members recognise the importance of an effective justice system, public safety and public confidence.

For the avoidance of doubt, I confirm that Labour is not opposing for the sake of opposition and that we are not insulting police staff, or police officers or those in the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service who do an important job in serving the public. We acknowledge the important job that they do in difficult circumstances. We are not being negative or partisan; we are doing our job as the Opposition, which is to bring up the concerns that are raised with us about what is happening in our communities and to urge the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to do his job and to pay attention to and address those concerns and the gaps that seem to be emerging in the quality of the service.

The motion mentions concerns that there are 428 fewer police support staff and that unmarked cases in the COPFS have recently doubled. I was struck by two things about the cabinet secretary's amendment. First, it reflects the continuing notion that 2007 was year zero and that nothing was done before 2007 to address those concerns or to improve the quality of service. Secondly, the amendment reflects a sense of complacency about what is happening in the justice system and the police service. When the cabinet secretary considers what is happening in his area of responsibility, he needs to listen to more than just the people who agree with him. There are concerns among police staff and staff in the COPFS about the quality of the service that they are able to deliver.

I want to cover issues to do with the COPFS and the impact of cuts on police staff, in relation to both the pressure on staff to do their jobs as effectively as possible and the impact on the service then provided. Those issues are critical. We know that there is a real-terms cut in the COPFS budget but the only area in which it has

been identified that spending will fall is staff costs, which will have an impact on the service and on those who remain within it. The key issue is what the price of such a cut will be. Will there be a redistribution of the workload to other staff? Will that increase the pressure and stress that has already been identified?

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Given that the justice budget and funding for the police have been increased by 20 per cent over recent years, how much more does the member suggest that they should be increased by? Which budget should be raided to pay for that?

Johann Lamont: This will be a dialogue of the deaf if the only way in which we can engage in a serious discussion about the choices that the Government is making and the consequences of those choices is if I am able to produce an alternative budget. That is an entirely unacceptable approach by the Government, which must take responsibility for what it is doing and for the budget choices that it is making. People have concerns about what they are expected to do. In October 2011, there were nearly 14,000 unmarked cases—52 per cent higher than at the same time in 2010. The cabinet secretary needs to explain why that is the case; if he does not know why that is the case he needs to show that he is addressing those concerns.

Kenny MacAskill: Is the member aware of the rebuttal of those figures by the Lord Advocate, who indicated that there are more lawyers and fewer reports and that the number of unmarked cases that are over four weeks old is significantly down? Does she dispute that?

Johann Lamont: Lord Hamilton reported to the Justice Committee that there were 100 fewer staff; the cabinet secretary may wish to investigate those figures.

The cabinet secretary needs to explain why the number of unmarked cases has changed as indicated. He cannot simply deny them away. There may be an explanation, but we need to know what it is. There are reports of planned closures of courts, which would impact on jobs and local economies. The cabinet secretary needs to address those reports, too. It is simply not good enough to assert that everything is fine if people who are working in the services say something entirely different. That is an issue for the cabinet secretary to address. It is not about finessing numbers or explaining away: it is about investigating the concerns and addressing them.

The gap between the ministerial view of the world and life in our local communities is also highlighted by the situation of the police and police staff. It was a key strand of policy and delivery in

the Labour-led Scottish Executive to civilianise significant elements of police work, thereby releasing police officers from roles that diverted them from the front line and seeking to increase efficiency. Now there are grave concerns that, as one police staff member said to me, we are seeing the decivilianising of the police in a shift that is ineffective, inefficient and illogical at a time of financial pressures. We are potentially taking police officers away from addressing community safety so that they can backfill posts. That is expensive and wasteful, when we know that they should be out detecting crime and giving the public confidence. We simply ask the cabinet secretary to investigate that and have an audit of what roles the police are undertaking.

It is just as critical that we recognise that, in losing police staff, we are not simply losing key administrative staff but losing highly trained staff whose jobs are more than simply admin, whether it is football banning order managers, intelligence analysts, resource managers, citations officers, scenes of crime officers, fingerprint experts, financial analysts or computer investigation and security officers, whose jobs are of course critical in relation to internet offences.

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: If you let me press on for a minute.

All those jobs are critical to delivering a high-quality police service. If those are going, it will undermine the capacity of the police to detect, identify and act against criminality in our communities. I ask the cabinet secretary to recognise that there are concerns that, if posts are going, those kinds of high-quality jobs that deliver a service may go too, with the consequence that the whole service is reduced. It is evident from the jobs that I listed that police support staff perform a wide range of complex and specialist functions that are central to a modern-day police force and are key in ensuring that officers spend the maximum amount of time out on the beat and not stuck behind a desk.

There are reports that some chief constables are concerned about having to make irrational staffing decisions in order that the cabinet secretary can say simply that 1,000 extra police officers are on the beat. There are 1,000 extra police officers, but are they all on the beat? Has the cabinet secretary clarified that that is what they are doing? Are we making the most logical, rational decisions that can be made about our police service?

Kenny MacAskill: Is the member suggesting that we should break the tripartite agreement that chief constables are not interfered with by the justice secretary, of whatever political hue, and are

held to account by the police board? Is the member suggesting that that should be changed? Is the function that she raises not a matter for the police board?

Johann Lamont: I am not suggesting that. I am suggesting that the cabinet secretary does his job. The job is not simply to take the credit because there are 1,000 extra police on the beat and deny any responsibility for what is happening on the ground in relation to those services. If the police are having to make choices to get rid of police staff because they are unable to address the question that the cabinet secretary has raised of police numbers, then there is a problem. The issue is about rational investment in our police services and in our prosecution service so that we address the needs of victims of crime and the capacity of police to identify crime.

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member take an intervention?

Johann Lamont: No.

There is no point in having huge numbers of police out on the beat if, when their reports go back, they are not pursued and progressed in a timely manner so that they end up in court. The current situation is irrational and illogical and a matter for the cabinet secretary himself to address.

We recognise, as everyone does, that there are tough choices to be made. We want the cabinet secretary to take responsibility for the choices that he makes and to engage with those who are concerned, even if that is an unintended consequence of his position. We need a substantial, honest debate. In particular, I urge the cabinet secretary to investigate what the police officers are doing. If they are backfilling posts, what are the consequences? If high-quality police staff jobs are going, what impact is that having? On the prosecution service, I urge him to ensure that justice is not being denied because of time barring or high levels of unmarked cases.

I am sure that, if nothing else, we can agree that an efficient, effective system of policing and prosecution is in the interests of the victims of crime and the communities that we serve.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern that the *Scottish Policing Performance Framework Annual Report 2010-11* shows that the number of police support staff fell by 428 in the last year and that violent crime increased by 2% during the same period; believes that cuts in the number of support staff lead to police officers being taken off the beat to fill civilian posts; further notes that the number of unmarked cases with procurators fiscal doubled to 14,000 in the six months to October and that many of these cases were more than four weeks old; considers that such delays in the processing of offences undermine public confidence in the justice system, and believes that both reductions in

police support staff and backlogs in the marking of cases put public safety at risk.

10:36

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Keeping communities safe has been at the heart of the Government's work since we took office in 2007 and we have delivered real improvements. However, it is acknowledged and accepted that there are still too many tragic cases and too many families are damaged by violence and crime, so I am clear that there is no room for complacency about the need for more improvement.

We are working hard to keep communities safe and build on the progress that we have made since 2007. However, it is clear from reading the Labour Party's motion for the debate and listening to Johann Lamont that the Labour Party is unwilling to acknowledge how much progress has been made since the Government came to office. Indeed, listening to Ms Lamont, one would think that no progress had been made at all. Let me take the opportunity to remind the Parliament how things have improved since Labour left office.

We have increased the number of police officers in our communities by more than 1,000. Let us not forget that Labour did not go into the election in 2007 seeking to increase police numbers at all. Despite the cuts that have been imposed on us by the UK Government, we are seeing the benefit of our investment. Recorded crime is at its lowest level since 1976 and is down by nearly a quarter since 2007. We have the lowest recorded crime in 35 years. The clear-up rate for all recorded crimes is at its highest level in more than 30 years. Reoffending rates are at an 11-year low. We acknowledge that violent crime is still too severe in Scotland, although we know the great propensity for violent crime to be fuelled by alcohol, and let us remember who in the Parliament is failing to support the Government in taking action on that. However, levels of violent crime are almost 20 per cent lower than in 2007, and I hazard a guess that, had we got minimum pricing, they would probably be lower still.

We know that knife crime is a significant problem in Scotland, but since the Government took office, it has gone down by 38 per cent. The number of homicides is down by almost 35 per cent and gun crime is down by almost half. Ms Lamont mentioned victims, so let me mention that the risk of being a victim of crime is lower than in England and Wales and people are significantly more positive about the crime rate in their local area. Fear of crime is down as well. None of that is a coincidence. We believe that it is down to the 1,000 additional officers. If Ms Lamont wishes to argue for fewer, or for a return to the halcyon days

of 2006-07, she should tell us what she thinks the number of police officers in Scotland should be.

The Labour Party has also raised the issue of the Crown Office marking cases within time limits. I have spoken to the Lord Advocate and I know that no cases will be time barred and that the Lord Advocate continues to give priority to staffing within the service to tackle serious crime.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): If the Lord Advocate gives priority to staffing, does the cabinet secretary share my concern that Lord Hamilton told the Justice Committee that there are 100 fewer staff as a result of the early exit scheme that has been applied?

Kenny MacAskill: I do not want to lecture Mr Kelly, but Lord Hamilton chairs the Scottish Court Service and the Lord Advocate is in charge of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. They are two entirely separate organisations. The day we merge them is the day we undermine the integrity of the system and jeopardise the notion of a balanced and fair trial. I would have thought that that would have been evident even to James Kelly.

We are absolutely committed to reducing violent crime in Scotland. The level in 2009-10 was the lowest since 1984, and the latest statistics show that the level is nearly a fifth lower than it was in 2006-07. However, as I have already said, there is no room for complacency. We are taking action to reduce violence across Scotland, and that remains a key priority for us.

There are also fewer people carrying knives and the number of crimes of handling an offensive weapon is at its lowest level in a decade—even though that decade included the halcyon days of Ms Lamont's reign. Those who are caught carrying a knife are facing the longest prison sentences in a decade. We believe that the key to tackling knife crime is a combination of tough enforcement on the streets, backed by early intervention and education. The no knives, better lives campaign has been a real success during its pilot phase. It has contributed to significant drops in the number of people carrying knives in Inverclyde and Renfrewshire. That is why we have doubled the funding for that important education initiative to allow us to roll out the tactics to six new areas and fund a fresh push of activity in existing areas. I am glad that many local authorities welcome that, even if Labour does not. The approach is supported across the justice community and, as the evidence shows, our approach of tough enforcement and education is working, and it should be supported across this chamber.

We are also taking action to reform our police and fire services to ensure that front-line services are protected. Reform will remove unnecessary

and costly duplication across the eight police forces, freeing up resources for local communities. We are doing all that while protecting front-line jobs.

While we are being confronted with the unprecedented cuts from Westminster, we should be uniting in Scotland to stand against the attack that is being led from down south on our front-line services. It is therefore disappointing that Labour has chosen not to use its debating slot to support our police officers in their demand to keep and protect their pensions. We, as a Parliament, should be standing shoulder to shoulder with those on the front line and supporting them in their fight against those who are undermining the relationship, based on consensus, that the Government has been building.

In the election in May, the people decided that Labour was not fit for government. Right now, as the First Minister has said, it is not fit for opposition.

I move amendment S4M-01285.3, to leave out from “with concern” to end and insert:

“that Scottish communities have become safer since the current Scottish administration first came to office; notes that crime in Scotland is now at its lowest level in 35 years, that the clear-up rate for all recorded crimes is at its highest level for over 30 years and that the risk of being a victim of crime in Scotland is lower than in England and Wales; notes that, since 2007, violent crime is down by almost a fifth, the number of homicides is down by almost 35%, gun crime is down by almost half and people are significantly more positive about the crime rate in their local area; notes the significant investment made in frontline policing since 2007, with police officer numbers reaching record highs during the last parliamentary session; welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to maintaining numbers at 1,000 more than the level that they inherited from the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat administration, and recognises that significant investments and improvements across the justice sector have been delivered in the face of budget cuts from the UK Government and that, while police officer numbers are predicted to fall by more than 16,000 in England and Wales, the Scottish Government is committed to prioritising frontline policing to ensure that Scottish communities remain safe places to live and work.”

10:43

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and thank Johann Lamont and the Labour Party for bringing this important topic to the chamber, particularly since this will be my last debate in my capacity as the Conservative justice spokesman.

The Scottish Government has been good at patting itself on the back in relation to the criminal justice system. However, it is vital that it recognises that, in keeping our communities safe, this is not the time to be complacent. Although I

recognise that the latest crime statistics are, overall, encouraging, there are other trends that the Government must take into account. An increase in violent crimes is unlikely to make people feel safer in their communities. Indeed, the latest Scottish crime and justice survey shows that 87 per cent of people perceive the crime rate in their local area either as having stayed the same or as having gone up in the past two years.

As the motion highlights, front-line policing is set to face pressure as a result of a reduction in the number of support staff. There are also indications that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service will not meet its performance targets. Most worryingly, however, the rates of reoffending remain unacceptably high, and have stayed virtually the same for years. Unless we tackle that issue, we will never properly cut crime rates.

I will start by dealing with front-line policing. We should not forget that the Scottish Conservatives were responsible for the delivery of the 1,000 extra police officers on our streets. We were pleased to see that commitment extended into the future. However, there seems to be a serious risk of that becoming a public relations exercise rather than a real, visible change in the police presence on our streets. The fall in support staff numbers has led some people to believe that the hole will need to be plugged by front-line police officers. Indeed, the Justice Committee took evidence from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, which has warned the Government that there are likely to be pressures on front-line policing as a result. It is hypocritical to boast about falling crime rates while allowing police officer numbers, which have been instrumental in that fall, to dwindle again.

I have argued, on several occasions, that the single most important thing to tackle in our justice system is the almost unbelievable rate of reoffending, which is the focus of my amendment. The latest Audit Scotland report shows that 69 per cent of those who were imprisoned in 2009-10 had more than five previous convictions. Reoffending rates have fallen by less than 1 per cent in three years, despite having been a policy priority for several years. It seems clear that something must change. I am sure that the Scottish Government—indeed, most MSPs of all parties—will agree that we need to take a different approach.

I will touch briefly on the need to tackle reoffending through rehabilitation in our prisons. It is vital that Scotland has a modern, fit-for-purpose prison estate with a focus on rehabilitation. I welcome the commitment to the new Grampian prison as well as the continued investment in the prison estate, and I will follow keenly the progress on that work. The Scottish Conservatives have long argued that both long and short-term prison

sentences are vital ingredients of a well-functioning criminal justice system.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Does John Lamont accept that all the evidence to the Justice Committee was to the effect that short-term prison sentences do not work and that recidivism—I will say that again: that reoffending takes place in nearly three quarters of people who have been out for less than two years? Short-term sentences really do not work, and the Conservatives should get rid of their mantra once and for all.

John Lamont: I fully accept that reoffending rates are far too high and that the current system in our prisons and in community-based alternatives to prison is not working. However, the answer is not the abolition of short-term sentences; the answer is in reforming the rehabilitation services that we offer both in prison and outside prison. It is vital that Scotland has a modern, fit-for-purpose prison estate with a focus on rehabilitation. The answer is not simply to abolish the short-term alternatives. We must always ensure that there are sufficient prison spaces to deal with those who are sent to prison by the courts and not try to interfere with courts' discretion to send people to prison if that is their decision.

We should not forget that prison terms have several functions. First, they should be a deterrent to criminals, as losing some of one's basic freedoms for a period of time is a powerful incentive. If it is not, it should be. Secondly, they prevent criminals from committing crimes again—at least, for the time that they are in prison. Thirdly, a modern prison estate should offer effective rehabilitation through a wide variety of purposeful activities and programmes. The Justice Committee has heard evidence suggesting that there is a lack of meaningful activities across the prison estate. That needs to be recognised by the Scottish Government, which should conduct a national review of all Scotland's rehabilitation schemes to work out what is providing good value for money and what is producing the results that we all want to see.

We all know that a lot of the crimes that are committed are alcohol or drug related. For example, last year's statistics showed that 77 per cent of young offenders were reportedly drunk at the time of committing an offence. Similar data can be found to confirm the link between drug use and crime. It seems clear that helping offenders to deal with their addictions would have a strong impact on the level of crime, especially in relation to reoffending rates, yet we do not seem to be making sufficient progress.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lamont, I would be grateful if you would come to a conclusion.

John Lamont: I will have the opportunity to speak later in the debate.

I move amendment S4M-01285.2, to leave out from first “; believes” to end and insert:

“and that reoffending rates remain unacceptably high; believes that cuts in the number of support staff lead to police officers being taken off the beat to fill civilian posts; further notes that the number of unmarked cases with procurators fiscal doubled to 14,000 in the six months to October and that many of these cases were more than four weeks old; considers that such delays in the processing of offences undermine public confidence in the justice system, and believes that both reductions in police support staff and backlogs in the marking of cases put public safety at risk as well as disillusion victims of crime who should be at the heart of the criminal justice system.”

10:49

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I do not like to bandy statistics about, but I inform John Lamont that 74 per cent of the public said that local crime had stayed the same or that the situation had improved in 2010-11. That does not gel with the facts that Mr Lamont cited. I might have time to talk about rehabilitation in due course.

The cabinet secretary has reprised many of the good-news stories on recorded crime, on front-line police officers and so on. The one thing that he did not touch on, which everyone welcomes, is the £42 million that has been committed to cashback for communities, much of which has gone to youth activities. Communities apply for the money and benefits are brought in; that creates a virtuous circle in which crime is shown to pay, but to pay back into communities.

Johann Lamont: Does the member agree that a lot of the money from the proceeds of crime is harvested from particularly poor communities and that it should be directed back into those communities? Some communities are concerned that, while they have suffered and there has been a conviction of, for example, an illegal moneylender, the money is distributed across the country rather than being directed to the needs of those specific communities.

Christine Grahame: If the member has a difficulty with the way in which the programme operates, she should take it up with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice. As far as I am aware, the distribution is done in a just and fair way, with applications being made throughout Scotland and the money going to local projects, depending on the status and quality of the application.

An end to automatic early release was a good move. To pick up on one of the only things that

Labour has come up with, which is mandatory sentences—

James Kelly: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: Let me get on for a moment, please.

Mandatory sentences for carrying a knife was a completely daft idea that would have been fraught with problems. It is not just me who has said that; many others have said exactly the same. In particular, Tom Harris, the Labour member of Parliament who is standing against Ms Lamont for Scottish Labour leader, said:

“We didn’t have a vision. Our vision could be summed up as send everyone who carries a knife to jail. That’s not a vision. It’s not even much of a policy.”

John Lamont said:

“It would be churlish not to point out the positives in these figures, although before the SNP put themselves on the back we note that grave offences like non-sexual crimes of violence, rape and attempted rape and crimes of dishonesty such as housebreaking have all increased.”

However, Ken Clarke then said:

“Anybody who is guilty of serious knife crime will go to prison but I’m not in favour of absolute rules. I’m in favour of actually allowing judges to see how nasty the offender is, see what the offence was, see what the best way of protecting the public from him is.”

Hugh Henry, too, is not in favour of mandatory sentencing, so I hope that Labour members will drop that stupid and counterproductive idea, even though it is the only one that they seem to have come up with.

On the other issues that are in the pipeline, I am prepared to say that the anti-sectarian bill that is before the Justice Committee needs to be improved, but it is a step in the right direction. The reform of police and fire services will, in time, save money. Are eight human resources departments and procurement departments necessary for Scotland, which only has 5 million people? A victims’ rights bill and paying attention to the victims of crime is also very important to the balance in society.

There is a stench of hypocrisy now around minimum unit pricing. Before the election, minimum unit pricing was opposed for purely political reasons in the face of all the evidence to the Health and Sport Committee from all the health professionals, and from all the criminal justice and enforcement professionals, that it would have a major impact on the health and criminal justice budgets. We just need to think about violence and domestic violence, which Ms Lamont has been very good at debating and pursuing in the Parliament. That violence would be greatly reduced if we did something about getting

rid of cheap alcohol—firewater—which just makes people go crazy and leaves them with no regard for their partners or themselves.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I would be grateful if you could close.

Christine Grahame: I say to Mr Lamont that the last thing we need is more prisons. They do not work. Building prisons will just make things worse for people. Of course we must protect society, but we have to do more rehabilitation and throughcare. I agree with the Tory amendment on that, but it is the only bit of the amendment that I agree with.

10:53

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I will use my time to discuss the reduction in the number of police support staff and the backlog of court cases, both of which I consider to undermine the justice system in Scotland and show the Government playing politics with community safety.

As of 30 June this year, there were 7,109 police staff in Scotland, which is a fall of 732 since June last year according to a response to a parliamentary question asked by Johann Lamont. I seek assurance from the Government that if the planned single police force goes ahead, those numbers will not fall any further.

In a written question to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, I asked whether there will be further support staff job losses. He replied:

“Final decisions on civilian staff numbers will be a matter for the leadership of the new service to determine based on operational requirements.”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 1 November 2011; S4W-03409.]

Is that another case of the Scottish National Party cutting budgets then leaving the service providers to pick up the backlash from the public when services are cut? We need to know just what effect the cuts to staff so far will have on front-line services. How many officers are being taken off front-line duty to carry out work that was previously done by support staff?

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret McDougall: I am sorry, but I do not have time to take interventions.

Many police forces are suggesting that if they receive any more cuts to their budget they will no longer be able to do their job effectively and it will be unsustainable for them to meet the Government’s pledge to keep an additional 1,000 police officers on the front line. Without a doubt, the cuts will have an effect on communities across Scotland and will lead to reductions in the number

of police on the beat, affect the ability of the police to handle emergency calls and increase response times—or, in the case of some less serious incidents, mean that police will not be able to respond at all.

The problem is further complicated by backroom staff cuts in our court system, where there is already a considerable backlog of court cases. As of October, there were 14,000 unmarked cases compared with 7,000 only six months ago, an increase of 100 per cent, and 4,300 of those cases have gone over the four-week target. I am greatly concerned that if the trend continues, many of the cases will not be heard and criminals will be let off without trial.

That situation is not helped by the recruitment freeze in the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, which has resulted in none of last year's trainees being employed at the end of their training contract. To have such delays in the processing of offences undermines public confidence in Scotland's justice system and, combined with the cuts in police support staff, could put public safety at risk. I call on the Government to give assurances today that police support staff numbers under a single police force will be maintained. Maintaining support staff numbers is vital to keeping police on the streets fighting crime, and any cuts to support staff will have a detrimental effect on community safety.

10:57

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I pay tribute to the monumental progress made by the police, in particular, in making Scotland's communities safer under this SNP Government. The facts clearly show that outstanding progress has been made, with overall crime at its lowest level for 35 years and recorded crime having decreased a full 23 per cent since the SNP took office, with 90,000 fewer crimes a year.

At the end of June 2011, there were 1,105 more police officers in Scotland than there were in March 2007, and that is 1,105 more than there would have been if the Labour Party had won the election. Police funding is also at a record level of £1.4 billion this year, £235 million higher than when the SNP took office—an increase of 20 per cent.

The resources that the Government has found to fight crime in Scotland, despite unprecedented economic pressure brought on both by the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat United Kingdom Government's decision to cut Scotland's block grant by 12.3 per cent and by the fact that the previous Labour Government at Westminster led us into our current economic difficulties,

demonstrate the extent of the Government's commitment to making Scotland safer. In the face of those cuts and difficult economic times, the Government has also overseen vast improvements in the efficiency and swiftness with which justice is delivered. We have also seen a 15 per cent increase in the number of Crown lawyers since 2007.

The simple fact is that this Government has been both tough and innovative in forcing down crime. The average length of overall prison sentences in Scotland has increased by 21 per cent since 2006-07 and is now at its highest level in a decade. The Scottish Government has introduced measures that directly benefit communities that are most affected by crime, such as the cashback for communities scheme that was mentioned by my colleague Christine Grahame. The Scottish Government has also recently announced that it will expand its successful no knives, better lives campaign into six new areas of the country, including North Ayrshire, which includes my constituency of Cunninghame North.

Although we should welcome the steps that the Government has taken to reduce crime and the great success that has stemmed from them, there is certainly more work to do, and the Government is anything but complacent about making our communities safer.

Johann Lamont: Does the member agree that he should urge his minister simply to investigate the claims that police officers are coming off the beat and backfilling staff posts and that we are losing quality police staff because of cuts? Surely he must agree that it would be a concern if that were the case. Does he agree that there should simply be an investigation and an audit to clarify whether that is happening?

Kenneth Gibson: The cabinet secretary has more than answered that question. We need a wee bit of reality from the Labour Party, not the usual sterility in saying, "Let's spend more money on absolutely everything." The Labour Party should try to accept the position that the Scottish Government is currently in. I do not know what anybody else thinks, but I do not think that most people out there are concerned about the number of support staff that there are; rather, they are concerned about the amount of crime in our society and how we will reduce it. It is about outcomes, which I want to talk more about.

James Kelly: Will the member take an intervention?

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

Kenneth Gibson: I have a minute left. James Kelly knows that I would have been more than happy to let him in otherwise.

My colleague Christine Grahame talked about the scourge of alcoholism in Scotland. According to the Scottish crime and justice survey, 63 per cent of perpetrators of violent crime in the current year were under the influence of alcohol. That has to be considered.

Surely it is incumbent on members of all parties to work constructively with the Scottish Government in taking a more comprehensive approach to ensuring further the safety of our communities. In this debate, as in every other debate that I can recall, Labour has engaged in an argument not about outcomes in respect of fewer crimes; rather, it has tried to pretend that support staff efficiencies are not essential to ensuring the continuation of front-line policing, with the 1,000-plus extra officers Scotland now enjoys. It ignores the financial difficulties that have been caused by its deregulation of the City of London, which is the world's largest financial centre, and its inept handling of the UK economy. That led to the financial cuts and the thousands of job losses that Scotland now has to endure. Labour should just once accept its culpability, acknowledge the economic reality, and come up with a positive idea. Pigs will fly first, of course.

All members should engage in a positive, robust and serious discussion. I say to Margaret McDougall that the SNP increased the number of community officers in North Ayrshire from 30 to 140, and crime fell by 12 per cent. That is what the people are interested in, not Labour's sterile arguments.

11:02

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): It is welcome that the Labour Party has used its debating time this morning to focus on keeping communities safe. This is an important debate that allows us to highlight shortcomings that we think will impact on that.

During its budget scrutiny, the Justice Committee received written evidence from the Procurators Fiscal Society that highlighted the significant increase in the number of unmarked cases and attributed that to a reduction in staff numbers in the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. A further reduction in its budget is hardly likely to improve the situation.

Kenny MacAskill: Is the member aware that the Lord Advocate has made it quite clear that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service had 513 lawyers in June this year, which compares with 446 in the halcyon days of Labour-Liberal rule in June 2007? That is a significant increase.

Alison McInnes: I did indeed see that correspondence. It is for the cabinet secretary to reconcile the two different points of view. I know

that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is facing a reduction in its budget this year, which is hardly likely to improve the situation.

Fresh research that was conducted by the Scottish Liberal Democrats via freedom of information requests updates the figures and reveals that, over the past year, there has been a reduction of 566 civilian staff jobs in police forces throughout Scotland. Police forces such as Central Scotland Police and Grampian Police have seen the biggest reductions—the figures are 18 and 14 per cent respectively.

In addition to the many administrative posts that have been lost, a wide range of other jobs have been lost from police forces throughout Scotland, including crime intelligence analysts, police custody officers, community wardens, road safety officers, a firearms licensing manager, and wildlife and environmental crime officers. It is clear that police forces are losing a wealth of knowledge and expertise that, until now, was harnessed to help to cut and prevent crime in Scotland. That is a retrograde step.

Civilian staff fulfil an important role in helping to keep Scotland's streets safe. They provide essential expertise and skills in the fight against crime, and they help to keep front-line police staff out on the streets protecting communities. A reduction in civilian numbers could lead to Scotland's visible police force being rapidly eroded. I urge the Scottish Government to recognise that it is essential to maintain a balance between civilian staff and front-line officers, not just for their expertise, but for the fight against crime in communities. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice needs to explain how the Scottish Government will get the balance right, because the public will continue to be protected only through that being achieved.

During last year's budget scrutiny, ACPOS warned that focusing purely on maintaining police officer numbers would result in police being taken off the beat to perform civilian staff functions. In evidence to the Justice Committee, Chief Constable David Strang said:

"If we reduce the number of front-line staff who do essential jobs, there is a real risk that we will have to remove police officers from other duties. For example, if we make custody officers redundant, we will have to release police officers to look after prisoners in police stations."—*[Official Report, Justice Committee, 23 November 2010; c 3815.]*

The Scottish Liberal Democrats are absolutely committed to keeping communities safe. We recognise that front-line civilian staff are an integral part of any modern police force. I agree with ACPOS that forces should have flexibility in the way that they deploy resources to maintain front-line policing.

However, let us be clear that the staffing reductions that I have mentioned will be only the tip of the iceberg if the cabinet secretary pursues his proposal for a single police force. The kind of savings that the Government claims would come from the creation of a single police force could be realised only through staff cuts that would lead to the loss of around 4,000 officers throughout Scotland.

Losses on that scale would put the current community focus of our police services under immense pressure. Chief Constable Colin McKerracher of Grampian Police has warned that it would risk a return to the crime-fighting, call-response mode of policing, in which officers run around answering calls for crimes that have occurred because they are no longer able to prevent them. Much good work would be lost, and the performance of which the Government has been so proud this morning would be jeopardised.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that the most effective way of keeping communities safe is to ensure that our police services are properly resourced, locally accountable and flexible enough to respond to local needs and that policing remains part of the local government family. The development of close links between criminal justice services, social work services and education, drug and alcohol services has brought about great progress on tackling the root causes of crime.

11:07

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I would have liked to give the Labour Party the benefit of the doubt about whether it is motivated by genuine concern for community safety, but its real intentions are given away by the motion and the speeches from Labour members.

The motion takes two entirely unrelated figures—on support staff numbers and on violent crime—and tries to imply that one is a direct consequence of the other. Talk about adding two and two and coming up with 43. The whole motion is based on similar unlikely leaps of logic, which are all intended to scaremonger.

One would think that, after the comprehensive rejection by Scottish voters of the right-wing, lowest-common-denominator criminal justice policies pursued by Labour in the previous session of the Parliament, Johann Lamont would take the opportunity to steer her politics and party away from fear and back towards a more constructive approach to the subject, but apparently not. That is a real shame, because I am sure that there are Labour members who would far prefer not to have

to spout stuff that would make Ann Widdecombe cheer.

The fact is that we are seeing real progress on reducing crime. In the process, we are gaining insight into, and evidence on, what works and what does not work in the drive to build safer communities throughout Scotland. Policing in Scotland—boosted by the 1,000 extra police officers that the SNP has delivered—is getting more informed and more effective all the time. We are giving the police and the courts the powers that they need to respond where spikes in rates of one or another kind of crime occur, against the prevailing trend of falling crime in Scotland.

James Kelly: Will Christina McKelvie give way?

Christina McKelvie: I will not give way because, if the Labour Party was really serious about the debate, it would have dedicated its entire time to it this morning.

I speak as the member for a constituency that, earlier this year, was given the unenviable label of the murder capital of Scotland, after there were an unprecedented 14 murders within the local division during 2010-11—up from three in the previous year. My constituents were shocked, and rightly so. However, in my discussions with local senior officers, I was reassured not only by how seriously they took the highly unusual figures, but by how swiftly and smartly they responded, using analytical police work to identify the flashpoints and locations for violence.

In every one of those 14 murder cases, arrests were made. I hope that justice will be delivered for all the victims and their families. That does not bring the victims back, but it shows that, where particular problem areas for crime are identified, effective policing is having an impact. I pay tribute to the police in Hamilton and the surrounding area for the work they have done on that.

In parts of Scotland, the prevalence of violent crime is complex and deep-seated, and we need far-sighted policy programmes to deliver profound social change for the long term. That is where initiatives such as no knives, better lives, which I am pleased to say will soon operate in South Lanarkshire, and cashback for communities come in. They provide in-depth engagement with young people and particularly with young people who are at risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviour.

I commend the street project in Hamilton, which is an incredibly impressive example of a project that confronts young people directly with the consequences of criminality, challenges them to address their behaviour and its effect on other people and offers them choices. The street project has been supported by cashback for communities and South Lanarkshire Council. It is exactly the kind of essential work that will divert future

generations of Scots from a culture of violence and crime and into more productive lives. I welcome the street 2, which was launched this week, and I wish those involved every success.

More policing and more effective policing, evidence-based sentencing reform, in-depth engagement with young people and a refusal to resort to the easy, headline-grabbing option—the criminal justice programme will deliver the profound and permanent social change that we need to create a Scotland that is safe for all, now and in the future. That is the programme that the SNP Government, of which I am proud, is determined to pursue.

11:11

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): This important debate has served to highlight the significant work to keep our communities safe that the SNP Government has done since taking office in 2007. We have heard about the commitment to have 1,000 extra police officers. That commitment has been not only delivered and adhered to but exceeded, as we have in fact 1,105 more police officers than we had in the dark days when Labour was in power in the Parliament. Those additional officers represent an important policy initiative for people across Scotland, who had cried out for a more visible police presence in their communities and on their streets.

The importance of the SNP Government's delivery of that manifesto promise must be seen against the backdrop of the massive cuts to Scotland's budget that the Westminster Lib—I mean Con-Dem; I want to get the names round the right way—Government is imposing.

James Kelly: Will the member take an intervention?

Annabelle Ewing: I will take an intervention, although I have not really started.

James Kelly: Annabelle Ewing speaks about the importance of front-line policing. Does she share the concern of ACPOS, which has pointed out that the budget settlement could hit support staff hard and have an impact on front-line policing, by taking police officers off the front line?

Annabelle Ewing: I hear what Mr Kelly says but, as has been said, if Labour wants to spend more money on the justice portfolio, where will the money come from? Labour members have been singularly silent on that question.

Notwithstanding the cuts that the London Government has imposed, the SNP Government has committed to protecting key front-line services, such as the police service. That is exactly what the people of Scotland want us to do.

They want us to husband our reduced budget carefully, just as every household in Scotland must. They want us to get the best value for money and to deliver on their key priorities.

We have heard that the evidence suggests that the SNP Government's policy is working. We have heard of the 35-year low in recorded crime, the 30-year high in the clear-up rate for violent crimes and the fact that 2,661 fewer violent crimes have been committed than in 2006-07, when Johann Lamont—who is not present at the moment—was the Deputy Minister for Justice. We need take no lectures from Labour on delivering justice policy.

Police funding is at a record level under the SNP Government. It was £1.4 billion in 2010-11, which was a 20 per cent increase on police service funding under Labour and—let us not forget—the Lib Dems. It might interest Alison McInnes to know that her Government will cut the police funding grant south of the border by 20 per cent by 2014-15. We need take no lessons from the other parties. The SNP Government is delivering justice policy in accordance with the people's priorities.

I will finish by talking about staffing levels in the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. It is the case that the head count of staff in post has increased since the dark days of Labour being in power in this Parliament.

Helpfully, I have with me a parliamentary question that was asked on that very subject on 9 September 2011. The answer should be very familiar to James Kelly, because he was the one who posed the question. The answer, given by the Solicitor General for Scotland, Leslie Thomson, is as follows:

"The headcount of staff in post in the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service as at 31 July 2011 was 1,760 employees.—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 23 September 2011; S4W-02605.]

There we have it—the facts from the law officer herself. If the Labour Party wishes to have any hope of winning back the trust of some voters in Scotland, it would be instructive for it to deal with the facts as they are. That would be a very helpful, concrete and positive development.

11:15

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The SNP ran its election campaign this year with a commitment to maintain police numbers in Scotland, but it has become abundantly clear that that is yet another manifesto pledge that it cannot uphold. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jenny Marra: I will take an intervention if one is offered.

In my region alone, almost 100 jobs at Tayside Police have been cut in the past 12 months under this SNP Government.

Kenny MacAskill: Given that they are not proposing any increase in the budget, how many fewer police officers are Jenny Marra and the Labour Party suggesting there should be?

Jenny Marra: The justice secretary will know that the problem is that police officers are performing essential backroom services. I am just about to explain that. Many of the people who have lost their jobs provided essential backroom services. A situation has arisen in which those functions are now being performed by police officers who are ordinarily on the beat. Not only does that remove police from our streets, but it means that backroom functions cost more to perform—often thousands of pounds more, based on annual salary. Police officers who are paid £30,000 a year and more doing jobs for which the salary is normally £17,000 a year does not seem to be efficient or effective. Those back-office jobs are often complex and require significant skills, for which significant training of specialist staff is needed. The essential skills of those dedicated back-office staff are being wasted unnecessarily due to the SNP cuts. I believe that that is unacceptable and entirely avoidable.

There is serious concern about the SNP's plans on police pay, too. Proposed changes to terms and conditions and police remuneration show that the Government is slashing pay at a time when living standards are dropping and the cost of living is continuing to rise. In one example, a 21-year-old member of staff at Tayside Police is having her shift allowance cut by a staggering 81 per cent, which translates into a 20 per cent cut in her overall pay. The minister might choose to ignore that point and chat while I am talking, but I do not think that the police officer would appreciate his ignoring her story. The total reduction in shift allowance that is paid to police staff across Scotland will be almost 30 per cent and the average reduction in pay for Scotland's police force will be 6 per cent.

Coupled with increased pension contributions, a proposed two-year increment freeze, a reduction in overtime rates to time and a third, and a reduction in public holidays to four in each force, the cuts are set to impact profoundly on the ability of Scotland's police to carry out their essential day-to-day duties, not to mention that the cuts will jeopardise the livelihoods of police staff and their families up and down the country.

However—I hope that the justice secretary will listen to this point—the Scottish Government has been offered costed alternatives to that course of action. Police staff and Unison have offered to reduce by one hour per week the time that is

worked by every staff member, which would deliver the savings that the Government deems necessary—the exact savings that the Government wants to make. That way, the burden of cuts would be shared by all staff—not just shift workers, many of whom are women and are being unnecessarily targeted by the Government's cuts. However, the proposal by Unison and police staff has been completely ignored by the SNP Government. It is clear that the Government cannot uphold its manifesto pledges—this is just one of them—nor is it prepared to listen, as is perfectly obvious today, to viable alternatives to its agenda for policing.

11:20

John Lamont: This has been a useful debate because it has highlighted many concerns that wider Scottish society has about the operation of our criminal justice system. I want to use my closing remarks to focus on the victims of crime.

I have always believed that victims should be at the heart of our criminal justice system. A visible police presence is pivotal in giving victims and communities a deserved sense of security, but the other side of the coin is their sense that justice has been done. If there are serious delays in the prosecution of criminals, victims rightly feel disillusioned and disheartened. It is the job of the Scottish Government to ensure that justice is served appropriately and swiftly for the sake of victims and of wider society.

Despite what the Scottish Government has said, concerns have been raised about the backlog of cases building up at the Crown Office, not least by the Procurators Fiscal Society—a point that was highlighted well by Alison McInnes.

I return to community sentences and rehabilitation, which were raised earlier in the debate. The Scottish Government and, it seems, Christine Grahame are great champions of community sentences. We on this side agree that there is a place for community sentences in our justice system, but we strongly oppose the idea that community sentences should be preferred to prison sentences just for the sake of a reduction in prison numbers. Under the current community payback orders, which in effect replace short sentences, those who are being spared jail include a four-time drunk and disqualified driver, a knife carrier, someone who is guilty of domestic violence and a small-time drug pusher, all of whom have previous convictions. What message does that send to the victims of crime and to wider society?

Scottish Conservatives have never shied away from being tough on crime. We need to make sure that criminals do not get off lightly, for the sake of

the victims who need the satisfaction of justice being served appropriately. We also need to ensure that we attempt to rehabilitate those who are convicted of offences, whether that is done in prison or during a community sentence. Reoffending rates suggest that the Scottish Government is failing miserably in that regard.

We believe that community sentences have to be tough, but there are indications that they are not. A recent freedom of information request revealed that almost a third of offenders who have been given community payback orders do no work whatsoever. There are also clear problems with enforceability of community sentences, as several recent examples illustrate well.

It is very important that punitive measures be properly enforced. We all remember the case of the first community payback order, which was breached because the offender simply did not show up. That will always be a challenge with community sentences; it does not apply if the person is serving their time behind bars. Overall, short-term sentences offer better punitive measures in some cases and, combined with proper prison rehabilitation, should and can be more effective.

To conclude, I have always stood proudly on the side of victims and not on the side of the criminal. Our criminal justice system should reflect this; victims should be at the heart of all the Scottish Government's policies on criminal justice. First and foremost, we need to address reoffending and tackle crime in order to lower the number of victims and to make sure that victims can rightly gain a sense that justice has been done.

11:23

Kenny MacAskill: It was disingenuous of Johann Lamont to come here and deny that Labour has an unrelenting diet of negativity and then to proceed to give a diet of negativity, which was supported in almost every Labour speech thereafter.

We face the challenge of huge budget cuts from Westminster. Notwithstanding that, we have delivered a 20 per cent increase in the police budget since we came to power in 2007. Police officer numbers have been maintained, we have preserved their salaries and we have made it clear that we will not implement the recommendations of the Winsor report, yet the coalition Government down south proposes to attack police pensions and the pensions of police support staff. What a tragedy that rather than come here to support the Government in the job that we are doing to protect hard-working front-line officials, Labour members come here and undermine us. The enemy is down in London, but they choose to snipe away. They

do not support us and they give us a diet of negativity.

Johann Lamont: Does the cabinet secretary accept that we are raising concerns on behalf of police staff in Scotland? We are speaking up for police staff and for staff in the Crown Office. Why does the cabinet secretary want to create a different argument, rather than address the problems that have been raised with him?

Kenny MacAskill: I am simply saying that it is Westminster that is cutting the budget. It was started by a Labour Government and has been accelerated by the coalition Government. It is Westminster that is attacking staff pensions. We would not know that or think about it if we listened to Labour members.

Along with dealing with their diet of negativity, the Labour members should get their facts right. We heard comments, which were supported by Alison McInnes, suggesting that the Crown Office budget is down, when in fact that budget will be £108.7 million in 2014-15, which is up from £108.2 million this year. We are investing, notwithstanding the Westminster cuts, but we do not hear about those cuts from Labour members and nor do we get credit for the increase in that budget. As Annabelle Ewing pointed out, the number of lawyers is up and the number of reported cases is down, but what did we get from James Kelly?

James Kelly: Will the member give way?

Kenny MacAskill: Just a minute. Let me point something out.

James Kelly mentioned Lord Hamilton. Mr Kelly has an obligation to debate constructively when he comes to the chamber. He knows that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is an entirely different entity from the Scottish Court Service. If we merged the two, we would undermine the whole basis of our legal system. It was not only a diet of negativity: it was, to be frank, a diet of ignorance.

James Kelly: I totally agree that we must get the facts on the record. Does Mr MacAskill acknowledge that answers to recent parliamentary questions asked by Johann Lamont reveal that we will have 33 fewer procurators fiscal in the next year, which undermines the effectiveness of the service?

Kenny MacAskill: As Annabelle Ewing referred to and as I said, in June this year the COPFS had 513 lawyers whereas in June 2007 it had 446. The current number is significantly more than the Labour legacy.

Labour members went on to undermine the tripartite agreement in Scotland. We are moving from having several police services to a single

service. Justice secretaries of whatever political hue do not interfere or give directions to police chief constables.

James Kelly: Will the member give way?

Kenny MacAskill: I will not, at the moment.

Miss Marra apparently wants me to direct chief constables. I remind her—as I reminded Mr Kelly—of the separation of powers. In Scotland, we have a tripartite arrangement under which chief constables are held to account by the police boards. The points that Miss Marra raised should be raised with the police board in Tayside, although I do not know whether she has done that. If she is suggesting that I should hold the chief constable to account, that would be a revelatory matter that would undermine the integrity and independence of chief constables. If Labour wishes to argue that with a single police service the justice secretary should give directions on police numbers and other matters, I am open to considering amendments on that.

Jenny Marra: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the situation is another example of the SNP making promises to the people of Scotland and then washing its hands and saying that those matters are not within its power? The SNP did that on education, when it promised that there would be no compulsory redundancies in further education, but then said that redundancies are decisions for colleges. It has done the same in local authorities. Now the cabinet secretary is doing it with the police. He—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have made your point, Miss Marra.

Kenny MacAskill: I look forward to seeing a Labour amendment that says that the justice secretary is to direct policing in Scotland. That will cause great concern to people outwith the Parliament, but when Labour does that, I will say, “Take it further.” In the interim, Miss Marra perhaps has an obligation when she comes to the chamber to understand the structure of policing in this country.

If Labour members want to reduce the number of police officers because they do not want to increase the budget, it is for them to tell us that. We are proud of our record of delivery and of the officers in our communities who have given us a 35-year low in recorded crime. Labour members should tell us how many fewer police officers they want on the streets.

Johann Lamont spoke about cashback for communities. We put additional resources into areas of multiple deprivation, but the Government does not accept the idea that money from the scheme should go only to those areas. Just this week, I received an invitation to visit a cashback

for communities project in Haddington that is supported by sportscotland and the local authority. Haddington is a very nice town and community, although it has its challenges and problems. It is not an area of multiple deprivation. It is not represented by me; it is represented by Iain Gray. If I can manage to—I have a constituency church engagement—I will be delighted to go along and say how delighted we were to contribute £100,000 to support the good work that is being done by Haddington Athletic Football Club, Haddington Rugby Football Club and the community. I will tell them that Labour did not want them to get that money. Whatever warm words Iain Gray might have uttered to them, he did not mean them, because Labour does not want any nice areas to get any money. What a shameful position for Labour to take. I will make it quite clear in Haddington that Labour did not want that £100,000 cashback for communities money to go to Haddington Athletic.

This country is getting safer. We are making progress, but we do not underestimate the challenges. Labour’s continual diet of negativity—which involves it sniping away at this Government, which is trying to steer us through turbulent times—while ignoring the problems that have been caused by the coalition Government down in London, will see it being rejected yet again by the people of Scotland.

11:31

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to close the debate and to bring some sense to the issues that have been raised in it, following the cabinet secretary’s political diatribe.

Labour welcomes improvements in the crime figures. Anything that gives relief to the victims of crime is to be welcomed. I say that as someone who comes from an area where—as Ms McKelvie well knows—the murder rate has gone up by 366 per cent in the past year.

The purpose of the debate is not to trade statistics on the levels of crime, but to raise important issues on police support staff, the impact on front-line policing and the backlog of cases in our courts. Jenny Marra and Margaret McDougall made some important points about police support staff. They concentrated on the issues in the motion, unlike Christine Grahame, who drifted off along political lines, which might have been provided by the SNP.

Christine Grahame: I am delighted to say that the lines were all provided by the Labour Party’s manifesto.

James Kelly: Ms Grahame’s intervention serves to make my point.

To return to the issues in the motion, the Labour Party has serious concerns about the reductions in police support staff, whose numbers have decreased by 428 in the past year. We heard from Jenny Marra about the threat of further cuts in Dundee, and we heard about the potential loss of 250 posts in Fife. Such losses will have significant effects on the front-line policing effort. In its budget submission, ACPOS strongly argued that the on-going impact of the budget cuts would mean hard decisions being taken on support staff, and would mean police officers being taken off the front line.

For Mr MacAskill, it has become a numbers game—it is about having 17,234 officers. It is all very well having the officers, but the question is this: where are they and what are they doing? I am sure that Mr Thompson shares my concerns.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): In the health debate earlier this morning, Labour called for increases in the health budget. How much would the member transfer from the health budget to the police budget to sort out the problems that he maintains are occurring?

James Kelly: I want to answer that specific question about the budget, which a number of SNP members have asked. I will come to that later in my speech.

It is also important to recognise the various roles that support staff perform. I agree with Christina McKelvie's comments, in which she supported the role that analysts have played in the police's solving of the murder crimes in South Lanarkshire, but we should not forget that those analytical roles are police support staff roles. As we move towards a single police force, it is urgent that we review all the roles of support staff so that we get them right.

Kenny MacAskill: This is the same matter that arose with Ms Marra. As we move towards a single service, does Labour propose to vary the tripartite arrangement? If so, does Labour suggest that the justice secretary should direct, or does it propose that the board should hold the chief constable to account?

James Kelly: Year after year, the cabinet secretary is absolutely delighted to intervene to tell local authorities that they must deliver 1,000 extra police officers or they will not get the money; but he is not prepared to intervene in the important area of support staff. Mr MacAskill is being hypocritical.

As Alison McInnes said, the backlog of cases has doubled from 7,000 to 14,000. A backlog of so many cases is clearly a concern. The victims of crime are greatly concerned that cases are not being moved through the justice system quickly enough. Mr MacAskill made great play of comments from the Lord Advocate that point to a

£600,000 cash increase in the budget over a three-year period. I point out to Mr MacAskill that that represents a real-terms cut. Even in these halcyon days of an SNP majority Government, he is not exempt from inflation. Furthermore, as the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service has pointed out, the details of the figures show future cuts in the staff budget. That will happen against the backdrop of there being 33 fewer procurators fiscal, an early exit scheme in operation, and an end to ad hoc staff—which means that the Government's resources for dealing with the backlog of cases has reduced.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

James Kelly: I will make some points first.

I suggest that the Lord Advocate has to be very careful. These are contentious matters. As others have, I have questioned what he said in his letter. He needs to be careful that he does not allow himself to be drawn in to act as a political shield for the SNP Government.

Bob Doris: May I intervene?

James Kelly: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

Bob Doris: There are still two minutes left.

James Kelly: If I have time later, I will take the intervention—but I have an important point about budget choices to make, first.

A number of SNP members, including the cabinet secretary, asked where we could find extra money for the justice budget. I invite the cabinet secretary to consider the Audit Scotland report of a few weeks ago, which shows that the justice system cost £857 million to administer. There are a few key areas of the report to concentrate on: repeating stages in the court system cost £10 million; late decisions not to proceed with trials cost £30 million; and information technology has been used poorly. That latter point has been highlighted on previous occasions, and not only by the Audit Scotland report. We are in a three-year spending review period, so I urge the cabinet secretary to consider the Audit Scotland report and to implement some of its recommendations, which would allow him to find money that could be crucial in finding positions for people to support community safety and in staffing our courts fully.

Does Mr Doris still wish to intervene?

Bob Doris: I thank Mr Kelly. Earlier, during the debate on healthcare, Labour front benchers were suggesting taking money away from justice and giving it to health because there is a new responsibility for healthcare in the prison service. Does Mr Kelly agree with other Labour front benchers that money should be taken away from

justice and given to health? If so, how much should it be?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Mr Kelly, you have less than one minute in which to wind up.

James Kelly: I point out to Mr Doris that I have made a number of recommendations that would save money in the justice budget. Perhaps the SNP Government would consider them.

This has been an important debate. It has highlighted issues of community safety and of security of jobs—not only for police support staff, but for people in the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. It is unfortunate that the cabinet secretary, followed by SNP back benchers, used some intemperate language during the debate. Key issues have arisen, and it is time for the SNP to face up to them and to have an honest discussion with the Opposition, in an effort to explore the issues and to move the justice system forward. It is time to reflect and think again.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Cities (Community Rejuvenation)

1. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to increase support for the rejuvenation of local communities in cities. (S4O-00328)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): We will publish the new national regeneration strategy in the next few months, which will set out a framework to help to improve the physical, economic and social wellbeing of communities throughout the country. It will clarify the roles of key players, including setting out the important role of local authorities in supporting the regeneration of our most disadvantaged communities in cities.

Bill Kidd: Given her background, the cabinet secretary will be aware of the situation faced by the community of Drumchapel in my constituency. After a long period of decline, there is a severe lack of amenity in an area that is already experiencing high multiple deprivation. Previous plans for regeneration have come to little, although local housing associations do the best that they can.

I invite the cabinet secretary to come to Glasgow Anniesland to see how Drumchapel might benefit from future community rejuvenation.

Nicola Sturgeon: I would be more than delighted to visit Drumchapel with the member. Before becoming a member of the Scottish Parliament, I worked in Drumchapel. I know the area well, I have a great fondness for it and I know the challenges that it faces. There has been a lack of leadership on the part of the Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council in driving forward regeneration in areas such as Drumchapel. I would be happy to see what this Government could do to work with partners and the local member to move things forward.

Road Safety (Young Drivers)

2. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to improve road safety among young drivers. (S4O-00329)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): We are addressing young driver safety through our commitments in Scotland's

road safety framework to 2020 and by taking forward the recommendations in “National Debate on Young Drivers’ Safety”, published by Transport Scotland in March 2011.

Alison McInnes: Road traffic accidents involving young drivers continue to blight the north-east and take a terrible toll. What progress has been made on developing an action plan to take forward the recommendations in “National Debate on Young Drivers’ Safety”? I ask the minister to comment on work relating to recommendation 6, which suggests that he should

“Investigate the effectiveness of accreditations for post-test training courses”.

Keith Brown: Alison McInnes makes a good point about the number of accidents involving young drivers. However, some misconceptions surround road casualties. In 2010, road casualties in general in Scotland were at their lowest level in 60 years, and if we look at the number of drivers killed and seriously injured in the period to 2009, we see a 48 per cent reduction in the 16 to 24-year-old age group compared with a 47 per cent reduction for all other ages, so there has been substantial progress.

From the recent debate on young drivers, the member will know the action that the Government is taking, including on the accreditation scheme that she mentions. If she would like, I can write to her with more details. We are also taking forward other recommendations, as well as some of the outcomes of the national debate with young drivers, which was carried out by Atkins.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does the minister support my campaign to introduce a graduated driving licence scheme to help to stop the carnage among young drivers, particularly on our rural roads? The minister may be aware that I am launching a DVD campaign tomorrow in Inverness. Every school in the Highlands and Islands will receive a copy of my road safety DVD. Will the minister send words of support to tomorrow’s official launch?

Keith Brown: We are supportive of the aims of the campaign for a graduated driving licence. As the member knows, we have written to the Driving Standards Agency. I acknowledge the work that the member has done in that regard.

I am aware of the event in Inverness that he mentioned. If he sends me the details of that we will look into whether we can send some words of support.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): The drink-drive alcohol limit is 80mg per 100ml of blood in this country, which is almost unique in Europe, where it is mostly 50mg. The Parliament supports and has voted for a

reduction in the limit to 50mg, which would save many young lives. Does the minister know why Westminster continues to block that life-saving reduction?

Keith Brown: I think that the member has asked me to get into the mind of a minister at Westminster, which I prefer not to do. I do not know exactly the reasons for that block. I think that the member would acknowledge that it is not a straightforward change to make. However, he rightly said that the Parliament supports the reduction that he mentioned. We will continue to press the Westminster Government to achieve that.

National Health Service (Advocacy Services)

3. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what guidance is issued to national health service boards about the funding of advocacy services. (S4O-00330)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS boards are responsible for ensuring that advocacy is available to all who need it within their respective areas and that resources are matched to those needs. “Independent Advocacy: A Guide for Commissioners”, produced by the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, is available to assist boards in scoping needs and procuring advocacy services; also relevant is “Guidance on the Procurement of Care and Support Services by public bodies in Scotland”, which was published jointly by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in September 2010.

Kevin Stewart: Given that information from the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance shows that Grampian is now the lowest spender on advocacy services in Scotland, will the cabinet secretary put pressure on NHS Grampian to meet its responsibilities in delivering effective advocacy services?

Nicola Sturgeon: Kevin Stewart raises an important point. I repeat what I said in my previous answer: all NHS boards, including NHS Grampian, have a responsibility to meet the needs in their areas. I understand that expenditure on advocacy by NHS Grampian has increased since 2009-10—it was £131,000 then, but in this financial year it is £213,000. Those figures suggest that Grampian is going in the right direction. However, we will work with NHS boards, including Grampian, on the review of their advocacy plans. I will finish where I started: all NHS boards have a responsibility to meet local needs in this respect.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that an

organisation that provides advocacy services should be independent of the organisation that it interacts with on behalf of an individual? Will she set out what the Scottish Government is doing to promote independent advocacy?

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with the principle underlying Jamie Hepburn's question. The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 places a duty on health boards and local authorities to secure the provision of appropriate independent advocacy services for people with mental health problems and to take appropriate steps to ensure that such people have the opportunity to make use of those services. Obviously, those issues are important in the context of the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 as well. We take those issues very seriously and we will continue to work with NHS boards to ensure the adequacy and—to respond to Jamie Hepburn's point—the independence of advocacy services.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): The cabinet secretary may be aware of concerns expressed by advocacy organisations about the fact that the recently launched draft "Mental Health Strategy for Scotland: 2011-15" contained not one word about advocacy, in spite of the duty in the 2003 act to which the cabinet secretary referred a moment ago. Will she ensure that the final version of the strategy addresses the crucial issue of advocacy for mental health service users?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, I am very happy to do that. I referred in my previous answer to the 2003 act—I cannot remember whether Malcolm Chisholm was a health minister when Parliament passed that act—which places very important statutory duties on health boards. Any omission in the draft strategy—I stress that it is a draft—is not intended to downplay those duties at all. I will take Malcolm Chisholm's point on board and we will ensure that due consideration is given to that as the strategy progresses.

Disabled Students Allowance

4. Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government for what reason a disabled student in receipt of incapacity benefit and disability living allowance has to undertake a further assessment for the disabled students allowance from the Students Awards Agency for Scotland. (S4O-00331)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Angela Constance): The disabled students allowance is available to cover the cost of additional educational support related to a particular course of study, and assessments are carried out on that basis. The support is specific to the individual and tailored to their particular

educational needs, whereas assessments for incapacity benefit or disability living allowance are more concerned with medical issues related to personal care or mobility.

Fiona McLeod: Is the minister aware of the extra pressures that the extra assessment can put on disabled students, especially those with developmental disorders such as autism? Would she consider working with representative charities and support groups to find an alternative set of criteria?

Angela Constance: I am aware of the particular challenges in engaging with young people with developmental disorders, whether Asperger's or autism, and in ensuring that they get the right support at the right time. With regard to the assessments, I stress that there is nothing to fear: they are very much about the accredited assessor sitting down with the young person and agreeing what support they need while on their course to enable them to achieve their qualification. However, I am more than happy to contact universities and colleges to ensure that the assessments and processes are being presented in the right way. If there is anything that we can do in and around the process to make it more user friendly for young people, we will happily pursue that.

A9 (Berriedale Braes Improvements)

5. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made by Transport Scotland in designing improvements to the A9 at Berriedale braes. (S4O-00332)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): A geotechnical study of the A9 at Berriedale braes has recently been completed. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether realignment or a widening scheme could be constructed at that location. The study concluded that the ground conditions are reasonably favourable for both options and recommended that further ground investigation and a topographical survey be undertaken. The cost of the realignment option is estimated at £2.3 million.

Road safety will continue to be monitored at Berriedale braes, with any further design work that is required for a longer-term project being taken forward when resources are available and priorities allow.

Rob Gibson: Will the minister treat this road upgrade with the utmost urgency and thereby back the transformation of the economy of Caithness and north Sutherland? Will he seek partners such as the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and potential energy developers so as to deliver this

£3 million—maximum—road scheme, which has been needed for many years? It appears to be Highland Council's top priority should any slippage occur in the Scottish Government transport budget.

Keith Brown: As I know the member is aware, there are substantial and competing pressures in prioritising road improvements throughout our trunk road network. However, he makes a constructive suggestion and we are happy to look at how we could, if possible, leverage in funding from other sources to move the project on. We will certainly do that.

Factors (Accountability)

6. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in improving the accountability of factors to the residents of housing estates in relation to landscape maintenance. (S4O-00333)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government is making good progress towards implementation of the Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011. The act will require all factors, including those that provide land maintenance services, to be registered and to abide by a code of conduct. In addition, consumers will be able to approach a new tribunal, the home owner housing panel, if they are dissatisfied with the services that they receive. The draft code of conduct is out to public consultation and all key provisions in the act will be in place by October 2012.

Willie Coffey: I thank the cabinet secretary for that detailed answer. I bring to his attention the near-farcical situation in my constituency, where some residents have two factors doing the same work and charging residents through separate bills. What action can local people take to stop that practice?

Alex Neil: Having referred to the code of conduct and approached the panel when it is established, they should make a complaint if the matter is not resolved by then. However, I believe that further legislation might be required in the area. We are actively looking at introducing legislation at a later stage to give people more power to switch companies or factors, because I believe that that competitive environment might be the best and most effective way of resolving many of these issues.

Social Rented Housing (Environmental Sustainability)

7. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it will take to promote

environmental sustainability in the construction of new social rented housing. (S4O-00334)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): Sustainability labelling was introduced to building standards on 1 May. The principles are applicable to all new housing and build on the degree of sustainability that is already embedded in the building regulations. In providing grant subsidy to a programme of new-build social housing, we require high standards of energy efficiency—standards that will be achieved by compliance with current building regulations.

Christina McKelvie: Given that the Scottish Government is investing record amounts in building new social rented housing, the opportunity should be taken to ensure that the investment also helps to reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty in the long term. Will the minister provide an assurance that fuel efficiency is being prioritised in the Scottish Government's house-building programme?

Alex Neil: Absolutely. The member raises a valid issue. One of my first visits when I became Minister for Housing and Communities in the previous session was to the Lochside estate off the A76 in Dumfries. I met a tenant who had moved from an old two-bedroom flat to a new four-bedroom bungalow. Her gas bill went down from £40 a week to £36 a month as a result of the insulation and building standards of her new home. That is a typical example of the huge improvement in heating and insulation standards in new-build social housing throughout Scotland.

Same-sex Marriage

8. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will introduce legislation on same-sex marriage in 2012 following completion of its current consultation. (S4O-00335)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): The consultation has not yet been completed and no decisions have been taken. However, as indicated in the foreword to the consultation, if the Scottish Government should decide to introduce a bill to Parliament, we will consult on the detail of any draft bill before it is formally introduced.

Patrick Harvie: I entirely accept that the final decision will, of course, be made after the consultation. However, if the Government's initial view continues to be that legislation should be brought forward, will the cabinet secretary confirm that there is no technical or legal barrier to introducing legislation next year, instead of delaying it until 2013? If Parliament and

Government both want this done, surely it is best that it be done quickly.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am sure that Patrick Harvie will understand that I am not going to be drawn too far into the post-consultation debate at this stage. It is right that we are having a consultation and that the Government listens to all the views that are put forward in that consultation.

In the consultation, we set out our initial view, as Patrick Harvie says. We also set out an indicative timeline, should our decision be to proceed. It is the case that some complicated issues would need to be resolved if we did so. Some of those issues have been raised by people on both sides of this debate. That is why, if the decision is to proceed, we need a period of consultation on the draft legislation.

Once the consultation period has concluded, the Government will come back in due course to the chamber to outline our final decision and say what the next steps forward will be.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for what she has already said, but could she reassure people who are thinking of responding to the consultation that doing so is worth while and that the Government certainly has not made up its mind on how to proceed?

Nicola Sturgeon: I have said many times before and I will say it again: this is a consultation. In the interests of honesty and transparency, the Government set out our initial view at the outset of the consultation. However, we also said that no final decision had been taken, and none will be taken until the consultation concludes and the responses to the consultation have been properly considered and analysed.

This is a genuine consultation. I have met a number of groups and individuals on both sides of the debate. We are listening to all the views that are put forward. In the few remaining days of the consultation, I encourage everyone with a view on the issue, no matter what that view is, to submit it to the consultation, in order that it be fully considered.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I am aware that, during the consultation, the cabinet secretary has met a wide range of representatives of Scotland's religious faiths. Have they presented a diversity of opinion on the issue? I have a feeling that the media perception is that there is a particular view on their part, rather than a range of views.

Nicola Sturgeon: I have not personally met representatives of every religious group that has submitted views to the consultation. However, among those who have submitted their views,

there is a diversity of opinion. A few weeks ago, five of the groups that might be described as the smaller religious groups submitted a view that was in favour of legislation.

So far in the consultation, I have met representatives of the Catholic Church, the Muslim Council of Scotland and—yesterday—the Church of Scotland. Those three religious faith groups have said to me that they do not agree that we should have legislation on this. We are listening to all the views on all sides of this debate and, as a Government, we will come to a final decision in due course and in the appropriate way.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): That ends general question time. I apologise to two members for the fact that we did not reach questions 9 and 10.

First Minister's Question Time

Engagements

11:59

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-00255)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I am delighted to announce to the chamber that, earlier today, a memorandum of understanding was agreed between Forth Ports plc, Scottish Enterprise and the City of Edinburgh Council. That agreement will unlock the vast potential of Leith port and will ensure that it will be transformed with the ability to serve a range of industries, thereby creating new jobs and economic growth both for Edinburgh and for Scotland.

Iain Gray: This week, the latest report by European experts Arabella Thorp and Gavin Thompson makes clear the cost to taxpayers of the requirement for a separate Scotland to join the euro. Our contribution to the bail-out fund would currently be around £8 billion. Is that a bill that the First Minister is happy to see Scotland pay?

The First Minister: I doubt that Iain Gray has properly read the report from the House of Commons library researchers, because it goes through a range of options. The idea that Scotland would be dragooned into the euro is totally wrong and completely without foundation. Scotland's position will be the same as that of the rest of the United Kingdom as we become an independent country; we will have exactly the same rights and obligations. The idea that Scotland will be treated differently—as some sort of region—is shared only by those who do not understand the important and valid point that Scotland is not only a nation, but a European nation.

Iain Gray: I have read the report. The First Minister needs to understand that he is not the only politician who can read. However, I wonder how much he has read, because he simply asserts that we would not have to join the euro.

Let us see how the evidence is stacking up. Those who disagree with him include Thorp and Thompson; Professor Jo Murkens of the London School of Economics and Political Science; Professor Robert Hazell of University College London; the First Minister's own economic adviser, Professor Hughes-Hallett; the European Commission's President Barroso, who says that there will be no more euro opt-outs; and the Maastricht treaty—I wonder whether the First Minister has ever read that.

On the First Minister's side, who do we have? The ever-trustworthy First Minister's spokesperson, who was this week reduced to misquoting the late Robin Cook. If the First Minister has crystal-clear legal advice on the question, will he publish it?

The First Minister: I refer Iain Gray to paragraph 2.3 of the Scottish ministerial code concerning legal advice, its assistance and its publication. Perhaps I can help him by citing some authorities. Lord Mackenzie-Stuart, the only Scottish judge to have been President of the European Court of Justice, was asked to address the point about Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom in the event of independence. He said:

"Independence would leave Scotland and something called 'the rest' in the same legal boat. If Scotland had to reapply, so would the rest. I am puzzled at the suggestion that there would be a difference in the status of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of Community law if the Act of Union was dissolved."

I think that we can reasonably say that the late Lord Mackenzie-Stuart was an authority on such matters, but I have no knowledge that he was ever friendly towards the SNP's position. However, he looked at precisely that question and his argument was very clear from that quotation. Incidentally, "I am puzzled" is legal speak for "I don't understand the argument that's being put forward." The point that he put forward very clearly is that Scotland and the rest of the UK would be in exactly the same legal position.

I will turn to what that legal position might be. I will quote Eamonn Gallagher, who is a former director-general of the European Commission and ambassador to the United Nations in New York. He said:

"Scotland and the rest of the UK would be equally entitled to continue the existing full membership of the EU."

I am quite happy to quote to Iain Gray a range of other authorities. I hope that he accepts that they are important legal authorities whose views have been published. I hope that he has read them and that he will now abandon his attempt to suggest that Scotland, with its enormous natural resources, its dominant position in the European Union's oil and gas resources and its great renewables resources, would somehow not be wanted by the rest of the European Union.

Iain Gray: I read Mackenzie-Stuart and Gallagher this morning. The point is that they do not precisely address the question that I am putting to the First Minister. They both say, one on the evidence of the other, that Scotland would continue to be a member of European Union. What does the First Minister say to all the experts who accept that point but say that, as a member of the European Union, Scotland would have to join

the euro? It might be that the interpretation is that the rest of the UK would be in the same position.

Members: Oh!

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Let the member finish his question, please.

Iain Gray: I love it when they think they have discovered something.

What would Scotland's position be? All those experts say that we would have to be in the euro and that it would cost £8 billion.

As for the legal advice, everyone knows that if Alex Salmond had legal advice that agreed with him on the point, he would have found a way to get it out. Fiona Hyslop says that letting Scotland know whether his policy will cost Scotland £8 billion would be contrary to the public interest. I do not think so. Does not she really mean that it would be contrary to the SNP's interests, so they are going to keep it secret?

The First Minister: We are making progress; Iain Gray has read—this morning—the legal advice of some of the most credible people to have addressed the question. Let me give him a quotation from another credible person. The first and longest-serving secretary general of the European Commission, Emile Noël, said that Scottish

“independence would create two new member states out of one. They would have equal status with each other and the other states. The remainder of the United Kingdom would not be in a more powerful position than Scotland.”

So we come to Iain Gray's dramatic admission before the members in the chamber that it might well be that the rest of the UK would have to join the euro. Now we understand the entrenched opposition of the unionist parties to Scottish independence. It is not about Scotland: they are worried that England and the rest would be forced into membership of the euro. As successor states, both parts would inherit rights and obligations, including the opt-out that was negotiated by the UK.

I offer Iain Gray a further point of reassurance. Sweden—a new member—is not in the euro. Why is that? It is because the people of Sweden said that they did not want to join it, and the European Commission accepted that. Let us sweep away all the scaremongering and accept that Scotland is a European nation, and that right across Europe, people will be anxious to see Scotland have the same rights and obligations as other European Union members.

Iain Gray: In the face of expert opinion that says that an independent Scotland would have to be in the euro, the First Minister continues to assert on no evidence that that is not the case.

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): Where is your evidence?

Iain Gray: Where is my evidence? I read out a list of expert evidence and opinion when I asked the question. That is where my evidence is.

The First Minister has a mandate to ask Scots whether they want separation, but he has no mandate to mislead them. He must give us all the facts before we decide. The experts say that a separate Scotland would have to join the euro and that it would cost at least £8 billion. On such an important question, does Alex Salmond really think that he can just stick his fingers in his ears and his head in the sand?

The First Minister: I think that that was a shimmy away from the dramatic admission that was made in the previous question. I have cited authorities—a former director general of the European Commission, the longest-serving secretary general of the European Commission and the only Scottish judge who chaired the European Court of Justice—but Iain Gray does not want to talk about them. So let us talk about the reality.

As successor states, Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom would inherit the opt-out that was negotiated by the UK Government. Even if that were not the case, we would be in the same position as Sweden—and Sweden has not joined the euro because the people of Sweden did not want to join the euro. Olli Rehn, the European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, says that membership of the euro is for the Swedish people to decide.

I have been in politics a fair time. I remember when the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom—a Labour Prime Minister—said that he wanted to have the courage of his convictions and join the euro. Most of us now say that we would not do that until it was in the economic interests of the country to do so. That would be decided by the people of Scotland in a referendum. We would have the same rights and the same obligations as the rest of the United Kingdom and every other European Union member. That is the reality.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-00251)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Prime Minister in the near future, although I know that Ruth Davidson met him in the very recent past. I congratulate her on her birthday and on her success in becoming leader of her party, although I will say that her hobby of kick boxing seems to have become endemic, in a

political sense, among her colleagues over the past couple of days.

Ruth Davidson: I thank the First Minister for his birthday wishes. There are not many people who get the boost of the front page of *The Scotsman* on their birthday.

I was reading a Scottish National Party press release today that quoted Liz Lochhead, the Scots makar, as saying:

“if there was a referendum tomorrow, I'd vote yes”.

Let me ask the First Minister this: if a straightforward yes or no referendum were to be held tomorrow, is he confident that he would win?

The First Minister: Yes, and I would vote “yes”.

Ruth Davidson: I guess that the question is, in that case, why does the First Minister not invite people to answer in a yes or no referendum tomorrow? We know the answer to that from the exchange that we have just heard; we know that the First Minister is feart. He is feart to publish the legal advice on an independent Scotland joining Europe. We know that he is feart to even ask Europe for its advice. He is feart to name the question for a referendum and we know that he is feart to name the day. No wonder.

The First Minister is such a fan of polls that I shall mention a couple to him. At the weekend, we saw a BBC poll in which barely a quarter of people backed independence. A poll that is running currently on www.scotsman.com has attracted more than 35,000 votes and shows that by nearly three to one Scotland wants a simple and straightforward yes or no question. Liz Lochhead wants a poll tomorrow and Scotland wants a single, simple yes or no question. Why does the First Minister not just get on with it?

The First Minister: I was interested in the poll at the weekend, and in Ruth Davidson's appearance on “The Politics Show”, when it was quite clearly explained to her that the question that she was citing in favour of the Scotland Bill was actually about devolution max, so the support that she was claiming for the Scotland Bill was not that. I have the quotation from Isabel Fraser when she pointed out the relevant sections. I was therefore very surprised to hear Ruth Davidson repeat on “Good Morning Scotland” on Tuesday what she said.

I will tell Ruth Davidson what we will do: we will stick to what we said in the election campaign and we will have the referendum on Scottish independence—there will be a straight yes or no question—in the second half of this parliamentary session. We will do that because that is what we said in the election campaign. I think that she will accept that that gained us a pretty overwhelming result in the verdict of the people of Scotland. Just

as the people of Scotland showed faith in the Scottish National Party, the SNP Government shows faith in the people of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I have a large number of members wanting to ask constituency and topical questions.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The First Minister will be aware of the double blow in my constituency this week. On Monday, the window manufacturer A C Yule and Son Ltd called in the administrators and made redundant 50 staff in Aberdeen and about 150 more throughout Scotland and the north of England. On Tuesday, the Argus Care group, which is based in my constituency and operates 12 nursing and residential homes throughout Scotland, appointed administrators. Can the First Minister assure me that a partnership action for continuing employment team is already in place to assist the redundant workers, and that the health and wellbeing directorate is fully involved with Aberdeen City Council and others to ensure minimum disruption to the care of the frail elderly people who are affected?

The First Minister: Yes, I can. Maureen Watt raises two really important constituency issues that are obviously of wider importance to Scotland as a whole.

I confirm that those who face redundancy due to the administration of A C Yule have been provided with information about PACE services. The Skills Development Scotland centre in Aberdeen is already providing tailored help and support for those who are affected.

Progress is being made on the second matter. The Scottish Government is working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other partners, such as the Association of Directors of Social Work and Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland, to ensure continuity of care for all residents in the 12 Argus Care homes in Scotland. I am pleased to say that the expectation is that all the staff who currently deliver those vital services will remain in place.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the sudden departure of Philip Preston from his post as managing director of CalMac Ferries Ltd. Staff have been informed that he is leaving as part of a company refocus. What is the nature of that refocus? Will the First Minister confirm that CalMac will remain as an entity and that his Government will continue to tender all the routes together? Will he guarantee that the refocus will not have a negative impact on service users, and that any changes will be subject to full consultation?

The First Minister: That is always the case, and I can indicate that it will be the case.

Personal matters are always difficult to touch on. John Swinney will send the member a letter that gives as much information as we can give. I can say that CalMac will continue to provide the key valuable and vital lifeline services for the island communities of Scotland.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): As we approach remembrance Sunday, will the First Minister join me in condemning the recent acts of disrespect at the Gordon Highlanders statue in Aberdeen and the commando memorial in Spean Bridge? Given the close links between those and other historic Scottish regiments and their local communities, does the First Minister agree that everyone should be aware of troops' sacrifices past and present, and that they should give them the respect and honour that they deserve?

The First Minister: I know that all members will unreservedly condemn wanton acts of theft or vandalism to war memorials. There are thousands of memorials in communities throughout Scotland that mark the sacrifice of our servicemen and servicewomen. Those memorials are an integral part of the fabric of our communities and they should be respected at all times. It is vital that young people in particular fully understand and appreciate the sacrifices that have been made by our armed forces. The Scottish veterans fund has provided a range of support to the Lady Haig Poppy Factory, Poppyscotland, the Royal British Legion Scotland and the Gordon Highlanders museum so that those sacrifices and their meaning can be fully explained and articulated, and can be appreciated by everyone in our communities.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I want to raise an issue as MSP for Glasgow Pollok.

Excellent housing associations and housing co-operatives serve my community. I am dismayed at the decision of the First Minister's Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth to cut £112 million out of Glasgow's housing development budget in the next three years. That is a catastrophic decision that will have a huge impact on the ability to create housing and a massive impact on the local economy because of the lack of jobs in construction. I urge the First Minister to tackle the issue urgently. It is essential that we have a housing policy that meets the needs of, and affords economic opportunities to, the people of Glasgow. The decision flies in the face of the needs of Glasgow, and I urge the First Minister to change it as soon as possible.

The First Minister: The position is not as Johann Lamont presents it, but I am perfectly happy to ensure that she has the facts at her disposal.

Two things are pretty clear. First, the Government's record in social housing is exemplary compared with what went before, and in view of the finances that are available to us.

Secondly, we are mobilising tens—indeed, hundreds—of millions of pounds of investment in Scottish housing throughout the country by a variety of new mechanisms that are urgently and desperately required. I gently point out to Johann Lamont that the gentleman who is sitting on her left—Iain Gray—once said that the Labour Party passed the best housing legislation in the world and then forgot to build the houses. We have not forgotten to build the houses.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-00254)

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

Willie Rennie: Last month, I asked the First Minister whether he would use part of the £67 million additional funding that his Government has been allocated to stop the £40 million cut to Scotland's colleges. He was not able to answer then. Is he any closer to making a decision?

The First Minister: The specifications of the consequentials will follow shortly.

In the past couple of weeks, I have had the great pleasure of opening the new Dundee College campus and the new Forth Valley College campus. I am sure that Willie Rennie will be interested to note that the capital expenditure that is moving through the college sector at the moment is approximately five times what it was when the party that he supports was in alliance with the Labour Party. He should take that expenditure, which continues in Glasgow, Inverness and Kilmarnock, into the equation when he speaks about the college sector.

Willie Rennie: The issue is urgent. The First Minister has £67 million that he did not expect. Scotland's colleges are doing great work helping people to get up and get on in the world, but Angus College predicts that it will lose 400 full-time places, Borders College could lose seven full-time courses and principals say that they cannot guarantee quality or student numbers.

The First Minister could take a positive step today and unite the Parliament for the good of

Scotland and announce that he will use the extra money to protect colleges. It makes no sense to continue to delay that decision. Why is he not able to give certainty right now? Does he not understand that it is urgent?

The First Minister: As the college principals have noted, we are in constructive debate about how best to help the colleges. I hope that Willie Rennie will take a look at capital expenditure throughout Scotland, because the college sector has been a dramatic and, incidentally, rightful beneficiary.

The consequentials will be announced. I know that the matter is difficult for Willie Rennie because the alliance with the Tory party is uncomfortable for many Liberal Democrats, although perhaps not for him. He says that we have £67 million that we did not expect. Yes we do—and our budget is down by £3 billion as a result of the activities of the Conservative-Liberal coalition at Westminster.

First Ministerial Visits (Qatar and United Arab Emirates)

4. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the outcome was of his trip to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. (S4F-00257)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The visit was highly successful that strengthened Scotland's economic and energy links with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In my meetings with both Governments, it was clear that not only is Scotland regarded as a world leader in the energy sector in oil and gas, but it has great opportunities for viable long-term investment in the renewables sector. In particular, I was also delighted to meet TAQA—or the Abu Dhabi National Energy Company—which is committed to a further £600 million of investment in its North Sea assets.

I know that the whole Parliament recognises the importance of those economic contacts to advertising Scotland's great energy wealth across a range of sectors and to mobilising the investment worldwide to develop those resources on behalf of the people of Scotland.

Nigel Don: I have a considerable interest in developments in the North Sea and welcome that investment. Will the First Minister tell me anything more about discussions that he had about development of renewable energy across the globe?

The First Minister: The Masdar Institute of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi has announced its intention to enter into a framework for action with Scotland. The framework is intended to result in a concrete set of actions to take forward investment in renewables and to

share expertise. It will be the first-ever agreement between the institute and a country—its previous agreements have been with some of the great energy companies of the world—and, if we are successful in securing the agreement, it will demonstrate that Scotland is leading the way in all aspects of the energy sector, including the renewables revolution.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): What human rights groups did the First Minister meet in Qatar?

The First Minister: I saw some stuff about Qatar, which I admit was not from the Labour Party and for which I know the Liberal Democrats have apologised. I point out that Qatar has not had a political prisoner for 10 years. It is the enabler of the Arab spring and the home of Al Jazeera. I am sure that Jenny Marra would not wish to create any impression that Qatar is other than very admirable on a range of policies that it has pursued of late. I know that Scotland and the Parliament would in no way want to insult the people of Qatar.

Junior Doctors (Working Hours)

5. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the General Medical Council survey suggesting that junior doctors feel pressured to work more than a 48-hour week. (S4F-00258)

That would breach the European working time directive.

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I take the issue seriously. Any suggestion that junior doctors feel pressured to work more than a 48-hour week on average is totally unacceptable. The GMC survey shows that the vast majority of trainees do not feel under pressure to pretend that they have worked compliant rotas, and it demonstrates a reduction in recent years which, I am sure, Duncan McNeil would be the first to recognise.

Through its national monitoring team, the Scottish Government will continue to work closely with NHS Scotland boards to ensure that the hours that junior doctors work comply with all contractual and legislative requirements.

Duncan McNeil: Against a backdrop of delays in replacing staff, a drive to reduce expenditure on temporary staff and locums, and uncertainty about future employment for junior doctors at the end of their training, is it any surprise that junior doctors feel that they must break the law and lie to meet the demands of the job? Does the First Minister share my concern about the consequences that that might have for patients and junior doctors, as in the tragic case of Lauren Connelly, who served at Inverclyde royal hospital?

The First Minister: I will answer the second question in the proper way, as it raises a constituency matter.

I wonder whether Duncan McNeil has read the GMC survey, which shows that the vast majority of junior doctors reported having rotas that complied with the working time directive. The survey asked whether people felt under pressure, to which 10 per cent of respondents replied that they did. That figure is far too high, but the percentage is declining and is small, and the survey is confidential. Please do not give the impression that this serious issue is not being tackled, because it is being tackled as regulations are introduced, and do not give the impression that we know from the survey that the practice is widespread, because it is not.

As for Duncan McNeil's second question, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is undertaking an internal investigation, and a police investigation into the road traffic accident is taking place. Given the on-going investigations, we should not comment further at this stage, other than to extend the Parliament's sympathy to Dr Connelly's family.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): The NHS had about 12 years to prepare for full implementation of the European working time directive. I support calls to protect junior doctors from pressure to underreport their working hours.

The British Medical Association and the Royal College of Physicians have expressed concern about the time that is available for training. What measures are being taken to maximise training opportunities for junior doctors?

The First Minister: A range of measures ensures compliance with the working time directive. I regard the issue as being hugely serious as, I am sure, the whole Parliament does. I do not want to turn it into political banter. I could quote to Alison McInnes where the figures were just a few years ago and where they are now. I am sure that she would accept that compliance has improved dramatically.

However, that is not enough. We want to ensure that no junior doctors feel pressured not to comply with the working time directive, and that the directive is universally enforced. From the statistics both from the confidential survey and the monitoring, there is no doubt that this very serious problem is at last being seriously tackled.

Public Health Levy

6. Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): To ask the First Minister what impact the proposed public health levy will have on employment in the retail sector. (S4F-00245)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The public health supplement will raise an additional £30 million in 2012-13 from large retailers of tobacco and off-sales of alcohol, which will sustain and support preventative spend. The figure is insignificant when we consider that the cost to Scottish business of the Tory Government's VAT rise will be over £1,000 million.

I am sure that Gavin Brown will be aware that Scotland has the most competitive system of business rate taxation available anywhere in the United Kingdom and we will continue to do so for the lifetime of this Parliament.

Gavin Brown: What a lame answer. Even the Scottish National Party back benchers forgot to clap at that one.

Let me ask a specific question. I asked what the impact on employment would be. This Government is able to tell us how many jobs are being created any time it makes any announcement, so can the First Minister tell us how many retail jobs will be lost in Scotland by taking £110 million out of the sector?

The First Minister: I have to correct Gavin Brown's interpretation of the reply. I was merely saying that if he believes that a £30 million health levy in order to fund the key programmes that we require as a country to tackle serious issues is a devastating blow to the major retailers, can he please tell us why he does not think that a cost of £1 billion—that is, £1,000 million—that will be imposed by the VAT rise of the Tory Government is not a huge issue?

Given that Gavin Brown seems to be the only member of the Conservative Party who was not offered the job of deputy leader—I am sure that that is not due to lack of ambition—I think that he should come forward with stronger questions if he wants to rise further.

12:31

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is themed question time. The questions are on finance, employment and sustainable growth. In order to get as many members in as possible, I would prefer short and succinct questions, with answers to match.

Employment and Regeneration (Cunninghame South)

1. Margaret Burgess (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to reduce unemployment and improve economic regeneration in Cunninghame South. (S4O-00338)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government remains completely committed to reducing unemployment and improving economic regeneration throughout Scotland. In Cunninghame South specifically, we have provided £11.2 million between 2006 and 2012 to Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Company and have offered a further £2.5 million for 2012-13. We have provided almost £1.9 million of European funding to support local employability activity, through the community planning partnership.

Margaret Burgess: Will the minister join me in congratulating Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Company on being given the United Kingdom roses design award for the work that it has done in transforming Kilwinning Main Street and pursuing to good effect other vital regeneration projects throughout North Ayrshire? Will the minister give reassurances about continued Government support to allow Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Company to continue its work to improve the economic landscape of North Ayrshire in the years ahead?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I will join the local member in recognising the good work that the company has carried out and congratulating it on its recent award, which recognises the good, hard work that its team has carried out. As far as future funding is concerned, I understand that, just in the past day or so, my colleague Alex Neil has had fruitful discussions with North Ayrshire Council, which are on-going. I very much hope that the outcome of

the discussions will be some good news for the member's constituents.

Social Economy

2. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is strengthening the social economy to enhance sustainable growth. (S4O-00339)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting the development of a sustainable and enterprising third sector, which is a key partner in helping Scotland to a successful and fairer future. Over the next three years, the Scottish Government will provide £73.5 million to the third sector, which is an 18.3 per cent increase on the period 2004 to 2007.

Anne McTaggart: Many of the social enterprises that have contacted me have raised concerns that the Government cuts to the third sector are increasing the demand on the social economy for its services. How will the minister address those concerns in order to support further this vital area of the economy?

John Swinney: One of the great strengths of the period since 2007 has been the positive response that we have had from third sector organisations, which are willing to develop social enterprises and to ensure that the third sector is placed on a more sustainable footing. I spend a good proportion of my time visiting a number of social enterprises around the country. I visited one recently in the city of Aberdeen called Aberdeen Foyer, which is an excellent example of an imaginative and regenerative social enterprise.

The Government will certainly give a firm commitment to the continuation of the development of the social enterprise sector, despite the challenging public finance environment in which we operate. I reiterate to Anne McTaggart and other members that the Government is continuing, despite the financial pressures that we face, to support substantial investment in the third sector.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mark McDonald has a supplementary question.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary rightly highlighted some of the good work that Aberdeen Foyer has done. As the Government looks to shift towards preventative spending, what role does he see organisations such as Aberdeen Foyer and others in the voluntary sector playing as part of that agenda?

John Swinney: I envisage a significant role for third sector organisations in the preventative

spend agenda on which the Government is focused. I want to point out to Mr McDonald a detail about Aberdeen Foyer with which I am sure he is familiar.

On my visit, I saw a number of excellent examples of preventative expenditure. Individuals who face substantial difficulties in their lives through drug and alcohol addiction, who would undoubtedly have required substantial support from the public purse or perhaps even got involved in the criminal justice system, have had their lives turned round by intervention to support employability. It was thrilling to learn about the journey that the individuals have taken and I warmly compliment them on their achievements.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Social enterprises have a major role to play in community regeneration. The town centre in Whitburn, in my region, has suffered three major fires and the closure of the Royal British Legion. Will the cabinet secretary visit Whitburn with me and local stakeholders, including representatives from social enterprises, to discuss how the Scottish Government can help to rebuild a proud town?

John Swinney: I will not commit at this stage to a visit to Whitburn but I will certainly ensure that officials are in touch with Mr Findlay about how we can ensure that all the local organisations are made aware of all the different areas of support that exist for the development of social enterprise in Scotland. Given the circumstances that he has recounted, I suspect that there is an argument for advice about regeneration strategy into the bargain. I am certain that we can co-operate with West Lothian Council in that regard. I will take the matter forward and take a keen interest in the issues that arise as a consequence.

Welfare Reform

3. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact will be on devolved services if £2 billion is taken from the Scottish economy because of the United Kingdom Government's welfare reforms. (S4O-00340)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): It is clear that the UK Government's programme of welfare reforms is impacting adversely on the Scottish economy, on Scottish services, such as housing, and on many vulnerable people in Scotland.

The Scottish Government estimates that around 60,000 tenants in Scotland are facing the prospect of losing an average of £40 per month, and the freeze in child benefit for three years from 2011-12 has reduced the real-terms income of approximately 621,000 families in Scotland. That

works against our efforts to promote growth and jobs.

Bob Doris: I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to the social housing sector and the housing benefit reductions in relation to the underoccupancy rules that the UK Government is bringing forward. Some 44 per cent of households would need one-bedroom properties, but only 24 per cent of households are currently in such properties, so the approach will cause rent arrears for vulnerable tenants and indebtedness for families. It will also seriously undermine housing association and local authority finances.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that that will undermine the public policy intent of the devolved Scottish Parliament? Does he think that not just the Scottish Government but the Scottish Parliament must have on-going scrutiny of the damaging effects on Scotland of savage UK welfare reforms?

John Swinney: It is clear that there will be a significant impact on areas of responsibility of the Scottish Government and local authorities in Scotland as a consequence of the welfare changes that the UK Government has made. In many respects, a cost-shunting approach is being taken whereby responsibility for changes that arise from the UK Government's approach will be passed to this Administration or to local authority partners.

We have published extensive analysis of the impact of the housing benefits. We know, for example, that the changes this year alone will take £100 million out of the Scottish economy annually. There are substantial consequences for the Scottish Government, and we have worked closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other housing stakeholders, through the housing benefit reform stakeholder advisory group, to assess the implications and make representations to the United Kingdom Government as a result.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I associate myself with the concerns that Bob Doris expressed. In his answer to Bob Doris and when he gave evidence to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, the cabinet secretary talked about the risks to the Scottish economy of the welfare changes, but I am concerned that not much cognisance is taken of the issue in the budget. There are only two references in the budget to the welfare reform proposals, and neither is particularly substantial. Will the cabinet secretary take the opportunity to say more about the impact on the Scottish Government's budget and how the Government is preparing for that?

John Swinney: There are two parts to my answer to Mr Smith. The first is that we are still

working to assess all the implications of the welfare reform agenda process, as it emerges from the United Kingdom Government. For example, changes are proposed involving the abolition of council tax benefit. As I confirmed to either the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee or the Local Government and Regeneration Committee the other week, I cannot in all honesty say that I am familiar with all the details, because they are not yet in our possession.

The second part of the answer is that the Government's priorities are clearly set out in the budget. We wish to support economic recovery and we want to support household income through this difficult period. The Government's position on, for example, the council tax freeze and the abolition of prescription charges is fundamental to our efforts to support some of the most vulnerable people in our society and to support their income at a difficult and challenging time.

Of course, many of the issues that I know will be of concern to Mr Smith are fully considered in the assessment of the budget from an equalities perspective.

Small Business Start-ups

4. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is creating a supportive environment for small business start-ups. (S4O-00341)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): We recognise the vital contribution that small business start-ups make to our economy and we are firmly committed to maintaining a supportive business environment and ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to stimulate and grow small businesses. Those measures include the small business bonus scheme, which reduces rates for 85,000 Scottish businesses; the transfer of the business gateway to local authorities; investing in broadband; reducing unnecessary burdens on businesses; and making it easier for small businesses to access public sector contracts.

Graeme Dey: Figures that I obtained from the local business gateway service in Angus show that, between April and August this year, 33 per cent more businesses were launched across the county than in the corresponding period in 2010, and almost 90 per cent more than in 2009. Does the minister share my view that Angus—along with, I am sure, many other parts of Scotland—is demonstrating the entrepreneurship, ambition and imagination that are required if we are to overcome these difficult economic times?

Fergus Ewing: I agree with the member's points and welcome the success that has been

achieved in Angus. I congratulate Dave Valentine, the head of economic development at Angus Council, on that achievement and on the work that he does as chair of the business gateway Scotland board, in which capacity I met him earlier this week to take that work forward.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): What discussions is the Scottish Government having with the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust to assist 18 to 25-year-olds to set up their own businesses?

Fergus Ewing: I have had a number of discussions with the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust, including on Monday evening this week, when I dined with a member of that organisation and various other members of the Institute of Directors in Glasgow. I take this opportunity to congratulate the trust on the excellent work that it does for young people in Scotland, without which many successful entrepreneurs would not have got the start that they needed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Question 5, in the name of Hugh Henry, has been withdrawn for understandable personal reasons.

Non-domestic Rates

6. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what advice it issued to local authorities regarding non-domestic rates, following the publication of the draft budget. (S4O-00343)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government regularly meets and issues guidance to local authorities on a range of topics, including non-domestic rates.

Margaret McCulloch: Local authorities are concerned that, several weeks after the publication of the draft budget, they have yet to receive any guarantees that their budgets will be protected should the increased income that the Government assumes will come from non-domestic rates fail to materialise. I also draw the cabinet secretary's attention to the fact that more local businesses in South Lanarkshire are collapsing than are starting up. Can he give Scotland's councils a categorical assurance that he will meet any shortfall in non-domestic rates if his figures are found to be less certain than his Government has claimed them to be?

John Swinney: I am surprised to hear that local authorities are waiting for reassurance on that point, because, on all occasions, it is a component of the local authority finance settlement that the Government provides a guarantee of the level of non-domestic rates income that will be provided. Once that guarantee is given, it is honoured by the

Administration. I am not sure what is particularly newsworthy about that revelation.

I point out to Margaret McCulloch what I pointed out to the Finance Committee on Monday. Even in the depths of the economic recession in Scotland, in 2008-09, there was still economic buoyancy of 0.91 per cent in non-domestic rates income. At that time, almost every other tax line in the United Kingdom's public finances was declining. I make that point to demonstrate that, despite the economic challenges that we face, there remains economic strength in the business rates base, which gives me confidence that the assumptions that I have made about non-domestic rates are securely founded.

The example of business growth activity that Mr Dey cited demonstrates that it is possible to achieve that in Scotland. The Government will give every support that it can to every locality in the country, through the work of Scottish Enterprise, Highland and Islands Enterprise and the business gateway, to ensure that all aspiring businesses are properly supported in that way.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): What are the specific growth assumptions for each of the three years of the spending review?

John Swinney: I have told Mr Brown in his capacity as the convener of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee that I will provide relevant information to the committee on that issue, and I shall fulfil that commitment to the committee.

Non-domestic Rates

7. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what analysis it has made of the impact of the proposed increases in non-domestic rates on investment, jobs and output for businesses and on inward investment. (S4O-00344)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Through our commitments to match the business poundage rate in England and to offer the United Kingdom's most generous business rates relief package, which is worth more than £500 million a year, the Scottish Government has ensured that Scotland remains the most competitive place to do business in the UK.

John Pentland: Further to the discussion of the matter that took place at the Finance Committee on Monday, I am aware that the cabinet secretary has a robust and optimistic faith in his own predictions that is based on his self-monitored past performance. However, I would prefer something a little more rigorous, particularly when his prediction is based on assumptions about the growth of new businesses. The non-domestic

rates increases will make life more difficult for new and existing enterprises—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have a question, please?

John Pentland: —at a time when even major high street companies are having their rents reduced to £1 a year to avoid empty properties. Although it is always good to look on the bright side of life—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Pentland, I need a question, please.

John Pentland: —does the cabinet secretary not agree that we need an independent formal modelling of non-domestic rates income, and does he have a contingency plan to raise revenue or cut spending if the business rates do not deliver?

John Swinney: This is déjà vu. I feel that I am reliving Monday in Largs, although I suspect that I will not get the visit to Nardini's into the bargain.

Mr Pentland said that I am "self-monitoring" on the issue of business rates, but I must correct him on that. All the information on business rates is published in outturn information. Although that may be described by some as self-monitoring, it is well-publicised self-monitoring if it is. As I told the Finance Committee on Monday—the answer that I just gave to Margaret McCulloch will help Parliament to understand this—the assumptions that we have made about economic buoyancy are consistent with the trends that we expect in the Scottish economy and with the advice that has been provided by the Office for Budget Responsibility. My estimates of business rates income—excepting the specific areas in which, I accept, I am increasing business rates through the reform of empty property relief and the public health levy—are broadly consistent with the assumptions of the United Kingdom Government. As I explained to the Finance Committee on Monday, we monitor the performance of non-domestic rates income annually and, if there were any requirement for us to make alternative decisions, we would make them in the light of that performance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will let Clare Adamson have a brief supplementary question and, hopefully, the answer will be brief.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): What benefits to business activity have come about as a result of the small business bonus scheme, particularly in light of the recent increased uptake, which indicates growth and buoyancy?

John Swinney: There are now 85,200 businesses in Scotland benefiting from the small business bonus scheme. On Tuesday, I attended a major event with the Federation of Small

Businesses at which the audience made it very clear to me how much the small business bonus scheme has contributed to the economic health of the small business community. It has clearly helped companies to get through a difficult time, and it has supported the development of new opportunities. The small business community can be assured of the Government's continued support.

Local Authorities and Enterprise Agencies (Meetings)

8. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met local authority leaders and representatives of the enterprise agencies. (S4O-00345)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I met representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authority leaders yesterday as part of a series of discussions on the local government finance settlement. I met the Scottish Enterprise board on 27 October and I met the chairs and chief executives of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise at the strategic forum meeting on 13 September. On 24 October, I chaired the convention of the Highlands and Islands, which involves local authorities and the enterprise agencies. Government officials regularly meet their counterparts in SE and HIE to discuss a range of subjects.

Margaret Mitchell: I thank the cabinet secretary for that full answer. Is he aware of a freedom of information request that I made earlier this year on the amount that has been spent on gifts by local authorities and enterprise agencies during the past five years? It revealed that local authorities have spent more than £1 million, Scottish Enterprise has spent £1,241,036, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise alone has spent a staggering £87,764. Does he think that that is acceptable? If not, what action will he take to address the issue?

John Swinney: I am not familiar with that FOI request. I see many FOI requests, but I cannot say that I have seen that one—it shows that there is still excitement to be had in the time I have left in my life.

Local authorities are independent public bodies and they are within their right to make their own choices about public expenditure, subject, of course, to the Accounts Commission's scrutiny of their performance.

I accept that Government agencies are the responsibility of Government. However, those organisations take part in promotional events to attract inward investment and so on. I saw a Scottish Enterprise stand yesterday at the Royal

Society of Chemistry science and the Parliament event that was giving out free gifts of things such as paperweights, notebooks and mouse mats. I accept that we are in a time of public spending constraint, but we can promote our activities reasonably and proportionately.

I will certainly look at the issue that Margaret Mitchell has raised to see whether I am satisfied that an appropriate and proportionate approach has been taken. However, I caution against sensationalising the numbers, because this work is fundamental to the promotion of Scotland as an attractive country to visit.

Economy (Highlands)

9. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what benefits to the Highland economy will arise as a result of the recent announcement regarding the Nigg service yard. (S4O-00346)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Global Energy Group estimates that the Nigg yard could create a minimum of 2,000 jobs by 2015. In addition, there is the potential to create many more employment opportunities, not only in the Cromarty Firth area but throughout Scotland, through a strong supply chain. Highlands and Islands Enterprise's recent investment of £1.8 million will be critical to developing Nigg's potential to meet the real and immediate needs of oil and gas, offshore wind and wave and tidal developers.

John Finnie: Does the Scottish Government consider that the current planning arrangements will allow the economic benefits of the Nigg development to be maximised?

Fergus Ewing: The member is right to raise that issue. Scottish Government officials met Highland Council officials earlier this year to discuss how the development plan and the council's development management procedures can best support the objectives of the national renewables infrastructure plan at Nigg. The council has adopted a masterplan to guide the future planning of the site and the proposed Highland-wide local development plan, although that is still subject to examination by reporters. The council supports the objectives of the national plan and the redevelopment of Nigg yard. All those matters will be given every possible consideration because of the immense potential benefit to the Highlands and Islands and Scotland of the exciting developments that will go ahead at Nigg.

Employment (Glasgow)

10. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is

taking to improve employment prospects in areas of high unemployment in Glasgow. (S4O-00347)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Glasgow community planning partnership has received almost £8.2 million of European funding between June 2011 and June 2013 to support local employability activity. Glasgow has also benefited from a range of other smaller funds, such as the £500,000 awarded to Glasgow City Council to deliver activity agreements and improve school-leaver destinations, and from Scotland-wide initiatives such as our guarantee of a training or education place for every young person.

James Dornan: Following the publication of the recent report from the House of Commons Transport Committee about the possibility of the high-speed rail link coming to Scotland, will the minister outline what discussions the Scottish Government has had with the United Kingdom Government on that issue and what employment benefits he believes it could bring to residents of my constituency of Glasgow Cathcart?

Fergus Ewing: Ministers have discussed the high-speed rail link with their UK Government counterparts on a number of occasions. We want closer co-operation on this issue. It is essential that the UK Government work with the Scottish Government to ensure that the planning for high-speed rail to Scotland is taken forward as a matter of urgency.

Third Sector

11. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I acknowledge that the cabinet secretary might feel a sense of déjà vu, as he answered this question in part earlier.

To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the third sector in the current financial climate. (S4O-00348)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The third sector has a major role to play in Scotland's future, especially during a period of economic austerity. Including the figures announced in the recent spending review, since 2007 the Scottish Government has allocated more than £190 million to support the core development of the third sector.

Dennis Robertson: The cabinet secretary will acknowledge that there has been a significant increase in the number of referrals to citizens advice bureaux and other welfare assistance agencies, such as Gordon Rural Action, because of the Welfare Reform Bill. What additional assistance can he offer organisations such as the CABx?

John Swinney: The Government puts in place support for various organisations across the third sector, which is designed to be focused on the needs of individuals at an identifiably difficult time. I assure Mr Robertson that we continue to monitor the appropriateness of that level of support to ensure that we assist in that respect. The Scottish Government does not fund welfare rights advice or citizens advice bureaux directly. Local authorities fund those services because they are best placed to assess local needs for advice services and to put in place appropriate provision. The Government funds Citizens Advice Direct, which provides a telephone and e-mail service, offering flexibility for the user and taking some of the pressure off the face-to-face service at the bureaux, and we will continue to do so.

Longannet Power Station (Carbon Capture Project)

12. Bill Walker (Dunfermline) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the withdrawal of funding from the Longannet carbon capture project. (S4O-00349)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government has had proactive discussions with the UK Government in the period up to and since the UK Government decision on the Longannet demonstration project. Ahead of the announcement, the First Minister wrote and spoke to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, to raise our concerns and to ensure every possible option was considered. Following the recent disappointment over Longannet and the previous UK Government's abandonment of the earlier Peterhead carbon capture and storage project, it is essential that Westminster clearly demonstrate its commitment to supporting the commercial development of CCS, not least when the continued commitment from industry is so clear.

Bill Walker: The Westminster decision on Longannet is a heavy blow for Dunfermline and west Fife. Can the minister advise us on what the future might be in Scotland for the further development of the pioneering carbon capture work that was successfully started at Longannet?

Fergus Ewing: The Longannet decision was a deep disappointment, not least for the Scottish Power team and the consortium that it led. They put in a lot of work, and they have left behind a legacy of invaluable advice on the topic.

In Peterhead, Scotland has a candidate for applying the CCS technology. I was in Brussels with a top team from Scotland yesterday evening, following the announcement yesterday morning of the excellent news about the joint arrangement

between Shell and Scottish and Southern Energy to proceed with a pre-feed study to allow Peterhead to have a CCS project for Scotland. That is excellent news that offers a tremendous opportunity, which I hope we will all grasp.

Credit Unions (Bank Charges)

13. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it gives to credit unions facing new or increased bank charges. (S4O-00350)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Credit unions are eligible to seek support through the Scottish Government's enterprise growth fund.

Jenny Marra: The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Royal Bank of Scotland, the Bank of Scotland and Clydesdale Bank have this year—as recently as September—introduced full-blown business charges for credit unions. Will he commit to meeting those three banks to find a way in which they could charge preferential rates to credit unions under their corporate social responsibility policies?

John Swinney: I assure Jenny Marra that I regularly meet representatives of the banks. In the past couple of weeks, I have met representatives of Barclays and Lloyds Banking Group, and I regularly meet representatives of the remaining banks. I will certainly consider the point that Jenny Marra makes, but I must point out that all the associated issues, such as the regulation of the banks and credit unions, remain reserved matters, which is rather frustrating. United Kingdom authorities regulate all of them.

Non-domestic Rates

14. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many more businesses will be required to pay non-domestic rates in order for its plans to increase revenue from such rates to be achieved. (S4O-00351)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Forecasts of non-domestic rates income are based on the rateable value of non-domestic properties rather than the number of businesses that pay non-domestic rates, and they include estimates for growth in the underlying tax base as the economy recovers from the recession.

Richard Baker: Like Mr Pentland, I hesitate to dampen the cabinet secretary's optimism. However, even after the answers that we have heard, I ask him why he has not revised his forecast for the growth of business rates revenue from buoyancy in the sector, given that gross

domestic product growth is only 0.1 per cent, the figure for buoyancy to which he referred earlier was only 0.91 per cent and, only this week, the Fraser of Allander institute halved its forecast for growth in Scotland. When will he supply the annual growth figures that Gavin Brown rightly requested?

John Swinney: I will respond to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee when all the issues on which I have to reply to it are at hand. I will do that timeously.

On the assumptions that the Government has made, the point that I made earlier was that there was buoyancy of 0.91 per cent at a time when the economy was in recession. It is clear that there will be improved performance when the economy is growing.

I point out to any members who are assessing the Fraser of Allander institute's contribution that, contrary to some of the media headlines, it still predicted growth in Scotland and the Scottish economy in 2012. We have to consider carefully those points of assessment, but the Government regularly makes assumptions about the expected take from non-domestic rates, and I believe that the forecasts for the on-going period are entirely consistent with our assessment.

Crown Estate (Finances 2010-11)

15. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the Crown Estate's revenue and gross surplus was in Scotland and what the value was of its property in 2010-11. (S4O-00352)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): For the period of 2010-2011, the Crown Estate Commissioners reported the revenue for Scotland as £11.9 million and gross surplus revenue as £9.9 million. Scottish Crown Estate property was valued at £207 million. Those Scottish public assets are administered by a body that is unaccountable to the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament. All revenue from the Crown Estate in Scotland flows directly to the London Treasury. Those revenues should be invested in the development of Scotland's offshore renewables industry and used to benefit communities directly. That is why we have called for the Scotland Bill to devolve the administration and revenues of the Crown Estate in Scotland.

Chic Brodie: The minister will be aware that the Crown Estate's capital values in renewables in Scotland have increased from 6.4 per cent of its total property portfolio in 2008-09 to 31.5 per cent in 2010-11. In real terms, that is a 74 per cent increase over that two-year period. He will also be aware—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brodie, can I have a question please?

Chic Brodie: Yes, I am just coming to that.

The minister will also be aware of the Sovereign Grant Act 2011—passed only three weeks ago by the United Kingdom Government—which replaces the civil list and other grants to support the Queen's official duties with a new grant that is based on a percentage of the profits of the Crown Estate. The Crown Estate is a business. For the next spending review, will the minister consider and explore what levies may be applied for the benefit of the people of Scotland to its surpluses as determined in Scotland and as remaining after the aforementioned contribution?

Fergus Ewing: The member makes a number of points. The UK Treasury will be a huge beneficiary from increased investment in offshore renewable energy in Scotland. We believe that the Crown Estate should be accountable to Scotland and its people through the Parliament.

Council Tax Freeze

16. Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the total cost of the council tax freeze between 2007 and 2016 will be. (S4O-00353)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government has fully funded the council tax freeze since it was introduced in 2008-09 by providing an additional £70 million each year. By the end of this session of Parliament, the cumulative cost of the council tax freeze will have been £630 million.

Margaret McDougall: That £630 million is a false economy in that most households have saved an average of 50p per week but have lost more in the cuts to services that councils provide.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I need a question.

Margaret McDougall: Households are losing out on services such as sheltered housing wardens and school clubs. Would it not have been better if the £630 million had been invested in national health service nurses, colleges, funding for local government and infrastructure?

Aileen Campbell: I thank Margaret McDougall for raising those points. I am still in a bit of a quandary as to what the Labour Party position is on the council tax freeze. At first, it was against it. Then it thought that the bills would not go up. Then the run-up to the election suddenly focused Labour members' minds, and they were for the council tax freeze.

The council tax freeze is fully funded and is helping hard-pressed families during these extremely tough economic times. For Margaret McDougall's information, in the period 2008 to 2012, the freeze saved the average band D householder more than £300. Extending the freeze for the whole of this session of the Parliament will mean that the same household will have benefited by around £1,200 in total, based on the Government providing an additional £70 million each year.

Non-domestic Rates (Impact on Post Offices)

17. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the level of non-domestic rates impacts on post offices in light of their role in local communities. (S4O-00354)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Post offices benefit from targeted business rates relief through the rural rate relief scheme and many post offices throughout Scotland also benefit from the small business bonus scheme. I am sure that Linda Fabiani will join me in welcoming the latest small business bonus scheme statistics, which show that more than 3,500 properties in her constituency benefit from the scheme, saving on average around £1,800.

Linda Fabiani: I certainly welcome that.

Is the cabinet secretary aware that, under the judgment in the case of Assessor for Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board v Bank of Ireland, automated teller machines in post offices are now entered separately in the valuation roll and that sub-postmasters are liable for the rates on the ATMs? It seems to be at the discretion of local authorities whether that ruling is applied. Will the cabinet secretary enlighten me on whether that is at local authorities' discretion? Can anything be done to alleviate that extra burden on small urban post offices?

John Swinney: I would have to look in more detail at the issues that Linda Fabiani raises, because I suspect that some such details are in contractual arrangements for individual properties with the relevant banking authorities. If she provides me with further details, I will explore the issue and give a full reply to the points that she raises.

Economy (Architecture and Place Making)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01287, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the importance of architecture and place making to Scotland's economy.

14:56

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Scotland has a proud heritage of architecture and place making; it also has a productive present and a positive future. Our architecture and design sector contributes about £1.3 billion of the estimated £5.2 billion per year that the creative industries generate for the Scottish economy, but that is only part of the picture.

Our architecture and design sector generates work in our construction sector, and the value of construction output for Scotland last year was about £11 billion. The construction industry is a significant employer. More than 172,000 people are estimated to be in its workforce, to which are added about 11,000 people in the architecture and design sector. We can immediately see the importance in economic and employment terms of architecture and place making to Scotland's economy.

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

Fiona Hyslop: I will move on.

Each period in Scotland's history is marked by the way in which our buildings and places have responded to challenges—whether they were economic, social or cultural. I was reminded of that on Friday when I visited the restoration project at Dunoon burgh hall. As we shape the future for Scotland's built environment in the 21st century, the challenges at the forefront of our minds are climate change, the economy and the need to secure sustainable growth.

These are challenging times, and we need to apply the commitment, vision and sense of purpose to creating places of value that can stand comparison with our successful historic places. I quote John Ruskin:

"Our duty is to preserve what the past has had to say for itself, and to say for ourselves what shall be true for the future."

The debate provides an opportunity to consider why architecture and place making are such a vital part of our cultural identity and to set out the steps that the Government has taken from a policy perspective to ensure that we manage and

develop our built environment responsibly and creatively. In that regard, I welcome the Labour amendment.

In 2001, Scotland became the first country in the United Kingdom to adopt a formal policy on architecture, and a renewed statement was published with broad cross-party support in 2007. We are now building on the policy statements that the previous Administration published.

I intend to develop a new architecture policy statement, to be published next year. In doing that, we will again engage with professional institutes such as the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, the Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland. We will engage with the many other bodies and agencies that have an interest in the quality of our built environment, such as the Scottish Civic Trust and private sector organisations such as Homes for Scotland. Our new policy can also be informed by today's debate.

Through our new agenda on place making—through design, planning, construction, architecture, regeneration and development—we want to create places with which people can identify and which succeed in bringing together activities and services for people to fulfil their potential in business and in society.

The story of Scotland's places is, of course, a fascinating one. The formation of many of our cities, towns and villages has been rooted in developments of trade and commerce.

The idea of planning new settlements in Scotland goes back as far as the 12th century and the burghs of David I, when the notion of planning for development, commerce and governance took root. More than 30 Scottish burghs came into being as a result, such as Dumfries, Kinghorn and Montrose.

The architecture of Edinburgh's new town reflected the values of the enlightenment, and the elegance of squares and crescents based on classical precedents was introduced to other Scottish cities.

The growth of Glasgow in the 19th century was fuelled by its place at the heart of the industrial revolution. Its Victorian built legacy is testament to its economic prowess.

In the 20th century, the desire for social change introduced a modernising agenda and saw the creation of new towns and comprehensive redevelopment. We also saw Scottish architects and planners take up the challenge of Sir Patrick Geddes to conserve and celebrate our historic cities within the context of an emerging focus on regeneration and communities.

As we can see from those very short historical perspectives, the making and remaking of places must respond to change in creative ways. We must also take account of issues of climate change and resource usage in the 21st century.

On a recent visit to Stirling to attend the Architecture and Design Scotland skills symposium, I was struck by the remarkable heritage and setting of the city, which lies at the heart of Scotland. A key challenge for Stirling now is how it can create a future that takes the wonderful heritage at the heart of the city and builds on it to create a more vibrant and successful city centre. ADS facilitated a three-day event with professionals, politicians and communities working collaboratively to express a vision of what is desired and how to achieve it. We need to see more such collaborative working taking place so that we can share our skills, vision and best practice about architecture and place making.

We cannot afford to be wasteful with our existing building stock or overlook opportunities within it. We know that we have fewer resources available to us, so we need to be smarter about reusing existing buildings. A careful combination of heritage and development often provides a catalyst for success when we aim to create thriving places that bring together business, housing and recreation with opportunities to socialise in public places.

There are strong social, cultural and economic arguments for adaptation and reuse of buildings. Retaining traditional buildings, neighbourhoods and landscapes can conserve valuable resources, contribute to healthy communities and help to define and protect our national identity and retain our sense of place. As the historic towns forum has noted, there is a strong

“relationship between the quality of the built environment (old and new) and an area’s ability to attract investment.”

Demolition is inherently expensive. Construction waste—120 million tonnes annually—is estimated to make up one third of all landfill waste in the UK. Restoration is a sustainable option, as it tends to use fewer resources but provides more employment. New construction is seen as 50:50 labour and materials; restoration and renovation can be as much as 75 per cent labour. So, for every pound spent we might get twice as much local employment and use around half the resources.

Neil Findlay: The cabinet secretary has just talked about labour. In her motion she recognises that creating high-quality buildings and places requires skilled construction workers. Is she aware that the eight major electrical companies in Scotland are seeking to withdraw from national

agreements, which would deskill the industry and cut wages by 35 per cent? Will she meet me and a deputation from Unite the union to discuss that situation, because it is a critical issue for the construction industry in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: The construction industry is important to Scotland. That is one of the reasons why we as a Government brought forward capital investment, and it is why this year and over the spending review period we are investing £11 billion in capital.

On the member’s invitation to meet Unite, he might want to speak to some of my back-bench colleagues who tried to have such a meeting yesterday but were, I think, somewhat thwarted.

I am happy to correspond with the member. Fergus Ewing has responded to a letter that I wrote to him on behalf of my constituents, who are raising concerns that are similar to those that the member raises. I am sure that Fergus Ewing will engage on that issue.

Adaptation also supports our low-carbon economy targets, as the City of Edinburgh Council’s successful pilot of slim-section double-glazing has proven.

Areas that have developed incrementally over time often support a mixed business use much better than areas that have been comprehensively redeveloped within single-use zones.

Refurbishment of older buildings, especially those of heritage value, usually acts as a catalyst for wider regeneration, such as in the merchant city in Glasgow and in traditional manufacturing areas such as Clydebank.

Reusing and adapting older buildings also helps to foster traditional building skills. We want to establish a world-leading system of traditional skills training that meets the needs of a modern, innovative and competitive construction sector. I launched the Scottish Government’s traditional building skills strategy earlier this year and announced a national conservation centre in Stirling as the focus for raising standards in the traditional building sector. Yesterday I visited phase 1 of the project, at the fantastic new Forth Valley College campus in Stirling, where a new Historic Scotland stonemasonry training facility is being created. It will open next summer and will be the best in the UK. Our investment in the national conservation centre, together with Historic Scotland’s commitment to recruit an additional 30 apprentices over the next three years, will help to sustain and develop the traditional building skills that are needed to secure the future of Scotland’s traditional buildings and support the wider economy.

The value of regeneration, renovation and reuse also has an economic impact for the construction, architecture and design sectors. The Government believes that the 20 per cent VAT on works to existing dwellings acts as clear disincentive to reusing existing buildings. That is why we are calling again on the UK Government to reduce VAT to 5 per cent for renovations, repairs and home improvements. A VAT cut would produce a stimulus for the construction sector, which would support growth and make it more attractive for people and communities to invest in homes and neighbourhoods across the country. Our request has huge backing in the country, and the UK Government should respond to it.

Heritage and new design are often perceived to be in conflict, but one of the great strengths of Scottish architecture over recent years has been its ability to respond well to existing settings. We continue to support the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland Andrew Doolan award. There have been a number of winning projects, such as Dance Base in the Grassmarket, the Pier arts centre in Orkney and last year's winner, Shettleston Housing Association, that demonstrate great care as well as innovation in fitting with their surroundings. Our recent publication "New Design in Historic Settings" highlights a number of case studies that promote an enlightened approach. Whether new or old, well-designed places and buildings should be seen as an investment that adds value.

The importance of walkable, connected streets and neighbourhoods is at the heart of our policies on the built environment. In our policy "Designing Streets", which we published last year, we encourage an approach that places great emphasis on responding to context in innovative and sensitive ways. We want to ensure that street design derives from an intelligent response to location, rather than the rigorous application of standards regardless of circumstances.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The other year, I was involved in a very successful charrette in Aberdeen, which was backed by the Scottish Government and which many people complimented. Does the cabinet secretary see charrettes playing a bigger part in helping to plan new and existing streetscapes? I think that a charrette is an extremely worthwhile exercise.

Fiona Hyslop: Absolutely. The Scottish sustainable communities initiative was launched three years ago with the idea of taking forward the issues associated with the charrette programme, working across Scotland to support new ideas on sustainable development. I attended the one at Lochgelly and I certainly support the idea of involving all the professionals, but, more important, having the community at the heart of

the exercise—a point that is reflected in Labour's amendment. I know that my colleague Aileen Campbell, who will wind up the debate for the Government, will want to address those issues. The idea of engaging communities in such a worthwhile way is a very exciting proposition and I am glad to have Kevin Stewart's support.

The Scottish Government was involved, along with Highland Council and others, in the promotion of Scotland's first national housing expo in Inverness from its inception. That was a fantastic opportunity to bring the best architects together in the design of innovative, sustainable housing, showcasing the quality of our architecture and design. It attracted 33,000 visitors—including me—from all parts of Scotland, the rest of the United Kingdom and abroad, and strongly stimulated public debate about design, sustainability and place making.

Within our new economic strategy, we recognise that capital investment is the key to economic recovery and we are prioritising our capital spend in order to maximise the impact on jobs and the economy. Our focus on infrastructure, development and place will harness the strength and quality of Scotland's cities, towns and rural areas. Through our policies on architecture, planning, heritage and street design, we aim to see a new culture that respects, protects and enhances the unique natural and built environment of our country and contributes to a more sustainable future.

The focus of today's debate will be on the importance of architecture and place making to Scotland's economy, but I close by stressing that the three key factors in place making—the economic, social and environmental concerns—are inextricably linked. Truly sustainable places are those that are successful economically because they provide a quality environment and a quality of life that attracts business, residents and visitors. Scotland's economic success tomorrow is closely linked to the quality of places that we create today.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of high-quality buildings and places and the vital contribution that they make to Scotland's economy as well as its cultural identity; acknowledges the importance of sharing skills, vision and practice in design and placemaking and the need to address the effects of climate change, engage communities and develop Scotland's skills base; recognises this, and the previous, administration's development of architecture, planning and design policies; acknowledges the economic benefit of reusing existing buildings, and calls on the UK Government to reduce VAT for renovations, repairs and home improvements to 5%, which would act as a significant stimulus to the building industry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a bit of spare time in the debate, so we can be generous until the time is used up. Therefore, we would welcome interventions.

15:10

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate, which is on an issue that is always topical and never irrelevant. However, I have a cautionary word to say. Casting my mind back to a previous session of Parliament, I remember a debate on architecture that was scheduled and that I was very much looking forward to leading but which, unfortunately, had to be postponed for some time because, two hours prior to it, one of the roof beams in the chamber came loose.

As I was growing up in Glasgow in the 1960s and 1970s, it was impossible not to be aware of the widespread change that was going on around me. Whole communities were moving from overcrowded and often insanitary tenemental flats to entirely new communities. Some of them, which were designated “the Glasgow overspill”, were outwith the city in new towns such as Cumbernauld and East Kilbride; Drumchapel, Easterhouse, Castlemilk and Pollok were located on sites on the periphery of the city; and a third group, mainly comprising multistorey flats, were built in existing communities.

Many of those new communities thrived, while others have become more successful in the longer term after they were revitalised and sometimes reduced in scale. Unfortunately, some of them failed, such as the multistorey flats in Red Road, where I lived for most of my childhood, or developments in the Gorbals. Although the reasons for that failure are complex, the blame for much of it can be laid at the door of those who planned and designed homes without thinking about the facilities that were needed to sustain them. It is sobering to think that some of those developments were, at the time, lauded internationally and that they won prestigious awards for their architects.

The irony is that those communities were designed with the very best of intentions: to address a real social need and to provide good housing with decent-sized rooms and a bathroom and kitchen for every family. However, in the drive to do that, the idea of the place—or the community, as I prefer to call it—was overlooked. As a child, I sensed only the enthusiasm that families brought with them to the new homes. However, even then, I was aware that my mum had much further to go to shop, that my school was overcrowded with portakabins in the playground, that the bus was often too busy to stop and that the two lifts in my building, each of

which held only eight people, simply could not cope with the needs of a building that more than 400 people called home. That was no joke if you lived on the 30th floor.

In nearby Springburn, the situation was perhaps even worse, as communities were split to accommodate roads or, perhaps more accurately, our dependence on cars. A vibrant shopping and social district was changed for ever and much of its character was lost, which many people regret to this day.

The motion talks about

“the importance of sharing skills, vision and practice in design and placemaking”.

I heartily agree with that sentiment, but we must go one better and learn the lessons from the developments of the 1960s and 1970s, good and bad. We need to build on the models of successful regeneration in recent years, always ensuring that local people are at the heart of decisions about regeneration and planning in their communities. Similarly, we should remember that the thing that Glasgow got spectacularly correct was recognising, before it was too late, that people like living in traditional tenements and communities, which led to the halting of the wholesale demolition that had been planned. Many Victorian tenements in Glasgow and other cities were saved and adapted rather than demolished, which will allow them to serve the housing needs of those cities for many more generations to come.

However, good housing alone does not tie us to the areas that we live in. It is the character of the locality that does that, and it is the distinctive nature of the architecture and the shared sense of community and history that help us to have that feeling of place and the comfort of the familiar.

Our older buildings are invested with materials and energy as well as history, and we need to be more creative about reusing them as well as preserving them. I congratulate Maryhill Housing Association in my constituency on its innovative project to convert the very old Maryhill primary school building into very modern homes.

Our architectural heritage is, of course, important to our tourism. When people think of Scotland, they often think of Edinburgh castle, Stirling castle, the Glasgow School of Art or one of the many other Rennie Mackintosh buildings that our country has to its credit. Therefore, I very much welcome the Scottish Government's investment in traditional building skills, which builds on the good work that Historic Scotland and its partners have done. However, it is important that we do not lose the expertise and experience of conservation and archaeological staff in local authorities, or the experience of the staff at Historic Scotland. I note with deep concern the 30

per cent decrease in funding to Historic Scotland over the next three years.

Fiona Hyslop: I certainly agree with the member's sentiments, and I reassure her that the Government's policy of no compulsory redundancies extends to Historic Scotland. I very much value the staff that she has mentioned.

Patricia Ferguson: I am grateful for that reassurance, and I hope that the staff at Historic Scotland are reassured, too.

Like the Scottish Government, we believe that a change to the VAT system would benefit the economy, and we have been saying so for some time. It is the case that, in times of recession, people are more inclined to extend or improve their homes rather than move to a bigger one. We should do everything that we can to encourage such decisions, but we need to ensure that the standard of our buildings—public and private, historic and modern—is maintained, and a change in the VAT rate on renovations would be an effective way of ensuring that our buildings remain in good condition, while preserving jobs in the construction industry and helping architects to remain in practice and in jobs.

We must also think to the future and recognise the need to address climate change in our building methods, as the Government's motion suggests. I recently visited the Glasgow house, which is a partnership between City Building, Glasgow Housing Association, PRP Architects and Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries. Those organisations have come together to create model homes that are energy efficient and built from materials that are recycled or come from sustainable sources. They are insulated to an extremely high standard, their windows are orientated to capture the sun, and the heating system is efficient and easy to use. Overall, they are houses that are easy to build and which cost approximately £100 a year to heat. Such houses must be the way forward, and we should congratulate the partnership on its innovative approach to housing, which I hope the Government will recognise and promote.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell): I have visited the Glasgow house as well, and I concur with many of the points that the member makes. The buildings are attractive not just because of their carbon-reducing nature and energy efficiency, but because they are well designed and well decorated inside.

Patricia Ferguson: That is absolutely right. In a sense, the minister's comments are central to my point that it is not just a case of creating good housing; good housing must be somewhere where

people want to live and will continue to want to live in the future.

If, as I suggested earlier, communities are about more than just good housing—I think that they are—we must also consider the environment that people live in. In our amendment, we make the point that too often in our communities we see land being left fallow and becoming an eyesore after demolition. It often becomes a place where antisocial behaviour and fly-tipping prevail.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

Does the member accept that one of the problems in Glasgow has been that more and more developments have been crammed into every little space in the west end? If we restricted development in the west end, that might help brownfield sites in other parts of the city.

Patricia Ferguson: The member has a point, but the issue goes wider than those sites in the west end, as I will come on to explain—if he will bear with me.

At the same time as those brownfield sites are becoming eyesores and places where antisocial behaviour prevails, the green belt is being eroded by new developers. I urge the Scottish Government to do everything in its power to encourage the use of such brownfield sites and to actively prioritise their development where possible.

At a time of reduced spending on housing and construction more generally, I recognise that many of those areas are, in effect, stalled spaces. A small amount of investment to carry out minimal landscaping and maintenance until a use is found for the land can make a huge impact on an area and help local communities to feel safer. It might even encourage developers to come in over the longer term.

I commend Glasgow City Council for its initiative, which provides small grants to help local communities turn such land into cycle tracks, community areas for growing or wildflower meadows.

We need all levels of Government to address the issues that have been raised in this debate, because they all have responsibilities. We produce excellent architects and skilled tradespeople, and we are a country with fantastic natural assets. However, if we cannot employ those architects, and if we downskill our tradespeople—as some companies are currently trying to do—and fail to create the opportunities for them to use their skills, we will all be the poorer for it.

I move amendment S4M-01287.2, to insert at end:

“; notes that prioritising the use of brown field sites, in addition to the renovation of existing buildings, would both

protect the greenbelt and enhance local communities, and considers that local communities should be an integral part of any regeneration of their local environment or facilities."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will take the fact that Patricia Ferguson was able to complete her speech today as a good omen for the future of the building.

15:21

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to take part in today's debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I thank those external organisations that sent briefings in advance, including Architecture and Design Scotland, the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, Planning Aid Scotland, Living Streets Scotland, Archaeology Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. All those briefings were useful and concise, and helped inform preparations for the debate.

I will make some general remarks on the subject before looking at some specific examples and issues, including some that are particularly relevant to my region of the Highlands and Islands.

The motion highlights "placemaking". That was originally planning terminology and it has now been adopted by architects and building professionals. Place making is also important to landscape architects in relation to producing public spaces and gathering points that are conducive to and appropriate for communities. Place making is site specific, and when it is done properly it can bring a focal point to a community, thereby improving the community's social fabric and wellbeing.

The Scottish Conservatives agree with the Scottish Government that the quality of the built environment has the potential to affect everyone, and that the purpose of architecture and urban design should be not only to meet our practical needs by housing ourselves and our activities, but to take account of the social and cultural values of our people and to help to improve their quality of life.

Good architecture and place making are crucial to the health of our economy, as they can make an area an appealing place to live and work in and visit. They can also attract inward investment, which underpins sustainable job creation.

Fiona Hyslop: On the economy, will the Scottish Conservatives support the call for a reduction in VAT to 5 per cent for renovations and repairs? If not, why not?

Jamie McGrigor: We will not, first of all, because that will cost £2 billion, and, secondly,

because there are probably better ways to achieve what we want to achieve.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way on that point?

Jamie McGrigor: No, I will not just at the moment.

We accept that architecture is about much more than just building design, although design that is pleasing to the eye is of great value. For example, my local town and royal burgh of Inveraray in Argyll and Bute, which is one of the first planned towns in Scotland, was designed by Robert Adam. To this day it remains virtually unchanged in appearance and produces huge pride among the inhabitants for its architectural beauty. It does of course have a magnificent castle, which was built much later, but it is the town that has the best architecture.

If we compare that with the woeful architecture in some other places, where 1960s concrete seems to instil depression and even deprivation, it is obvious that enlightened, modern housing developments can inspire optimism and be hugely beneficial. That can be helped by well-designed green spaces that allow people's imagination to flourish, meaning that we get more poets, artists and writers. I agree with John Mason on the importance of having green spaces within reach of everybody.

I am aware that the Scottish Government's spending review 2011 seeks to support Architecture and Design Scotland in championing the highest standards in architecture and place making across all sectors and advocating a better understanding of the importance and economic value of quality design in both the public and private sectors. We are sympathetic to those aims but remain of the view, as set out in our manifesto earlier this year, that there is merit in turning Architecture and Design Scotland into a self-sustaining social enterprise free from the Government. Given the pressure on public expenditure, we believe that the Scottish Government should explore such a model.

My amendment refers to the contribution of businesses to economic growth and the need to support them, and it urges the Scottish Government to initiate a review of the planning system to identify barriers that still hinder business growth—something that was also in our recent manifesto. It is a matter of real concern to us that, as Audit Scotland's recent report highlighted, the cost of submitting a planning application has risen by 40 per cent in the past six years and the cost of processing planning applications has increased by 17 per cent in real terms over the same period. Will the cabinet secretary explain those figures?

Aileen Campbell: I can clarify for the member's information that there will be a consultation on planning fees. If he wants to tease out some of the issues, he may like to contribute to that forthcoming debate.

Jamie McGrigor: I am grateful for that information, and I am sure that we will take up the invitation one way or another.

The call for the reduction in VAT on repairs and home improvements has been raised already. I recognise the potential boost that that would provide, but it has to be balanced against the current fiscal position of the UK Government and the anticipated cost of £2.2 billion in year 1 alone. I have no doubt that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement at the end of the month will take into account all the issues and will seek to help businesses and families wherever possible to get over the appalling mess left by the last Labour Government.

The office of the Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Business and Government Strategy circulated web links for this debate, and I was pleased to see highlighted two examples of good practice in rural design initiatives in my region of the Highlands and Islands.

The Outer Hebrides kit-house study has seen architects work with Scotframe Timber Engineering kit-house suppliers and manufacturers, the Scottish Government and Western Isles Council to design an appropriate kit-house that is both economically competitive and architecturally sensitive to the special Hebridean landscape.

On Orkney, the Scottish Government invited Dualchas Building Design to work with local planners, roads engineers and councillors to take a fresh approach to the development of eight houses in the village of Birsay, which is the ancient capital of Orkney and which contains the nationally important Earl's palace. New proposals emerged following substantial community engagement that reduced infrastructure costs and achieved a higher number of houses on the site with better public amenity space—all great improvements. There are clearly lessons that can be applied to other housing developments in rural communities with particular historic importance.

In conclusion, today's debate is welcome and timely.

I move amendment S4M-01287.1, to leave out from "and calls on" to end and insert:

"; recognises the vital contribution of businesses, large and small, to economic growth and the need to support them, and urges the Scottish Government to initiate a review of the planning system with a view to identifying the barriers that still exist in the system."

15:29

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I first declare an interest as an honorary fellow of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland.

The importance of architecture and place making to the economy of Scotland goes without saying, but it does not stand in isolation. That is why I am so pleased that the Government's motion talks about cultural identity and that the cabinet secretary put so much emphasis on the social, environmental and economic success of cities, towns and rural communities and how architecture contributes to that.

In that regard, she also mentioned the Doolan award, which is in memory of the late Andrew Doolan, who will be celebrated in this Parliament on 17 November. I am delighted to be hosting that event. The Scottish Parliament building won the award in 2005, so it is fitting that it is being presented again in what is arguably its natural home. Of course, the Government supports that award, which indicates that it regards architecture as a major contributor to Scotland's economy and the quality of life of Scotland's citizens.

Over the centuries, Scotland has excelled in many disciplines, such as engineering, medicine and education, and of course in many art forms. Among those, I would say that architecture and literature have profoundly shaped our perception of the world, our international profile and, of course, our national identity. The impact of the enlightenment on the physical form of Edinburgh is well known. The contrast between the rationally planned, bright, wide streets and formal gardens of the new town and the dark, narrow passageways of the old town is illustrative of changing ways of thinking—architecture is embedded.

We cannot talk about Edinburgh without talking about Glasgow. Charles Rennie Mackintosh is celebrated worldwide for his unique contribution to architecture. His buildings and his style continue to influence architects from New York to Tokyo, and his finest achievement—the Glasgow School of Art building—still operates, not as a museum but as a fascinating and vibrant art school.

The development of new, distinctive places is something about which I feel very strongly. We need to look ever more closely at the questions of identity and our built environment, and the creation of places of real character. How do we work towards achieving that? I would like to see a public that has greater expertise and skill in contributing to the shaping of its built environment. An interest in the built environment and a concern for architecture are not solely the preserve of a privileged few. My colleague Kevin Stewart mentioned the charrettes in that regard, and

although that may well be a start and an idea to consider, I am not convinced that it is the answer to getting the public to make a real contribution.

Everyone in Scotland has a legitimate interest in the quality of our built environments and how they are formed. Everyone is entitled to live and work in a built environment that they can enjoy. From my own experience in the housing association sector, I know how vital the input of informed users can be in creating places that work technically and in which communities can thrive. I have seen it in action; it can be done, with some forethought.

If we wish to drive up the quality of architecture, we need to provide a favourable climate in which it can flourish. A favourable climate is one in which the quality of architecture is widely valued. In order to get that climate, we must promote, through education and encouraging informed discussion, a greater understanding of the value and benefits of good architecture. We should be innovative when given the opportunity to create new places and innovative in protecting the rich architectural legacy that we have inherited. That is, we should be innovative in terms of the architectural product and in enabling that to flourish.

In that regard, I am glad that our Government has the policy of promoting community asset transfer of precious old buildings. In that context, I refer to Hunter house in East Kilbride. A community asset transfer of such a building could stimulate community involvement in a sense of place, history and culture. That is particularly important in new town communities such as East Kilbride, where we have a couple of bits of really good modern architecture, such as the Dollan baths and St Bride's church, which was a Gillespie, Kidd and Coia design. However, we also have historic architecture that should be cherished.

Reducing VAT for renovation, repairs and home improvements would be an innovative support for such initiatives and many others. It is innovative to promote good environmental practice. It is also innovative to ensure that procurement in Scotland is as efficient as possible and that costs are reduced as far as possible so that small and medium-sized businesses in Scotland are not disadvantaged, whether they are architectural practices or businesses in the construction sector.

The cultural strength of our nation is fundamental to our sense of national identity. The place that is in our minds, our ideals, our history, our aspirations and our vision of the country is implicitly linked with the physical place.

Few people have conveyed that better in the Scottish context than our own Alasdair Gray did. In his novel "Lanark", the stunning visual artist and great writer has a character describe Glasgow as

a magnificent city that we hardly ever notice, because nobody imagines living there. He contrasts Glasgow with Florence, Paris, London and New York—cities where, according to Gray,

"Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films."

We should have such a confident sense of place here in Scotland and show it to the rest of the world. We have artists, designers, engineers, conservationists and people with other skills—working here at home and internationally—who are capable of doing that. We should support them and move forward with a recognition of the importance of place making to the wellbeing of Scotland.

15:35

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston)
(Lab): I am pleased to speak in this important debate. Architecture and place making are important not just to the economy but to our people's wellbeing and quality of life. The cabinet secretary made that point well.

My constituency, Coatbridge and Chryston, has had excellent development during the past decade, which has contributed to the local economy and improved people's health and wellbeing. A major example is the regeneration of Coatbridge town centre. North Lanarkshire Council must be given credit for its hard work to improve the town.

In particular, the new £18 million Buchanan centre development in Coatbridge has transformed a derelict site on the main street into a state-of-the-art community facility, which was delivered in partnership with the council and NHS Lanarkshire. The centre is designed to be a one-stop shop, which will increase footfall in the town centre and in turn drive growth in the local economy. Its success so far is a testament to what can be achieved through good planning and design. Architecture is a matter of taste, of course. I like the building, which is bright and airy inside and has a modern, simplistic style, which blends well with the traditional buildings around it.

Also in Coatbridge, millions of pounds have been invested in new schools, leisure facilities, Coatbridge College and our environment. Indeed, Coatbridge's rise from the ashes of its industrial past should be celebrated. It is sad that some elements among professionals and the media choose to denigrate our town. In 2007, Coatbridge received a carbuncle award and was outrageously and wrongly described by the award's organisers as Scotland's "most dismal" town.

Such so-called architectural awards do nothing to help to promote architecture and place making

in Scotland's towns and cities. Instead, self-appointed judges give negative opinions, with no care for the consequences for local economies or the wellbeing of communities.

The carbuncle judges should get out of their ivory towers and consider the harm that they do with their cynical and nasty so-called awards, which are simply a patronising publicity stunt aimed at selling architecture magazines. It is astonishing that the mainstream press helps such people by widely reporting their judgments. In particular, the plook on the plinth award is an insulting cheap shot at towns that are nominated and can do great damage in relation to future investment and people's view of their environment.

Coatbridge, like many towns in Scotland, is far from the dismal place that the posh promoters of the carbuncle award wanted to portray. Yes, we have challenges, and I would like measures to be adopted that improve the take-up of empty shops, to ensure that they do not lie empty. However, people in post-industrial towns like Coatbridge have worked hard to improve their surroundings. Their health and wellbeing has suffered enough as a result of their industrial past, and they deserve positive support and encouragement for their achievements in improving their environment.

I was born and brought up in Coatbridge and I live there with my family. I am passionate about the facilities that our town has to offer to visitors, locals and people who are pursuing new business opportunities. Of course I want further improvements, but we have good facilities and friendly people. We have fantastic attractions, such as the museum of Scottish industrial life at Summerlee and the Time Capsule, both of which have enjoyed significant investment and modernisation during the past few years, and both of which have reused old buildings.

This year, Coatbridge was awarded a bronze prize in the best small city category of the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in bloom awards. The judges were particularly impressed by the way in which the town's industrial heritage is fused with our more modern buildings. Much of the credit for that positive award goes to volunteers in our communities who were fully involved with projects to improve their town and were assisted by council staff.

The judges were full of praise for the Bank Street canal basin, which has been another beneficiary of investment by the council and British Waterways, representatives of which met me a few years ago to discuss improvements in the town centre. That particular project dramatically transformed the former derelict canal site into a vibrant public arts space, and it is now used for concerts, among other things, and as a gathering place for our young people.

The site sits below our distinctive railway bridges, which are adjacent to a road bridge and the pedestrian bridge over the canal. That gathering of bridges is quite unique, and should be more widely celebrated as architecturally significant. After many years of complaints by me and my colleagues Tom Clarke MP and Councillor Maginnis, the eyesore of peeling paint and rust on the bridges was addressed when Network Rail finally repainted them. They now form an excellent backdrop to a great public space leading up to Coatbridge fountain. That project is a great testament to what can be achieved using ambition and foresight. It combines the best of our industrial past with our modern, forward-thinking town and it demonstrates perfectly the importance that place making can have in driving economic growth. Such projects also show what can be achieved through good planning, architecture and design policies, along with strategic investment and engagement with our communities.

With regard to what Labour's amendment says about greenbelt land, I want to highlight the plight of people in the northern corridor part of my constituency who are fighting an appeal by house builders to develop 39 greenbelt sites, which, for good reason, North Lanarkshire Council did not include in the local plan. My constituents are concerned that their views are not being taken into account, which would be a clear example of non-engagement with communities. They also want me to point out that they feel that this would be an attack on democracy if it is allowed to go ahead despite the massive opposition by local people.

I have facilitated a lobby of the Parliament by representatives on 1 December, and I have written to request that a member of the Scottish Government—not necessarily the Minister for Local Government and Planning—meet the group to listen to people's concerns. I hope that that request will be accepted.

15:42

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the subject matter of this debate. Architecture is the most public of our arts. It cannot be ignored. It affects the way in which we live, how we feel and our sense of identity. We can escape from Picasso if we want. We can escape from Da Vinci—perhaps even from his code. We can even escape from the Glasgow boys. However, we cannot escape from our architecture and our built environment. We cannot ignore it.

We also cannot easily escape from some of the mistakes of the past—the dismal architectural and

planning mistakes. I judge policies by their outcomes and I am forced to reflect that in the latter half of the 20th century, after the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, we did not build all that much that we can be proud of or that future generations will admire as the listed buildings of tomorrow, and our planning system did not prevent the intensification of many of our social problems or the loss of community.

Those failures are symptomatic of a state in decline—the UK state—and the withering of the union and its associated creative energy. Architecture mirrors our triumphs and our failures. It can lift us up or it can drag us down. Like any art, it also expresses our deepest feelings, our confidence and our sense of wellbeing.

As an optimist, however, I see signs of hope in Scotland in this early part of the 21st century. This building, this Parliament, is a metaphor for that hope and for a rediscovery of our Scottish identity. As a newcomer, I find that this building is growing on me. It seems to reunite the old Scotland with the new. Queensberry house exemplifies respect for the past; the new part of the building exemplifies our newly awakened confidence and our internationalism. It is an interesting and complex building, and each part of it is interesting and complex just as each part of Scotland should be. Each part of it is different but linked by a common theme, just as Scotland has its regional variations and vernaculars that are linked by our national identity.

However, Scotland needs more than just one fine house. I have been encouraged, therefore, to see good examples of architecture springing up in the past few years. I am encouraged to see movements towards place making and masterplanning, which offer a means of reconnecting people with place—because if buildings are important, people are even more important. Architecture and planning must be about people and must be centred on people. We should talk about building not houses, but homes, and we should talk about building not just homes, but communities. Our design talents should not be confined to the blank pages of new communities and new homes but be used to alter and improve our existing communities and homes. Each of them is special or capable of being so; each of them deserves a quality of approach and treatment; and each of them deserves care and craftsmanship.

Every stage of the process needs to be enshrined in quality, from initial design right through to final commissioning. Each participant in the process needs to be enthused with the vision that we are together building a new Scotland. Of course, it will cost in labour, effort and the care that we bring to bear, and it will cost money to

build a new Scotland that is truly fit for the 21st century. However, in that great labour we will rediscover our confidence, our capability and our creativity. Perhaps that is why the Westminster Government is so reluctant to assist us and why it refuses to contemplate reducing VAT on repairs and improvements to help Scotland's hard-pressed construction industry. Perhaps that is also why it refuses to contemplate adequate borrowing powers for Scotland so that we can properly fund that work, and perhaps that is why it refuses to devolve corporation tax so that Scotland's construction sector can become more competitive. Perhaps the Westminster Government is too feart because it knows that, in that great endeavour of building this new Scotland, our growing national pride will necessarily propel us towards independence.

In closing, I pay tribute to my fellow Highlands and Islands regional member, Jamie McGrigor, who seems to be the only member from the Tories and the Lib Dems who is not too feart at least to come to the chamber and stand up for Scotland's built environment. However, I have some sympathy for him in trying to defend the indefensible.

15:49

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I declare a small interest as the tenant of a listed building although, as I am the member for Edinburgh Central, it is perhaps no surprise that my constituency office is in an historic and conservation area. Edinburgh is one of a kind. We already have a sense of place that municipalities the world over can only dream of. Along with the festival, that atmosphere and ambience is the cornerstone of our international tourism and business appeal, and it is one of the reasons why so many people fall in love with the city and move here—I include myself among them.

The Scottish Government's current set of national outcomes recognises and cherishes that strength for Edinburgh and for all of Scotland:

"We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations".

As a national outcome, it is well said and well timed. It cannot be repeated often enough. The vagaries of architectural fashion have shown that they can, in months, effortlessly destroy heritage that has taken centuries to develop. In Edinburgh, we have the vandalism that is the St James centre, the narrow escape from the Caltongate development, and the Missoni hotel, which is better than the old Lothian Regional Council headquarters, but then a bandage is better than an open wound. The Parliament's design is novel and distinctive inside, but it is hardly in keeping with the buildings around it. Some of us still carry

a torch for the Royal high school. Glass and concrete can be found anywhere.

I have heard a lot of concerns about clone towns, but that usually refers only to the shops, which are identical on every high street. Edinburgh has that too. In the Royal Mile, heritage memorabilia—the euphemism for what everyone else calls tartan tat—continues to expand in the face of valiant and welcome, if unfortunately limited city council action. My understanding from the Scottish Parliament information centre is that councils might already have further powers to restrict the more garish displays but they are not willing to put it to the test. I would welcome clearer guidance on that, perhaps from the minister in due course.

Local authorities have to guard against the clone town effect happening to our urban spaces. Residents and visitors alike want to look around them and know that they are in Edinburgh, a world heritage site, not some soulless identikit North Atlantic modernist dystopia that is reminiscent of one of those 1960s campus universities that are only ever used as sets for filming low-budget sci-fi.

No one is proposing to bulldoze wholesale the old and new towns of Edinburgh, but over the decades there have been numerous earnest applications, each of which would chip or have chipped away at the atmosphere. Poor maintenance makes historic buildings more vulnerable to an unsympathetic developer. The Odeon on South Clerk Street springs to mind. It is therefore imperative that the VAT hike's blockage to proper maintenance be swept away.

Like boiling a frog, gradual erosion can go unnoticed until it is too late and history has become a hodge-podge. At least the residents of the new town have a better record at making their voices heard than those in the old town, although sadly it was not enough to defend Princes Street from the fashions of the 1960s and the out-of-town obsessions of the 1970s and onwards.

Historic Scotland's guidance in "New Design in Historic Settings" provides a welcome steer. Historic Scotland singles out the Scottish poetry library as a case study of sympathetic development, but the poetry library is helped by scale. Too often, the developer's objective, even today when the 1960s should just be a memory, is the great new landmark building that will make their name. It is not just a 1960s problem. I look at many of the new builds and wonder what they will look like in 30 or 40 years' time. We must build with the long term in mind.

The sentiment of the residents in the last planning meeting that I attended in the old town was, "Heaven protect us from landmark buildings." Residents have long memories and perspectives.

Above all, they want to be listened to when they talk about the future of their own communities. Whether it was developers' threats to the buildings that they grew up with or the impacts of landlordism when the community was once a year-round community, the worries that they expressed are real. There is an unfortunate legacy of planning as something that is done to people rather than with them, especially in lower income areas. If I make one plea for the new architecture, it is that it should pay heed to the importance of communities' input, whether through charrettes or other forms of involvement.

Human nature leads us to overlook the familiar, and we in Scotland have turned underrating ourselves into an art form. However, what is at stake here is precious. The sense of place in Edinburgh is valuable for not just its economic contribution, but the simple reason that it is irreplaceable. The national outcome cannot be repeated enough because it stresses that we must protect and enhance our built environment for future generations.

Today, the old and new towns can stand proudly alongside Amsterdam's Grachtengordel, Salzburg's Altstadt and many of the other beautiful city centres across Europe that are both preserved and thriving. The city of Edinburgh is not a museum, but if it becomes nothing more than an architectural testing ground, it will not continue to be a vibrant community that offers so much for the entire nation.

15:55

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I am really enjoying this afternoon's debate and hearing about all the different aspects of the subject with which colleagues are regaling us. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government accepts the amendment lodged by the Scottish Labour Party.

My constituency office is in the ancient royal burgh of Inverkeithing and I believe that our previous Parliament had a meeting there at one stage, so I live and work in an area with a great wealth of history and heritage. I guess I am among the most privileged members of the Scottish Parliament in that I am very fortunate to have an iconic rail bridge and the Forth road bridge in my constituency, and we will soon have the new Forth replacement bridge. The past and the future have been and will continue to be very important to us in my area and in all of Scotland.

Some say that I represent Scotland's golden mile, stretching from those bridges to the former naval dockyard area at Rosyth, where we now have Babcock and the supercarrier work, which is growing day by day. I have massive land areas from the brownfield sites at Rosyth, where naval

activities once took place, to the legacy in Cardenden, in the northern part of my constituency, of what was once open-cast coal mining. Before the strict planning policies there was no remediation for such work and today we still have the scars of past industry. That underlines for every one of us how important planning policy and legislation are so that we ensure that when developers take from our land there is remediation for the people. I have learned nothing that is more important to my people than that fact because farmers and landowners of all different sorts have had to put right what history has left for them.

We have received briefing notes from a variety of sources for today's debate and some points particularly caught my eye for reasons that I shall go on to explain. The Royal Town Planning Institute speaks of providing

"the right framework for planning at national, regional, local and community levels to help deliver sustainable change through ... building on the plan-led system through producing visionary strategic and local development plans, as well as pro-active supplementary planning guidance, to provide the framework for delivering sustainable change."

That goes on in many local authorities and we are very lucky to have such talented planning officials and architects in our communities. The RTPI also asks us to engage effectively with our communities and we have heard about that today. I agree with what Marco Biagi said: it is vital that we do that through charrettes and other means, but it is critical, cabinet secretary, to follow through after the charrettes. The cabinet secretary is right about what happened in Lochgelly, and it was welcomed, but it raised expectations and people have not followed through. Will she take that up with the appropriate people? As she will know, Fife Council is controlled by a Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrat coalition. I hope that once expectations have been raised, people are not just left with those expectations without the delivery of any results.

Fiona Hyslop: I am happy to get back to the member about the Lochgelly experience. We must recognise that times are challenging for developers. When the market recovers across the country we must have construction plans ready, but we need to be aware of the economic circumstances.

Helen Eadie: I accept that point to a degree, but some of what we have seen has not helped. Elaine Smith commented on awards that can blight localities. Lochgelly was also given an award in times gone by that was not very helpful, and Christopher Harvie likened Kirkcaldy to the back end of an elephant. Such comments are simply not helpful to communities.

Setting all that aside, we must work with the RTPI and other such people. That is very important. In Rosyth—this brings me to an important point—the community has come together to create a future plan for the Rosyth waterfront, an area that, I hasten to add, has not been accessible to them for more than a century. The community has worked with churches, community councils, trade unionists and developers to create a visionary plan that will afford leisure and recreational activities at the waterfront, and create opportunities for shops, offices and industries to sit alongside residential developments. Yes, half a billion pounds' worth of development can happen. We talk about hard times, but there are developers who say that they have the money, and more developers are going to the town next week with their proposals, so there will be competing developers. I ask the cabinet secretary to go away and ask Fife Council why it is standing in the way of allowing that development. It points to the future and talks about wanting a massive port area, but let us take the world as it is.

Instead of hoping for something different in the future, let us take the reality and the opportunities that we have now, so that we can deliver to people who are desperate for the jobs and homes that colleagues have rightly talked about. As the RTPI has said:

"Planning is all about creating great places for people."

Politicians should support rather than stand in the way of local people and their vision for their community.

Finally, I want to make an appeal. I declare a registered interest. I have a love for Bulgaria and an involvement with it, Hungary, Romania and eastern Europe as a whole. I hope that many of our practitioners in architecture, planning and other areas will share knowledge and experience with eastern Europeans and that we can learn from them. Believe it or not, some places in eastern Europe have wonderful architecture. We must take the opportunities that exist. Those places are not too far to visit. We can work with them, and create business opportunities. Many of my constituents have bought businesses in Bulgaria and elsewhere in eastern Europe. Let us support them, work with them and make new friends with the eastern Europeans. I hope that the cabinet secretary will help me with that.

16:02

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for bringing the debate to the chamber. It is one of the reasons why I think that the Scottish Parliament can do so much. For generations, this kind of debate was

never heard. Such debates were never heard in Westminster and they are never likely to be heard there. The fact that we are debating this subject, and in public, means that we start to raise our game.

Architecture has often been seen as the unrecognised art form that lags behind. Mike MacKenzie talks about it being the one art form that we live with all the time, but we have never recognised it as such. It is a bit like design generally: we do not criticise it until it is really bad. If a person has to sit for three or four hours on a badly designed chair, they will think that somebody designed it badly, but they will not think about the design when they are really comfortable and somebody has designed the chair well. As long as something is reasonably pleasing to the eye and seems to work, we are uncritical.

I was thinking about Scottish studies as Fiona Hyslop was making her opening speech. I hope that all the arts in Scotland, including architecture, will be recognised in an educational context. The Scottish Arts Council never recognised architecture. That was not in its portfolio, but Creative Scotland recognises it. Those are good moves that the Government has made. It put down the marker, and I am sure that architects must be delighted with what has happened.

I return to the topic of the debate. I agreed with much of what Patricia Ferguson said, and have written down that the generation before us cleared slum housing that was built in the 19th century, and we continue to clear slum housing that was built much more recently. There is a huge learning curve in that respect. Some of that housing was built only a couple of generations ago.

We cleared people from places where several families on one landing shared one toilet without any running water. We all know about that, and earlier generations of some members' families lived in such conditions. However, it is interesting and relevant to the debate that getting an inside lavvy and a bit more living space were not prerequisites for wellbeing, neighbourliness or a sense of place. I remember people leaving the Gorbals and going to live in Easterhouse, where they would have a dry, lit space with their own front door and where they would not share a bathroom with a bath and a lavatory. Although people were excited about that at the time, it did not work.

Those are the lessons that we must learn. We did not learn them quickly enough. Patricia Ferguson said that we discovered that we had made mistakes with high-rise living and corrected them, but we did not. In the 1950s, it was known to be a disaster, but we went on to build Easterhouse with 40,000 people—the same population as Perth.

Patricia Ferguson: I am not sure that I said what Jean Urquhart suggests that I did. I would not suggest for a minute that multistorey flats can never work. They can and do work extremely well. The problem with the multistorey flats about which I was talking was that they were built for families but were totally unsuitable for that purpose. However, they got people out of unsanitary conditions and, in that sense, they succeeded, although they caused other problems for those communities.

Multistorey flats are not always a failure. They can work well and I can take Jean Urquhart somewhere where they work particularly well, if she is interested.

Jean Urquhart: I stand by what I said. The method that we used to build post-war flats was known to have failed elsewhere. We sent 40,000 people to live in tower blocks with no other services. It did not work. We learned the lesson later on and started to correct it.

Those examples show us that we must think about what we are doing now. The importance of place making to Scotland's economy is that we move into a better place if we recognise the worth of design. Good and bad design may be in the eye of the beholder, but we must recognise design. We must recognise the fact that there are traditions of building in, for example, the Highland vernacular or the Edinburgh vernacular and we must respect them, but that should never stop new design.

We must tackle climate change. We have good examples on that. The cabinet secretary mentioned the expo that we held. That was all about finding a different way of living. Some of the designs at that expo were reputed to have an annual heating bill of between £100 and £150. We cannot afford to ignore that or to ignore new building.

The Government has a duty to try to bring together the developer, the architect and—perhaps more importantly—the master planner. We can do that for no more money. Good design need not be expensive. We must find a way of delivering energy-efficient homes to tackle climate change and fuel poverty. At the same time, we must give people good, well-designed houses where the community becomes more important and services are local.

It is not at all unlikely that we can achieve that. We have really good examples throughout Scotland—a number have been mentioned already—but we often do not know about them. The future must be sharing that information and bringing together the experts that we already have in Scotland to recognise the importance of architecture and place making to our economy.

16:09

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):

The debate has raised a number of significant points that highlight the crucial role that architecture and place making have to play in Scotland's economy and the Scottish people's wellbeing.

I echo the support of colleagues in the SNP group and the Labour group for a VAT cut for renovations and repairs. It is disappointing that that has not been replicated across the chamber. For Mr McGrigor's benefit, I will quote Brian Binley, who is the Conservative MP for Northampton South. He said:

"The Federation of Master Builders has long campaigned for a reduction in the rate of VAT on home repair, maintenance and improvement work, estimating that a five per cent cut could lead to a loss of revenue to the Government of between £102 million and £508 million, but deliver a ... stimulus to the economy of around £1.4 billion in the first year alone. Their estimates also suggest that around 34,500 new jobs in the sector (and 81,500 jobs in the wider economy) would be created by such a measure by 2019. Hardly Plan B but it could be a nudge in the right direction."

I encourage the Conservatives in Scotland to think again about their policy. Ruth Davidson has supported a different policy on computer games tax and has lobbied for what is best for Scotland. I encourage the Conservatives in Scotland to follow the rest of the Parliament and to support what is best for the Scottish economy, which is to reduce VAT on renovation and repairs.

It is vital that the architecture of a modern Scotland be visionary, bold and dynamic. I have listened to the speeches from around the chamber on how that is materialising in communities up and down Scotland.

I am sure that it will come as no surprise to members that I consider Dundee to be at the forefront of improving Scotland's architecture. The waterfront development that is progressing there is one of the most exciting projects to be under way in Scotland. The waterfront is a leading example of how projects can be sustained in the long term, be of social and economic benefit to the community in which they are built and—the important bit—be environmentally friendly from the initial construction period through to the years of use.

Construction creates a carbon footprint, which must be addressed as part of any debate on construction. To mitigate that in Dundee, the jewel in the crown of our waterfront—the Victoria and Albert at Dundee—will be constructed as sustainably as possible. The building's cladding will be made from eco-friendly compound stone, which is made from waste materials that are collected from quarries and from recycled industrial waste, such as ceramic, silica and glass

fragments. That will add to the building's sustainability.

It has been acknowledged that the architecture of individual buildings alone is only part of sustainable place making, but another aspect of the V&A at Dundee project that has captured Dundee's imagination and aspirations is the potential to create a cultural centre in our city. Kengo Kuma's design for the V&A is set to become our city's focal point. In the architectural brief, the emphasis was on creating a building that adheres to 21st century environmental and sustainability regulations, and I believe that the design has achieved that.

Kengo Kuma's design will give us not only a visually stunning building that will define the Dundee waterfront for years ahead, but a highly flexible building that is adaptable to many functions. Once the project is complete, we will have a sustainable and environmentally friendly building that creates a focal point for visitors and residents alike. The terraced and decked areas that will surround the building and their pedestrian-friendly links to other areas of the city will make for an excellent point of social interaction for Dundee and Dundonians.

The central waterfront project as a whole is expected to create at least 1,000 jobs over 10 years, to generate more than £500 million for Scotland's economy and to contribute an additional £270 million of private sector investment in the project. It has been estimated that the V&A alone will attract some 500,000 visitors in its first year and that 300,000 will visit thereafter. That demonstrates the enormous economic potential for the city.

The project has been possible only because of Government support. I thank the cabinet secretary again for her personal support to ensure that the project proceeded, despite the difficult times.

The University of Dundee, the University of Abertay Dundee, Dundee City Council and Scottish Enterprise have all worked together to create a functional and practical community in the heart of Dundee's waterfront, which has historically been separated from the rest of the city.

We have already had more than 15,000 people visiting and engaging in the initial exhibition of the plans for the V&A at Dundee and thousands more have taken part in the consultation online, making the V&A at Dundee the recognisable face of the waterfront redevelopment. That enthusiastic response to the consultation shows how engaged with the plans people are and it underlines just how important it is that place making and architecture are responsive to the needs of the population. Somebody said that architecture and

planning should be done with communities, rather than to them. That is absolutely right and it is what we have managed in Dundee—the projects are moving forward with the people of Dundee.

I will finish by picking up on some of the points raised by Living Streets, to which Jamie McGrigor referred, which sent out an excellent briefing to members prior to the debate. One of the points that it raised was that we must invest in the walking environment and ensure that when we are place making, we create spaces that enable and encourage all pedestrians to get around. I will shortly launch a consultation to take forward proposals for a member's bill that will build on the bill that Ross Finnie sponsored in the previous session and seek to prohibit obstructive parking, which can prevent pedestrians from accessing our public spaces. The debate has highlighted the importance of public spaces and I hope that my bill will help to ensure that all members of our society can access them freely.

16:16

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I am grateful to be called to speak in what has already proved to be an interesting and informative debate. I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for indicating that the Government's architecture policy statement will be informed by the debate. She might be regretting saying that now, having heard the range of opinions that have been expressed around the chamber. As Jean Urquhart said, beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder—a wide range of views have certainly been expressed today.

I draw to members' attention my entry in the register of members' interests and, in particular, to my membership of the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust.

I noticed that one of the questions that have been asked of new members in recent editions of *Holyrood* magazine has been what job they might have done if they had not decided to become a politician—or, as in my case, if they became one unexpectedly. I am kind of torn between two responses about my ideal choice of career. One answer is that I would have been in social work, but that does not really help me in this debate. So, I turn to my first choice. Given that as a small boy I had a profound Lego obsession, I would dearly have loved to have become an architect, had I the brains, patience or artistic flair to pursue that.

Buildings shape our environment, our working lives and our relaxation. The difference between good and bad buildings can have a huge effect on our quality of life and the quality of our public space. I welcome the inclusion of place making in the debate.

As a Glasgow representative, I am in so many respects a privileged person—perhaps in no respect more than in relation to our built environment. Glasgow boasts great buildings and important spaces, but our built environment reflects change and dynamism as well as landmarks that should be preserved. I thought that Patricia Ferguson made an excellent speech about her experience of life in the Red Road flats and some of the changes in the city that we have seen over the years.

It might be unpopular, but one of my favourite documents is the Bruce report—which was actually two papers—in which the corporation engineer Robert Bruce set out options for the long-term redesign of Glasgow city centre in the post-war years. The report and interesting drawings that are associated with it are well worth a look for a range of reasons. The plans to move railway stations and to open up new expressways and motorways are breathtaking, if not a little frightening, in their scale. Plans to demolish slum housing, combined with options for the demolition of George Square and the creation of new municipal buildings, speak equally of a vision for a brave new world as well as a desire to leave the past behind.

Elements of those various schemes happened—the M8 being the most obvious example. In other areas, the report continued to influence planning through to the days of Strathclyde Regional Council. Many important Glasgow streets and tenements were cleared for new super-road arteries that were never built.

Architecture and design are important and stimulating, not least because in the kind of pencil drawings that are in the Bruce report we can see glimpses of a future that never came, albeit that we might be thankful for that.

John Mason: The Glasgow transport museum, which is an iconic building, cost somewhere between £70 million and £100 million. For the same money, we could have had a simpler building and been able to replace some of our primary schools. How do we tie up having iconic buildings and suchlike with being able to spread the money around a bit more?

Drew Smith: I point out to John Mason that Glasgow also has the world's largest municipal art collection. There are choices to be made and balances to be struck. Of course we need investment in schools, but I am sure that, if the member looked at Glasgow City Council's record in its school building programme, he would be impressed by what has been achieved—although, unfortunately, things have slowed since 2007. I certainly think that there is a place for iconic buildings.

As a world city and home to thousands of people, Glasgow has, for better or worse, been influenced by the thinking of Sir Basil Spence as much as by the surviving works of George Gilbert Scott, Alexander Thomson or Charles Rennie Mackintosh, or by the outstanding Catholic churches and commercial buildings of my own favourite practice, Gillespie, Kidd and Coia, which Linda Fabiani has already mentioned. In Glasgow today, the key skills of building design and planning are taught in our colleges, universities and, of course, the Glasgow School of Art. Whether undertaken at a Park Circus architecture practice or as part of an apprenticeship with City Building helping to construct the Glasgow house, these careers provide worthwhile and rewarding work.

Buildings do not exist in isolation any more than people do. They can either make or spoil spaces; in Glasgow, we have examples of both. Living in Glasgow's unique west end, which is a mix of Victorian estates, pre-urbanisation industrial and residential buildings—particularly around the River Kelvin—the University of Glasgow's postmodern concrete towers and many new buildings and older buildings that have been given a new lease of life, I am acutely aware of the importance of planning and good design to communities where the built environment is considered precious.

However, good buildings should not be the preserve of only affluent communities. Investing in the skills that are required to make and maintain better buildings and places can benefit all Scotland. The new school and hospital building programme that was implemented in the years after 1997 has given us many fine new public buildings; however, it is probably the case that the quality of many of those buildings improved as capacity improved and more were built. Indeed, I visited one of those buildings—Hillhead primary school—just last week.

Architecture and design should be seen as a Scottish success story and I hope—indeed, I am sure—that in having this debate the cabinet secretary is signalling her intention to invest in and celebrate our skills and innovation, as well as her determination to ensure that the Scottish Government gives even greater priority to the challenge of constructing sustainable buildings and places.

Finally, I wish to associate myself with the remarks that were made by the cabinet secretary, Patricia Ferguson and others on VAT for building extensions. I was particularly impressed by Mike MacKenzie's ability to connect the issue of constitutional change with VAT relief for conservatories. It was very cleverly done.

I encourage members to support Patricia Ferguson.

16:23

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I refer members to my declaration in the register of members' interests as a North Lanarkshire councillor and member of North Lanarkshire Leisure Trust.

I am a Lanarkshire lass, born in Motherwell, and the closure of the Ravenscraig steel works brought me to the cause of Scottish independence. My overwhelming memory is of a skyline that was dominated by the gas holder and the plant's three cooling towers. Indeed, it affected my formative years so much that I believe I would prove to be an interesting study subject for gestalt theory practitioners. When I drive between Motherwell and Wishaw, I am still surprised and confused by the absence of the towers on the skyline.

It is because of the dramatic and lasting impact that our environment can have on our appreciation and enjoyment of our home towns that I believe that place making—and getting it right—is so important. As Mike MacKenzie pointed out, we cannot escape our built environment and although I mourn the loss of the steel works to the area's economy I do not mourn the loss of the view.

At more than 455 hectares, Ravenscraig is one of the biggest brownfield sites in Europe and presents North Lanarkshire Council with one of the country's greatest place-making challenges in recent history. Its size is equivalent to 13 London Canary Wharfs or 700 football pitches and it is almost twice the size of the development site for the 2012 London Olympics. It is uniquely placed to benefit from Scotland's current infrastructure and it is set at the heart of Scotland's central belt.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I agree entirely with Clare Adamson about the importance of the Ravenscraig development, but does she agree that it was disappointing that the Scottish Government reduced Ravenscraig from a development of national importance to one of regional importance?

Clare Adamson: Michael McMahon knows very well that the failure to set Ravenscraig as a development of national importance belongs to Jack McConnell, the then First Minister of Scotland and MSP for Motherwell and Wishaw. The member should direct his questions to Lord McConnell, not to the Government, which inherited the situation from the Labour Administration.

Ravenscraig could provide many local and national benefits. Its redevelopment has been a long time coming. It is estimated that Ravenscraig steel works at its height supported as many as 10,000 jobs in the Lanarkshire area, so the loss to the community is so much more than the loss of the 770 jobs at the plant's closure.

In September 2009, the doors of the new £70 million Motherwell College campus opened for the first time, marking the completion of the first major regeneration development at Ravenscraig. The college includes a five-storey state-of-the-art teaching block and has an iconic circular residential building that reflects the former Ravenscraig cooling towers.

The theme of referencing the former site has continued in the £32 million Ravenscraig regional sports facility, which was funded by the Scottish Government in conjunction with North Lanarkshire Council and Ravenscraig Ltd, and which opened its doors to the public in September 2010. It is a fabulous sporting facility that has already delivered real benefits for sport and recreation. I believe that it is a beautiful building. It is designed to resemble the coils of steel that rolled off the production line at Ravenscraig. Ravenscraig sports centre was highly commended in the community benefit category in this year's Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors awards. The new facility has green credentials, too. The designers, mindful of its carbon footprint, designed it to use as much natural daylight as possible, with north light windows in a striking serrated roof that bring natural light into the main activity areas.

Linda Fabiani mentioned the importance of innovation. Perhaps the most exciting and innovative part of the regeneration of the Ravenscraig site is the development of the Building Research Establishment Scotland innovation park. The park will be used as a housing demonstration project that incorporates new technology in energy performance and sustainability. Building Research Establishment Scotland will create up to six full-scale demonstrator houses at the innovation park, which will seek to point the way towards how houses of the future will tackle affordability, energy efficiency, recycled materials, carbon emissions and sustainable methods of construction. The site will build on the lessons that have been learned from BRE's first demonstration centre, which pioneered the use of groundbreaking technologies such as wind turbines, rainwater harvesting, heat recovery systems and recycled waste timber, in the homes. The innovation park can inform our future choices about the built environment and place making.

I will conclude by raising a local concern. The Ravenscraig site has much potential and presents many challenges, but we cannot forget that it should not eclipse the existing towns of Motherwell and Wishaw. The development must complement regeneration in and benefit the existing towns. I welcome the award to North Lanarkshire Council of £2.745 million from the Scottish Government's town centre regeneration fund to support a series

of projects that support physical regeneration, including of Motherwell and Wishaw town centres.

Ravenscraig has many challenges, not least of which is the current economic climate. It has the potential to house 10,000 residents and to have two new schools and a retail park. The Scottish Government has already driven the provision of social housing on the site, which opens to residents this year. The site is a unique opportunity and challenge. The Government's motion will compel the best practice in place making to be brought to bear and applied to its evolution.

16:30

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I confess that when I first read the term "placemaking" in the motion I winced a little, because "placemaking" is not a particularly elegant word. It has the whiff of the council planning committee about it—and I say that with the greatest respect to the many councillors who are present and to the cabinet secretary, who is elegant in all matters.

Although place making may be an inelegant piece of jargon from the 1970s, it has an impeccable pedigree as an idea. Indeed, it has its roots here in Scotland in the work of Patrick Geddes, whom the cabinet secretary mentioned. Geddes is regarded as being the father of modern planning, but he began his working life as a botanist. He believed that the balance that is found in nature should be present in the built environment, too. Like John Ruskin in England, whom the cabinet secretary also mentioned, he worried about the community dislocation that the industrial revolution of the 19th century had caused. Both men believed in social progress and believed that it was essential to link social progress and spatial form. It is a great pity that the 20th century town planners and architects who were responsible for Patricia Ferguson's unpleasant childhood experiences did not study Geddes, but the superorganised machines for living that Le Corbusier favoured, which ripped the soul out of so many of our urban areas.

In contrast, Geddes spoke of the trilogy of place, folk and work, all three of which he believed had to be in balance. He used the old town in Edinburgh as the laboratory for his ideas. In the 18th century, the shift of political power that followed the adjournment of the Parliament meant that the old town became neglected and unfashionable, and it fell into disrepair. Geddes set about reviving the tenements and wynds. He tried to bring different social classes together in residential halls like Milne's court. He gave us Ramsay Gardens and the outlook tower, and regenerated and protected a total of 70 sites. He did not just preach

renewal—he practised it by cleaning closes and digging gardens. He was to some extent a romantic, in that he was returning to an idealised medieval Edinburgh, but without the squalor. Like many members who have spoken in the debate, he understood the importance of place, people and continuity, as well as that of cultural identity, which the cabinet secretary mentioned. That is why I support the calls of the cabinet secretary and of Labour for a VAT reduction on repairs.

When we in Scotland first began to revive Geddes's theories about returning to human-scale mixed communities, we did not always get it right. Many inner-city regeneration projects of the 1980s used brick, which is a material that has very little connection with most of Scotland, which is a land of stone. Geology defines our towns, villages and cities as much as it defines the rocky outcrops and headlands of the countryside. From the Caithness flag on the roofs of Orkney long houses to the red sandstone of Dumfries and the grey granite of Dalbeattie in the south, it contributes to Scotland's sense of locality and diversity, so any talk about place making and architecture in the Scottish context must include mention of stone as a building material. The Government's commitment to retaining traditional buildings and the traditional skills strategy to upgrade those buildings are particularly welcome.

The use of stone does not mean ossification. Stone can be used in design that is innovative as well as being sympathetic to the past. A good example of that from the South Scotland area that I represent is the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick, which makes a bold statement without frightening the puffins or, indeed, the people of North Berwick. Its most notable feature is the exterior wall of whinstone, which looks like a dry-stane dyke, but which acts as a rain screen for the rest of the building, drying out quickly and preventing mould and salt damage.

I would therefore like to draw Parliament's attention to the "Land of Stone" exhibition in the Lighthouse gallery in Glasgow, which explains the use of stone as a building material, and to the work of Architecture and Design Scotland, which looks at the challenges of using stone as a material.

One of those challenges is scarcity. There were 1,200 quarries in 19th century Scotland and now there are 20. However, there have been some interesting innovations, such as snatch quarrying, which involves opening up an old quarry for a short time for small amounts of stone for regeneration. Another issue is landfill; quarries are often used for landfill. If we use them for landfill, we will not have access to the stone to keep our heritage alive.

I draw members' attention to the need to make our heritage buildings sustainable. We are not going to meet our climate change targets solely through new build. It is easy to make new build sustainable, but the big challenge will be to do that with our older buildings, because 80 per cent of the buildings that will exist in 2050 are standing today.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to Glasgow School of Art last week in my capacity as a member of the Education and Culture Committee. The GSA contains the Mackintosh environmental architecture centre, and it was interesting to hear about the work that it is doing in that area. The communal living of Scotland's stone tenements and lands is ideally suited to the adaptation of communal heating systems, either through biomass, ground-source heat or wind power.

I am sure that Patrick Geddes would approve of that, and I hope that the new architectural strategy will consider coupling preservation of our heritage with preservation of the planet.

16:36

Jamie McGrigor: We have had a largely useful and constructive debate with some good speeches. I thank Mike MacKenzie for his kind remarks and assure him that the Scottish Conservatives recognise the importance of high-quality buildings and place making. I am encouraged that there has been broad consensus on a key issue: namely, the importance of high-quality buildings and place making and their large interconnection with the economic growth that we all want for our communities and constituents.

We can be very proud that our architects and town planners such as Robert Adam, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Patrick Geddes and Robert Matthew have not only given Scotland places of distinction, but have exerted—and continue to exert—global influence.

A number of members referred to the economic importance of our historic buildings. I emphasise the value of that sector, not least in my region—the Highlands and Islands—where tourism is such a big creator of employment. Research suggests that as many as 83 per cent of visitors to Scotland come primarily to visit our historic sites.

I welcome Historic Scotland's recent award of building repair grants to a number of important historic properties, including Campbeltown's old courthouse—one of that proud burgh's very oldest buildings—which has been previously listed as a building that is at high risk of being lost altogether.

Mike MacKenzie: Given that the costs that are implicit in preserving and repairing our listed and historic buildings still attract VAT, will Jamie

McGrigor give an undertaking that he will put his kilt on, go down and twist the arm of David Cameron and ask him to zero-rate—or at least reduce—VAT on repairs?

Jamie McGrigor: I have already said that I will not do that. You do bang on about it. If the Government takes VAT off that, it will have to find the money from somewhere else for other things. Perhaps the member would like to come back on that.

The project in Campbeltown aims to repair the courthouse and ensure a sustainable long-term future for the building, which is a very good thing.

Another project involves the Burgh hall in Dunoon, which was recently reconstructed by the notable Scottish architect John McAslan. It is fast becoming a meeting point and an exhibition centre for Dunoon, and I congratulate John McAslan on bringing something back to the town of his birth.

A number of members spoke about architecture's place in greening our society, and I think that we would all support the vital role that our architects and place makers play in helping to reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production. That is very important if we are to meet our green targets, not least on energy efficiency. Our buildings must be environmentally sustainable and resource efficient; I note the Scottish Government's efforts to raise awareness of the green infrastructure, which I suspect we will hear more about.

I agree with the Government's reference to the economic benefit of reusing existing buildings. I have previously championed use of the rural empty properties grant, which seeks to increase the supply of rented housing in rural areas by assisting projects that improve or convert eligible empty properties—including old farm buildings such as steadings and cottages—for provision of affordable rental units. Such schemes are to be recommended.

Patricia Ferguson: Mr McGrigor is correct to highlight the importance of bringing buildings back into use and finding new uses for them. Does he appreciate that the VAT relief that most of us now want would help us to invest more money in local economies and would probably save the Government money in the longer term?

Jamie McGrigor: That is a good point well made, but I do not agree with it.

As I have already said, I agree with the Government's reference to the benefit of using existing buildings. I also want to talk about the price of poor design. It is unusual for me to agree with the Government or Labour, but I agree with a comment in its policy statement "Designing

Places" from 2001—all those years ago, when Labour held sway. It stated:

"The price of poor design is paid by people who find their familiar routes blocked, who walk in the shadows of blank walls, whose choices are limited by spaces that make them feel unsafe and unwelcome ... The price is paid by people who find themselves living in newly built suburban housing whose designers gave no thought to the quality and distinctiveness of the place they were making."

That is an unusual piece of prose for a Government document, and I recommend it.

I will focus my closing remarks on the planning system, which I have already asked the minister about. Why does it now cost twice as much to make a planning application as it did in 2005? That seems absurd, and it is why I lodged my amendment.

Aileen Campbell: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The member is just winding up.

Jamie McGrigor: I am winding up. [*Laughter.*]

Audit Scotland's recent report "Modernising the planning system" specifically called for greater focus on engagement in planning and greater creativity in the way in which we involve people in planning. If we get those aspects right we will, I hope, see the increase in the efficiency of the planning system that is so important for businesses and jobs. That is what my amendment talks about, and I hope that members will support it this evening.

The Presiding Officer: I call Michael McMahon—I can give him eight minutes.

16:42

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I do not know whether I will need entirely that amount.

I have enjoyed the debate. Like Helen Eadie, I think that it has given us an opportunity to debate an issue that we do not often get the chance to discuss in the chamber, so I congratulate the cabinet secretary on bringing the debate this afternoon. The debate has also been helped by the fact that members have had the time to take interventions and engage in a discussion. That may be an indication that less is more and that, when we have such debates in the future, having fewer speakers and giving them more time to elaborate on the points can help us to have a better debate on a subject that is so interesting.

I congratulate the minister on lodging a motion that allows us to unite—that is vital—and I agree with her argument that investment in creative industries can make an important contribution to other areas, such as construction. She was right to

outline that point, as it is important that we consider cross-cutting investment. Investment in less prolific areas can play a vital part in assisting the delivery of overall economic growth. I agree that we need collaboration with the creative arts in all the areas that she outlined in order to expand the growth in the economy that we all want.

There were lots of comments on the need to cut VAT. We cannot support the Tory amendment because it would remove the recognition of that point from the Government's motion. The motion rightly identifies the stimulus that VAT reduction could have on the building industry. That said, I must disagree with Mr MacKenzie. We would benefit from such a reduction not just in Scotland but in the United Kingdom as a whole. It is important that we do not draw a distinction at the border when it comes to trying to help the economy. Scottish companies will benefit from any work that becomes available from a cut in VAT for the building industry down south. Not everything comes down to independence.

In looking forward to the debate, I was drawn to recollections of having the good fortune as a young person to visit big cities such as London, Paris and Madrid. Who could not, regardless of their age, be impressed with the historic buildings in those cities? Their palaces, castles, parks and places of interest have made them interesting for centuries and continue to do so, along with their newer buildings. We can see the contrast between the old and the new, which are sometimes side by side and sometimes in different parts of the city. For example, the Louvre, which is an important old building in the heart of Paris, has a modern glass pyramid in its courtyard; similarly, we can contrast Notre Dame cathedral with the glass square of the Government buildings there.

Jamie McGrigor: I wonder what the member thought about the Pompidou centre.

Michael McMahon: I will come on to that later, because I want to consider the notion of beauty being in the eye of the beholder, to which Jean Urquhart and Marco Biagi alluded.

I am fortunate in that, later in life, having visited those cities, I became friends with an architect from Toulouse called Laurent Ballas. While sharing with me a visit to Edinburgh, he opened my eyes to the importance of looking not only at the buildings but at their functionality, their place in the overall milieu and the contribution that each one makes to the sense of community in the area in which it is located. We looked at the contrast between buildings in the old and new towns of Edinburgh.

I was drawn to a quotation that he left me with from Julia Morgan, an American architect who

designed over 700 buildings in California, which is not a place that is immune to new ideas. She said:

"Architecture is a visual art, and the buildings speak for themselves."

My friend taught me that every building speaks to and touches our senses, even if the sense is one of distaste.

I remember distinctly walking around the bridges area of Edinburgh with him when he saw the Festival theatre and stopped in his tracks, not only to look at that building's fine architecture but to contrast it with surrounding old buildings and 1960s buildings and consider how they all contributed to the community in that area. Again, it comes down to taste, which brings me back to the question about the Pompidou centre. It is important that we see everything in the round and how each building fits into the broader context of the city and place that we all want to come and look at. As we develop, even a building such as this one, sitting beside a historic palace, although it may not be to everyone's taste, creates a contrast that gets people interested and talking.

Fiona Hyslop: The member makes a good point. One of the real strengths in Scotland's architecture just now is the ability to add new extensions to old buildings. For example, in my constituency, Linlithgow Burgh halls is a very old building, but it now has a Malcolm Fraser-designed extension that makes it more functional. We should celebrate not only the juxtaposition of old and new buildings but the juxtaposition of old and new parts of buildings.

Michael McMahon: I totally agree with the cabinet secretary on that point.

We must take into account what local communities want in terms of architecture, which is a theme that has come through in the debate. How many of the buildings and places that we talk about had the input of local people at the start of the process? Patricia Ferguson quite rightly drew on her own experience in considering 1960s tower blocks, which became high-rise ghettos in some instances, and the monolithic council housing estates, which at one time gave great hope to so many people of a better life but latterly became a bit of a postcode noose around the necks of many young people, holding back their social advancement. However, Patricia Ferguson also rightly pointed out that regeneration turned those buildings and communities round, and the investment in that was vitally important. Even when we get something wrong initially, we can turn it round so that it can enhance the community that lives there and be part of the fabric of that society.

Linda Fabiani: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael McMahon: I was just about to come to Linda Fabiani's speech, so I am happy to take her intervention.

Linda Fabiani: That is very nice of the member, because I just wanted to say that, in all the years I have been here, this is probably the first time that I have agreed 100 per cent with everything that Michael McMahon said.

The Presiding Officer: It is your lucky day, Mr McMahon.

Michael McMahon: Presiding Officer, I told you that I would not need eight minutes, but that has completely thrown me.

Linda Fabiani and Helen Eadie made important points about putting people at the heart of the design of not just individual buildings but how communities are regenerated, including the programmes that the cabinet secretary talked about and the town planning system.

I entirely agree with Elaine Smith that we must try to develop the brownfield sites that exist in communities. I share her concern that, although North Lanarkshire has an array of brownfield sites, the Scottish Government recently allowed reporters to overturn the housing strategy in North Lanarkshire and direct development away from brownfield sites and towards the green belt in the northern corridor.

Planning is vital, but we must bring communities with us so that we deliver on the programmes that the cabinet secretary talked about, which have our support.

The Presiding Officer: I call Aileen Campbell to wind up the debate. Ms Campbell, you have until 5 pm.

16:51

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell): My goodness, thank you Tricia—sorry, Presiding Officer. I apologise.

This has been an excellent debate, which has given us a tour of Scotland. It has been interesting to hear about Drew Smith's profound obsession with Lego and to hear that Linda Fabiani has reached agreement with Michael McMahon.

The Government wants a future for our country in which the quality of life of all Scotland's citizens is greatly improved. Every one of us deserves to live and work in environments of which we can be proud, and we all want a prosperous future for Scotland.

The quality of our built environment can motivate and inspire us. It can make us feel good about ourselves. It is also vital to the country's

economic future. The Government thinks that a strong and widely supported and understood vision for the future is a prerequisite for successful cities, towns and rural developments in Scotland.

The manner by which we aim to achieve such a vision goes to the heart of democracy. It is vital that the development of Scotland's built environment is inclusive. We want to make the planning process easier to understand, we want greater public participation, and we want to enable participants to see that direct account is taken of their views.

The cabinet secretary talked briefly about what we are trying to achieve through the Scottish sustainable communities initiative. The underlying principle that she described is the taking of a long-term view of development strategies, which is concerned with outcomes and delivery. A modernised planning system, which is focused on outcomes, can help to deliver sustainable growth and development of the right quality in the right places.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Can the minister reassure members that, for her and across the Scottish Government, the issue is not just buildings but a sustainable future for communities and that the Scottish Government will make connections with transport, schools, sustainable energy and all the other things that we need?

Aileen Campbell: I take on board Claudia Beamish's point. The fact that the cabinet secretary with responsibility for culture opened the debate and the minister with responsibility for planning is closing it shows the breadth of support for the agenda. The member might be interested to know that I launched the document "Green Infrastructure: Design and Placemaking" the other day, which is about innovative use of green space and allotments, among other things. Of course, Architecture and Design Scotland does work in schools, as Claudia Beamish probably knows, given that she is a former primary school teacher.

Our agenda is twofold. We want to ensure that future developments are consistent with our principles of sustainable growth and we want to help existing developments and communities become more sustainable. However, the translation of policy and guidance into effective outcomes on the ground through the planning system is not easy and successes are not as numerous as we would wish them to be.

Therefore, along with Architecture and Design Scotland, we are working to promote and support practical projects, the benefits of which can be understood, seen and felt on the ground and can be replicated, through successful processes. We are all familiar with the term "charrette"—Kevin

Stewart seems to be a bit of an enthusiast—which is one of the ways in which we are taking the agenda forward. A charrette is a design process, which takes place over a number of days. The public, design professionals and project consultants work together to develop a detailed masterplan for a site.

Charrettes can help to harness communities' deep understanding and knowledge of the places in which they live and work. The approach gives local people a voice, so that they can contribute to the development of well-informed plans, which provide the best opportunities for their communities to flourish. The process is truly inclusive. I hope that that will encourage Patricia Ferguson, who made clear her passion for architecture and place making and warned of examples from the past of people being ignored and of developers having no understanding of how people in the community live and where new development should be created. Jean Urquhart also stressed the need to learn from our past.

Kevin Stewart: I declare an interest, as I am a member of Aberdeen City Council, which I am about to mention.

There has been some discussion today about turning old buildings into modern, sustainable ones. Will the minister comment on the rebirth of Marischal college, which is an old building that has been given a new, modern design with a top BRE environmental assessment method rating, and which is a jewel in the crown of Aberdeen? Does she agree that those who were involved in the project deserve some praise for that?

Aileen Campbell: I am happy to praise that project. I visited it when I visited Aberdeen City Council. It is a great example of the council investing in its community and providing a one-stop shop, similar to that which Elaine Smith described in Coatbridge.

The charrette in Lochgelly was attended by students of planning from the University of Dundee. They were enthused by that process, as are the young planners across Scotland. It was a remarkable success. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: I ask members who are coming into the chamber to please keep quiet. The minister is trying to wind up.

Aileen Campbell: Building on that achievement, we recently launched a new programme that is aimed at mainstreaming that innovative approach. I acknowledge the issue to do with Lochgelly that Helen Eadie raised. I assure her that Scottish Government officials have been working with Fife Council since that project and continue to do so.

The SSCI mainstreaming programme involves a further series of charrettes across the country, linking new projects with specialist design teams. That is intended to embed charrette-style working in Scottish practice. I hope that that gives some reassurance to Linda Fabiani that we are not taking a “do something and then clear off” approach but instead are trying to empower people to use their abilities, skills and knowledge.

The first of those charrettes, which I attended last week, was held in Johnstone south-west. The next will be held in Callander, and one will be held in Girvan at the start of the new year. A remarkable amount of work was done in Johnstone to engage folk, not only using typical approaches but also going out and enthusing people to come along. That meant that it was not just the usual suspects at the meeting but a breadth of people from the community. They even turned up again last Saturday, at the close of the charrette, despite competition from the Singing Kettle and Stacey Solomon, who was switching on the Christmas lights in Paisley town centre. Through the mainstreaming of charrettes, Scotland is leading the way in how communities are contributing to their future environments.

I should also mention, with regard to the SSCI, that, last month, the exemplar project at Knockroon in Cumnock opened the first phase of a new neighbourhood to the public. Many people, such as Mike MacKenzie and Jamie McGrigor, will be pleased to know that that development looks Scottish and gives the visitor a sense of being in Ayrshire. I suggest that members go and visit it, because it is something that East Ayrshire is proud of. It is also in an area that is one of the most challenging in the Scottish housing market, yet it attracted more than 1,200 visitors in its opening weekend. It is well worth a visit.

The high level of interest was generated to a great degree by the strong vision and commitment of—

Jamie McGrigor: Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer: The minister does not have time.

Aileen Campbell: I am in my last couple of minutes. I apologise to Mr McGrigor, but I will touch on planning issues before I close, as I am sure he would want me to.

We want in the future to develop new places like Inveraray, and we want to do that well, taking on board people's views and opinions as we do so.

We have launched a couple of new guidance documents. The first is about green infrastructure, which I mentioned to Claudia Beamish, and the other promotes good design in rural landscapes,

which is of particular interest to the members who represent rural areas.

This afternoon, we have had an excellent discussion on the value of our historic environment and the need for contemporary design to match the quality of architecture that Scotland has produced in the past. All too often, heritage and development are viewed as being in conflict. However, we cannot continue to create a heritage for the future without development.

Marco Biagi made a passionate case for preservation and the need to be sympathetic to our history and heritage, with particular reference to Edinburgh. Similarly, Elaine Smith and Helen Eadie made a valuable point about how unhelpful the carbuncle awards are and how demoralising they can be for local residents who are trying to do their bit to improve their area. They do nothing to help Scotland's image internationally.

Joe FitzPatrick and others have made great contributions about the importance of—

The Presiding Officer: You need to wind up now, minister.

Aileen Campbell: I would just like to say that we have had a tremendous debate. Clearly, one of the greatest themes in the debate was community engagement. That is at the very heart of what we want to do, as well as improving Scotland's economy for the future.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on keeping communities safe, if amendment S4M-01285.3, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, is agreed to, amendment S4M-01285.2, in the name of John Lamont, falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-01275.1, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01275, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting Scotland's national health service, 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)

McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01275, in the name of Jackie Baillie, as amended, on protecting Scotland's NHS, 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that despite real-terms cuts in the Scottish block grant by the UK Government and the previous UK Labour administration, NHS resource spending in Scotland has been protected; further notes that, over the next three years, NHS boards' resource budgets will increase by £740 million and in real terms, ensuring that resources are directed to frontline services; recognises that, under the SNP administration, cancer waiting times targets have been met for the first time, waiting times are at record lows, MRSA and Clostridium difficile rates have been cut substantially, day case rates are at an all-time high and length of stay in hospitals at a record low, and welcomes the fact that the SNP administration has rejected the NHS privatisation agenda pursued by both the UK Government and the previous UK Labour administration.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01285.3, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01285, in the name of Johann Lamont, on keeping communities safe, 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)

Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01285, in the name of Johann Lamont, as amended, on keeping communities safe, be agreed to. Are we all 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)

McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that Scottish communities have become safer since the current Scottish administration first came to office; notes that crime in Scotland is now at its lowest level in 35 years, that the clear-up rate for all recorded crimes is at its highest level for over 30 years and that the risk of being a victim of crime in Scotland is lower than in England and Wales; notes that, since 2007, violent crime is down by almost a fifth, the number of homicides is down by almost 35%, gun crime is down by almost half and people are significantly more positive about the crime rate in their local area; notes the significant investment made in frontline policing since 2007, with police officer numbers reaching record highs during the last parliamentary session; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to maintaining numbers at 1,000 more than the level that they inherited from the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat administration, and recognises that significant investments and improvements across the justice sector have been delivered in the face of budget cuts from the UK Government and that, while police officer numbers are predicted to fall by more than 16,000 in England and Wales, the Scottish Government is committed to prioritising frontline policing to ensure that Scottish communities remain safe places to live and work.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01287.2, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01287, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the importance of architecture and place making to the economy of Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01287.1, in the name of Jamie McGrigor, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01287, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, as amended, on the importance of architecture and place making to the economy of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central 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)
 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)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (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 101, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01287, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, as amended, on the importance of architecture and place making to the economy of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we all 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)
 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)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 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)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 101, Against 12, Abstentions 4.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of high-quality buildings and places and the vital contribution that they make to Scotland's economy as well as its cultural identity; acknowledges the importance of sharing skills, vision and practice in design and placemaking and the need to address the effects of climate change, engage communities and develop Scotland's skills base; recognises this, and the previous, administration's development of architecture, planning and design policies; acknowledges the economic benefit of reusing existing buildings, and calls on the UK Government to reduce VAT for renovations, repairs and home improvements to 5%, which would act as a significant stimulus to the building industry; notes that prioritising the use of brown field sites, in addition to the renovation of existing buildings, would both protect the greenbelt and enhance local communities, and considers that local communities should be an integral part of any regeneration of their local environment or facilities.

Air Discount Scheme

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The final debate is a members' business debate on motion S4M-01157, in the name of Liam McArthur, on the air discount scheme changes. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the benefits that the Air Discount Scheme has brought to Scotland's island communities since it was first introduced in 2006; considers that, even with the Air Discount Scheme reduction, the cost of flying to and from the islands imposes a considerable financial burden on island life; understands, therefore, the very real concerns that the exclusion of business travel from the Air Discount Scheme has caused for businesses as well as the public and voluntary sectors in the islands; considers that the change, on which there was no prior consultation, means that businesses and other organisations now either have to face even higher travel costs or have to miss out on opportunities to take part in meetings and other events on the Scottish mainland and further afield, and would welcome an urgent review of the impact of the exclusion of business travel.

17:09

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I am delighted to have the opportunity to lead a debate on an issue that I have been pursuing over many months, as I know the minister will testify. Before I turn to my specific concerns about the decision to cut any and all work-related travel from the air discount scheme, I want to acknowledge the cross-party support my motion has received and I thank all those who have signed the motion and joined me in calling for ministers to review the decision. I look forward to hearing colleagues' contributions as well as the response from the minister.

I shall set out why I think the decision must be not only reviewed but overturned. In making that case, I shall highlight the damage the cut is already causing and is likely to cause as well as the entirely spurious basis on which the decision was made.

It might be helpful if I start with a little historical context. The air discount scheme was introduced in 2006 by my colleague, Tavish Scott. It followed years of debate about how to address the real social and economic disadvantage suffered by communities across the Highlands and Islands as a result of the high cost of accessing lifeline air services. Providing a 40 per cent reduction on air fares for all those mainly resident in the islands and the north and west Highlands was a very deliberate attempt to level the playing field. As someone born and brought up in Shetland, Tavish Scott understood fully the inextricable link between economic development on the one hand and

social cohesion and population retention on the other.

It is that link, presumably, that convinced the European Commission that the scheme was indeed a genuine aid of social character. The same link, however, was completely ignored by the Scottish Government in choosing back in April arbitrarily to remove work-related travel from the scheme. In seeking to justify their decision to cut the ADS, Scottish ministers made three claims. The first was that it was never the intention of the scheme to cover work-related travel. The second was that the scheme risks contravening European Union state-aid rules, raising the possibility of fines and potential clawback. Finally, Mr Brown told me that

"we do not believe that a publicly funded scheme should be used to subsidise public and private sector travel budgets."—[*Official Report*, 23 December 2010; c 31968.]

Let me take each of the arguments in turn. First, it is ludicrous for Scottish National Party ministers to argue that they know better the intentions of Tavish Scott, Jim Wallace and those responsible for putting in place the ADS. Indeed, presumably Mr Brown's predecessor, Stewart Stevenson, had the same intentions when he rolled forward the ADS unamended in 2008, or is the Government now saying that Mr Stevenson did not know what he was doing?

The second argument—that the scheme somehow contravenes EU state-aid rules—is equally specious, or suggests that the Government believes the Commission does not know what it is doing. The truth is that similar schemes are in operation across the EU, in the Balearics, Madeira, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Corsica and, most recently, the German islands. When the Corsican scheme was approved in 2005, the announcement specifically stated that

"the Commission considers that living on an island can be a disadvantage which justifies transport aid".

So, it is clear that the Commission had no concerns about the scheme operating in the Highlands and Islands and would have been content to sanction a further extension from April 2011. Scottish ministers, who admit to carrying out no assessment of other schemes operating in the EU, have used state-aid rules as a smokescreen to press ahead with cuts to the scheme that were both unnecessary and potentially hugely damaging.

Having applied for the removal of work-related travel from the ADS, ministers have succeeded in building those new conditions into the scheme approved by the Commission. At a meeting in June with Tavish Scott and me, the minister and cabinet secretary agreed to seek further guidance on the Commission's position. That seemed like a

half-hearted attempt to close the door after having pushed the horse into bolting. The fact that the same undertaking was then made to the leaders of the three islands councils three months later confirmed a total lack of urgency or a total lack of appetite by ministers to deal with the issue seriously.

The final argument used to support the cut to the ADS is that public funding should not be used to subsidise business travel. Again, that is nonsense. When tolls were removed from bridges across Scotland, businesses were not asked to keep coughing up. In announcing plans in January to extend the scheme to Colonsay residents, Mr Brown said the Government recognises

“the social and economic benefits that an extension to this scheme will ... bring”.

Ministers boast of the benefit to businesses in the Western Isles of the road equivalent tariff, or RET, the record-breaking pilot scheme targeted solely at that community for reasons best explained by SNP strategists. In that case, the subsidy to business comes at a cost not just to the public purse but to many businesses in Orkney and Shetland that have seen the displacement of tourism traffic and a competitive advantage handed to counterparts in the Western Isles.

The reasons offered by ministers for cutting the ADS simply do not stack up. Perhaps that explains why there was no prior consultation on the proposal, which was slipped out in budget documents last December. In a recent survey of businesses, charities, voluntary groups and the public sector in Orkney, almost 60 per cent of respondents said that they were unaware of the cut before its introduction in April. Even now, 73 per cent say that they do not know how the cut would be enforced. Indeed, the advice from the Government and some of its back benchers seems to be, “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” That is a ridiculous situation that is giving rise to confusion, inconsistency and, increasingly, anger.

Likewise, assessing the impact of the decision—in the islands at least—has been left to Tavish Scott and me. The feedback over the summer shows that damage is already being done to business competitiveness, skills training and the ability of charities, voluntary organisations and public bodies to participate in events and networking opportunities on the Scottish mainland. Some 77 per cent of respondents to the survey that I carried out on Orkney insisted that they will have to cut back on the flights that they make, over and above the decisions that they had already taken as a result of the economic climate. Even so, almost half confirmed that their travel costs will still increase. One firm said:

“Air transport is a vital link for us, allowing us to forge new links with suppliers/contractors, negotiate becoming

involved with public/private funding opportunities and bringing new money into Orkney. To attend conferences raises our profile and the profile of the county, especially in terms of marine renewables”.

Another firm said:

“the ability to travel and participate in relevant events is essential, not just to our business, but to ensure Orkney has properly skilled people locally and to keep them in our economy”.

Another firm talked about the risk that the cut to the ADS and an inability to travel could

“result in housing in the isles becoming marginalised”.

The evidence therefore shows that the cut to the ADS has increased costs, eroded business competitiveness and undermined efforts to improve skill levels. Over a period, the risk is that businesses, voluntary groups and the public sector in Orkney will become more isolated from wider networks and the places where decisions that affect them are taken.

There is also a clear threat to the lifeline routes themselves. The service between Kirkwall and Inverness has already been reduced following a sharp decline in passenger numbers that was directly prompted by the ADS cut. The figures for September are not yet out, but from anecdotal evidence and from speaking to staff at Kirkwall airport, I believe that there is a real danger that we will see passenger numbers continuing to fall dramatically.

The situation is not sustainable. Asking ever-smaller numbers of passengers to pay ever-higher prices to fly is a recipe for disaster, particularly for a lifeline air service.

The basis for the decision to cut the ADS is untenable, the impact is unsustainable, and the case for a rethink is now unanswerable. I hope that the minister recognises the strength of feeling and the breadth of support that the campaign enjoys, and that he will confirm his intention to reverse the unnecessary, ill-founded and damaging cut.

17:17

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I simply have a few questions about Liam McArthur’s motion.

At the start of his speech, Liam McArthur said that he would show how dramatically awful the situation is with the removal of the ADS for businesses, but he singularly refused to do that. He has not given evidence on that. I am interested in the alternatives that we might consider.

My reading of the European Commission paper is that, when the air discount scheme was introduced in 2006, it was heavily biased towards individuals. The paper says:

"The aid must have a social character, that is, it must, in principle, only cover certain categories of passengers travelling on a route such as children, handicapped people, people with low incomes, etc. However, in the case where the route concerned links an underprivileged region, the aid could cover the entire population of this region."

So it does. Individuals are free to take advantage of the scheme.

The SNP Government has introduced other business aids through rates and the promotion of food and drink, for example. Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles have taken advantage of those opportunities and the determination to link people by broadband.

I am not defending what has happened, because it is always difficult to take away a service that has been offered. I am sure that the minister has a view on that, but I am sorry that Liam McArthur has not addressed some of the positives of the air discount scheme as it stands.

In this day and age, encouraging business travel is pretty outdated. In Shetland, we have one of the finest departments in a college promoting videoconferencing. Surely it would behave Liam McArthur to propose a members' business debate on how we shake up the Parliament and, indeed, central belt Scotland and make them recognise that that is the direction in which we have to go. Communication is about a lot more than taking a flight, which does not fit with any carbon-reduction agenda.

There is a big debate to be had but, sadly, this debate is not it and has not contributed to it.

17:20

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I congratulate Liam McArthur on his initiative in securing the debate on the air discount scheme. I strongly support and endorse his comments and hope that my speech will add cross-party support to the campaign to keep business, local authority and third sector air travellers within the scheme.

The European Commission approved the ADS for the Highlands and Islands on 11 May 2006 on the basis that it was aid of a social character. It was an initiative by the previous Administration to make air services more affordable for remote communities and was aimed at addressing low gross domestic product and peripherality.

There is good custom and practice throughout Europe for similar schemes. We have heard about schemes in Corsica and Madeira and for the German islands. I spoke recently to Councillor Angus Campbell from Western Isles Council, who told me that he could find no definition of "aid of a social character". However, in its decision on Corsica—Liam McArthur mentioned this as well—the Commission said:

"the Commission considers that living on an island can be a disadvantage which justifies transport aid".

In that announcement and all other relevant announcements, no restriction is imposed on the purpose for which an individual travels, so I have a simple question for the minister: where did the decision to exclude business passengers—by which I mean private, public and third sector employees on work activities—come from?

In his reply to my written parliamentary question on 29 September, the minister said that excluding the above groups would save around £2.7 million. Let us put that another way: that means additional costs of £2.7 million for business, local government and the third sector in the Highlands and Islands.

Let me be straight: the minister should come clean, stop blaming Europe and accept that it was a simple cost-cutting exercise. I have spent a lot of time examining the matter. The European Commission approved the scheme in May 2006. More importantly, it reaffirmed that the scheme was correct under state-aid rules in 2008 and agreed it again in March 2011.

However, there are some exemptions. Public service obligation routes, people who live outwith the area and national health service funded trips are not covered. That is clear and no one disputes it, but there is no mention at all of an exemption for business trips.

The European Commission wrote to William Hague and said that it did not encounter any problems in the scheme. I ask the minister to confirm that the Scottish Government did not take it upon itself to consult the European Commission before making the sea change in policy that has hurt island businesses so much.

If the minister disagrees with me—I suspect that he does—will he agree to put the advice that he has received in the Scottish Parliament information centre? Why can business users in Corsica but not in Castlebay access the scheme?

The Scottish Government asked Halcrow Group Ltd to review the scheme in August 2007. It said:

"ADS has been well received in the eligible regions and has had a positive impact on making air services more affordable in the most peripheral regions of the Highlands and Islands".

The review concluded that the scheme should be continued in its current form beyond March 2008 as part of a long-term strategy of increased connectivity to more outlying communities within the Highlands and Islands. There was no mention of cutting business users out of the equation.

That review was sponsored by the Scottish Government—the minister's own Government—so where did the idea come from? I do not know

whether the minister is a smoker but, if he is, it looks like the idea appeared as a small doodle on an equally small fag packet. Unfortunately, it has had large implications for the Highlands and Islands.

There has been outrage throughout the business community because of the changes. I have stressed the effect on business, but let us not forget about local government. Western Isles Council tells me that the cost per year of the measure will be £75,000 and Shetland Islands Council tells me that the cost will be £250,000.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Will the member give way?

David Stewart: Do I have time to give way, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes.

Angus MacDonald: Does the member acknowledge that Western Isles Council has on a good number of occasions block-booked seats that it has not used, which has deprived ordinary citizens of seats on flights? Surely that is an abuse of the ADS.

David Stewart: I would be happy to raise that issue directly with Western Isles Council's chief executive, but that is not my point today. My point is about why the change has been made, because it is inconsistent with European Union rules.

Orkney Islands Council tells me that the change will cost it £140,000.

I will conclude, as I am running out of time. The ADS was well received across the Parliament when it was introduced in 2006. The aim of making air services affordable for remote communities in the Highlands and Islands is a vital plank of social inclusion. As I said, the scheme received a glowing assessment from the Scottish Government's own review in 2008 and there was no intention to withdraw it.

My suspicion—which is shared by many who are, like me, interested in aviation—is that the changes are cost driven and that the European Commission was perfectly content with the scheme in 2006, which it approved with no business exemptions.

Jean Urquhart: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—David Stewart is in his last minute.

David Stewart: No—I am in my last minute.

I challenge the minister to show evidence to the contrary. He has some explaining to the Highlands and Islands business community to do. I thank

Liam McArthur again for his initiative in securing the debate.

17:26

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I congratulate Liam McArthur on securing today's debate, which is significant to the many communities in the Highlands and Islands—in Colonsay, Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles, Islay, Jura, Caithness and north-west Sutherland—that are eligible to take part in the air discount scheme. The scheme is of particular value to my constituents in the remote island communities who do not enjoy the benefits of the road equivalent tariff scheme on ferries.

As Liam McArthur said, the air discount scheme has made a difference to many of my constituents since 2006. It is popular and well used. David Stewart made a strong point very well: that the money that the Scottish Government has saved by getting rid of the discount's business element is being paid for by the island businesses that are no longer part of the scheme.

Earlier this year, the EU gave its agreement for the scheme to continue for a further four years until 2015. We need a scheme to tackle the problem of high air fares for the remotest communities in the Highlands and Islands. What sustains island communities, if not business?

Like Liam McArthur, I am aware of the genuine concerns because of the decision to exclude business travel from the scheme from April this year and because of the impact of that on businesspeople and those who are involved in the charity sector, including representatives of religious organisations, such as the Western Isles presbytery of the Free Church of Scotland, who are often short of money. I agree with him that it is disappointing that the decision was taken without the relevant communities being consulted.

The detailed 2008 "Review of the Air Discount Scheme" concluded:

"Most stakeholders agree that the ADS has had a positive impact on businesses and commercial inclusion as it enables them to reduce their travel budget and journey times or to travel more frequently for the same travel budget as before."

Orkney Islands Council's leader, Stephen Hagan, was right to say:

"As well as the additional cost to the Island Councils, other public sector bodies, businesses, voluntary and charitable organisations, there is a real risk that the number of passengers travelling by air will fall, leading to a corresponding reduction in the level of the air service in the future."

This has the potential to impact on all potential users of the air services to and from remote island communities."

The exclusion of business travel from the scheme is an important issue for many of my constituents. I am pleased to support Liam McArthur's call for a review. The issue is especially important to the island of Barra, which has been notoriously difficult to get to. Barra's airport is famous and makes the island famous, and it is one feature that draws businesses there. I hope and am sure that the minister will reply positively and constructively.

17:29

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): As Dave Stewart did, I congratulate Liam McArthur on securing time to debate this important issue. My colleague Alasdair Allan, who would have liked to be here, sends his apologies—he is at a British-Irish Council summit elsewhere.

It is fairly obvious from the speeches that we have heard so far that we do not have consensus on the exclusion of business-related travel from the air discount scheme. I had hoped that those who had been opposed to the Scottish Government's position—as they have every right to be—would understand, even if they do not appreciate, the rationale for exclusion. I also hope that they agree that I have given due time and consideration to them and to the concerns emanating from the eligible areas.

David Stewart: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: No. I am just starting off.

Since we confirmed the more active exclusion of business-related travel, I have met Mr McArthur and other elected representatives from Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles and I have clarified our position with a number of local organisations. Our submission to the European Commission reflected on some of those representations.

I have listened carefully to the speeches this afternoon—not all of which were positive and constructive, I have to say—and I will continue to listen to any representations that are made to me. I am aware that Liam McArthur and Tavish Scott wish to present the findings of an Orkney and Shetland business survey to ministers, so I would be happy to meet them to take delivery of it.

A number of points that have been made deserve to be responded to. Clearly, the more active exclusion of business-related travel has impacted on some businesses—a point that I accept was made by a number of members—as well as on public sector and third sector organisations. We have maintained that the ADS was not designed for such use. That does not

mean that we do not recognise and value the vital contribution that those businesses and organisations make in our remote communities.

David Stewart: The minister might be about to touch on this. I just want to put this simple point to the him. I can understand that his Government might wish to remove business travel as a cost-cutting exercise—that is a decision of the Government. My point—and, I think, Liam McArthur's point—was that he should not blame Europe for that. My strong understanding from senior officials in the European Commission is that no such application was made. The scheme was approved, with business travel in it, in March. It is the minister's Government that has removed it. The European Commission did not advise or instruct it in any way; if the minister chooses to make an application and removes business travel, that is another thing. My point is, can he be clear with us today that the move was not initiated by the European Commission?

Keith Brown: I am coming to two rebuttals to that point.

We have reflected the vital contribution that businesses and organisations make in the level of resource that was allocated in 2011-12 to transport in the Highlands and Islands. We have allocated funding of £35 million for air services, £109 million for ferry services and £32 million for roads.

Our support for local government and the third sector also needs to be considered in this context. Despite UK funding cuts—it is a rich irony that the parties that are telling us that we have to cut our budget by £1.3 billion come up with an ever-growing list of demands for what they want to spend money on—local government's share of the 2011-12 Scottish budget was preserved at previous years' levels following on from the previous increases. For the next three years, local government's revenue funding will be maintained and its overall share will still be higher in 2014-15 than it was in 2007-08.

Over the next three years, we will provide the third sector in Scotland—a major part of this debate—with nearly £74 million compared to funding of £62 million in the final three years of the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration.

Jamie McGrigor: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I want to make more progress. If I have time at the end, I will come back to the member.

These are undoubtedly testing times for the public and third sectors in Scotland, but the figures illustrate that we are doing as much as we can to help.

To address Dave Stewart's point, members will be interested to hear that within the past 48 hours we have received the Commission's informal view on business-related travel under the ADS. Clearly we need time to consider the full implications, but the advice on "undertakings"—that is, organisations that are involved in economic activity—is absolutely clear and unequivocal: they should not profit from a scheme that was introduced under the Commission's mechanism for aid that is of a social character. Although that would apply to private businesses, both large and small, we need to consider how it would apply to other bodies for which economic or commercial activity is not their *raison d'être*, but which could be considered to have economic or commercial interests. That is the Commission's view. That is what it has told us. It has said, as it often does, that the advice is informal at this stage and it will have to come back to us. There will have to be further dialogue.

Members will also wish to note that the Commission has stated that member states are free to restrict support under aid of a social character schemes in a variety of ways, including for the purpose of travel. Indeed, the Commission has indicated that there is a precedent for this in another member state. Our position on business-related travel therefore appears to cause the Commission no concern whatsoever and I have to say—this is an important point—that this is completely in tune with the discussions that Scottish Government officials had with their Commission counterparts in 2006 when it was clear that businesses were not to be included under the scheme. The idea that this was, to quote the various adjectives used, "spurious", "untenable", "specious" and "not consistent with EU rules" is wrong. That is the EU position: we asked them for their view and that is what they have come back and said to us.

David Stewart: It is very clear that the Commission looked at this three times and approved the scheme with business in it. There is a world of difference between that and the Commission recommending to the Government that it change the scheme because it does not comply with EU rules. If a member state goes to the European Commission with an approved scheme and wishes to withdraw an element of it, the Commission will approve that. The minister's civil servants recommended the change—not the European Commission.

Keith Brown: Mr Stewart has made more of a speech in this final contribution than I have. We have to consider carefully what the Commission has said. Maybe that will clarify some of the points that Dave Stewart raised and how the matter will impact on the scheme. I am trying to keep my

mind as open as I can, unlike some previous contributors.

I understand that there is a real desire in the eligible areas to draw a line under the issue in general terms and I share that desire. We will therefore give timely consideration to what we now have and will report back shortly to all the scheme members and their representatives who are present here today. I hope that we can then begin the process of moving on in the interest of concentrating on this important issue. We are very concerned about business, whether it is in the northern isles, the Western Isles or other parts of rural Scotland. That is why, as Jean Urquhart rightly said, we have provided millions of pounds in support for businesses under the small business bonus scheme and the various other things that I have mentioned. Our intention is to make sure that the air discount scheme, for its part, is as well used as it should be by those who are resident in our most remote communities.

Meeting closed at 17:37.

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