



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 17 November 2011

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.scottish.parliament.uk or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Thursday 17 November 2011

CONTENTS

	Col.
HOUSING	3513
<i>Motion moved—[Alex Johnstone].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Keith Brown].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Lewis Macdonald].</i>	
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	3513
The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown)	3517
Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab)	3520
Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP)	3522
John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)	3524
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)	3525
John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)	3527
Humza Yousaf (Glasgow) (SNP)	3529
Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD)	3530
Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab)	3532
Derek Mackay (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)	3533
Lewis Macdonald	3535
Keith Brown	3537
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)	3539
PUBLIC SECTOR	3543
<i>Motion moved—[Mary Scanlon].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Richard Baker].</i>	
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	3543
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney)	3546
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)	3549
Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP)	3551
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)	3553
Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)	3555
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	3556
Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)	3558
Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)	3560
Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP)	3561
Richard Baker	3563
The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell)	3564
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	3566
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE QUESTION TIME	3570
GENERAL QUESTIONS	3570
Road Equivalent Tariff (Orkney)	3570
Gritting (North Lanarkshire Council)	3571
Combined Heat and Power	3572
Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme	3573
Public-private Partnerships (Scottish Trades Union Congress Protocol)	3574
Tourism (Olympic Games)	3574
British Waterways Scotland (Waterfront Development and Public Safety)	3575
Unemployment (Older People)	3576
Motorway Gantry Signage	3577
VAT (House Extensions and Improvements)	3577
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	3579
Engagements	3579
Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)	3582
Teachers (Industrial Action)	3585
Inward Investment	3586
Unemployment (Women)	3587
Fossil Fuel Levy	3588

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE QUESTION TIME	3590
JUSTICE AND LAW OFFICERS	3590
Scottish Prison Service	3590
Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland (Single Police Force)	3591
Proceeds of Crime (Allocation)	3593
Drug Dealers	3594
Criminal Cases (Evidence of Similar Fact)	3595
Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007	3595
Prisoners (Looked-after Children)	3596
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (Discussions with Victims' Families)	3597
RURAL AFFAIRS AND THE ENVIRONMENT	3598
Animal Welfare	3598
Landfill Sites (Life Extensions)	3599
NFU Scotland	3600
Litter	3602
Common Agricultural Policy (Reform)	3603
Greenpark Energy (Licence to Extract Shale Gas)	3604
Climate Change	3606
Food Safety (European Regulations)	3606
OIL AND GAS SECTOR	3608
<i>Motion moved—[Fergus Ewing].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Lewis Macdonald].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Gavin Brown].</i>	
The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing)	3608
Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab)	3613
Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con)	3617
Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)	3619
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)	3622
Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)	3624
Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD)	3627
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)	3630
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)	3632
Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)	3633
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)	3636
Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP)	3638
Gavin Brown	3640
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	3643
Fergus Ewing	3646
TERRORISM PREVENTION AND INVESTIGATION MEASURES BILL	3650
<i>Motion moved—[Kenny MacAskill].</i>	
DECISION TIME	3651
HEARTSTART	3666
<i>Motion debated—[Siobhan McMahon].</i>	
Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	3666
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)	3669
Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)	3671
Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)	3672
Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)	3673
Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	3675
Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)	3677
Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)	3678
The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson)	3680

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 17 November 2011

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

Housing

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01346, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on housing. I remind ministers and members that time is tight and that I would like them to stick to their allotted time.

09:15

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): It is nice to be here to raise the subject of housing once again. The Conservative party has a proud record on housing, but it is a feature of this Parliament that that record is denigrated by our opponents, so I make no apology for the fact that I begin by detailing that proud record.

In the 1950s, the Conservative Government broke records for the building of public housing. During that period, it was the Conservatives who provided the homes fit for heroes that were spoken about in the years after the second world war. The quality of that housing has stood us in good stead for many years. Moving on through the decades, I note that, in the 1980s, it was the Conservatives who came up with the ingenious plan of allowing the tenants of many of those houses to own the property themselves.

The concept of selling social housing to its tenants delivered social change on a scale that Britain and particularly Scotland had never seen before and has not seen since. The communities of mixed tenure that it created are among the safest, most sustainable communities that we have in Scotland. Furthermore, the sale of council houses created a pool of houses in the market, which gave many young tenants the opportunity to buy their own homes at an affordable price. In many parts of the country, if it were not for the market in ex-council houses, it would be impossible for people to make the jump from the private rented sector into home ownership. That vital stepping stone is essential to many young potential home owners.

However, the concept of the right to buy has been the subject of political prejudice in the Parliament for many years. The stimulation for bringing the matter to the chamber for debate today, although not the key issue, was the news last week that one local authority in Scotland, East Lothian Council, has gone forward with a project

that is designed to buy back ex-council houses. I do not know the specific circumstances and I do not wish to raise them. It is the concept that I will address today. I do not want the practice to spread because it is dangerous and we should not allow it to be the next step of the anti-right-to-buy prejudice.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No. I will not take an intervention at this stage.

East Lothian Council's decision to buy back former council houses is simply a rehash of that old prejudice. Some immediate need might be dealt with, but the practice will do nothing to help the wider picture. If the council purchases a former council house at £80,000, it will certainly have acquired a property to let, but that money would benefit many more people if it was used to subsidise the construction of two or more new houses, which would also sustain jobs and create training opportunities for young skill seekers. I am also concerned that the council's actions might warp the local property market and drive up property prices, which could put home ownership even further out of reach for young families who are trying to get on to the property ladder.

The current market conditions are an opportunity for the public and private sectors to work more closely together in order to provide social housing; doing so will be to everybody's benefit. I encourage East Lothian Council and any other council that is considering taking that step to explore more constructive solutions that will maximise the limited funds that are available.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No. I will not take an intervention at this point.

Surely East Lothian's action goes against everything that the Scottish National Party has said about supporting construction jobs and boosting the economy. Although I am sure that estate agents will be delighted, the building trade, which faces an uncertain future in the area, will be less than impressed.

The Government's approach to housing over the past five years has been confused and contradictory. It is noteworthy more for the sheer volume of consultations in which it has indulged than for the number of houses that it has built. On the one hand, it pursues a simplistic anti-right-to-buy campaign for nothing more than political purposes, while on the other hand it seeks to develop best practice in rent-to-buy schemes.

While portraying itself as the champion of social housing, the Government has substantially

reduced its overall investment, cutting subsidy to registered social landlords and then accepting that councils can enable construction by topping up that grant in the form of aid from a council's own resources.

Earlier this year, the Scottish National Party manifesto commitment was to build more than 6,000 new social rented houses each year; since the election, ministers have referred to a target of 6,000 affordable homes—a different definition. Today, the Government amendment talks of 4,300 homes. The minister claims that he is building houses for less, but in reality houses are being produced less efficiently and with more bureaucracy.

Some years ago, like other parties, the Scottish Conservatives signed up to the Labour-Lib Dem commitment to end homelessness by 2012. While we stand by that commitment, the SNP has demonstrated its commitment to 2012 by taking a step back, leaving local councils to pick up the pieces. To add insult to injury for our hard-pressed communities, the Government's soft criminal justice regime means that the antisocial behaviour that blights so many neighbourhoods is not being tackled effectively.

When a council jumps through the hoops required to evict a tenant who consistently makes his or her neighbours' lives a misery, it is faced with having to rehouse that individual, albeit temporarily in some cases. The result is that although tough action can be and is taken by councils, councils' hands are tied and there is no real positive outcome.

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No, not at this point.

Sadly, it is our neighbourhoods that are left to pay the price. The whole thing is a sham, and all the while the Government has done little more than issue consultations, in between posing for yet more photos in its now well-worn hard hats and high visibility jackets.

So where now for housing in Scotland? One thing is clear: the Government cannot deliver on its own. If we are to close the gap between the number of homes that we need to build to satisfy demand and the number of properties that are built, closer partnership working between the private sector, housing associations and local authorities must be developed still further.

The national housing trust is a step in that direction but it is a blunt instrument that does not do the job for many developers or councils. Perhaps that is why the NHT is back on the drawing board. The SNP has been sent homeward

to think again. Clearly, a more flexible, sophisticated solution is required, especially bearing in mind the level of return required by many lenders in order to enter the process.

However, the public and private sectors are clearly willing to work together in order to achieve outcomes. That must be harnessed and encouraged, not just to satisfy housing demand but to boost the economy, sustain jobs and create vital training opportunities for young people. It is not just about bricks and mortar. Scottish Conservatives want safe, sustainable communities that people can take pride in—communities in which people know their rights but also accept their responsibilities.

Making the planning system in Scotland more accessible could contribute to getting construction under way. Many construction businesses have expressed their frustration to me about the planning system, which they see as unpredictable and ponderous. It is holding up much-needed development and putting jobs on the back-burner. The cost of submitting substantial planning applications is prohibitive. A system that provided greater certainty of outcome and that was faster and more efficient would help remove the bottleneck of applications that are lying on planners' desks across Scotland.

There is much that we can do. The Conservatives have always been and will continue to be active participants in the process of housing the people of Scotland. We wish to engage in that process and we have laid out our position. We look forward to hearing the usual negative resistance of our opponents.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the pivotal role of the housing market to the Scottish economy; is concerned that housebuilding in Scotland has fallen to a 30-year low; further recognises the need to ensure that there is an adequate supply of good quality housing to buy and rent in the private and social sectors; notes the success of the right to buy policy in that it empowered people to choose their preferred form of housing tenure, allowed over half a million households to own their own home and strengthened local communities; encourages the Scottish Government to remove the limitations on the right to buy contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 and to provide higher discounts under the modernised right to buy as a means of increasing capital receipts to invest in building affordable homes for those on low incomes and to boost jobs in the construction industry; further encourages the Scottish Government to consider legislative reform to ensure fairness and equity in public housing and also to allow social houses to be allocated to people with local connections so as to protect the long-term sustainability of Scotland's communities, and further calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that landlords make greater use of the enforcement of tenancy agreements to tackle antisocial behaviour.

The Presiding Officer: Perfect timing, Mr Johnstone. I call Keith Brown, Minister for Housing

and Transport, to speak to and move amendment S4M-01346.2—you have precisely seven minutes.

09:26

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

First, I congratulate Alex Johnstone on his elevation to his new post, which I think gives him the title of the official spokesperson for the Conservative and Unionist Party, although during the leadership contest he might have wanted a different title.

Alex Johnstone acknowledged the pivotal role of the housing market in the economy, as well as the severe challenges facing the market and the consequences for the economy as a whole. It would have been far better, however, if Alex Johnstone had acknowledged that cutting Scotland's capital investment by 36 per cent over three years, as his United Kingdom Government has done, has at the very least compounded the problems that we face. Of course, the welfare reforms, including the housing benefit reform, have done a great deal to hinder the future supply of housing in Scotland and it would have been better had he acknowledged that. It would also have been better had he acknowledged that the Scottish Government has been doing everything in its power to support the housing market.

I will make up for Alex Johnstone's oversight. The Scottish Government has accelerated capital spend on affordable housing, kick-started a new generation of council houses—much though I know that that annoys Alex Johnstone—and continued investment to help first-time buyers access home ownership through our shared equity schemes. We recognise the scale of the challenge that we face, so we have been encouraging and supporting innovative solutions, including the one in East Lothian that Alex Johnstone mentioned, which we think is a commendable innovation in how we fund affordable housing. There is also the example of the widely acclaimed and successful national housing trust.

As a result of all that, it has been possible for us to deliver a total of £460 million to be invested, which will deliver around 4,300 homes. That is not the be-all and end-all of what we will do this year, but just one part, although Alex Johnstone seemed to interpret the 4,300 homes as the total for this year. That will not be the total, but it will contribute towards our commitment to deliver 30,000 affordable homes during the life of this Parliament. It is also unfortunate that Alex Johnstone chose to overlook all that we are doing to counter the effects of ill-conceived Westminster policies.

It is even worse that his own solution to the problem is more of the right to buy at more generous discounts—talk about confused thinking. He offers a partial assessment of the impact that right to buy has had on our communities and ignores the problems that it has caused, for example, in managing blocks of flats when some flats have been bought but others continue to be owned by social landlords. Above all, though, he overlooks the impact that right to buy has had on the amount of housing that is available for social rent and the impact that that has had on those in housing need. Certainly, in my area in Clackmannanshire we saw the council's housing stock reduced by half over a period of time, which has produced huge constraints for people looking for social housing.

Indeed, it was the recognition of the harm being done by the right to buy that resulted in almost universal support for the previous Administration's proposals under the previous housing minister to reform the right to buy and to end it for new-build social housing and for new tenants in the sector. Those proposals became key elements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, which the previous Parliament approved overwhelmingly. The idea that a year later we might contemplate overturning such popular legislation is at best fanciful, although not perhaps as fanciful as thinking that more generous right-to-buy discounts would give social landlords more money for new build.

If Alex Johnstone and the Conservatives could drop their obsession with right to buy and perhaps even recognise the damage being done to the economy by Westminster's policies, we might be able to have a much more productive debate about how we achieve fairness and equity in the allocation of social housing, an objective that everyone in the chamber probably shares. We all know from our constituency experience that that is a pressing problem and one that ultimately arises from demand constantly outstripping supply. The long-term solution is to build more of the houses of all tenures that people want and can afford in areas where they want to live, and that lies at the heart of our vision for housing.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I recognise the great difficulties that the minister faces because of the cuts in the capital budget from Westminster, but given that £200 million of capital is still to be allocated by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, will he guarantee that he is fighting for a large slice of that money to come to housing? Given that he has dual responsibilities for housing and transport, which sometimes compete for capital, will he assure us that housing is his top priority for the extra capital that is still to be allocated?

Keith Brown: The member can rest assured that I will always argue for more funding for housing, but both housing and transport are central to the Government's policy of economic growth because the construction of such projects is very labour intensive.

We face a challenge and, essentially, requiring landlords to strike a difficult balance between the legitimate claims of one group of prospective tenants over another is one element of that. We are committed to consulting on that and other matters, such as toughening tenancy rules to deal with antisocial behaviour, and plan to do so early next year.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: I do not have time for more interventions; I apologise to Mr Brown.

I look forward to working with Alex Johnstone and others on devising legislation that works for tenants and those in housing need and for landlords and the communities that they serve. It is important to recognise the work that is being done by the Government on housing across the piece.

There was a large degree of confused thinking in Alex Johnstone's speech, particularly if we go back to his point about East Lothian Council. He fails to recognise that buying those houses helps engender more interest in the local market, because once the houses have been sold their owners will look to buy elsewhere. He also conceded that he did not know that much about what was going on with this policy, but he should know that East Lothian Council has worked very hard with private sector developers and has a version of the Scottish Government's national infrastructure loan whereby they will forgo or defer capital costs for infrastructure elements of new housing projects in order to go ahead as quickly as possible. There has been a great deal of innovative thinking.

Alex Johnstone: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: You have one minute, minister.

Keith Brown: I will take an intervention, although Alex Johnstone refused to take any.

Alex Johnstone: I want to ask the minister whether the money used to buy back those houses would have been more effectively used to promote the building of additional houses. If so, the council could have had more property.

Keith Brown: That would be true if it was an either/or situation. If the member went to speak to East Lothian Council, he would find that it is doing

a great deal, despite the particular constraints in that area, to try to encourage further housing development. That in itself will encourage further housing development and add to the council's housing stock in an area where supply is hard-pressed. I recommend that Alex Johnstone looks in more detail at what is going on in East Lothian Council, as he should at Scottish Government policies, which have been extremely useful in starting to increase the available housing stock.

In conclusion, my amendment acknowledges the points that I have made and recognises the folly of much else in Alex Johnstone's motion. I move amendment S4M-01346.2, to leave out from "is concerned" to end and insert:

"notes the Scottish Government's recent announcement that £460 million will be invested to build 4,300 homes as part of its commitment to build 30,000 affordable homes during this parliamentary session, including 5,000 council houses in spite of significant cuts to Scotland's capital budget by the UK Government; recognises the Scottish Government's progress in modernising the legislative framework for housing, and calls on the Scottish Government to continue with an innovative approach to housing policy and invest in all types of houses to meet the demands and needs of the population."

09:33

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Conservatives might have changed their leader and reshuffled their front-bench team, but there is no evidence this morning of any profound change in their approach to housing policy. That might, of course, suit Alex Johnstone very well. He is on familiar ground, although he seems uncharacteristically shy about engaging in debate today. Perhaps that will change. It might even suit his new leader, who, sadly, has just left the chamber, if her priority is to emphasise old certainties rather than new departures.

It is a shame for those in housing need, however, because they want the focus to be not on the right-to-buy arguments of the 1980s and 1990s but on today's need for social housing. The Tory motion highlights the record low levels of house building that are an issue in the public and private sectors and in both the owner-occupied and rented sectors. The failure of such a well-established and respected business in the construction sector as A C Yule and Son Ltd in the north-east shows an economy in serious trouble, as yesterday's unemployment figures confirmed, and shows both the breadth and the depth of the crisis facing Scotland's construction industry.

Responsibility for that lies in part at Westminster and in part with the SNP Government, not just for its plans to cut support for building new affordable homes but for the complete hiatus in the

commissioning of new public sector buildings of every type between 2007 and 2010.

It would therefore have been useful if the Conservatives had chosen to seek a debate on what the Scottish Government should do now, which is not to get rid of existing social housing, but to find ways of building more. However, as Mr Johnstone has chosen to prioritise selling ahead of building, it falls to Labour to highlight the real issues that the housing sector faces. The SNP will claim that all is well—we have heard that from Keith Brown—but the reasons for its unwillingness to address directly some of the issues remain hard to fathom.

The minister's amendment mentions the Scottish Government's

"commitment to build 30,000 affordable homes during this parliamentary session".

His problem is that that was not in his party's election manifesto only a few months ago. The commitment that the SNP made in that manifesto was

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

Mr Brown knows as well as anybody that a target for a total of affordable homes is very different from a target for a total of homes for social rent. That is why his amendment talks of investing

"in all types of houses to meet the demands and needs of the population."

We are happy to support investing in all types of houses. In government, Labour was as keen as anybody to encourage mid-market rents and rent-to-buy schemes to support those on middling incomes to obtain housing at an affordable price, but mid-market and shared ownership or shared equity are not the same as social renting, and they are not what the SNP promised when it sought election in May.

This is the third time that we have offered ministers an opportunity to explain in the chamber why there is a difference between their commitment in the election campaign and their commitment in government. Labour members have asked the same question in committee, but Mr Brown and Mr Neil have so far refused to tell us why they do not intend to implement the SNP's manifesto promise.

As I said in our previous debate, I am glad that Mr Brown has now conceded that 20,000 of the 30,000 new affordable homes will be for social rent. That is a distinct improvement on his previous refusal to say anything at all on the subject, but it is a little surprising that the 20,000 homes for social rent do not feature in the Government's amendment and that they have not featured in the debate so far. Let us hope that Mr Brown is not having second thoughts about that

commitment as well. Our amendment is positive about the SNP's positive commitment in its manifesto and we have offered it another chance to tell us what it will do or if it will do what is needed to make that happen.

Keith Brown: The member mentioned election commitments. Is the Labour Party's position that which has been put forward by a contender for its leadership, Tom Harris: that allocation by need should be ditched in favour of allocation by virtue? Young people in particular would be put above older people, as they might have a job. Is Labour's policy what Tom Harris described or what Lewis Macdonald described?

Lewis Macdonald: It is a shame that the minister rose to his feet to respond to my challenge to tell us what he is doing about his manifesto commitment and did not mention it. He did not tell us anything at all. If the SNP does not take the chance to address that matter, attention is bound to focus on the changes in housing policy that it has made, and particularly on the spectacular cuts that it has made in Government funding for new affordable homes.

The Tories have called a debate on the right subject, but they have highlighted the wrong issues. The SNP has talked about what it plans now, but not about what it promised in May. If it wants to, it can move that debate on; all that it has to do is follow our suggestion.

I move amendment S4M-01346.3, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"welcomes the SNP's manifesto commitment 'to build over 6,000 new socially-rented houses each year', and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward plans to implement this promise and to make a statement to the Parliament at the earliest opportunity."

09:38

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to put on record once again my views on the housing situation in Scotland.

In debating the motion, we need to consider the effects on house building and housing of the current UK Tory-Liberal coalition Government's economic and social policies. As Keith Brown said in his opening remarks, the unprecedented cuts in public spending that the UK coalition Government has implemented are undoubtedly the single biggest cause of the decline in house building throughout the country. If Alex Johnstone is serious about addressing that problem and if he wants to see an upturn in house building, I encourage him to add his voice to the Scottish Government's demands that David Cameron and George Osborne immediately change course and

increase spending on capital projects, particularly on house building.

We should all recognise that housing is fundamentally about people and that social housing is often about protecting the welfare of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged people. If Alex Johnstone is concerned about that, as he seems to be, I again urge him to join us in campaigning against the Tory reforms to housing benefit, which will hit the poorest people in society hardest.

Housing associations the length and breadth of Scotland are telling us that reducing housing benefit is a direct attack on the poor. In a housing debate on 6 October, prior to her elevation to the leadership, Ruth Davidson spoke of first-time buyers' struggle to get on the property ladder because of the high deposit required and pointed out that people of a similar age to herself—that is, early to mid-30s—were below the average age for getting a first-time buyer mortgage; it tends to be 36 to 37-year-olds who are able to get on the housing ladder for the first time. How, then, can she justify the Westminster-led benefit reforms that will raise the age at which the local housing allowance rate will apply? With that move, 4,400 single people in Scotland aged between 25 and 34 without dependants will be restricted in their ability to apply for housing assistance.

The Conservative motion proposes that the Scottish Government remove the limitations on right to buy that were introduced in 2010. The right-to-buy policy, which was introduced by a Tory Government, has been a disaster in Scotland and has led to more than half a million homes being taken out of social housing stock, leaving councils unable to address housing needs in their areas. Few would dispute that the right-to-buy policy destroyed the council house building programme in Scotland; indeed, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has said that it has been absolutely disastrous for the low-cost homes for rent sector.

Instead of voting for a Tory party determined to push social housing stocks down further, leaving less of a chance of getting affordable housing, the people of Scotland voted for an SNP Government that was determined to see through its vision for a fairer Scotland.

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

Aileen McLeod: No—I want to keep going.

This Scottish Government has a proven track record not only of investment in housing despite the severe funding constraints—indeed, it has invested £1.7 billion in affordable housing between 2008 and 2011—but of house building. Between 2009 and 2011, 3,295 council houses were

approved and, in 2010, 1,055 were started. That is the highest recorded figure in 20 years.

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: The member has no time, Mr Hume.

Aileen McLeod: The Scottish Government is doing everything that it can in very difficult financial circumstances to provide affordable, sustainable and original housing solutions such as the innovation and investment fund, which is building 3,462 new homes, and the national housing trust, which is kick-starting stalled construction sites.

Although I welcome the fact that the Conservative party has brought this important issue to the chamber, its motion simply urges us to turn the clock back and repeat the mistakes of the failed policies of the past. Instead, we must move forward in a spirit of consensus, building on legislation that the Parliament has already passed and continuing to find and develop innovative ways of supporting our affordable housing market.

09:42

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): Although we are all concerned about the dire state of house building, I think that we begin to part company over what should be done about the situation. I believe that there is significant and unaddressed demand for social rented housing and shared equity schemes, but both are dependent on Government support that is rapidly shrinking. The housing and regeneration budget will be reduced from nearly £400 million to little over £250 million in 2014, which is a cut of more than 35 per cent. Next year, the affordable housing supply budget is to suffer an even more drastic cut of 53 per cent, falling from just over £268 million to as little as £125 million.

Of course, some of the affordable housing budget is included in the local government settlement but it, too, will be under severe pressure. Manifesto promises and the requirement in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016 are unlikely to be met. The pledge to build 6,000 social rented homes each year has become a pledge to build 6,000 affordable homes, just over 4,000 of which will be social rented homes. That is nowhere near enough to meet demand; Scotland needs 10,000 new affordable homes a year.

The 60 per cent decrease in the money for building affordable homes will be achieved by limiting the subsidy to a maximum of £40,000 per unit, but it remains to be seen whether that subsidy will be raised for areas of greater need. Unless it is relaxed, the limit will make it difficult to

fund social rented accommodation in areas of high deprivation; if it is relaxed, there will not be enough money to fund the building of as many houses.

The 1,000 intermediate rented homes, available through the national housing trust, are by definition affordable only for some. They are out of reach of the poorest tenants. Another 1,000 are to come from subsidised home ownership. I support the continuation of the open market and the new supply schemes, but I note that the Scottish Government is still not providing funding for the open market scheme. That scheme was assessed as being the best to meet particular needs—for example, the needs of people with a disability—and also as being a particularly cost-effective option. However, it is now available only for a very limited number of homes that are already in the process of being built.

I am also concerned about the future of social housing under the new regime of the housing regulator, which has brought forward proposals that will undermine the role of local residents on the boards and committees of registered social landlords. I am sure that there is no great demand for those proposals from housing associations and residents. In accordance with the tenant consultation and satisfaction principles of the Scottish housing charter, their views should be paramount. Any attempt to impose those new rules will be an attack on local democracy. It will not be acceptable for the Scottish Government to wash its hands and say, “It wisnae me. It was that quango what done it.”

The Government must take responsibility, and not give it away to organisations that it then blames when things go wrong. Instead of trying to fix things that are not broken, the Government should address real problems—such as factors who are withdrawing their services because absentee landlords make their task so difficult. Instead of attacking social landlords, how about the Government giving local government more powers to deal with antisocial landlords?

09:47

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): If awards were given out for persistence and obstinacy, the Tory benches would be weighed down by bunting and medals. In every debate on housing, they return to the same old chestnut—their obsession with the right to buy. That position flies in the face of the situation on the ground. If the Tories are relying on their record of achievement in the 1950s—as Alex Johnstone seemed to be suggesting—it will be a long way back for the Ruth Davidson-led Tory party.

Alex Johnstone referred to “prejudice” against the right to buy on the SNP benches. I have no

prejudice against the right to buy. Indeed, many people in my extended family have exercised the right to buy, although—I do not know whether my stepfather will appreciate my saying this, but I am going to say it anyway—my stepfather’s father refused to buy his council house on a point of principle.

We have to question whether the right to buy was good and sound public policy. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has estimated that, as a result of that creation of the Thatcher era, some 500,000 homes have been lost from rented stock in Scotland alone. Many people are languishing on waiting lists for council houses, or for social rented houses, and every member in the chamber will have seen many of them. I question whether the removal of all the houses that would otherwise have been available to them was a sensible policy. The position of the Government—of my party—in relation to the right to buy is not prejudiced but practical.

We are now having to play catch-up in relation to the availability of social rented housing, and the Scottish Government is doing a lot. Members do not have to take my word, or the minister’s word, for that. The Scottish Building Federation has said that

“Between 2007 and 2010, the value of public sector new housebuilding in Scotland has risen by 89 per cent”

and that

“the number of public sector new homes built in Scotland annually has risen by 42 per cent”.

Good work is going on. A significant number of those homes are council houses—the most council houses that have been built for a great number of years. Therefore, the Tory position on the right to buy is a nonsense; it is an absolutely ridiculous position because there would be no incentive for local authorities to continue that council-house building programme if, as soon as they built a house, it became subject to the right to buy. Again, members do not need to take just my word for that. Shelter has said that it disagrees with the Conservative position on right to buy as expressed in the motion today, and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has said that the Government’s position is correct.

The Government’s position is coherent; it is designed to protect social rented housing, and it is backed by the people at the coalface—those who work in the housing sector. However, there is a degree of incoherence in Alex Johnstone’s position. He criticises the Government’s position on housing association grant but simultaneously calls for increases to the discount for the sale of council houses. Such a position would not only remove vitally required houses for social rent but would cut money from the public purse.

Lewis Macdonald was right when he said that the Tories have brought forward

“the right subject but ... the wrong issues”.

As Aileen McLeod said, it would have been better if we had been talking about the Welfare Reform Bill and how it will affect housing.

The Presiding Officer: The member must wind up.

Jamie Hepburn: I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say at the end of the debate.

09:51

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I will use my contribution to the debate to raise an issue that I am sure many MSPs frequently have to deal with on behalf of their constituents: that is, how local councils and other RSLs allocate houses. Before I do so, however, I want to emphasise the importance of house building and construction to the overall wellbeing of the Scottish economy.

According to the Scottish Building Federation, the Scottish construction industry workforce has been reduced by 31,000, or 15 per cent, between 2009 and 2011. Private sector construction has been particularly badly hit, with the consequence that the house-building industry has become increasingly dependent on public sector investment for new work. Those in the sector are therefore concerned by the fact that the Scottish Government's affordable housing budget faces a cut of 30 per cent between now and 2014-15 and by the impact that that will have on jobs in the construction sector.

As my colleague Alex Johnstone did, I will mention the importance of the right-to-buy policy and the success that it has been for many people in Scotland. We should not forget the sense of pride that people gain from owning their own homes. Home ownership gives people a stake in the maintenance and improvement of their communities and neighbourhoods. It also fosters social mobility and enables people to build up capital. That is why we believe that as many Scots as possible should have the opportunity to share in the benefits of home ownership. They must include those who live in social housing, which is why we have opposed, and will continue to oppose, the restrictions on the right to buy that the Scottish Government has imposed in order to prevent people from exercising that right. None of us should forget that almost half a million households in Scotland have taken advantage of the right to buy since it was introduced in 1980.

The policy is about more than allowing people to own their homes; the Scottish Government could use the right to buy as a means to re-energise the

Scottish economy. By increasing the available discounts to encourage tenants to buy their own homes, it would increase the funding that would be available for investment in building affordable homes for people on low incomes, which would also boost jobs in the construction sector. I am pleased that British Government has recognised that, but I am disappointed that the Scottish Government has not.

I will return to the main point of my contribution, which relates to the allocations policy that prevents many RSLs from giving priority to local people when allocating properties. That can often lead to frustration among applicants and anger in communities. Under the current legislation, landlords cannot take into account the length of time for which an applicant has lived in the area. They can give preference to people who reside in the area, but they have to give the same preference to other groups who meet certain criteria—for example, people who want to move into the area to take up employment. We want social landlords, including councils, to be given greater ability to take into account local connections when deciding on housing applications and transfer requests.

The situation is a particular concern in rural communities such as those in my constituency. One issue that has been raised with me time and again is the difficulty that people face when they want to apply for a house within their own community, only to find that they are so far down the housing list that it is impossible. The effect of that is to break up communities, to force young people from the communities in which they have grown up and, in the long run, to increase the average age of people who live in more remote areas, which has an obvious impact on provision of services in those communities.

I am strongly of the view that the Scottish Government should allow social landlords more scope to give extra weight to local connections in allocating houses. That would be a welcome step that would help to ensure that local people have access to local houses. We must do everything that we can to keep rural communities together and to support families who want to move house within their community. Changes to the allocation rules would benefit rural areas such as those in the Borders.

The debate is a welcome opportunity to highlight the importance of the housing sector to the Scottish economy. Even if ministers do not accept our arguments about the right to buy and the importance of the housing sector, the Scottish Government must surely acknowledge the need to help people to stay in their communities by reforming the allocations procedures.

09:55

Humza Yousaf (Glasgow) (SNP): When I read Alex Johnstone's motion, which extols the virtues of the right to buy, I thought that we were going to be cast back in time to the 1980s. I half expected to see him wearing a leather jacket and one sparkly silver glove and doing a moonwalk across the chamber. For those who like their 1980s movies, I point out that the motion is a bit like "Back to the Future" and even has a ring of "Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back" about it.

However, there are no two ways about it—the right-to-buy policy was a disaster for low-cost homes for rent. Those are not my words, but those of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, and many more words like them have been used. Under Thatcher's right-to-buy policy, not only did homelessness increase, but the number of households in arrears on their mortgages shot up from 30,000 in 1983 to 130,000 in the space of seven years.

Let us drag ourselves back to the present reality—an uncomfortable position for some, I am sure. There is no doubt that housing is one of the biggest concerns of many of our constituents. We are all, in Parliament, united in wanting to tackle the shortage of affordable homes, but each of us has a different role to play. I intend to make the case for Glasgow to benefit as much as possible from the Scottish Government's near £600 million investment as part of its plans to build 30,000 affordable homes. I am delighted that, last year, 1,023 new builds were approved in the city that I have the honour of representing.

As will my colleagues in the Opposition, I will be watching the Government's progress towards the target of building 30,000 affordable homes. That target is undoubtedly ambitious—but I argue that we have an ambitious Government.

Jim Hume: Humza Yousaf is going on about 30,000 affordable homes. Does he remember the SNP manifesto commitment to provide 30,000 social rented houses, which is completely different?

Humza Yousaf: Jim Hume is in no position to talk about that. I will come to the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition Government and the effect that it is having on the housing sector.

Just as I feel that I have a duty to hold the SNP Government to account, do not those in the blue and yellow corner feel the same obligation in relation to their bosses in London? As my colleague Aileen McLeod said, every single member has a duty to speak out against the Tory benefits reforms, which will result in a rise in homelessness in Scotland. As a result of the changes that the Tory Government has proposed,

about 55,000 Scots are in danger of losing more than £500 a year, and some as much as £2,500 a year. To call those changes "reforms" is inaccurate and even disingenuous.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member give way?

Humza Yousaf: No, I will not.

The word "reform" suggests progress, useful change and making things better. The welfare changes are not reforms; they are a systematic decimation of housing benefit that will leave the vast majority of those who claim the local housing allowance much worse off. Housing organisations are queuing up to attack the Tory-Liberal coalition. Crisis's chief executive Leslie Morphy has said:

"This cut will lead to thousands of people losing their homes across the country and Glasgow is among the worst hit. We are extremely concerned that some will end up homeless and at worst on the streets."

Once again, the Tory-led Government is continuing its crusade on the poorest families and those on the lowest incomes while allowing billions of pounds to escape our shores through tax loopholes for the super-wealthy. It really is a tale of two Governments. In the face of a 36 per cent real-terms reduction in the capital budget from Westminster, the Scottish Government is prioritising affordable homes with the aim of delivering 30,000 of them, two thirds of which are intended to be for social rent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You must close, please.

Humza Yousaf: Scotland needs innovation and investment to boost our housing sector; Alex Johnstone's motion cannot be supported. His cry to reinstate the policies of Thatcher serves to remind us why there are so few Tory members in the Parliament.

10:00

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): Last week, the cabinet secretary was again afforded the opportunity to clarify at committee that the Government has reneged on its commitment to build 6,000 social rented houses a year. Like most members, I reacted with astonishment when he described such terms as "irrelevant". It is not "irrelevant" to establish how many social rented homes the Government plans to provide every year when 156,000 families languish on housing waiting lists. The commitment that we heard today does not mirror the one that is in the SNP manifesto.

Alex Neil: Does Jim Hume realise that we inherited that long waiting list because, in the eight years that the Liberal Democrats were in administration with Labour, they built fewer than

4,000 houses a year on average, only about 3,000 of which were social rented houses?

Jim Hume: The minister is getting a bit confusing and trying to create a smokescreen. *[Interruption.]* Does he not recall that, under the previous Administration, more than 40,000 housing association houses were built? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jim Hume: The number was 40,000 plus houses, if the minister did not hear. He has a long way to go before he can criticise the Liberal Democrats.

A significant supply of new homes being available for social rent is vital if Scotland is to fulfil its commitment to giving every unintentionally homeless person the right to a home by 2012. The 4,300 homes that have been referred to—74 per cent of which will be social rented houses, I believe—are a welcome start, but we have a long way to go until we get the other 25,700.

When the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth introduced his draft budget and spending review to the Parliament, he said:

“I am delighted to announce that the spending review marks a decisive shift towards preventative spending in Scotland”.

He went on to say that the Government’s shift in spending priorities respected

“the parliamentary consensus that exists in that area.”—*[Official Report, 21 September 2011; c 1925.]*

Unfortunately, we have recently learned that the budget that was supposed to herald a “shift towards preventative spending” contains a proposal to cut the housing adaptations budget for registered social landlords from an already modest £8 million to only £6 million. I understand the financial pressures on the Government, but that significant 25 per cent cut is disproportionate and seems to contradict the Government’s commitment to preventative spending.

The nationalist members are quick to blame others for every reduction that the Scottish Government announces, but each week we hear announcements for initiatives that the Government is extending or introducing for the first time. For example, on 13 October, the Government announced the extension of funding to the open-market shared-equity scheme to the tune of more than £4.5 million. That is a worthwhile project, but it is clear that when an initiative that is to the Government’s liking requires funding, a pot of money is found somewhere.

The Government was not forced to cut 25 per cent of the housing adaptations budget: it chose to

do so. Adaptations are an example of effective preventative spending. They keep thousands of Scots living in their own homes and lead to substantial savings in the long term. An independent study revealed that for every £1 that is invested in stage 3 adaptations, the Scottish Government could benefit from a total social return on investment of between £5.50 and £6.

I recently met affected housing associations, which informed me that there is a real prospect of their having to raise rents or stop providing adaptations altogether. Naturally, that will apply more pressure on the national health service, councils and the third sector.

The Government needs to admit that it got that decision wrong and reverse it. I look forward to the cabinet secretary or the minister referring to that in his closing speech.

10:04

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I draw the Parliament’s attention to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee meeting of 9 November, at which the Minister for Housing and Transport almost admitted that the SNP made a mistake when it committed in its manifesto to building 6,000 social rented houses a year. We all know that that has changed to 6,000 affordable new houses a year. As we have heard repeatedly, that is a different thing from social rented houses. Why is it so hard for the Government to admit that it made a mistake and could not deliver what it originally promised in its manifesto?

As I have said in previous debates, housing is the single biggest loser in the draft budget. Still, no action has been taken to correct that. The Government will cut funding by 63 per cent over the spending review period, but the number of affordable houses that are to be built will be cut by 16 per cent. Does that mean that the quality of the houses that are built will suffer?

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way?

Margaret McDougall: I am sorry. I have no time to take interventions.

Will higher rents be charged in the long term to recover the cost? The registered social landlord subsidy has been cut from £77,000 in 2009 to £40,000 this year. Much higher rents are likely to be charged to cover borrowing costs. Shelter argues that, although that is a viable short to medium-term solution, extending it over a longer period would mean significant rent increases. Has the Government carried out affordability tests to gauge whether the likely increase in rents will be within hard-pressed tenants’ means? That is even before the new housing benefit reforms come in.

Less funding for new social rented homes is, of course, having a detrimental effect on the construction industry, which employs 127,000 people in Scotland.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way?

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

The construction industry involves a further 63,000 self-employed people. Between April and June, 10,000 Scottish construction workers lost their jobs and a total of 30,000 jobs have been lost since March 2009.

The fall in the number of houses that are built not only reduces the supply of new housing but puts people's jobs and livelihoods at risk. While youth unemployment is at its highest level since 1994, the Government is reducing the availability of modern apprenticeship places in construction. That is, of course, a major blow to modern apprenticeships, because between April and December 2010, 32 per cent of all modern apprenticeships were completed in the construction industry. I ask the Government again whether it thinks that it is wise to put further pressure on the construction industry and to put the economy at risk by hitting housing so hard.

It is not just housing that will be affected by the cuts—they will have far-reaching social consequences. In the past few weeks, the Government's response to criticism of the budget has been to ask Labour members for alternatives. Has the Government considered using the £67 million in Barnett consequentialities that were gained from the English council-tax freeze to boost the supply of affordable social housing?

I again urge the Government to re-examine the draft housing budget. We urgently need to breathe life into the construction industry and to get it back on its feet. If we do not, more jobs and more modern apprenticeship places will be lost and the construction industry will be deskilled.

Housing is a basic human need and the Government must give it priority.

10:08

Derek Mackay (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): Once again, we hear not positive contributions but yet another whinge from the Labour Party. I look forward to seeing exactly what their priorities are, if Labour members ever produce an alternative budget.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Derek Mackay: Labour members have not managed to produce anything in their 20 or so minutes.

At least the Conservatives offer a position on housing for members to consider. Mr Johnstone is a reasonable man—I am disappointed that I will no longer sit beside him in the Finance Committee—so I gave his speech, and particularly his comments on the right to buy, some thought. I know that a film will come out shortly that reminisces about and romanticises Margaret Thatcher, but the Conservatives have shown that they are ahead of the curve—for the first time in a while—because they want to romanticise some of her greatest policies.

The right to buy may have had some attributes. Arguably, it transferred some resource.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Derek Mackay: I would like to make more progress.

The right to buy involved an asset transfer to people who might not otherwise have had access to capital. The problem is that the asset transfer was not from the rich to the poor but was, in many ways, from the poor to the poor. The right-to-buy discounts that were offered have been paid for through debt that was left with the remaining tenants, who have paid through their rent and, arguably, through a lack of investment.

The right to buy was not a useful tool for targeting housing investment and resource either. We know that it was taken up more in popular areas, or areas of higher demand. Rather than housing that is fit for heroes, which was the original concept of council housing, we are left with housing for the poor—in particular, the working poor.

The argument that if we were to extend the discounts many people would take up the right to buy—because they can afford it and are just waiting for the moment—is ill informed, because two thirds of people who are currently in council housing rely on housing benefit, which is also under threat, thanks to the UK Government's Welfare Reform Bill. We would end up with a further mismatch between housing provision and what people aspire to and require.

As Jamie Hepburn said, a number of people have taken up their right to buy—I am aware of some former militant MSPs who took up their right to buy, despite their principled opposition to it. I am not, for pragmatic reasons, happy about the right to buy because it has not helped the housing situation in Scotland. The discounts were such that the debt burden increased and the impact on housing departments has been significant.

I am glad that John Lamont touched on the local connection issue. There might be more of an issue in rural areas, but there is something quite sinister about a housing policy that starts with, "You're not

from round these parts, are you?" The Conservatives have to consider carefully what they mean by local connection, because more than 50 per cent of housing applications come from homeless people. How do we establish what their local connection is? There could be just a parochial analysis of who should be allocated housing. Surely we should allocate it on the basis of need, which must be the over-riding concern when it comes to housing.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Derek Mackay: Yes.

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

Derek Mackay: Further emphasis has to be placed on investing in the innovative package that the Government has created around mixed use, mixed tenure and a range of funding packages to ensure that new homes are built. Crucially, we must invest in the houses that currently exist so that they are sustainable.

The Liberal Democrats mentioned the number of people on waiting lists. What they said is true, but we must ensure that the homeless are accommodated first. A large proportion of the 140,000 on the lists do not want to move; they are looking for a step up—it is aspirational. For some, that might be about improved housing and for others it might be about larger housing. A step backwards to enhance discounts for the right to buy, which would be disingenuous, misdirected and not affordable, would be the wrong step to take.

10:12

Lewis Macdonald: Boosting jobs and training in the construction industry, providing good-quality houses for sale and for rent, preventing homelessness, tackling fuel poverty, challenging antisocial behaviour, cutting carbon emissions and growing the Scottish economy are all objectives of a Scottish housing policy that I suspect every party in this chamber would say it supports. The Tories alone say that the key to achieving those objectives is to extend the right to buy and to sell more houses in the social rented sector into the private sector in order to create capital receipts to pay for new homes. As we have heard, nobody else believes that.

The key to affordable housing is not, in fact, to sell off the housing that we have, but for there to be Government investment. The need for social provision of housing comes from market failure, on which only Government can intervene on a sufficient scale to resolve it. That is not to say that Government needs to act alone. Innovative

funding mechanisms and new kinds of public-private partnership can help lever in additional funds and get more houses built. If they do so, we will welcome it.

To sell more rented homes into the owner-occupied sector is not the best way to find the funds. If there is a debate on the right to buy it should be on whether we need to do more to limit the loss of homes from the social rented sector rather than on how to remove the limits that already exist.

Whatever the leveraging opportunities, it is still for Government to take a lead if market failure in housing is to be addressed. That is why we are so concerned by the cuts that the Scottish National Party has already made in the funding of affordable homes. As the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations noted in its evidence on the draft budget and spending review:

"The overall amount of funding available for new investment ... has been cut by over 30% in 2011-12 and subsidy levels were cut by around 48%. This has become unsustainable."

Keith Brown: I will ask Lewis Macdonald a question that I have asked before. If he believes that the housing budget should be increased, can he say by how much and from where that money should come?

Lewis Macdonald: I am addressing a decision by the Scottish Government to reduce the housing budget radically when it should be looking at what it can do—we have heard some suggestions this morning—to increase the level of support.

It is no coincidence that the benchmark level of subsidy per house has gone down at the same time as the overall level of funding has gone down. Over the spending review, Alex Neil proposes to cut the total funding for the housing budget by half. Those proposals have come from ministers and ministers are responsible for them. They are also responsible for the fact that the number of new houses started by housing associations fell from some 6,500 in 2009-10 to barely 4,500 in 2010-11—a cut of nearly 30 per cent—with worse to come. It is little wonder that ministers want to stop being judged by the achievement of targets for the approval of new homes and instead to start counting completions, because that will allow them to count for a second time homes that were begun before they started their current funding squeeze.

Those are the real issues for the funding of housing policy in Scotland, and the challenge is how to find the funds to enable building of houses. However, in order to deny the fact that they are making cuts, ministers are setting targets and providing subsidies in such a way that the outcomes will be more homes for mid-market rent or sale, and fewer homes for rent at a level that

people on low incomes can afford. Rather than extend the right to buy, we should protect the right to rent; in that way, we really could lift people out of poverty, build more homes and grow the economy. The real housing challenge for the Government is to invest more, not less, and to concentrate support on those who need it most by honouring the promises that it made in its election manifesto.

10:16

Keith Brown: I will use my closing remarks to say more about the strategy for tackling the problems that Alex Johnstone's motion describes in part but, unfortunately, appears to have no solution to. His reference to "homes fit for heroes" after the second world war was at least 20 years out of date, as that initiative took off after the first world war. However, the fact that he was 20 years out of date seems to reflect the nature of the proposals in the motion.

I will also focus on action that is being taken to increase supply across all tenures. There is, rightly, an understandable emphasis on the inputs—how much money is going in. However, we must focus much more on the outputs—the number of affordable houses that are being built. That is the direction taken by Government policy. We recognise the connections between different tenures—how they can impact on one another—and the critical importance of supply to Scotland's economic recovery and future growth.

Reference has been made to the challenges that exist in the construction industry and how much money is in the economy. It is interesting to note that more than £100 million will be removed from the economy generally as a result of the changes to the local housing allowance. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are responsible for that but made no reference to it in any of their speeches.

It is our job to make our funds work harder and deliver more affordable housing at lower cost and for greater value to the public purse. To that end, we have tried to encourage housing associations, developers and local authorities to work together to deliver housing that meets their communities' needs; to make better use of the existing housing stock to improve choice and quality for households; and to help to deliver our ambitions for tackling climate change.

John Lamont talked about meeting local needs and allowing extra weighting for local connections. We have listened to that point and will start consultation in January on allocations. Nevertheless, I agree with Derek Mackay that we must be aware of the dangers of such an approach. A recent trend has been to ensure that

veterans do not require the same number of points for local connections, as they do not establish those during their time in the service. There are difficulties with that approach, and some of the points that Derek Mackay raised are well worth bearing in mind. We will consult on the issue.

Increasing the supply of affordable homes remains our top priority. However, we could be so much further down the road in terms of the money that is available to us had successive Labour and Conservative Administrations, when tenants decided to keep their stock with the council rather than transfer it, treated both types of debt equally. Addressing homelessness and affordability issues is a vital part of our effort to build a better and fairer Scotland as we continue to regenerate our most deprived neighbourhoods.

Our target—which I have set out several times—is to deliver 30,000 affordable homes, completed by the end of the current Parliament. As one of the SNP speakers said, that is a challenging target. We understand that—it will not be an easy target to achieve. However, I am a bit puzzled by the different versions of what happened in the previous eight years.

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: Just a second—I am just going to mention Mr Hume. He talks about the building of 40,000 housing association houses in those eight years. However, yesterday, Patricia Ferguson told us that fewer than 32,000 were built, which is fewer than 4,000 a year, with just over 3,000 of those being for social rented accommodation. There seems to be some doubt about the numbers. Perhaps we will get some clarity and consistency on that in the future.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: In a minute.

We are working towards our target, despite the cut in capital spending. It is rich to hear Mr Hume talk about a 25 per cent cut to the housing adaptations budget. Can he not refer to the 36 per cent cut in the capital budget? Does he not recognise that that produces pressure in all our budgets? He says that we have gone looking for those cuts, but that is not the case. We are having to adapt to the cuts that have been imposed by Westminster.

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: I will take an intervention from Mr Macdonald.

Lewis Macdonald: I offer the minister a further opportunity to address the point that I thought he was going to address when he intervened during my speech, which concerns the SNP's manifesto commitment to build 6,000 social rented housing

units a year. Does he have any intention of fulfilling that promise?

Keith Brown: Unlike Lewis Macdonald, who did not answer my question about whether Labour was about to ditch allocation on the basis of need, I have answered that question here and in committee on a number of occasions, as has Mr Neil. It is up to Lewis Macdonald whether he chooses to listen to those answers.

Along with the commitment to more affordable housing—30,000 affordable homes over the five years of this session—I have been able to announce a doubling of investment in new affordable homes through the investment and innovation fund. Through an input of £111 million, we are producing more than £400 million of investment in our housing stock. That is the kind of result that we want to see, and it means that local authorities in Scotland are building almost as many council houses as the rest of the UK combined—5,000 over the next five years. Lewis Macdonald should compare that to his Government's record and then think about whether he should criticise what we are doing on council house building.

Private developers are taking advantage of opportunities that are offered through the national housing trust and our support for shared equity. A great deal is being done.

As I said, one of the major elements that affect the issue that we are talking about is the housing benefit changes that have been announced. We have conducted a detailed analysis of the impacts. We know that housing stakeholders will have to deal with the reforms and that there will be major pressures on landlords. We have tried to deal with that. Accordingly, I am happy to announce today Scottish Government support for three strands of activity. This year, we will spend £100,000 through the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the housing options hubs. That money will be spent on the development and sharing of best practice across the social rented sector, adding to the capacity of those at the sharp end at a critical time.

We are taking positive action to try to deal with the cuts that have been imposed by Westminster and I would like the other parties to come forward with positive suggestions. I hope that that will happen in the next housing debate, because it has not happened today.

10:22

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): This has been a worthwhile and revealing debate. I will start by dealing with the things in the Conservative motion that are not in dispute. We are all agreed that the housing market is pivotal to

the Scottish economy. Equally, there is no dispute about the fact that house building in Scotland has fallen to a 30-year low, nor is there any disagreement about the need to ensure that there is an adequate supply of good-quality affordable housing to buy and rent in the private and social sectors. It is a fact that the housing and regeneration budget suffers from the second-largest cut in the Scottish Government's spending review. It has suffered a cut of £96 million—or 25 per cent in real terms, as Jim Hume pointed out in the amendment that he lodged—which is certainly of concern to at least three out of the four main parties.

The SNP's response is very upbeat. Apparently, the pinnacle of its success is that it has built more social housing than the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition did. What the SNP cannot say is that it has built more than the Conservatives did. That record number was achieved through aspirational policies such as the right to buy, which was introduced by the Conservatives in 1980 and scrapped last year by the SNP, despite the fact that the receipts from sales under the right to buy were used to modernise houses and build new houses.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way?

Margaret Mitchell: I am afraid that I have heard Mr Hepburn's views on housing all too often, and he has nothing new to add this morning.

The SNP wants to take its political dogma to new heights, praising the SNP-Liberal Democrat East Lothian Council proposal to buy back former council houses. That is a deeply flawed proposal, despite what Keith Brown asserts. It is retrograde and it does not represent value for money at a time when local authorities are under severe financial pressure. Worse still, it contradicts everything that the SNP Government has told us that it wants to do nationally in terms of boosting the economy by supporting jobs in the construction industry. So there we have it: the SNP says one thing locally and another nationally.

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

Margaret Mitchell: If Mr Hume does not mind, I will not, as I am the only member who is concentrating on what our motion is about—one else has done so.

I turn to the next part of our motion, which is on the need for legislative reform, not just to reinstate the right to buy and to address local connections, but to deal with the growing and vexing problem of homelessness. The homelessness legislation creates local tensions, because young couples and others wait patiently for accommodation—in some cases, for years—trying to build up points to improve their prospects, only to be pushed further and further down the waiting list. It is not in dispute

that the ever-increasing numbers of homeless people get precedence over them.

As of March 2011, there were 156,200 applicants on local authority waiting lists. Furthermore, during 2010-11, 43 per cent of the available social lets were for the homeless. An analysis of those applicants reveals that 62 per cent of them were single people, 24 per cent of them were single parents and only 31 per cent of them were households with children. Although many of those applicants should be and are a priority for housing, many of them should not be, including those who have a record of causing chaos in their communities and who come under the banner of antisocial tenants.

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

Margaret Mitchell: Perhaps later.

That brings me to the final part of the motion, which is on antisocial tenants. Antisocial behaviour has been ignored by every other party in the chamber, yet, as every elected member knows, it is a major problem in every constituency. Therefore, it defies belief that statistics on the use of antisocial behaviour orders and other antisocial behaviour remedies are no longer collated. That is because, in 2008, the SNP Government decided to develop a voluntary performance framework instead, with an annual report being made to Parliament on progress—or lack of it—towards the implementation of the promotion of positive outcomes. That represented a change in direction from enforcement and punishment of crimes to prevention and early intervention. The only problem is that, to date, there has been very little evidence of early intervention or prevention strategies delivering for people who are suffering from the blight of antisocial neighbours.

I will give one example, which, appallingly, is not uncommon. A constituent of mine has lived in her flat for 16 years. She works during the day and has an evening job. The past three and a half years have been, in her words, “a living hell”. Why? Because three and a half years ago, a 17-year-old girl was allocated a house in her block of flats, where the tenants had all looked after common property and had lived in harmony for many years. That individual does not work, so it has been party time, with loud music into the early hours and a constant stream of young people coming and going.

If that was not bad enough, a 17-year-old male, also unemployed, was allocated housing in the same block of flats. The result is that what was a well-kept council property has had its security doors ripped off and fights are commonplace, with walls being left smeared with blood. A constant stream of teenagers come and go late into the

night and the early hours of the morning, urinate on the stairs and are usually so drunk that they shout through letterboxes completely unaware of which flat they are trying to access. That is a terrifying experience for my constituent, who lives alone. Sleep is impossible. The lady in question, who has never been ill or taken a day off work in her life, has had to visit the doctor, who has prescribed antidepressants such as Valium, which she does not want to take—and why should she have to? I do not need to go on. It is clear that that situation does not make any sense from a human or an economic perspective. There is absolutely no evidence of early intervention or preventative spend there.

What is evident is that the SNP Government, which has been in power for almost five years and which presides over local government and housing policy, has done nothing to ensure that tenancy agreements are enforced by local authorities so that, at the first sign of trouble, respectable, law-abiding tenants know that officials are on their side. The Government has also done nothing to ensure that allocation policies are proportionate and sensible and that they protect the elderly and other tenants.

The debate has exposed the extent to which the SNP Government's warm words about early intervention and preventative spend are, in practice, a sham. More significantly, it has made clear the real priorities of the SNP, Labour and the Lib Dems, all of whose amendments seek to delete the motion's reference to antisocial behaviour. Indeed, Lewis Macdonald and Jamie Hepburn dismissed the topic as being the wrong one to concentrate on. The clear and indisputable message to honest, hard-working tenants and families in Scotland who merely want to live in decent housing and in peace is that, if those parties are not prepared to make tackling antisocial tenants a priority, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party will do that. Quite simply, we are on their side.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on housing.

Public Sector

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01348, in the name of Mary Scanlon, on the role of the public sector.

10:31

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I begin by acknowledging the valuable contribution that the public sector makes to the economy and society in Scotland. It is that hugely valued contribution by public sector workers that makes the potential strikes so devastating, particularly for the most vulnerable. Public sector staff make their contributions in their working lifetimes, and their pensions should be based on fairness, quality and sustainability in retirement. I understand that this could be the first focused debate on public sector pensions in the Parliament, although I appreciate that we are the warm-up act for the Government's debate on pensions in two weeks' time, for which I fully commend the Government.

Earlier this week, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body agreed to progress to the next stage of the external security facility to ensure that democratic business continues in the Parliament despite any security threats. I hope that all parliamentarians will ensure that their duties within this democracy and Government continue on 30 November should the strikes go ahead while negotiations continue.

In five years' time, the United Kingdom is due to spend £33 billion a year on public sector pensions. That is the same as the budget for the Scottish Parliament. Any politician who thinks that the figure can continue to rise must be explicit about where the money will come from. There is no doubt about the urgent need for reform against the background of people living much longer than when the funds were set up. Labour's legacy was state spending of £4 for every £3 in revenue, with the UK Government having to borrow £1 in every £4 just to keep the lights on, pensions paid, teachers in schools and doctors and nurses in hospitals. That simply cannot continue, given the huge national debt, of which we are all aware.

The former Labour minister Lord Hutton reviewed pensions in the UK and concluded that there is a clear case for change. He stated:

"The responsible thing to do is to accept that because we are living longer we should work for longer."

I also agree with Rachel Reeves, Labour's shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, who set out three key tests for a fair agreement on pensions: affordability, fairness and sustainability. I believe that the current proposals, which are under negotiation, meet those three tests. While I am

being consensual, I also agree with Ed Miliband, who described strike action while negotiations are on-going as a "mistake".

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: I will make some progress, if the member does not mind.

As recently as 2 November, the UK coalition Government placed a new offer on the table of an 8 per cent increase in the accrual rate, and it is committed to continue working constructively with unions for a settlement.

Having read the Labour amendment, I think that it is important to set out the facts. Most public sector workers will see no reduction in the pension that they receive on retirement, with many low and middle-income earners receiving a larger pension income on retirement. Any worker within 10 years of retirement will see no change to the age at which they can retire and no change to the amount of pension that they will receive when they retire.

After all the reforms, people in the public sector will still have significantly better pensions than those in the private sector, especially given the former Labour Government's tax raid on private pension funds of around £5 billion a year, which took up to £100 billion out of private pension funds.

It is obvious that Scottish Labour has not read or understood Lord Hutton's report, so let me give some examples of the proposals.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: I would like to give some examples so that I can put the member right.

A nurse with a salary at retirement of £34,000 would receive a pension of £23,000 if the reforms were introduced; under the current scheme, they would receive £17,000. A teacher with a salary at retirement of £38,000 would receive £25,000 under the proposed scheme; under the current scheme, they would receive £19,000. A hospital porter with a salary at retirement of £14,600 would receive pension benefits of £12,000 under the new scheme, as opposed to £9,000 in the existing scheme.

Perhaps Labour is going on strike because some people will receive less. A senior civil servant, of whom there are many, with a salary of more than £100,000 would receive £37,000 under the new proposals compared with £44,000 at present. The hospital porter's pension increases, whereas that of the top civil servant is reduced. The lowest paid and people who are 10 years from retirement will be protected and public sector

pensions will remain far better than those in the private sector.

It is worth noting that the settlement will not require further negotiation for a generation. The Government is not proposing any increase in the total employee scheme contribution rates in addition to the proposed 3.2 percentage points already announced.

We value the contribution of the public sector, but it is worth comparing public sector pensions with those in the private sector, which is so critical to the recovery of our economy. After the proposed reforms, public sector pensions will still be among the best, with a guaranteed pension that very few in the private sector could ever dream of.

In February this year, an Audit Scotland report highlighted the differences in contribution rates and levels among public sector schemes. There is no doubt that the Scottish Government will have to tackle the issue soon. I welcome the last line of the Scottish Government's amendment—it is probably the only line that I agree with.

The Scottish Conservatives encourage constructive debate and chose this subject for debate as there needs to be an open and honest discussion as well as a more realistic approach to public sector pensions. The Prime Minister has given a commitment to members of Parliament at Westminster that they should face exactly the same changes to their pensions as those imposed on public sector workers.

We should remember that, without reform, public sector workers would retire much earlier than private sector workers. Is that fair? Two thirds of private sector workers are not even members of any pension scheme.

The taxpayer contributes three times more to civil service employees' pensions than the average private sector employer pays into its employees' pensions. Is it right and fair that private sector employees contribute through taxation to a pension scheme that is far more generous than they could ever dream of?

Richard Baker: I am glad that Mary Scanlon has given me an opportunity to make my point so that she can establish whether I am wrong before she replies to it.

Mary Scanlon talked about Lord Hutton's recommendations. He said that the move from the retail prices index to the consumer prices index would result in a 15 per cent cut in pension benefits not just for people in public sector schemes but for people in private sector schemes. Does she think that that is fair? Does she agree with Lord Hutton that that move represents a

significant cut in benefits in private pension schemes?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have less than one minute, Ms Scanlon.

Mary Scanlon: I appreciate that, Presiding Officer.

When it comes to a cut in pension scheme benefits, the biggest cut that anyone could ever see is the £100 billion that Gordon Brown took out of the private sector and occupational pension funds, which affected people the length and breadth of Scotland.

On 30 November, instead of Labour members standing shoulder to shoulder with the strikers outside the Parliament, they should be face to face with people across Scotland, apologising for the £5 billion annual raid on private sector and occupational pension schemes, which reduced the tax value of those funds by more than £100 billion.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the very valuable contribution that the public sector makes to the economy and society; accepts that, while government has an obligation to ensure that public sector employees are well rewarded with good quality pension schemes, there is an urgent need for reform, believing that the proposed reforms will ease the burden on taxpayers and still leave public sector employees in a far better position than their counterparts in many private sector schemes, and further believes that the planned strikes by the unions on 30 November 2011 are a deeply irresponsible action at this time and will do nothing to help Scotland's recovery from the recession.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Swinney to speak to and move amendment S4M-01348.2. Mr Swinney, you have seven minutes.

10:41

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): It is a pleasure to speak on behalf of the Government in this debate and to begin by welcoming Mary Scanlon to her new post. This is new territory indeed—it will be a novel experience for those of us on these seats who are accustomed to debates on the economy to face Mary Scanlon. I am glad that the reshuffle has provided us with Mary Scanlon.

I was a bit surprised by the title of this debate, which was advertised last Thursday as "The Role of the Public Sector". I thought that we would perhaps be treated to the early thinking of the new Conservative leadership in Scotland on the approach that we should take to running our public services—an explanation of why the Thatcherite reforms that have been taken forward south of the border, involving the privatisation of the national health service, are the way that we should

proceed in Scotland. But, no, the Conservative party has returned to form and, rather curiously, has focused on a particular aspect of the role of the public sector, which is of course the live and important topic of public sector pensions. I will come on to discuss some of the issues in that regard.

Neil Findlay: I thank Mr Swinney for mentioning the new Conservative leader. Given the nature of this debate, is he aware that not long ago the new Conservative leader was apparently a placard-wielding striker at the BBC?

John Swinney: That just goes to prove that every individual has a right to protest and to strike and, moreover, to change their mind about these issues.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful that the cabinet secretary reminds us that every individual has the right to change their mind. Will he urge the Cabinet Secretary for Parliament and Government Strategy to change his mind about the proposal to schedule a debate on public sector pensions that is specifically timed to ensure that only MSPs who cross picket lines can participate?

John Swinney: No, I will not encourage the cabinet secretary to change his mind, because it is entirely appropriate that Parliament sits on every day that it is due to sit and addresses issues that matter to and affect the people of our country. I look forward to savaging on 30 November the Conservatives and the Liberals for their approach to public sector pensions. I will use the opportunity of that occasion in Parliament to do exactly that. It would be helpful if Mr Harvie was here to add his voice to the arguments in that respect. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

John Swinney: Before we move on to pensions, I want to spend a few moments discussing the public sector. Despite all the warm and considered words in Mary Scanlon's opening remarks, she then went on to attack public sector workers in virtually everything else that she said.

I want to make it clear that the Scottish Government values enormously the contribution made to our public services by public sector workers. We are committed to a process of public sector reform that is predicated on four principal themes: integrating public services at a local level; ensuring that we enhance the development of our public sector workforce to maximise its capability and effectiveness at a time of financial constraint; ensuring that we have an open, transparent and rigorous performance culture that challenges public services to improve their performance and boost the outcomes for members of the public; and, crucially—this is for the benefit of Margaret

Mitchell—focusing extensively on preventative intervention. Any analysis of public sector reform and the condition of our public services demonstrates that unless we intervene early to arrest some of the long-term problems that affect individuals and circumstances in Scotland, we will continue to have significant burdens on public services that will be difficult to meet.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary agree that although focusing on preventative spend is all very well, what really matters is outcomes, and that that is where this Scottish National Party Government is failing dismally?

John Swinney: That is just complete and total rubbish. If Margaret Mitchell looks at the Government's national performance framework, which she derided in her earlier speech, she will see a programme of constant improvement in the effectiveness of public services. The Government will continue to focus on that to improve the outcomes for the people of our country, and we will challenge vigorously any attempts to misrepresent the focus on preventative spending in the way that Margaret Mitchell has done.

I have set out very clearly the Government's disagreement with the United Kingdom Government's approach to public sector pension reform. There is a clear argument, which is at the heart of the Government's amendment today, that all public sector pensions should be "fair, sustainable and affordable". We accept that argument and we believe in Lord Hutton's proposal that there is a great deal of substantive and considered thinking to be done about how to approach the long-term sustainability of public sector pensions.

The problem is that the approach to that debate, which by its nature must be focused on negotiation and agreement with trade unions, has been contaminated by the cash-grab of the 3.2 per cent increase in pension contributions that has been required by the UK Government. That has made the debate on the question of public sector pension reform all the more difficult to sustain because, essentially, it has added a financial burden on public servants who already face acute financial challenges at this time. That is why the Government has set out its opposition to that proposal. Our ability to do something different in Scotland is constrained by the UK Government's threatening approach, as it says that it will reduce our budget if we do not accept the increases in contributions that its proposals require of us.

The Scottish Government will welcome the opportunity at the end of this month to set out in more detail and over more time all our thinking on public sector pensions and to make clear and reinforce the many areas in which we disagree

with the UK Government's approach. I stress the importance of our continuing dialogue with employer representatives and trade unions to ensure that we have a sustained approach to public sector pension reform.

We accept and understand the reasons why people feel the necessity to strike at this time. We do not agree with that action, because we believe that dialogue should be the way that we proceed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

John Swinney: The Scottish Government will firmly set out to Parliament on 30 November our principal reasons why the UK Government is taking the wrong course. We will make that position abundantly clear to Parliament.

I move amendment S4M-01348.2, to leave out from "accepts" to end and insert:

"believes that pensions must be fair, sustainable and affordable; considers that the 3.2% increase in contributions proposed by the UK Government is a cash grab that has more to do with deficit reduction than fair pensions; acknowledges that these increases come at a time when households are under financial pressure due to rising costs, and encourages the Scottish Government to continue to engage in full and extensive dialogue with trades unions and employers' representatives on the future of pension provisions."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call Richard Baker to speak to and move amendment S4M-01348.3. You have a very tight five minutes. We have absolutely no spare time left in this debate so people must stick to their time.

10:49

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, welcome Mary Scanlon to her new post, but I must say that the Conservative motion today might be best described as a "Life on Mars" motion. While everyone else is looking for the way forward to steer Scotland from recession, the Tories are harking back to the 1980s and their disregard for the trade union movement. I note, however, that not only did Ruth Davidson strike in her previous career as a journalist, she seems to be boycotting parliamentary business already. She is just out a week early; perhaps she will be out with us on 30 November after all.

The decision to raise the issue of public service pensions as part of Tory business today merely highlights the failure of the Tory-Liberal coalition to deal properly with pension reform. Instead of working in partnership with the trade unions to try to reform and future proof pensions and ensure decent provision for workers in retirement—we agree with what the cabinet secretary said about the potential in the Hutton proposals—we are being treated to one of the worst-handled

negotiations in Government history. We still hope that action can be averted by sensible negotiations between the Government and the trade unions, but thus far there have been months of dither and delay by the UK Government, and we are still waiting to be told what many of Danny Alexander's most recent proposals mean in detail.

Let us be clear: the unions understand that pension reform is needed. Every trade union takes the position that pensions need to be looked at in a fair and progressive way, but we have seen a series of botched announcements from the coalition, which concluded with Francis Maude's latest brainwave that the unions could go out on strike for 15 minutes and the Government could then carry on with business as usual, as it were. Mary Scanlon neglected to refer to the change from the RPI to the CPI for the uplifting of pensions, which will have a serious effect; the required 50 per cent increase in annual contributions; the fact that those increased pension contributions will be required for up to eight years longer; and that pensions will be payable to retired workers for up to eight years fewer. Very significant changes are being proposed.

The Tory motion describes the planned strikes as "deeply irresponsible", but who are the civil servants who are so "deeply irresponsible"? Who are the far-left militants who are determined to smash the state? Perhaps the Tories mean the FDA, which was formerly known as the First Division Association and is now described as the senior public servants union. Some 81 per cent of its members have voted to back strike action. Even the trade union of Sir Humphrey and Sir Peter Housden has had enough. Perhaps Sir Peter will even tear himself away from his blog for long enough to stand by the brazier with his colleagues. Who knows? That is the extent of the hash that the coalition has made of reform. Even senior civil servants who work in Her Majesty's Government have voted to go on strike.

However, it is not the Sir Humphreys or even the Sir Peters of the public sector who will get hit hardest. Rather, it is the lowest-paid public sector workers who will see the biggest cuts in their pay because of the proposed increase in contributions. In fact, those who earn the least will end up paying much more relatively. It is the refuse collectors, dinner ladies and care home and nursery workers who will get hammered, not the mandarins. Alongside that, the decision, which was taken without consultation or negotiation, to change from the RPI to the CPI for the uprating of pensions will mean a reduction of at least 15 per cent in the real value of pensions even before any further changes are implemented.

There is inherent dishonesty in these changes. They are not about making pensions more sustainable. Rather, they are a clumsy attempt to cut the deficit by hitting public sector workers. It is not so much a reform as a ruse—and a badly played one at that. If the Tories want to cut the deficit, they could back Labour's plan for a levy on bankers' bonuses, but I expect that we shall hear scant support for that from Conservative members—indeed, I already hear Mr Johnstone grumbling. The Tory motion glibly talks about the strikes doing

"nothing to help Scotland's recovery from the recession",

but it is the UK Government's botched economic strategy that is cutting growth and increasing unemployment.

It does not have to be that way in Scotland. The Scottish Government is not doing enough to take a different approach here, but it can do so, and it can take a different approach on pensions, too. It falls to Mr Swinney to make decisions on a number of pension schemes. Indeed, we encouraged him to take a different approach on the local government scheme, and it is right that he did so. Different choices can be made for other schemes, although we acknowledge that those choices are not easy.

We support much of what the Scottish Government has said about public sector reform, but the choices that it has made on public sector jobs also affect those who will strike on 30 November. Those people put up with a great deal of pain, including from thousands of job losses—those losses have been proportionately more in Scotland than in the rest of the UK—before reaching the difficult decision to take action. It is not action that is lightly taken, but it has the support of the Labour group in the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): We move to the open debate. Speeches should be a tight four minutes. Unfortunately, we will have to stop the clock on members at four minutes.

10:54

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome Mary Scanlon to her new role.

In speaking in support of the cabinet secretary's amendment, I agree with him that this Trojan horse of a motion has nothing to do with the role of the public sector. Instead, it is a naked attempt by the Conservatives to exploit their prejudices about public sector pensions provision in the same way that Gordon Brown exploited his prejudices about the private sector in 1998. No matter how much we might accept the smooching of the first part of the Conservatives motion, with its references to the public sector's "very valuable contribution" and

its employees' "good quality pension schemes", we cannot escape the Con-Dem jackboot.

The motion mentions the "urgent need" for pension reform. As speakers have pointed out, the reforms are set out in the Labour peer Lord Hutton's formidable report, which has unwittingly unlocked the safe and allowed the Tory and Lib Dem coalition in London to make its smash-and-grab raid on public sector workers' contributions in order to reduce its deficit more quickly—

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: No—I have only four minutes.

This smash-and-grab raid is a means of not only reducing the deficit more quickly but dismissing the sustainability of long-term pension schemes.

What did Lord Hutton say about pension reform? In a speech that he gave in March at a National Association of Pension Funds conference, he said:

"it's a question of what reforms we need to make to ensure the sustainability of good quality public service pension schemes. And this is reform for the long-term, not in response to the fiscal pressures currently facing the country".

He went on to say:

"public service pensions are a vital part of our national savings system".

I agree partly with Labour that, if public service employees leave their professions or curtail their contributions—that might well be part of the Tories' tactics—the subsequent lack of sustainable and substantial contributions to and savings by pension funds will result in reduced investment by those funds and will further damage a discredited economic strategy by a London Government—and for what?

I go back to Lord Hutton's speech. He said:

"the fact is that public service pensions are not 'gold-plated' ... half of public service pensioners receive less than £6,000 a year."

Moreover, in paragraph 4.27 of his interim report, he says:

"Net of ... contributions ... payments peak at about 1.5 per cent of GDP in 2010-11, before falling to below 1.1 per cent"

of gross domestic product

"by 2059-60."

There is no mention of a blatant short-term cash raid to bring forward and accelerate the timescale for meeting the above objective. Of course, as Mary Scanlon said, we need to discuss and debate pension changes, but we must do so over time. The Hutton report certainly provides a basis for those discussions.

I believe that a strike will achieve little. However, it is not “deeply irresponsible”; it might be understandable and it is certainly regrettable. The people who will suffer will be public service customers and public sector employees themselves. However, the situation is not helped by the kind of crocodile tears and grandstanding that we saw from the Labour Party yesterday; the Labour Party is not and never will be the guardians of public sector employees. Labour members’ political posturing on such matters confirms that they are still in a time warp. In other words, they are 1970s Klingsons.

Churchill said:

“To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war.”

That is why we call on the unions and the non-union members in Scotland’s public sector to engage with our—their—Government on seeking a meaningful dialogue and way forward on future pension provision.

10:58

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): First of all, I thank the Tory party for lodging a very important motion that gives us the opportunity to debate something that we probably do not debate enough these days: our political ideology and philosophy.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the pioneers of the labour and trade union movement agitated and campaigned for the collective and public provision of services through friendly societies, municipalities and co-operatives. Such an approach, which was taken in direct response to the market’s failure to provide and the resulting poverty, squalor and ill health in which many were left, culminated in the creation of the national health service, the welfare state, council housing programmes and many of the services that are available now. Our services were developed out of that realisation and the desire for a fairer, better community, in which all our people, irrespective of wealth or status, would be looked after from cradle to grave. That is something that the market could not and will never deliver.

Public services are the glue that binds our society together. They act as a civilising force. They bring us into the world, cure us when we are sick, provide us with shelter and social welfare, educate us—well, they educate some of us—and look after us in old age. How we support public services—whether we support them—what resources we provide for them and the extent of our commitment to maintaining and improving them are determined by our political philosophy.

Given the current attack on public services by the Tories and the job losses caused by the SNP, we have some indication of how the UK and

Scottish Administrations see our public services. We see attacks on workers’ terms and conditions, a blitz on local authority jobs, police support staff cut, nursing posts lost and wages frozen in real terms as inflation rises. We see Osborne and Cameron use the global economic crisis as a cover for their ideological assault on the public provision of services. In doing so, they peddle myth after myth.

Let us have a wee look at the current situation with pensions. It was not public sector workers or their pension funds that caused the economic crisis; that was down to the bankers.

John Swinney: Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Findlay: I have four minutes—not a chance.

It was down to the greed of the bankers and their accomplices.

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): It was down to the Labour Party.

Neil Findlay: I hear Mr McLetchie blame the Labour Party. I am sure that it was not the Labour Party that caused the crisis in Iceland, Ireland, Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy, or maybe he has better information.

David McLetchie: All socialist Governments.

Neil Findlay: We know who it was. It was down to the irresponsibility of the bankers and Mr McLetchie’s friends, not the teachers, cleaners and hospital staff who are legitimately defending their jobs and pensions. The rise in pension contributions is not going to pay for pensions; it is going directly to the Treasury.

Another myth is that public sector pensions are gold plated, but nothing could be further from the truth. The average is £7,800 per year and, for a woman working in local government, it is £2,800—hardly gold plated. It is also said that, as a nation, we are getting older and we cannot afford our pensions. Wrong again: by 2060, it is predicted that pensions will represent only 1.4 per cent of gross domestic product, down from 1.9 per cent today. Of course, if we tackled the tax avoiders and evaders and introduced a Robin Hood tax on speculation, there would be no need for any of this at all. As I said earlier, it is about our philosophy and what type of society we wish to see. We all know the type of society the Tories wish to see—a cheap-labour, divided and deskilled society and a society flogged off to the highest bidder.

We should be investing in our public services. My colleagues and I will be supporting our public sector workers on St Andrew’s day. There is still time for the rest of the parties to join us. They will be welcome.

11:03

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP):

Yesterday, when this subject was very briefly debated through the unusual means of a business motion, for a moment I felt as if I was in Westminster, not because of the issue that was being debated but because of the exchanges between Labour and Conservative members, the attitudes that were being expressed and the tone that was being taken in all the contributions. I was glad that there was the buffer zone of the voice of reason in the middle. That intemperate set of exchanges reflects what has been going on between the UK Government and the unions as well, which seems less like dialogue and more like monologue conducted through a megaphone. As with the rest of Westminster's deficit reduction plan, it has the distinct smell of ideology rather than reason.

There are some redeeming features and the concessions have certainly been welcomed all round. It was not so long ago that left-wing publications were talking about the value of career average rather than final salary pensions for people on low incomes that tend not to progress greatly over the course of their careers. It is interesting that it was accepted that the public sector tends to have better pensions than the private. If that were an indication that the UK Government wants to address the issue by levelling up rather than by levelling down, we might not see so much of private sector workers being set against public sector workers and instead look at the underlying issues of long-term security and pay.

No wonder there is resentment from the unions—the problem is not just the impact of these changes but the whole way in which the issue has been approached and the breach of trust. The proposals include a commitment to no further reforms for 25 years but, as the Royal College of Nursing took pains to point out in the briefing that it circulated, it was only in 2008 that there was an agreement with the previous UK Government that aimed to ensure sustainability in public sector pensions, which we are told is the underlying motivation. The UK National Audit Office report in December 2010 estimated that the overall saving to the UK taxpayer from that agreement was £67 billion. Between that and the switch from the RPI to the CPI, which has already happened, the long-term cost of public sector pensions has reduced by almost 30 per cent.

In the earlier deal, staff in the public sector agreed to pick up costs for the growing pension bill, should it happen, as people lived longer. However, again according to the RCN, in the last year for which figures are available, the NHS pension scheme across the UK paid out £6.3

billion but took in £8.4 billion. That is not to give a permanent clean bill of health to the pension scheme, but it is hardly a picture of a scheme in crisis.

The figures come from 2009-10, before the current UK Government took office. As the RCN notes,

"it is difficult to get an exact figure"

for the balance now. That lack of disclosure does not build trust. Public sector workers and their unions can ask, rightly, what the UK Government is trying to hide. If the argument is on sustainability, it is not one that I heard today and, frankly, the case has not been made.

Looking ahead to next week, I think that it is a shame that there is not greater unity in the chamber. This Parliament is at its best when it is united, and there would be much better outcomes for public sector workers if the Labour Party did not approach the SNP with the same ideological objection as the Conservatives approach the unions.

Next week, thousands of workers throughout Scotland will take to the picket line because of an ideological cash grab on their livelihoods. The Scottish Government has been working a lot more constructively, and I hope will continue to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Biagi, could you come to a conclusion?

Marco Biagi: As they strike on Scotland's national day, public sector workers might want to reflect on how matters would have been different if the real decisions on pensions had lain with Scotland's national Parliament.

11:06

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I am pleased to take part in today's important debate.

As usual, we Conservatives are dealing with the difficult issues head on. We are not afraid to do that in the interests of our economy and, especially, our pensioners in the public sector. The subject is one that requires long-term strategy rather than short-term fix, and Francis Maude has a very good record of finding solutions.

I praise the role of public sector workers, especially in my region of the Highlands and Islands. Our teachers, policemen, firefighters, doctors and nurses and all the other public sector employees do superb work. We also recognise the pensioners' contribution to society more generally in all the extracurricular, voluntary and community activities that so many undertake. They are a major element of the big society on which we all depend, and they deserve decent pensions—the

increased pensions that Mary Scanlon quantified in her excellent speech—and a Government that plans ahead to deliver them.

The fact of the matter is that the UK Government is having to deal with the dreadful state of the public finances left by the last Labour Government. I commend its efforts in doing that. If we had not taken the decisive action of deficit reduction, our economy would be facing the Italian scenario, with Italian bond yields above 7 per cent again this week, despite efforts to secure a new Government, compared with UK yields of around 2 per cent. On that basis, in the future I would rather be a British pensioner than an Italian one or, for that matter, a Greek one.

People now realise the enormity of the crisis that we face in western Europe. It started as a liquidity crisis, mutated into a solvency crisis and has now become a systemic crisis. That means that the economic infrastructure is crumbling and severe measures are necessary now to avoid a far worse scenario in years to come. That is the reality.

Part of reconfiguring the public finances must involve genuine reform of public sector pensions, which the previous Labour Government patently failed to achieve. The proposed phased rise in employee contributions will average 3.2 per cent from April 2014, but the rises will be staggered according to salary with high earners paying the biggest rises.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Jamie McGrigor: I am sorry; I cannot do that at the moment.

Even after the changes, public sector pensions will still be miles above the average in the private sector.

The UK Government's pension reform plans are realistic, practical and detailed, and the Government has responded to specific concerns by, for example, confirming that no worker within 10 years of his or her retirement on 1 April 2012 would see either an increase in the age at which they retire or a decrease in the pension that they receive.

It is a cop-out for the SNP Government to claim that more time is required to assess the proposals. We must act now in the interests of future pensioners. Any responsible Scottish Government should recognise the economic circumstances and support the UK Government's plans.

I will take that intervention from Patrick Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful for that.

The member mentioned the urgency of the situation and the requirement for extreme measures. Why, then, does he think that the UK

Government is working so hard to prevent Europe from shutting down the tax havens?

Jamie McGrigor: As usual, Patrick Harvie shoots off after another red herring. All I know is that the UK Government is trying to plan for good pensions for people in the future.

I urge the trade unions to reconsider the strike action on 30 November, which will be disruptive for families and communities. Everyone should get back round the negotiating table and engage on the issue. The Parliament should send out that message loud and clear. Nobody likes paying more for anything, but the alternative to reforming public sector pensions is to burden further the general taxpayer disproportionately for years to come, which would be a dereliction of responsibility that no Government should accept.

11:11

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): The motion states:

"That the Parliament recognises the very valuable contribution that the public sector makes to the economy and society".

It goes on to say that

"there is an urgent need for reform",

and that the Parliament believes

"that the proposed reforms will ease the burden on taxpayers".

Let us get it right—public workers are taxpayers, too, and in very large numbers. They contribute directly to the Treasury through taxation and, on top of that, provide the staffing in schools, hospitals and the transport system, among other services, that enable the public sector to carry out its activities. Those same public sector workers and others will suffer as a result of the proposals.

We all know what the reaction has been to the proposals. I welcome the fact that Danny Alexander has accepted the need for concessions, even if no members of his party are present in the chamber. Those concessions include the proposal that employees who are within 10 years of retirement will have no changes made to their anticipated benefits. It is right not to penalise those who are least able to change their pension planning but, even among that group of people, there are widespread concerns about the UK Government's perceived divide-and-rule strategy.

We should remember that the average local government pension is less than £5,000 a year. The average pension for female NHS workers is only £5,000 a year, but the median pension for women is much less than that. Although teachers, firemen and police do better than that, they are a relatively small percentage of the total number of

people in public pension schemes. Half of all women pensioners who have worked in the NHS get a pension of less than £3,500 a year. That does not strike me as largesse or excessive. We should also remember the impact of the change in indexation for inflation from the RPI to the CPI.

David McLetchie: Will the member give way?

Roderick Campbell: Sorry, but I have only four minutes.

A Government that spends money on a properly funded pension scheme for its public workers is simply recognising its responsibilities. That must be our aim. There is a lot of merit in Lord Hutton's proposals but, whatever the merits, given the record fuel prices, VAT rises and high inflation, now is not the time to penalise ordinary workers. We believe that the proposals are another example of the poorly thought out deficit reduction plan.

As the cabinet secretary said, we know the consequence of the Scottish Government failing to introduce the planned increased contributions in the NHS, fire, police and teachers schemes. We must continue the dialogue and press the UK Government for a change in policy. In the absence of that, there is no alternative. However, the fight should be not with the Scottish Government but with the UK Government.

The NHS pension scheme was reorganised in 2008 and, in the short term, it has a surplus of contributions over benefits paid out. As Marco Biagi alluded to and as the British Medical Association suggests, the contributions to the scheme currently exceed the benefits that are paid out by £2 billion a year. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that increasing contributions amounts to a deficit reduction mechanism above all else. As the BMA and others have said, there is a risk that implementing the proposals will cause large numbers of folk to walk away from their public sector pension schemes, which would leave the schemes worse off than before.

The Tories have raised concerns about people in private pension schemes. In the current financial climate, we must accept that few of those schemes are prospering and annuity rates continue to fall. However, the answer to that dilemma is not to penalise the public sector at this difficult time for ordinary folk. As the Scottish Trades Union Congress has said, nothing in the Government proposals will improve the situation of those in private schemes. I welcome the cabinet secretary's suggestion about continued dialogue, and I urge members to support his amendment.

11:15

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I agree with Roderick Campbell that the matter is largely the UK Government's responsibility. I could not disagree with much of what John Swinney said, nor could I disagree with much of what is in his amendment. However, I urge him to face up to his responsibilities, listen to the trade unions and engage with them in a constructive discussion to determine what more can be done within his remit.

John Swinney: Will Hugh Henry give way?

Hugh Henry: No.

As John Swinney said, the debate is disappointing and the Tories have reverted to type. When they talk about the public sector, they want to focus on one narrow aspect. It is a shame that Mary Scanlon, who is a decent human being, comes to the Parliament to portray the Tory party in its usual form.

Jamie McGrigor said that the Conservatives are confronting the matter head on. Yes, they are. They are confronting the cleaners, nurses, teachers, local government workers and other public sector workers head on and making them pay dearly. They are making them work longer, pay more and receive less.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will Hugh Henry give way?

Hugh Henry: No.

However, the Tory party is not confronting head on the bankers, financiers and hedge fund managers who funded it generously in the run-up to the previous election. It is not dealing with the bonuses, obscene pensions and obscene pay for those at the top. It has double standards.

Mary Scanlon was right in one respect. She said that the pension reforms are coalition policy. It is telling that there is not a single Liberal Democrat present in the chamber to participate in a debate about a policy for which they have direct responsibility. That is an abrogation of responsibility and cowardice of the worst type.

The Liberal Democrats provide a human shield for the Tories' crude and cruel policies. The hapless Nick Clegg is, in fact, the General Haig of this political generation, leading his troops to slaughter. They are heading into oblivion and disaster while providing cover for the Conservatives. It is about time that they showed a bit of gumption and courage and took full responsibility for their actions.

We have heard a lot today about what should or should not happen on 30 November. Neil Findlay eloquently set out the ethos of the trade union movement. Trade unionists whose pay has been frozen, who face heavier workloads and who face

paying more for pensions that will pay less do not take the decision to go on strike lightly. They do so on account of desperation because the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition Government will not listen to them. They do it reluctantly.

When so many workers across so many trade unions stand together to say that something must be done, we should not demean or demonise them but should listen sympathetically to what they have to say. The Parliament should send a much clearer message to those workers that it will support them in their justified action for fairness, decency and dignity in their retirement.

11:19

Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP):

The first part of Mary Scanlon's motion is welcome in that it stresses the value of the public sector. However, we must judge the Tories on their deeds and not their warm words.

The public sector is crucial to the social fabric of Scotland and to enabling the country to flourish. As Neil Findlay and Roderick Campbell said, public sector staff earn modest pensions. The reality is that the vast majority of public sector workers provide services in the full knowledge that they will never come anywhere close to the earnings of local authority or NHS board chief executive officers.

The myth of excesses and largesse is widespread among commentators and policy makers alike. The question that must be asked and which still requires an answer is this: why does the UK Government, in order to fund deficit reduction, continue to pursue damaging reforms to public sector pensions, which will, in effect, cut workers' pay by an extra 3.2 per cent?

In the face of £3.3 billion of cuts that Westminster has passed down for the spending review period, the SNP Government has done all that it can to protect the pensions of people who work in the public sector. The Scottish Government has faced difficult decisions and, despite all the odds, John Swinney has managed to find the necessary balance to maintain jobs across the public sector and not to add to the burdens on Scottish families.

The Scottish Government has reluctantly had to ask public sector workers to accept another year of frozen pay. Ministers have led the way by freezing their own wages for the past four years. I wish that things were different for people across Scotland whose wages are not increasing in line with inflation but, as the Finance Committee has heard, the pay freeze is essential to maintain staff levels and to fight off the spectre of mass unemployment.

I have several questions for the Conservatives to answer in summing up. How many people do the Tories expect to walk away from public sector pensions as a result of the 3.2 per cent cut to their pay? How many will move into the private sector? How will that affect the pension schemes' viability and sustainability? Do the Tories accept that, in each of the past five years, Scotland's spending on pensions as a share of gross domestic product has been lower than that of the UK? In 2009-10, Scotland's figure was 15.1 per cent, versus 15.7 per cent for the UK as a whole. That means that pension schemes in an independent Scotland would be in a much better position.

Which of the following do the Tories believe have helped to support families through the recession? Is it the VAT increase, the national insurance increase, petrol price increases or significant pension contribution increases? Where does Danny Alexander's rather tactless letter to the Scottish Government—in which he threatened to remove £8.4 million a month from the block grant if the contribution changes were not imposed without any meaningful consultation—fit into Cameron's respect agenda? That amounts to a threat of £550 million in cuts over the spending review period to 2015.

As I said, we are seeing drastic reforms to disability living allowance, housing benefits and public pensions. The UK Government seems to be hell-bent on a ruthless ideological agenda. The truth is that every worker who provides a service on which others rely—whether in the public or private sector—is essential to the commonweal and to the economy. No one will dispute that the private sector is a creator of wealth and jobs, but its importance as a wealth creator cannot be viewed in isolation: teachers educate the nation's workforce, and nurses and doctors treat employees who fall ill.

Mary Scanlon's motion refers to "the burden" of pensions "on taxpayers", but perhaps of greater concern is the growing burden of unemployment benefit as a consequence both of disastrous economic mismanagement by successive UK Governments, and of Tory cuts to public spending at any price to society. It should be clear to all public sector workers that only if they embrace independence for Scotland can they rid themselves for good of Tory dogma and of the slash-and-burn approach to funding our services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank back benchers for keeping to the tight time allocations and I ask front benchers to do the same.

We move to closing speeches. Richard Baker has a maximum of four minutes.

11:23

Richard Baker: As expected, the debate has been sharply polarised, but a number of speeches were thoughtful and persuasive. Hugh Henry described passionately and persuasively the flaws in the coalition's policy and the Liberal Democrats' unfortunate position as a human shield for the Conservatives in the exercise. We welcome Liam McArthur, who has joined us for the end of the debate, at least.

Neil Findlay talked about the importance of the changes to pensions and about job losses, to which I will return. I agree with a number of SNP members—Roderick Campbell, Paul Wheelhouse and Chic Brodie—that some changes threaten the sustainability of pension schemes that are otherwise performing well. That highlights the great flaws in the UK Government's policies and proposals. However, I disagree strongly with Chic Brodie about what should happen on 30 November; we should ask trade union members what they want the Parliament to do on that date.

I take issue with the Conservative members who have defended the UK Government's position. Let us be clear—the increased contributions will not go back into schemes to make them more sustainable, but will simply go to the Treasury. It is part of an economic plan by the UK Government that is failing to such an extent that even the International Monetary Fund has urged George Osborne to prepare a plan B.

For all the travails of the euro zone—which the UK Government now blames for the economic woes in this country—we in Scotland have one of the weakest growth rates, as does the UK.

The UK Government is making a cash grab from public sector workers, many of whom are poorly paid, which will mean another reduction in spending in our economy. It is quite clear that the Conservatives simply do not get it: their economic strategy is not working.

Of course, we agree with a number of points that were made by Scottish National Party members today. We appreciate that there are difficulties associated with delivering alternative approaches to pensions here—although it is in the gift of the Scottish Government to do that—but there are other aspects behind workers' decision to take the action on 30 November for which the Scottish Government is responsible. Those include the extent of the job losses in the public sector in Scotland, the cuts to local government budgets, which will mean further job losses and—as we heard only recently—teachers having to purchase equipment for their classrooms because education budgets are being cut again due to the council funding settlement. The Scottish Government has made choices that are making

life for public sector workers far harder. We urge the Scottish Government to make different choices that we believe will also benefit the wider Scottish economy.

Nevertheless, the content of the Scottish Government amendment is in line with our thinking on the pensions debate. We would have liked the chance to debate Patrick Harvie's amendment, which reflects strongly our views on this important matter. Of course, we will not support the Scottish Conservative motion today. In failing to recognise the impact of the proposed changes to pensions on public sector workers, the motion—and that party—does not properly recognise the contribution that those workers make to our society and our economy. Although we hope that industrial action can yet be avoided through proper negotiations, the motion does not recognise their right and their need at this time to take proper industrial action to protect their rights to fair pensions and to protest against an economic strategy that is hurting them and families across this country. I moved the amendment in my name because we support the trade unions. We support the action on 30 November.

11:27

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Aileen Campbell): I thank colleagues for a lively debate on an important issue and I extend my welcome to Mary Scanlon in her new role.

The views of Conservative party colleagues are no particular surprise because, despite warm words and efforts to disguise it, those views seem still to be founded on the notion that the public sector is part of the problem, rather than an essential ingredient in achieving economic prosperity and social wealth, as Rod Campbell expressed well in his speech.

That is not the view of the Scottish Government. As Mr Swinney set out at the start of the debate, we recognise and are taking action on the importance of public sector reform. We are not shying away from the many challenges with which we are presented and which are made even more challenging by the financial constraints that have been placed on us by the UK Government, one half of which—the Lib Dems—was not here today to participate in this important debate, the subject of which is affecting many people across Scotland. The UK Government appears to be incapable of considering the economic damage that its policies are causing, or of changing its course.

We believe that such challenges are best faced in partnership and collaboration wherever possible—a point that Chic Brodie made. The best way to get the best results is by engaging and

showing respect, not by diktat. On partnership working, we agree with what Richard Baker and Hugh Henry said in their opening remarks. Another area where we find agreement with Richard Baker is in his welcoming of the Scottish Government not doing to local government what the UK Government has done to us regarding local government pensions. That is welcome—it is better late than never, given the comments that his colleague Paul Martin made yesterday.

What we need—rather than a piecemeal approach—is a measured and coherent approach to public sector pension reform. That is the best approach for achieving potential once-in-a-generation changes.

Let me be clear: the Scottish Government is committed to public sector pensions that are affordable, sustainable and fair to public sector workers and taxpayers alike. We recognise that a case has been made for longer-term reform and we will consider that once we have greater clarity on the UK Government's proposed reforms and their impact on Scotland. However, we will do that to a timetable that suits Scotland's interests rather than those of the UK Government.

We think that it is wrong to increase public sector workers' contributions to their pension schemes at this time and in this way. It is a naked cash grab that is geared towards reducing the UK deficit and will do nothing to address the sustainability or fairness of pensions over the longer term. We have made abundantly clear our principled opposition to the UK Government policy of increasing employee contributions at a time when public sector workers face pay freezes, significant increases in national insurance contributions, higher VAT and rising inflation and fuel costs.

In response, the Scottish Government is taking a number of positive steps to address the challenges: the living wage, no compulsory redundancies, the council tax freeze and the abolition of prescription charges are all policies to protect families and provide security at a time of uncertainty.

Mary Scanlon: Given that the Government recognises the need for the long-term reform of public sector pensions, does the minister agree that they are not sustainable?

Aileen Campbell: We believe that we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to look at the matter as a whole instead of taking the piecemeal approach that the UK Government is taking, in which the unions are coming blind-sided into negotiation agreements.

The UK Government's position is absolutely clear. Danny Alexander's letter of 5 September confirmed that if the Scottish Government does

not implement the increase in pension contributions, he will cut the Scottish budget by more than £100 million in 2012-13 alone, which is not a sustainable position. That would have a knock-on effect on Scottish public services, thereby making the necessary reforms much harder to achieve. Therefore, and regretfully, unless the UK Government can be made to think again we will implement the increases in pension scheme contributions for 2012-13 for the NHS, teachers, police and firefighters schemes.

Despite the announcement by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury of an improved pension reform offer on 2 November, we are concerned that the UK Government is taking a piecemeal approach to this significant issue. Not only has it introduced short-term contribution increases in a way that has contaminated discussions about longer-term reforms, but it also appears to be realising its policy proposals bit by bit. That is either a deliberate way of stifling debate, or it is evidence that the UK Government's proposals are simply being made on the hoof. Indeed, if we look at the various twists and turns in the UK Government's short-term proposals, it is possible to see a pattern that begins with a set of principles that are subsequently abandoned in favour of the bottom line.

In a very impressive speech, Marco Biagi noted that the approach that is being taken by the UK Government—its lack of meaningful engagement with others in terms of using the opportunity to look at pensions in the round—represents an opportunity lost.

Rod Campbell helpfully pointed out the gender concerns with regard to the pensions issue. His speech included some good points that were well made.

Paul Wheelhouse also made some excellent points and posed some pertinent questions that need to be addressed by the coalition Government. I look forward to hearing the Conservatives' responses when they sum up the debate.

Although we can find common cause with the public sector on the short-term increases in contributions and can understand the frustrations around the proposals for longer-term changes, we believe that striking is the wrong choice. We will make a strong case as to why these clumsily handled reforms are wrong and we will send a strong message to the UK Government that it must think again.

11:33

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It is not surprising that this has been a fairly highly charged debate. However, as Neil Findlay and

Jamie McGrigor said, nothing should distract us from facing up to a hugely challenging issue. If politics is about anything, it is about the ability to make tough decisions, even if at times they are unpopular. We, on this side of the chamber, are certainly not going to apologise for measuring up to that challenge.

We should start from the understanding that there is clear cross-party agreement that the pensions status quo is not sustainable, especially in Scotland, where the public sector is a bit bigger than it is south of the border. There is a fundamental need for reform. Originally, it seemed that politicians on all sides had accepted the conclusion in Lord Hutton's interim report of October 2010 that there is both a short-term need to address the pensions issue, resulting from the imbalance between the employer and employee contributions and the problem of an ageing population, and a long-term need to redesign the pension schemes completely so that they are less of a burden on the taxpayer and less open to the wide variations received by employees. There is both a short-term and a long-term issue.

None of us doubts the emotional context of the debate, nor the fear of some employees that the increased contributions that they will be asked to make will create difficulties for them in their personal financial decision making. However, I am afraid that I cannot accept Richard Baker's assertion that the lowest-paid people will come off worst. The Westminster Government has given a guarantee that people who earn under £15,000 will not have any increase at all.

Nobody doubts that this is a difficult issue. However, to do nothing is not an option. That is why it is important to understand the facts as well as to appreciate the strong feelings.

Aileen Campbell: Liz Smith says that the lowest-paid people are not getting a bad deal. Will she concede that she is comparing apples with pears and that the comparisons should be made with people who will be working up to the age of 68, as opposed to people who are retiring now at the age of 60?

Liz Smith: Forgive me, but I think that there are two issues there. First, the assertion was made that we are not looking after the lowest-paid people. That is, frankly, not true. The minister is referring to a measure for change within the whole pensions structure.

The facts are important. The cash-terms expenditure on paying out pensions to public sector pensioners over the past 10 years has increased to £32 billion—no one needs to be reminded that that is roughly the same amount as the Scottish budget. Secondly, as Mary Scanlon rightly said, the taxpayer contributes three times

more to an average civil service pension than the average private sector employee pays in to a pension. Thirdly, that average public sector pension remains at £5,600 a year, compared to only £3,900 in the private sector.

Despite some of the protestations in this chamber, we are clear that moving towards a career-average scheme would be fairer, as everyone would receive broadly the same amount for every pound that they contribute and it would guard against the risks that come from individuals jumping on to higher salaries in the later stages of their career.

We should not forget that that is also a logical step that is in tune with some of the greater flexibility that is likely to be a feature of future employment trends, similar to those that were described by Graham Donaldson when discussing the future of the teaching profession.

John Swinney: Could Liz Smith address an issue that troubles members on the SNP benches, which is that the short-term decision about increasing contributions has contaminated the ability to secure Lord Hutton's well-argued case in relation to pensions reform? Does she not accept that the coalition has made a fundamental error in taking that approach?

Liz Smith: All the Westminster parties are clear that there is a short-term need to deal with the funding of pensions, which we face because of the serious economic difficulties that we were left with by the Labour Party. However, there is obviously also a longer-term provision to change the structure. I make no apologies for raising both of those parts of the approach because, as Mary Scanlon pointed out earlier, we must ensure that the pensions system is not only sustainable in the long term but can deal with some of the difficult issues that we face just now.

I will finish on what is perhaps the most controversial issue of all: the impending strike action, on which there have been heated exchanges. No one doubts the difficulty that we face, particularly given the backdrop of tough economic times. No one doubts the strength of feeling on all sides. We respect that. That is why the Westminster Government has been at pains to have constructive engagement with the unions and why it saw the need to make a substantially improved offer. The negotiations are on-going and, as other parties have said, at Westminster and in this chamber, while they are on-going it is not appropriate for strike action to be taken.

It is incumbent on all of us to understand that, although feelings are running high, the problem cannot just be swept under the carpet. We must deal with it. We must confront it. We must get some kind of sustainability for the future.

I support the motion in Mary Scanlon's name.

Patrick Harvie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I understand that as a member of a small party I will not always be able to move amendments or to participate in debates. I respect the decision that was made, even though Liberal Democrat members chose not to take part at all.

However, given that I have been unable to participate in this debate, I must ask you about the discussion that will take place in the Parliamentary Bureau next week. I will have no representative during that discussion, and you are the only person who can represent the interests of all members. I ask for your assurance that you will represent the interests of members who wish to give the unions the support that they have asked for on 30 November and will make it clear to the Parliamentary Bureau that scheduling a debate that is specifically designed to exclude those members from debating this issue is not acceptable.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I thank the member for his point of order. I point out that the members who were called in the debate had all requested to speak in the debate before Mr Harvie did. There was simply not enough time, in what was a very short debate, to call Mr Harvie.

On the Parliamentary Bureau, it is open to the member to come and discuss that issue with me at any time. If he wishes to ensure that his views are represented to the bureau, I suggest that he write a letter to the members of the bureau so that they are made well aware of his concerns.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Road Equivalent Tariff (Orkney)

1. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment it has made of the impact of introducing a road equivalent tariff on ferry fares for routes to, from and within Orkney. (S4O-00358)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The draft road equivalent tariff evaluation report, which was published in March this year, shows illustrative RET fares for all Scottish Government-subsidised routes, including Orkney routes, and the likely impact on passenger numbers. It also shows that, on balance, most local authority-run ferry services have fare levels that appear to be set below or at around the level of an RET fare.

Liam McArthur: The minister will be aware of the anger and, indeed, disbelief among my constituents at the Government's decision to extend, seemingly indefinitely, the so-called pilot road equivalent tariff scheme on ferry routes that serve the Western Isles. The decision to extend the cheap ferry fares scheme to other islands on the west coast is also one that people in Orkney and Shetland are struggling to understand.

Will the minister explain to my constituents the basis for those decisions? Will he clarify why, to date, there has been no opportunity for robust public scrutiny of the scheme or debate about how the funding that is available might best be used to provide benefits to all the communities that are dependent on lifeline ferry services? Given previous ministerial promises that this record-breaking pilot was the first step in rolling out RET to other routes, including those across the Pentland Firth, will he update Parliament on what progress has been made in meeting that commitment?

Keith Brown: The decisions were based on our manifesto commitment to have a pilot in our first term in government and to roll it out to other areas in the Clyde and Hebrides in our second. There was no manifesto commitment to roll it out in the northern isles.

However, we provide £38 million of subsidy for ferry services to the northern isles. The implementation of RET would result in higher fares for many northern isles trips. Islanders currently receive a discount of around 30 per cent; the

same discount is available to families and friends on those crossings.

If Liam McArthur wants more to be done in this area, it would be useful for him to address fuel prices and the cuts by the Westminster Government, which are reasons why it is becoming more and more expensive to subsidise the northern isles services. Despite that expense, we will continue to support them in the ways that I have described.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Is the minister aware of the comments of the leader of Orkney Islands Council, Stephen Hagan, who fears that Orkney is losing out on tourism because of the lack of RET there? The people on Mull, Islay, Jura and Colonsay also feel that they are losing out.

Keith Brown: I am aware of the council leader's comments. If the member refers to the study that I mentioned, he will see the extent to which the pilot has resulted in increased traffic to, and increased tourist numbers on, the islands that are benefiting from the scheme. There is very little evidence of any displacement from other islands.

In relation to the other islands that the member mentioned, there is the commitment that I referred to earlier, on which we will make an announcement in due course.

Gritting (North Lanarkshire Council)

2. Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with North Lanarkshire Council regarding its winter gritting programme. (S4O-00359)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government is responsible for trunk roads and motorways. Individual local authorities are responsible for setting policies that are relevant to local conditions on their own road network. Transport Scotland and its operating companies have been in contact with local authorities throughout the summer and are co-ordinating the management of the Scottish salt cell to monitor salt supplies.

Clare Adamson: The minister will be aware that North Lanarkshire Council issued a press release in which it threatened to withdraw gritting services in areas where crews had been subjected to attacks and highlighted the Pather area of Wishaw, which received national coverage on television and in newspapers.

Would it surprise the minister to know that, when it was approached, North Lanarkshire Council was unable to confirm how many incidents had taken place and that Strathclyde Police has confirmed that it has had no discussions with the

council about how to tackle what was alleged to have been a serious problem? Furthermore, Strathclyde Police stated that it was

"rather surprising to hear North Lanarkshire Council's announcement".

Keith Brown: Clearly, such behaviour is abhorrent. The acts are also criminal, and I am sure that the council and the police will take action as appropriate. As the member suggests, it is somewhat surprising that—from what has been said—discussion appears not to have taken place.

I call on everyone to acknowledge the crucial role that gritters, and others who clear the roads, play during severe weather. I encourage North Lanarkshire Council and Strathclyde Police to work together to eliminate any and all criminal activities and to respect and support public sector workers in carrying out their essential tasks. Of course, all local authorities have a statutory duty to keep the roads clear, as far as is practicable.

Combined Heat and Power

3. Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides for the development of local combined heat and power biomass energy plants. (S4O-00360)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government has a policy to support the deployment of biomass in heat-only or combined heat and power plants, particularly off-gas grid, to a scale that maximises heat use and local supply.

Paul Wheelhouse: Developers of a biomass CHP at Charlesfield, St Boswells, have concerns about the availability of investor capital to fund the infrastructure to establish a district heating network. Given the instability of the United Kingdom policy on solar energy, investors in biomass are seeking reassurance and long-term support for the sector. Will the minister give such reassurance from a Scottish Government perspective? Will he be willing to meet me to discuss funding the associated infrastructure costs?

Fergus Ewing: I would be happy to meet the member to discuss those matters. District heating projects are extremely important to the Scottish Government, which is why we have invested £1.9 million towards them. We acknowledge that they play a very important part—as, indeed, does biomass—in heat-only or CHP schemes off grid. In 2010, more than 90 per cent of renewable heat in Scotland came from biomass. I am therefore very happy to work with the member on all of these matters.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I welcome the Scottish Government's proposals to remove the subsidy from large-scale, electricity-only biomass. However, will the minister clarify the Scottish Government's proposals for large-scale electricity biomass where a small, but not insubstantial, amount of the heat is also used?

Fergus Ewing: As Malcolm Chisholm knows, our policy position on biomass is clear, and is covered in the draft electricity generation policy statement, in the national planning framework 2 and in planning guidance. We believe that large-scale biomass plants that produce only electricity are not the best use of biomass, which is a valuable product.

We acknowledge that biomass has a place, especially in local community projects that use a local supply. Such projects often provide additional income to tree-growers when no other use of the material would be possible. We support local use, but we do not believe that large-scale use for electricity only is the most effective use of biomass. As Malcolm Chisholm knows, that has been our policy for a considerable time.

Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme

4. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made in bringing forward an approved tenancy deposit protection scheme and when the details of such a scheme will be announced. (S4O-00361)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government is evaluating three proposals for the operation of national tenancy deposit schemes. Prior to final approval, public consultation will be conducted on the terms of all schemes meeting the Tenancy Deposit Schemes (Scotland) Regulations 2011. Once a scheme is approved by ministers, full details of that scheme and its date of implementation will be announced.

Marco Biagi: The tenancy deposit protection scheme is welcome; it will offer security to private renters in my constituency and in many other areas. The cabinet secretary will know that, once the scheme is introduced, few challenges will arise in promoting it to recipients of housing benefit and to students. However, can he reassure me that the scheme will be promoted to harder-to-reach groups, such as groups of young renters sharing flats in city centres? Such people tend not to access services, and it can be hard to reach them with information.

Alex Neil: I can assure Mr Biagi that we will do everything possible to promote the scheme, once it is introduced, to all the target groups. The

purpose of introducing it is to ensure that the most vulnerable people are fully protected.

Public-private Partnerships (Scottish Trades Union Congress Protocol)

5. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether the protocol agreed by the Scottish Executive and the STUC in December 2002 concerning employment issues in public-private partnerships is still in force. (S4O-00362)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): "Public Private Partnerships in Scotland—Protocol and Guidance Concerning Employment Issues", issued in November 2002, remains applicable.

Malcolm Chisholm: I welcome that reply. The cabinet secretary will know that section 9.5 of the protocol says:

"The service provider will be required to offer new recruits to a PPP workforce access to the same pension arrangements as transferred employees."

The cabinet secretary may not be aware that the City of Edinburgh Council's proposed privatisation of a large number of council services does not conform with section 9.5. I hope that the proposal will, in any case, be rejected but, in the meantime, will he write to the council to remind it that the protocol—and that section in particular—is still in force?

John Swinney: I am happy to confirm that the protocol is in place.

The local authority will have to have regard to the section 52 guidance, which is essentially statutory guidance to local authorities on contracting. The guidance is not binding on the local authority but the local authority must have regard to the contents of that provision.

At this stage I am unable to confirm to Malcolm Chisholm whether section 52 conveys any obligation in respect of the issue of pension entitlement that he has raised. I am happy to write to the member with clarity on that point. If there is further detail that he wishes to explore with the Government, I would be happy to meet him to discuss it.

Tourism (Olympic Games)

6. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to attract tourists to Scotland during the 2012 Olympic games. (S4O-00363)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Government is working closely with VisitScotland, the enterprise

companies, VisitBritain and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to ensure that we maximise the benefits that Scotland can realise from the significant tourism opportunities presented by the games.

In addition to that and its highly successful core campaigns, VisitScotland will undertake targeted promotional activity around the games to highlight Scotland's world-class tourism credentials. In particular, through our year of creative Scotland, we will showcase our culture and creativity.

George Adam: Does the minister agree that there is a real opportunity to attract to Scotland residents of the south of England who wish to get away from the hustle and bustle of the games?

Fergus Ewing: You can never have too many Londoners visiting Scotland. We are happy to welcome them if they wish to take refuge from the hustle and bustle of the great metropolis and come and enjoy the manifold attractions that Scottish hospitality has to offer.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The minister will be aware that one of the threats to Scottish tourism before and during the Olympic games is the increase in air passenger duty. What discussions has the minister had with the United Kingdom Treasury about keeping to a minimum the tax, which so disproportionately affects regional Scottish airports such as Prestwick?

Fergus Ewing: John Scott makes a very good point indeed. We are extremely concerned about the impact of APD. I know that many airlines have highlighted the issue; indeed I received a message from easyJet this morning about it.

I am delighted to make common cause with Scottish Conservatives and work shoulder to shoulder with them to persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the case for taking effective action, as many other countries are doing, to provide a better tax environment to attract tourists and visitors. I am delighted that the Scottish Conservatives recognise the need for change in the fiscal approach of the London Treasury.

British Waterways Scotland (Waterfront Development and Public Safety)

7. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its strategic management plans are for British Waterways Scotland regarding waterfront development and public safety. (S4O-00364)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): British Waterways Scotland works in partnership with local authorities and others to maximise the wider benefits of our canals and to stimulate the regeneration of the canal corridors. Speirs Wharf in Glasgow, Edinburgh Quay and the

Falkirk wheel are all examples of such partnerships delivering safe waterside environments providing quality places for people to live, work and play.

Bill Kidd: What plans are there to encourage further developments along canals such as the Forth and Clyde canal, which runs through my constituency of Glasgow Anniesland, and what community involvement could be encouraged from those who live alongside the canals?

Keith Brown: The reopening of the Forth and Clyde canal 10 years ago had, as the member noted, a significant impact on areas in Glasgow close to the canal. The Glasgow canal regeneration partnership has had great success in revitalising the canal and engaging local waterside communities. British Waterways Scotland's key projects include new social and affordable housing at Maryhill, the regeneration of Maryhill locks and a new cultural quarter by the Forth and Clyde at Speirs Wharf. The master plans for Speirs locks and Maryhill locks were both recognised as being exemplary by the Scottish sustainable communities initiative, reflecting not only the quality of the design and master planning but the successful and well-considered community engagement underpinning them. There are many other developments to which I could refer, but I will write to the member with details of them.

Unemployment (Older People)

8. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address unemployment in older people. (S4O-00365)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Tackling unemployment for individuals of all ages is a priority for the Scottish Government. Within the scope of the powers that we have, we are implementing an economic strategy for growth, targeting resources where they are most needed and working to better align all employability and skills services across Scotland.

Sandra White: The cabinet secretary may be aware of the recent announcement by Glasgow City Council, offering cash incentives to companies to employ unemployed people over the age of 50, which is a very good idea. Will he look into that scheme with a view to extending it throughout Scotland?

John Swinney: As I said to Sandra White in my initial reply, the Government seeks to ensure that its employability initiatives are focused on all areas of the labour market. I will certainly consider the Glasgow City Council proposal. The fact that the council can offer such an incentive is an indication

of the strength of the local authority funding settlement that the Scottish Government provided, which I think will be welcome throughout the city of Glasgow.

Motorway Gantry Signage

9. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with Transport Scotland regarding motorway gantry signage. (S4O-00366)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): Transport Scotland is responsible for motorway gantry signage. Through its Traffic Scotland service, it uses variable message signs to provide advance warning to drivers of emergencies, incidents and road closures. It endeavours to communicate what it knows when it knows it by as many means as possible. When the signs are not required for those purposes, they are used to promote road safety, network operations and related campaigns. The background messages have been developed in consultation with a number of stakeholders, in particular the police authorities.

Liz Smith: Will the minister give assurances that the gantry signs will hold time-sensitive information about weather forecasting as we approach the winter?

Keith Brown: Yes, and over and above that, on routes such as Edinburgh to Glasgow, there will be real-time information about how long journeys are expected to take, which is a significant enhancement of the service that is provided.

VAT (House Extensions and Improvements)

10. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding reducing VAT on house extensions and other improvements. (S4O-00367)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): Scottish ministers have written to the UK Government on a number of occasions to make the case for a reduction in the rate of VAT for work on houses. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 16 November on that issue.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We will have a brief supplementary from Mr Stewart, and a brief answer, please.

Kevin Stewart: Does the cabinet secretary agree that reducing VAT on alterations, repairs, maintenance and extensions for dwelling-houses would cut down on the amount of black market work that currently goes on, maintain health and

safety standards and boost legitimate trade, and could lead to a greater tax take for the Exchequer?

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, cabinet secretary.

Alex Neil: I entirely agree with the member. Such a reduction would also create more jobs and improve housing in Scotland. I point out that the chancellor has the power to do most of what has been suggested and could do so on 29 November, because on 10 March 2009 the economic and financial affairs council—ECOFIN—gave him that power in relation to labour charges for repairs and renovations, which is by far the largest element of the cost of repairs and renovations for housing. We call on the chancellor to act now.

First Minister's Question Time

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-00270)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I shall have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Iain Gray: Presiding Officer, 215,000 Scots are unemployed and 100,000 young people are without work. How many Scots have to find themselves on the dole before the First Minister admits that his plan MacB is not working?

The First Minister: The unemployment situation in Scotland is extremely serious. The Government is working flat out to generate the maximum number of jobs, but even Iain Gray would have to accept that the position on aggregate demand in the United Kingdom is set by the UK Government. Within that context, the Scottish Government is being successful. We have lower unemployment, higher employment and lower economic inactivity than the rest of the United Kingdom. That is an important aspect that indicates that some of the efforts we are making are bearing fruit in bringing people back into employment and generating employment for our young people.

Iain Gray: Is that really the limit of the Scottish National Party's ambition? Is that what they call success, to be not quite as terrible as the Tories? Even given that very low bar, youth unemployment in Scotland is higher than in the UK as a whole. George Osborne is cutting too fast and too deep, but is it not the truth that Alex Salmond is cutting capital budgets and public sector jobs even faster and even deeper than the Tories?

The First Minister: I do not know where to start with Iain Gray, but let us examine his record. In the period when Scottish unemployment was higher than that of the rest of the UK—it was a brief period in comparison with the Labour Party's record in office—Iain Gray mentioned it seven times, at virtually every First Minister's question time. Indeed, in his valedictory address as leader of the Opposition, when he thought that he was going into government, he said:

"Here is the figure that matters. Alex Salmond inherited a Scotland with lower unemployment than the rest of the country, and he leaves a Scotland with higher unemployment than the rest of the country."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2011; c 34602-3]

So, on 17 March that was the figure that mattered. Now, at a time when, thanks to the efforts of the Scottish Government to mitigate the impact of Westminster cutbacks, employment in

Scotland is higher than that in the rest of the United Kingdom and unemployment is lower, all of a sudden that does not matter any more. Of course it matters. It is one of the figures that matter. As for ambition, my ambition and that of the Scottish National Party is to have this country free to harness its resources and to bring wealth and employment to all our people.

Iain Gray: If any of the 215,000 unemployed people are listening, that will not sound like a plan MacB to them. It will sound like nothing but a lot of MacMince, which is what they have come to expect from their First Minister.

Between last year and this, George Osborne cut capital budgets by 11 per cent; Alex Salmond cut them by 21 per cent. George Osborne got rid of 3.8 per cent of public sector jobs; Alex Salmond got rid of 4.1 per cent. George Osborne cut colleges by 3 or 4 per cent, but Alex Salmond cut ours by 10 per cent. If Alex Salmond cannot give those 100,000 young people a job, he can at least give them the truth. Will he admit that he is cutting faster and deeper than the Tories and that that is why unemployment is rising in Scotland?

The First Minister: Employment in Scotland is higher than it was at this time last year, unemployment is lower than it was at this time last year, and unemployment in the rest of the United Kingdom is at its highest for 20 years.

Let us dispense with the nonsense about capital spending that I have heard Labour Party spokespeople repeat many times over the past few days. Iain Gray should really beware of taking any lines from Richard Baker. The reason that capital investment is being cut in Scotland is that it is allocated using the Barnett formula. It is being cut harder in Scotland and Wales and in the devolved authorities because of the Barnett formula. In other words, the non-devolved departments are getting slightly less capital spending cutbacks than the devolved departments, but before we just blame the Tory-Liberal coalition Government, we should realise that it is proceeding with exactly the capital plans that were set out by the Labour chancellor, Alistair Darling—the man who was going to cut deeper and tougher than Margaret Thatcher. He said in his memoirs that his plans lacked credibility because they were not tough enough.

What are we doing about the Westminster cutback in capital spending? We are shifting £750 million from resource to capital spending, and we have a non-profit-distribution programme that will generate £2.5 billion in capital spending. That gives us a capital spending total that is unique in these islands, rising every year to 2014-15. That is real action to help real people. The Labour Party chooses to engage in collective amnesia about

where the capital cuts came from: they came from Westminster Labour rule.

Iain Gray: I see that the First Minister has won a couple of awards in the past week. It would be churlish of me not to congratulate him, but with unemployment in Scotland standing at 215,000 and at 100,000 for young people, if there was a complacent politician of the year award, he would run away with it.

The First Minister likes to talk about a mythical independence generation. This generation is on its own, okay—100,000 of them. He will give them a wristband that says, “It’s starting”, but he will not give them a start, a job, an opportunity or a future.

I see that Alex Salmond would like to be called Prime Minister in a separate Scotland. Does not that tell us everything that we need to know about his Government’s priorities? When will he stop thinking about his next job and give our young people a first job so that they can make a start in life?

The First Minister: Let us look at the track record of Scottish National Party ministers, who are working hard to generate employment in Scotland, and the great international companies that have decided in the past few months to locate their activities here: Mitsubishi, Doosan, State Street, BNY Mellon, Gamesa, Dell, INEOS/PetroChina, Aker, FMC Technologies, Vion Hall’s, Avaloq, Amazon and TAQA. Let us consider all those companies and the efforts of SNP ministers and our officials in gathering that investment to Scotland. What has the Labour Party been doing? It is in cahoots with the Tories, trying to talk Scotland down at every opportunity.

The Labour Party says that responsibility lies with only the Scottish Government, despite the fact that it knows full well where the cutbacks are coming from. Its five-point plan for growth gives the game away, of course. I have already dealt with capital investment, but the other four points that Labour’s plan for growth entails are all requests of the Westminster Government. Labour in opposition is lobbying the Westminster Government because it knows that that is where the economic power lies at present over the Scottish economy and the Scottish people. That is why the SNP’s ambition is to harness Scotland’s resources and put them to work for the Scottish people, and that is why Iain Gray will never be called First Minister.

Iain Gray: Let the First Minister not dare call it talking Scotland down when I speak up for 100,000 unemployed young Scots. Somebody must speak for them, because neither he nor his supine back benches are doing so.

Let us look at his ministers’ record. Over the past two years, the number of people unemployed

is worse; the unemployment rate is worse; the employment rate is worse; and the economic activity rate is worse. That is their record. Not only should ministers be ashamed of it, but the First Minister should tell us now what he is going to do about it.

The First Minister: I note that Iain Gray has changed to talking about two years. Otherwise, he would have to acknowledge that in Scotland—uniquely, in the United Kingdom—unemployment has gone down and employment has gone up over the past year.

In the UK, Labour is in power in one place: Wales. I am not going to criticise the Government of Wales, because it is under the same strictures of Westminster cutbacks that we are. If Labour has the answer to economic problems and unemployment, why are unemployment and youth unemployment in Wales higher than they are in Scotland? If Labour has the magic solutions, why is it not implementing them in the one place in these islands where it is still in government? The failure to come forward with answers when in government in the UK, or to realise that it was in cahoots with the Tories in trying to discourage investment in Scotland, is why Labour failed in the election and why it is on the route to extinction in this country.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-00277)

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

Ruth Davidson: Forty-eight hours ago, Transport Scotland, a finger’s-length organisation of the Scottish National Party Government, published its plans for wrecking our railways by having slower trains, fewer stations, more crowding and longer journeys for passengers up and down the country. However, this morning, we read of a screeching U-turn and the SNP Government’s attempts to run a mile from its own consultation. I see that the first page of the document carries lovely pictures of Alex Neil MSP and Keith Brown MSP. How can anyone have the confidence to invest long-term in Scotland’s future when SNP ministers are talking down our railways?

The First Minister: There is a clue to the document’s status in the reference to “consultation” on the front page. I really am surprised by Ruth Davidson. I point out, for example, that page 6 of the document, which sets out options for sleeper services—which is what, I should add, the document is meant to be doing—

suggests that they could be reduced or have increased “financial support”. Understandably, some of our press interpreted that as going only one way. This is a document of options from Transport Scotland; SNP ministers’ view on the railways will be published when the consultation ends at the beginning of March.

However, I say to Ruth Davidson that although the consultation is a very important part of the process and although we will listen to the responses to it, I do not think that we need a crystal ball to see the direction of travel in Scotland’s railways, the past four and a half years of which are laid out in the document. This is a railway with new stations, expanding passenger numbers and dramatic increases in the amount of track and availability of rail services, and that is the course that SNP ministers will continue to set.

Ruth Davidson: I understand very well that this is a Government consultation. Indeed, that is my very point: it is a Government consultation from whose words and terms the Government is now running a mile, saying, “A wee quango did it and ran away.”

We all want Scotland’s railways to be fit for the 21st century and to attract long-term investment. However, as the Neil-Brown document itself admits, there is a cloud hanging over such investment. On page 21, the document suggests that we might get only a short-term deal for our railways because investors could be worried about the unanswered constitutional question. So, there we have it. SNP ministers have come clean and the First Minister should come clean right now. Failing to answer the constitutional question is turning off long-term investment in Scotland. The SNP’s dither and delay on the constitutional question could sabotage long-term investment in Scotland, and this document says so.

The First Minister: What people will look at is the contrast, not just in the past few years but over the next few years, between rail services in Scotland, which have been expanding—and where passenger fares, for example, have been set at retail prices index plus 1 per cent—and the situation in England. I do not know whether Ruth Davidson is aware that the Conservative and Liberal Administration’s position on fares in England is RPI plus 3 per cent. We have an expanding revenue base for the railways rising to £794.7 million in 2013-14.

I am delighted that Ruth Davidson has taken the opportunity to rather quietly repeat some of the nonsense that has been coming from her colleagues in Westminster and the argument about investors being deterred from Scotland. I have read out the substantial list of substantial international companies that are investing in Scotland. I have also noted the lobbying from

Conservatives in the north-east of England—the most senior Conservatives, who are lobbying the chancellor because they are jealous of Scotland’s success in job creation.

I hope that Ruth Davidson, at some point in her new leadership, will distance herself from her own party colleagues—lobbying her own chancellor—who are trying to remove jobs from Scotland and take them elsewhere. I hope that the Conservative Party in this Parliament will stick up for Scotland and disassociate itself from the views that are being expressed by the Conservative Party in the north-east of England.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I refer the First Minister to Lord Carloway’s report, which was published today. In paragraph 32 of the executive summary, Lord Carloway recommends that the High Court should not be able to refuse a referral from the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission, as it can currently do under the Criminal Procedure (Legal Assistance, Detention and Appeals) (Scotland) Act 2010. He recommends that that provision should be repealed. Is the First Minister minded to accept that recommendation?

The First Minister: We have to consider Lord Carloway’s report in some detail before giving a ministerial response. It is a deeply detailed document with more than 400 pages of detailed assessment and potentially far-reaching implications across the range of our criminal law. Those who have had the opportunity to look at Lord Carloway’s review will recognise that, in a range of areas, he is pointing out that decisions made piecemeal by a number of courts, including the Cadder judgment, have serious implications for Scottish criminal law. Therefore his report was designed—and, I think, fits the task—to set out options for this Parliament to consider. The correct way to proceed is to consider Lord Carloway’s review in detail and then, if necessary—and I think that it will be appropriate—bring to this Parliament the requisite changes that are required to rebalance the judicial process in Scotland.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The First Minister is aware of the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of my constituent Alison Hume in Galston in 2008 and the fatal accident inquiry report that was published yesterday by Sheriff Leslie. In light of Sheriff Leslie’s comments about significant failures in handling the incident by senior officers within Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, will the First Minister assure me that there will be a comprehensive review of the rescue capabilities of that service that puts saving lives first and foremost?

The First Minister: This whole Parliament would want, once again, to join in issuing its

condolences to Alison Hume's family and friends over the circumstances of her death. Sheriff Leslie's determination is extremely detailed and carries many important lessons and issues. We give our sheriffs in Scotland very substantial powers in fatal accident inquiries—I think that that is the right thing to do. The institution of sheriffs is well recognised and well respected, and therefore the determinations that sheriffs make have to be accepted by all parties. I do not think that they should be second-guessed, and people will be looking for an indication of the action that must now follow.

Sheriff Leslie's fatal accident inquiry raised important issues surrounding the operational procedures in Strathclyde Fire and Rescue. Under section 44 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, ministers may request that Her Majesty's chief inspector of fire and rescue authorities conduct an inquiry into the manner in which an authority is carrying out its functions.

Given the serious nature of the determination by Sheriff Leslie, I have asked the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs to make such a request of the chief inspector. He will carry out a comprehensive inquiry, and the report will be laid before the Parliament. It will then be for ministers to decide what direction, if any, can be made under the powers provided by the 2005 act. That is the most serious course of action that ministers can take under the legislation, and I believe that the circumstances of the case reflect and require it.

Let me add that, although Sheriff Leslie's determination laid bare a number of key organisational and procedural points that are of great seriousness and had tragic consequences in this case, there is nothing in the determination that questions the fact that every single one of the firefighters and fire officers on site had the aim and intention of rescuing Alison Hume. There is also nothing in the determination to deflect from the general admiration and support that we give the fire services and our other blue-light services, which do such a fantastic job on Scotland's behalf.

Teachers (Industrial Action)

3. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the Educational Institute of Scotland's call for a ballot on industrial action about proposed changes to the McCrone agreement. (S4F-00279)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish negotiating committee for teachers is due to discuss the McCormac review of teacher employment on 23 November. The EIS and the Scottish Government will both be involved in those discussions. In my view, any suggestion of strike

action by the EIS as a result of the review is therefore premature.

Ken Macintosh: The First Minister's colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has repeatedly talked about the importance of high-quality teaching and the professionalism of our teaching staff. How does freezing the pay of teachers, cutting the pay of supply teachers and now changing their conditions of employment improve the quality and professionalism of teachers?

The First Minister: The sacrifices that the public sector is making are being made not just by teachers but by all public sector workers. I do not want to go into the economics of where the problem came from, but I think that even a Labour member with his head firmly in the sand should recognise that the Labour Party had a substantial role in creating the economic circumstances in which the situation has arisen.

I do not believe that a review that brings forward changes to procedures and working practices can bring forward positions that are not capable of being discussed and implemented. The basis of the McCormac review is to find procedures that will improve the situation in our classrooms and for our professionals. I bow to no one in my recognition of the commitment and professionalism of the teaching profession.

I will add this: the attitude that the United Kingdom Government has struck on the pensions issue has rather poisoned the atmosphere in negotiations with public service workers that are essential if the integrity and value of our public services are to be maintained.

Inward Investment

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether overseas companies are continuing to invest in Scotland. (S4F-00265)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Yes. I read out a substantial list of major overseas companies earlier—[*Interruption.*] I will resist the overwhelming cry from the Conservative benches to read out the list again because you may intervene, Presiding Officer. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

The First Minister: On Tuesday, I opened the new Amazon fulfilment centre in Dunfermline and the new customer service centre in Edinburgh. Those investments alone will create more than 3,000 permanent and temporary jobs in Scotland. I hope that, whatever views members have on a variety of political issues, the Parliament will unite at least in welcoming the investment by Amazon and the other great companies, expressing more

confidence in the future of Scotland than is perhaps held by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Westminster.

Kenneth Gibson: Does the First Minister share my disappointment that, whenever he announces significant new investment or the creation of new jobs, rather than applaud the hard work of those who strive to bring such companies to Scotland or welcome the positive impact on families, Opposition members sit silently with long faces, disdainful of good news? Does he agree that, rather than constantly scaremongering, Opposition members should show the same confidence in the Scottish workforce as Allan Lyall, the vice-president of European operations at Amazon—

The Presiding Officer: Can we have the question, Mr Gibson?

Kenneth Gibson: When asked about the prospects of Amazon investing in an independent Scotland, he said:

“We are looking for great people that look after our customers the way they need to, and as long as that continues we’ll be in Scotland.”

The First Minister: The member might wish to know that, although the success of those investments is not recognised on the Opposition benches in this Parliament, it is recognised by the Tory party in the north-east of England. Earlier, I mentioned Mrs Arkley, the senior Conservative in the north-east of England. She has engaged in a range of well-documented activities, including going to the Conservative conference in Manchester on 5 October to lobby the chancellor about the success and firepower of Scotland in attracting thousands of jobs.

I want to mention two aspects of that. First, if north-east of England Tories can recognise the success in attracting major international companies to Scotland, at least the Tories in this Parliament should try to recognise the same thing. Secondly, the dangerous thing is that that lady, after lobbying the chancellor, said:

“Ministers have agreed to look at this”.

What action do Westminster ministers have in mind to try to dissuade major international companies? Was that the real reason for the chancellor’s comments last Sunday?

Unemployment (Women)

5. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what measures the Scottish Government is taking to tackle female unemployment in light of concerns that women are being disproportionately affected by job losses. (S4F-00271)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): It should be noted that, over the year to September,

unemployment decreased in Scotland by 14,000 while it increased in the rest of the United Kingdom. Of that drop in unemployment, 13,000 was a drop in female unemployment. The Government is focused on jobs and growth and is taking a range of actions to ensure that more women and men get the job chances that they need. For example, in 2010-11, nearly 10,000 women started a modern apprenticeship, which represents 45 per cent of the starts; we have made a commitment to having no compulsory redundancies in the Scottish Government and the national health service and to a living wage for the lowest paid in the public sector; and we have established a £1.5 million fund for families and communities to support wraparound childcare and community crèches. That is real positive action from a real Government in Scotland.

Richard Baker: Given that yesterday we found out that unemployment in Scotland increased for the second month, does the First Minister share my concern that, along with the worrying figures on young people who are out of work, which include a rise in female youth unemployment, female workers more generally have been particularly affected by recent increases in unemployment? Will he outline what further action he intends to take to deal with the problem? What discussions has he had with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the issue, given that the 6.3 per cent cut to local government budgets is likely to affect female workers disproportionately?

The First Minister: We take those matters very seriously. I have discussed them with COSLA and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. I note that, because of the timing of the release of unemployment figures, Richard Baker had to lodge his question before he saw the statistics, which were released yesterday. They show that, in the July to September period, female employment in Scotland rose by 9,000 and female unemployment fell by 4,000. Female unemployment in Scotland among those aged 16 and over is 6.2 per cent, whereas it is 7.5 per cent in the United Kingdom as a whole. Just so we are absolutely clear, I point out that I do not regard 6.2 per cent unemployment among women in Scotland as in any way acceptable, which is why I want to do something about it by having the real economic powers that this Parliament requires to act for all our people.

Fossil Fuel Levy

6. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government plans to use the £103 million released from the fossil fuel levy account. (S4F-00264)

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Say thank you.

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I hear, "Say thank you," from the Tory benches. I am delighted to say that, after a huge amount of negotiation, the Westminster Government has decided in its munificence to give Scotland half of the money to which it is entitled. That is amazing. There is a £202 million fund of Scotland's money paid by Scotland's generators and it is right and proper that we did a deal to try to release some of it, but it is reasonable to say that the Labour Government would never agree to such a deal.

Does it not speak volumes for the attitude of David McLetchie—I see him away in the back benches now; I do not know whether that is significant—and others that they think that it should be counted a tremendous triumph to get 50 per cent of Scotland's money? Would it not be better if we could spend 100 per cent of Scotland's money?

Maureen Watt: Given that the long-overdue release of that £103 million has been made possible only by the Scottish Government agreeing that the other half of the fossil fuel levy money that the Treasury holds would fund the creation of the green investment bank, does the First Minister believe that the case for Edinburgh to be the home of that bank is overwhelming?

The First Minister: Yes. As First Minister, I express a consensual point to unite the Parliament: Fergus Ewing and I have written to the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Vince Cable, making the point that the fact that the other 50 per cent of Scotland's money will help to capitalise the green investment bank is yet another reason for the bank to be headquartered in Scotland.

12:31

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Justice and Law Officers

Scottish Prison Service

1. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Justice last met the Scottish Prison Service. (S4O-00369)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I meet the Scottish Prison Service's chief executive monthly to discuss matters relating to the operation of Scotland's prisons—we most recently met on 3 November. In addition, I have regular meetings and conversations with other senior members of SPS staff on a variety of prison-related issues.

Duncan McNeil: From those regular meetings, the cabinet secretary will be aware of the SPS's plans to close HMP Gateside in Greenock and replace it with HMP Inverclyde on the former site of Greenock high school. The new prison is due to open in August 2015. Can he confirm that work will begin on schedule by 2013 and that the prison will open for use in 2015? Given the reported current and projected capacity problems in Scotland's prisons, has discussion taken place on prolonging HMP Gateside's life beyond 2015?

Kenny MacAskill: The staff and the governor at HMP Gateside in Greenock have given exemplary service, but the prison is ageing. That is why the SPS has acquired a site and secured planning permission to construct a new prison to replace HMP Gateside. However, before work can commence, preparatory work is required, including the demolition of the school on the site, once it has relocated.

The SPS's spending plans for 2013-14 and 2014-15 include the commencement of the construction of HMP Inverclyde. That shows the direction of travel. We obviously monitor progress and discuss the matter with the local authority, which clearly has an interest with regard to the school. That is as specific as we can be.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Has the cabinet secretary discussed with the SPS the 28 per cent increase in remand prisoners at Barlinnie since 2009 and the effect of that on overcrowding, which I witnessed at first hand on my visit to the prison on Monday?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes. Remand prisoners are one reason why we have a significant increase in prisoner numbers. The other aspect is women prisoners. With regard to women prisoners, we have set up a commission under Dame Elish Angiolini to investigate the issue. Remand is a more complicated issue, but we are looking at it.

One aspect is the understandable and correct tightening of the Crown's approach to those charged with a crime of violence. It may be that Labour is now suggesting a looser approach, but the Government is not in favour of that. Given that Labour previously called for an even tighter approach—indeed, it called for mandatory sentencing—I would have thought that the suggestion that the situation is devastating and drastic, which it is, is something that Labour should have considered when it still championed mandatory sentencing.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): In the light of publicity in the press today about Barlinnie prison, can the cabinet secretary share with us any plans that he has for Barlinnie and any timescales that apply? Will he also note the heartfelt support that I offer to the staff at Barlinnie, who carry out their duties very impressively for us?

Kenny MacAskill: First, I concur with Mr Pearson that the staff at Barlinnie prison are exceptional. The governor is outstanding, as was his predecessor, Bill McKinlay. The staff do a good job in difficult and pressing circumstances.

I have regular discussions with the chief executive of the SPS and with other staff. I think that it is accepted that, at some stage, Barlinnie requires to change. However, as I have argued at the Justice Committee, I can build any number of prisons that any Opposition member wishes—some have argued for a new Cornton Vale and some for a new Barlinnie—but it is incumbent on them to tell us what projects they wish to cut, whether they be in transport, housing, education or health.

At present, we recognise the priority. Our priority is to open Low Moss and to prepare for HMP Grampian, where planning is proceeding and a contract has been issued. We accept the challenges that Cornton Vale and Barlinnie face. The SPS is considering, thinking through and planning on those matters.

Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland (Single Police Force)

2. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what role it anticipates the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland having once a single national police force is established. (S4O-00368)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): On 9 September, we published the consultation paper, "Keeping Scotland Safe and Strong: A Consultation on Reforming Police and Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland", which set out the Scottish Government's commitment to maintaining recourse to an independent body for dissatisfied complainants. It stated our belief that an independent body should undertake investigations into serious criminal allegations and incidents involving the police. The paper invited views on a number of options for meeting those commitments.

The consultation closed on 2 November. We are now carefully considering the responses before reaching a decision about how complaints will be handled when we have a single police service.

Alison McInnes: In light of the major reforms that the cabinet secretary proposes to the police service, does he agree that key to public confidence in a single Scotland-wide police force will be ensuring that Scotland has a dedicated independent oversight body that can effectively hold the police to account? Will he commit today to strengthening the role of the Police Complaints Commissioner by handing investigative powers to him, thus ensuring that the investigation of criminal complaints against the police is completely independent?

Kenny MacAskill: Alison McInnes outlines a fundamental principle that is made clear in the consultation document. There are various options. One is to consider expanding the powers of HM inspectorate of constabulary. Another is to expand the role and remit of the Police Complaints Commissioner. I will make an announcement on that shortly.

I am going through the submissions that we have received. However, I can say that I recently met the Police Complaints Commissioner and many of his staff, who do an outstanding job. I will outline my position once we have properly considered the views of those who have taken the time to make submissions.

I take on board and am sympathetic to Alison McInnes's comments.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): On the planning for a single national force, the cabinet secretary will be aware of the publication from Reform Scotland showing that 899 police support staff have lost their positions. Will he give a guarantee that, in its model for a single national police force, the Government will not axe vital support staff, which would compromise police officers on the street?

Kenny MacAskill: There are two issues. The division of labour—if I can put it that way—between serving officers and backroom staff is an

operational matter for the chief constable, who will be held to account by the board.

I put it on record yet again that we have an outstanding police family, including those who hold the office of constable and those who serve in a variety of ways, such as technical staff.

It would be appropriate if Mr Kelly came to Parliament with the proper information. The Reform Scotland paper did not take into account staff employed by the Scottish Police Services Authority and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency, so his scaremongering is without foundation. Reform Scotland has acknowledged that its paper was erroneous.

Proceeds of Crime (Allocation)

3. Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what factors are taken into consideration when allocating funding from the proceeds of crime. (S4O-00370)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 allows the Scottish Government to seize illegal gains from organised crime and—uniquely, through the highly successful cashback for communities initiative—to invest bad money in community programmes, facilities and activities, largely for young people, to the ultimate benefit of Scottish communities affected by crime and antisocial behaviour.

The key factors that we take into account are that projects must deliver improved facilities and build better, safer, healthier communities—outcomes that simply would not have existed otherwise. That gives our young people positive, purposeful and constructive opportunities to contribute to Scottish society.

Mark McDonald: Many groups and organisations across north-east Scotland have benefited from cashback funding. In last week's justice debate in the chamber, Labour's justice spokesperson called for the funding to be directed purely and simply to those communities that the cash actually comes from. Will the cabinet secretary resist that call and ensure that communities across Scotland continue to benefit from that worthwhile funding?

Kenny MacAskill: As I said in last week's debate, the funding should be allocated across Scotland. Frankly, although some areas of Scotland are much worse hit by criminality and offending than others are, every area should have the opportunity for its youngsters to achieve their full potential. It is for that reason that I was delighted to go to a cashback initiative yesterday in Brechin and will be delighted to go to an event on Sunday for the roll-out of a 3G pitch in

Haddington. Neither of those communities is without its challenges but, to be fair, neither would be viewed as a hard-pressed, deprived urban area.

It is important that what Mr McDonald suggested is carried out. Children and young people in communities such as those to which I referred are as entitled to have the opportunity to be all that they can be as those in other communities are. That is why we will not impose a postcode lottery on cashback funding. Every youngster will have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Drug Dealers

4. Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that drug dealers are dealt with adequately by the justice system. (S4O-00371)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Maximum penalties up to life imprisonment are available for drug dealers on conviction. In addition, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 allows us to deprive criminals at all levels of cash and assets gained through their criminal activity, including stripping drug dealers of their ill-gotten gains. Earlier this year, we made changes to the proceeds of crime legislation to make it easier for law enforcement agencies to recover criminal profits from all levels of criminals, including street-level drug dealers. We support all efforts by the police, the prosecutors, the courts and the law enforcement agencies to use the full power and force of the law to crack down on drug dealers and help make our communities safer.

Hugh Henry: Two families in Elderslie in my constituency were burned out of their homes for 16 months because a convicted criminal caused a fire by tapping into street electricity to cultivate cannabis in his flat. He recklessly endangered lives, including the life of his own son, who was in the flat at the time. The police said that they had a great deal of evidence, but the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service dropped a number of charges and the drug dealer was fined £500. Does the cabinet secretary think that that is acceptable? Will he order an inquiry? Will he meet my constituents?

Kenny MacAskill: Mr Henry, as a former justice minister, will be aware that I cannot comment on a specific case. However, if he writes to me I will have the matter investigated and, if needs be, I would be delighted to meet with him and his constituents. I can assure him that we will investigate the matter thoroughly, because we take such matters most seriously. I will do him and his constituents the courtesy of ensuring that there is a full and important investigation.

Criminal Cases (Evidence of Similar Fact)

5. Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the use of evidence of similar fact in criminal cases. (S4O-00372)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Law Commission is considering this issue as a part of its project on similar fact evidence and the Moorov doctrine. The commission expects to present a final report to ministers in early 2012, at which point we will closely consider any recommendations. This is the final part of the substantial reference that I made to the commission in November 2007. I have always been broadly supportive of reform in this area and referred the subject to the commission as an essential part of ensuring that our laws of evidence are fit for purpose.

Stewart Maxwell: The cabinet secretary will no doubt be aware of the murder trials of Peter Tobin and, more recently, Robert Black, in which evidence of their previous convictions for similar crimes was used to help to establish their guilt. In Scotland, however, those previous convictions would not have been known to the jury, despite their being directly related to both men's cases.

In light of Lord Carloway's report, which was published this morning and, in particular, the use of evidence of similar fact in both the Tobin and Black cases, does the cabinet secretary agree that there is, indeed, a gap in the law of Scotland and that that emphasises the pressing need for reform in this area?

Kenny MacAskill: I thank Mr Maxwell for raising again an issue that he has raised with me over a considerable period. I do not want to comment on individual cases or on different jurisdictions that have different systems. Suffice it to say that the matter was remitted to the Scottish Law Commission because it raises legitimate public concern. Mr Maxwell has articulated that concern very ably today, as have others.

The community in Scotland has cause for concern when it sees other jurisdictions deal with matters in a way that our jurisdiction is deprived of using. I will not pre-empt the Scottish Law Commission's consideration of the issue; as I said in answer to the principal question, I remain firmly supportive that it should consider the matter, and I will do it the justice of awaiting its response. However, it is correct to raise the issue and I think that there is a great deal of public sympathy for the point that Mr Maxwell made.

Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007

6. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what evidence it has

that the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 has been effective in terms of convictions and as a deterrent. (S4O-00373)

The Lord Advocate (Frank Mulholland): The Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 was brought in by the United Kingdom Government. We support the act as we believe that it sends a robust message to organisations that failures to meet their duty of care to employees and the public will not be tolerated. To date no company has yet been convicted of corporate homicide in Scotland. The health and safety division—a specialist division—is currently considering a number of cases under corporate homicide.

John Park: I thank Mr Mulholland for his response and the information that he has provided today. Given that there is some concern about the effectiveness of the legislation, does he believe that the time is right perhaps to consider a review of its effectiveness and make proposals in the Scottish Parliament that we can debate and discuss to find a robust Scottish solution in relation to corporate homicide and corporate manslaughter?

The Lord Advocate: First, I make the point that health and safety is reserved, of course. The act is new and still to be tested in the court. Where there is sufficient credible and reliable evidence to bring such a charge it will be brought. I should perhaps recognise the progress made in health and safety prosecutions in Scotland as a result of the establishment of the health and safety division at the Crown Office, which has been in existence for two years. That division is considering cases under corporate homicide. To date, it has dealt with 76 cases, which have all resulted in convictions, and it is considering approximately 100 cases involving potential health and safety breaches and prosecutions, including, potentially, cases of corporate homicide.

Prisoners (Looked-after Children)

7. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many and what proportion of prisoners were previously looked-after children. (S4O-00374)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Prison Service does not routinely receive information about whether prisoners had previously been looked-after children. However, the 2011 prisoner survey contained, for the first time, a question about prisoners who had previously been in care. Responses to the survey are being collated and the findings will be published in December 2011. I will provide the member with the information that prisoners gave to the SPS.

Joan McAlpine: The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Education and Culture Committee is examining the educational attainment of looked-after children. Does he agree that investment in the education and care of looked-after children, particularly in their early years, will feed into the Government's preventative agenda and will affect justice budgets in future years?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. Although we do not have any raw data—even the data that we have, which I will happily share with the member and others, will be dependent on the information given by individual prisoners—I do not think that it is rocket science to recognise that a significant percentage of Scottish prisoners have been children in care, which is clearly disturbing.

We must address prisoners' offending, but equally it is imperative, and not simply on a moral basis, that we ensure that those who have been dependent and deprived in many ways do not become involved in the criminal justice system. As Joan McAlpine suggests, there is a clear cost saving. If we can prevent these young people from spiralling into the criminal justice system, the criminal justice budget will be reduced significantly. I undertake that we will provide Joan McAlpine with the information. We recognise that there is something manifestly wrong and that not just the justice department but every department in Government and local government is required to try to tackle that problem, which starts with children being neglected, dependent or whatever else and results in their becoming part of the problems in the criminal justice system.

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (Discussions with Victims' Families)

8. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service has any discussion with the families of victims prior to deciding not to proceed with a case. (S4O-00375)

The Lord Advocate (Frank Mulholland): In deciding not to proceed with a case, the procurator fiscal has regard to all the relevant factors of the case, including an assessment of the available evidence and the public interest. Although the final decision on whether to prosecute remains the responsibility of the procurator fiscal, it will be appropriate in many cases for the procurator fiscal to meet the victim or the nearest relatives of a victim to explain the reasons why criminal proceedings can not be commenced or why it is considered that criminal proceedings already commenced require to be discontinued.

Jackie Baillie: The Lord Advocate may be aware of the case of Dean Geary, who tragically died outside Gartocharn on 6 February last year. A related case was due to be heard in Stirling sheriff

court. It was dropped, but Dean's parents found out about that only through the media. Given that a lack of information to the family has characterised that case, will the Lord Advocate be good enough to agree to meet me and Mr and Mrs Geary to discuss their experience?

The Lord Advocate : Obviously, I am not fully aware of the circumstances of the case, but once I have looked into them, I would be happy to meet Jackie Baillie and the Geary family in due course .

Rural Affairs and the Environment

Animal Welfare

1. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to protect and improve animal welfare. (S4O-00379)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government will consult on new legislation on the welfare of animals at slaughter that will implement European Union legislation early next year. Other issues under consideration include the use of wild animals in circuses, the regulation of equine establishments, the use of electronic shock collars for dog training and the tail docking of dogs.

John Pentland: I remind the minister that, over four years ago, he promised to introduce within two years secondary legislation that dealt with pet dealers, animal sanctuaries, travelling circuses, electric shock collars, pet vending and livery yards, and in the following two years secondary legislation that dealt with riding establishments, cat and dog boarding, dog breeding, the sale of dogs and performing animals. As far as I know, only pet dealer regulations have been introduced. When will the minister address the backlog of animal welfare issues?

Richard Lochhead: I know that John Pentland was not an MSP in the previous session, but I well remember discussing those issues with members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee and other members time and again, and I gave a commitment to consult on a number of those issues, of course.

Legislation has not yet been introduced on electric shock collars, as the results of that consultation exercise were inconclusive and we are awaiting further research findings. There has been no ban on wild animals in travelling circuses, as there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that their welfare is any worse than that of animals in other forms of captivity. We are concurrently considering other mechanisms for dealing with that issue and we retain an open mind.

There have been a number of consultations and there are a number of other issues in the pipeline. As the member correctly said, we have, of course, already taken action on a number of important animal welfare issues.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): The Government recently made much of its success in negotiating with the European Commission for a more proportionate electronic identification cross-compliance system for Scottish sheep but, in response to a question from George Lyon MEP, the Commission confirmed that it is not in a position to approve a precise accuracy requirement. In essence, that is entirely the responsibility of the Scottish Government. Why has the cabinet secretary been misleading the industry about sheep electronic identification over the past few months?

Richard Lochhead: If it is not the disallowance of agricultural funds in the European Union or sheep ID, Jim Hume and his colleague-in-arms George Lyon MEP mislead farmers throughout Scotland on a range of other issues. They scaremonger and put inaccurate information into the public domain to try to get publicity, which is a real pity, as I would much rather have a mature debate. In particular, I would like to debate the fact that sheep EID, which is a big challenge for the sheep sector in Scotland, was introduced and agreed to by the Labour-Lib Dem Administration a few years ago. I will continue to remind the industry in Scotland of that fact.

I know that many sheep farmers in Scotland welcome the concessions that have been achieved by the Scottish National Party Administration to try to ease the pain of the introduction of sheep EID. We will continue to work closely with the sector in Scotland, and we are taking a proportionate approach to compliance. As long as sheep farmers maintain their paperwork as required by the regulations, we will do our best to maintain that proportionality in applying the compliance regulations.

Landfill Sites (Life Extensions)

2. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether life extensions for landfill sites are compatible with its zero waste policy. (S4O-00380)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The need for landfill capacity in Scotland will dramatically fall as landfill tax increases, bans on landfilling certain materials take effect and recycling rates increase. Last year, we published information on the landfill capacity that Scotland will need for the next 10 years. If we are to meet our zero waste targets, we will landfill around 80 per cent less than we currently do. That might mean that certain landfill

sites might need to operate for longer to reach full capacity or create the desired landscape profile stipulated by the local authority prior to restoration.

Lewis Macdonald: Is the cabinet secretary aware of issues around the Stoneyhill landfill site in Peterhead, where the operator has applied for a life extension, and does he believe that such an application fits with the prospectus that he has just set out? Does he also acknowledge the possibility that applications for such extensions are being made because there has not been enough progress in introducing alternative forms of waste disposal?

Richard Lochhead: I am sure that the member will acknowledge that the Government has made tremendous progress in taking Scotland down the road towards a zero waste society. Of course, many of the concerns that he has highlighted about landfill sites should be raised by the local authorities in his region—Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council.

Unfortunately, as Scotland goes through the transformation phase from its current waste profile to zero waste, tens of millions of tonnes of waste will still be required to go to landfill, but at least we are travelling at a reasonable pace in the right direction. Indeed, there might be a positive aspect to such a move. The success of and progress with recycling might require licences for existing landfill sites to be extended because they will take longer to fill.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): With regard to the zero waste strategy, the cabinet secretary will be aware that the 2010 householder survey showed a significant boost in household recycling rates. What timeframe does he envisage for providing all households in Scotland with separate recycling bins, which will help with the country's recycling effort and assist households in recycling more waste?

Richard Lochhead: Again, many local authorities are making good progress in collecting material for recycling—and, of course, it is up to those authorities to decide the roll-out of recycling, kerbside collections and so on. We are taking steps to expand this approach, given that our zero waste regulations will make it mandatory for local authorities to collect dry recyclables and food waste from households, wherever economically or environmentally practicable, from 2013. The Government is putting in place ambitious measures to support the progress that a number of Scottish councils have already made.

NFU Scotland

3. John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish

Executive when it last met representatives of the National Farmers Union Scotland. (S4O-00381)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I met the president and other representatives of NFU Scotland yesterday at AgriScot—and I am meeting the president and his team again today to discuss the proposals for reform of the common agricultural policy. I assure the member that that is just coincidence.

John Lamont: The president of NFU Scotland, Nigel Miller, recently called on the Scottish Government to address the mounting threat of cattle scab. Despite its eradication from the United Kingdom almost 50 years ago, the disease has been identified in more than 20 herds in Wales, England and Ireland, with imports from Europe thought to be responsible for its resurgence. How does the cabinet secretary respond to Mr Miller's warning that if the disease is already in some of Scotland's herds the Scottish Government needs to intervene with the necessary restrictions on movement to prevent its spread?

Richard Lochhead: My response is to welcome very much the seriousness with which Nigel Miller and NFU Scotland have taken the issue, and I note that the organisation is doing a lot of good work on preventing animal disease in Scotland and promoting animal health.

I listened to Mr Miller's speech yesterday at AgriScot—after all, I was sitting next to him—and discovered that tackling cattle scab was the new priority. Cases of the disease have been identified in Wales and the south of England and, following Nigel Miller's remarks, the chief veterinary officer in Scotland has signalled that he is prepared to look at the issue again. There were discussions last year between the industry and the chief vet at the time, but we have to address a number of complex issues with regard to treatment processes and disease identification and we cannot commit too hastily to legislation or otherwise as we might not be able to back it up with enforcement or other measures. Nevertheless, we are taking the issue seriously.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Perhaps not this afternoon but doubtless at subsequent meetings with NFU Scotland, the cabinet secretary will discuss the report on disease surveillance produced by the group headed by John Kinnaird. As he will be aware, the report highlights the serious concerns expressed by the local farming industry and vets in my constituency at the rundown in recent years of the Thurso vet lab. Given the recommendation by Mr Kinnaird's group of a reduction in disease surveillance centres and the creation of a single central laboratory, can the cabinet secretary assure me that Orkney's interests will be

safeguarded in such a model and will he commit to ensuring that any strategic management board that might be established includes representation from Orkney?

Richard Lochhead: I know that the member has a long-standing interest in this and I hope that, like me, he welcomes John Kinnaird's report on the future delivery of the veterinary surveillance service in Scotland. It will ensure that we have services appropriate for the 21st century. I am aware that John Kinnaird interviewed around 750 farmers and others across Scotland as part of that exercise. I have already indicated that we will set up the strategic management boards in the very near future.

As Liam McArthur rightly points out, there were other proposals and recommendations in the report about the number of labs that we should have in the future, so a great deal of work must be done in order to identify the way forward following those recommendations. There are, however, a number of good recommendations that we can proceed with in the meantime and I give a commitment to Liam McArthur and to the chamber that we will consult members and the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee as we take this very important debate forward.

Litter

4. Derek Mackay (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what further action will be taken to reduce litter. (S4O-00382)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): We fund Keep Scotland Beautiful, through zero waste Scotland, to support local authorities and others in tackling litter and raising public awareness of the problem. This includes the annual national spring clean, which has grown from 11,500 to 97,000 volunteers in just four years. Importantly, those are mainly young people. Carrier bags are another highly visible litter problem and we have given a commitment to consult shortly on proposals to introduce charging for carrier bags to cut the numbers used and discarded every year.

Derek Mackay: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. Does he agree that the time has come for a national zero tolerance approach to litter to ensure that we address this continual problem?

Richard Lochhead: Derek Mackay is right; litter continues to be a problem in Scotland. I know that when he was convener of his local authority, Derek Mackay led from the front, ensuring that there was a big campaign in that part of Scotland to tackle litter and I hope that that leadership is followed by other local authorities in Scotland.

Anyone who drops litter is irresponsible and shows a complete lack of respect for the local environment and their own community. I urge all local authorities to use existing enforcement measures, such as fines—which some councils use and others do not—as a means of deterring littering in Scotland. I agree that we must raise the profile of the issue and do a lot more.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister join me in welcoming Highland Council's recent initiative with the chewing gum action group to tackle gum litter and get chewers to bin their gum rather than spitting it on the pavement?

Richard Lochhead: Yes. I will chew over the member's contribution, which was very good and which raises a very important issue. Chewing gum is a big social nuisance for many communities in Scotland. We should remember that local authorities spend up to £100 million per year cleaning our streets and that one of the biggest menaces is chewing gum, which is a particular problem in our cities and larger towns. I join the member in welcoming Highland Council's work and I hope that we can see progress in the coming years.

Common Agricultural Policy (Reform)

5. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding reform of the common agricultural policy. (S4O-00383)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government has regular interaction with the UK Government on the common agricultural policy. Most recently, I met the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Caroline Spelman, and the Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, Jim Paice, ahead of the agriculture and fisheries council meeting in Brussels on Monday of this week.

Nigel Don: I thank the cabinet secretary for his continuing interest, which I know very well and the farmers know very well. Farmers around me tell me of particular concerns about new entrants and the fact that Scotland, of course, has far more less favoured area than the rest of the UK. Those are particular concerns in negotiating with the UK, and therefore with the European Union. Does the cabinet secretary feel that any progress is being made on those issues?

Richard Lochhead: Scotland is making progress on achieving some of our key principles in the new common agricultural policy. We all accept that there is a long way to go and much more to achieve. The member rightly highlights the

need to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard, because whereas 85 per cent of Scottish land is of less favoured area status, it is exactly the opposite south of the border, where it is around 15 per cent. Therefore, we have distinct needs that have to be recognised in the new common agricultural policy. One of those, of course, is the fact that, because Scotland has been stuck with a historic payments regime, anyone who entered farming over the past few years—indeed, most of the past decade—has been excluded from current supports. This Government is arguing, and I know that we have the support of the chamber, that those who are actively, genuinely farming but are currently excluded from support should receive support from day one of the new common agricultural policy regime.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): In the on-going discussions that the minister has with the UK Government on CAP reform, will he do everything that he can to ensure that the change of support from the historical basis that he just mentioned to an area basis, which will come about as part of the reform, will not impact unduly on farmers in the south and west of Scotland, which it could do without considerable Government intervention?

Richard Lochhead: The member raises a good point and highlights Scotland's diverse agricultural profile. That is one reason why there is sometimes a contradiction in arguing for a simple common agricultural policy while asking for a policy that is tailored to Scotland's regional needs. There can sometimes be a tension in that.

The proposals on the table allow for basic area payments and lots of other payments for different types of activity. Such a system would be complex, and there are lots of negotiations ahead on what it would finally look like, but it gives us the opportunity to ensure that those who are generally active in agriculture, whether in the dairy or another sector, can in some shape or form continue to receive a reasonable level of support, as they deserve.

Greenpark Energy (Licence to Extract Shale Gas)

6. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what criteria were used by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in granting a licence to Greenpark Energy to begin hydraulic fracturing to extract shale gas. (S4O-00384)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): SEPA's specific obligations under the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 are to consider the risks to the water environment.

Those are the only environmental factors considered by SEPA.

Alison Johnstone: The minister may be aware of a report from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research setting out concerns about ground and surface water contamination as a result of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, and the recent Caudrilla Resources report on the impact of the process in Blackpool, which stated that it is “highly probable” that fracking triggered the seismic tremors there.

Those concerns and others have led some states in the United States to place a moratorium on fracking operations. Quebec has suspended fracking, New South Wales has introduced a moratorium, and—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Question, please.

Alison Johnstone: France has banned fracking. Is the minister listening carefully to the evidence, and will his Government take action at the very least to support a moratorium on fracking in Scotland?

Stewart Stevenson: The member should be aware that consents cover the installation of equipment to monitor microseismic activity, so we are looking carefully at the implications of fracking in Scotland. Let me also say that the Greenpark Energy consent is for coal-bed methane rather than shale gas, as described in the question, although I accept that the same equally applies to that particular gas.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): The place in question is in my constituency. What sort of consultation would the minister expect to take place with the community about the application of such techniques? All that happened in Canonbie was an application to drill boreholes to find out how much coal gas is there. With a technique as controversial as hydraulic fracturing, would the minister expect that there should be consultation with and information for the community? People will be quite frightened by some of the information that has come out in the past few days.

Stewart Stevenson: I accept that things have been said that could cause some difficulties in people’s minds. However, the scientific position is that the monitoring that is part of the controlled activity regulations—CAR—licence will ensure that we monitor the effects. The member’s constituents should be aware that we are tracking the issue with considerable care. The issue is dealt with through the planning system; as I said, SEPA’s responsibilities relate to the water environment.

Climate Change

7. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to tackle climate change. (S4O-00385)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 sets the framework and targets for tackling climate change in Scotland. The report on proposals and policies sets out how the statutory annual targets for reductions in greenhouse gases will be met to 2022. The report builds on the work that we have already undertaken to reduce emissions from various sectors including energy supply, homes and communities, business and the public sector, transport, rural land use and waste. A further report for the period 2023 to 2027 will be published next year.

Graeme Pearson: The First Minister and others have long heralded the impact of the climate challenge fund in reducing carbon emissions by 700,000 tonnes, but in response to a freedom of information request the Scottish Government confirmed solely that community groups have reduced their CO₂ emissions by 125,866 tonnes. Although those communities are to be congratulated on their reductions, has the balance of 570,000 tonnes been delivered and, if so, how was it done?

Stewart Stevenson: It would be astonishing if the balance had been delivered, because the 700,000 tonnes relates to the 461 projects that have been funded by the climate challenge fund, some of which have just started, while others continue to start. The proportion of projects that are complete accounts for 125,000 tonnes of saving. The member must not make the mistake of comparing entirely different questions and assuming that the answers will be the same.

Food Safety (European Regulations)

8. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it monitors compliance with European Union food safety regulations. (S4O-00386)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Compliance with food safety legislation by food businesses is monitored and enforced by local authorities, the Food Standards Agency and the Scottish Government. The Food Standards Agency is also responsible for auditing food law enforcement activities for which it is the competent authority.

Gordon MacDonald: Will the minister ensure that Scottish egg and pig producers will not be undermined by imports of illegally produced eggs and pig meat from non-compliant EU producers when the EU welfare of laying hens directive

comes into force at the beginning of 2012 and the EU ban on sow stalls comes into force at the beginning of 2013?

Michael Matheson: My colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment remains committed to protecting the interests of egg producers who have invested significant sums of capital to comply with the ban on conventional cages from January 2012. He and his officials are working closely with the UK Government, which is maintaining pressure on the European Commission and non-compliant member states to ensure that eggs from conventional cages are not freely traded in EU markets. It is in our interests to help the Commission to find a solution to the issue, particularly as the agreed approach is likely to set a precedent for the sow stall ban, which will come into force in January 2013. The Government recognises the need for a level playing field in the area and it will continue to work to achieve that.

Oil and Gas Sector

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-01349, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the oil and gas framework.

14:58

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):

Thank you for accommodating this important debate, Presiding Officer. I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge the success of Scotland's oil and gas sector, which is a cornerstone of Scotland's economy. The North Sea oil and gas industry makes a significant contribution to the economies of Scotland and the United Kingdom and acts as a major source of employment by supporting 440,000 jobs across the UK, including more than 196,000 in Scotland alone.

The industry is also a major source of investment: BP's recent announcement of a programme of investment of almost £10 billion in North Sea oil and gas in the next five years is terrific news for Scotland. The industry is also a major source of tax revenue and has provided more than £300 billion in tax revenues to the UK Government over the years. The industry also supplies the majority of the UK's oil and gas needs.

Since large-scale oil and gas production commenced in the North Sea in the 1970s, more than 39 billion barrels of oil equivalent have been extracted from the UK continental shelf. Although production levels might have peaked in 1999, the story does not end there—far from it. Indeed, 40 years after oil and gas pioneers in the North Sea first started to pump Scotland's oil, the North Sea continues to produce 900 million barrels every year, and the story continues, with significant unharvested reserves remaining in the North Sea.

Forecasts from Professor Alex Kemp at the University of Aberdeen and others suggest that oil and gas production will continue at least until the 2040s. Oil & Gas UK—the trade representative body for the sector—estimates that between 15 billion and 24 billion barrels have yet to be recovered. That suggests that between 30 and 40 per cent of total oil and gas reserves by volume have still to be extracted. At current prices, those reserves could have a wholesale value of in excess of £1 trillion—which is a denomination that is not normally used in debates in the Parliament. Given that extraordinary potential, it is imperative that recovery of those reserves be maximised. I have enjoyed cordial relations with members of all parties in the Parliament on the shared pursuit of that objective.

In February this year, Oil & Gas UK published the results of its 2011 activity survey. The report makes good reading. The potential for new fields development is promising, with 67 possible new field developments reported. Confidence in the sector is fairly high, and levels of capital investment in the UK continental shelf are strong. There has been a series of recent commitments to the North Sea from leading oil and gas companies. There is more: looking to the longer term, the investment horizon in the UK continental shelf over the next decade and beyond is reported to have the potential to reach £70 billion.

Of course, much of the skill and the supply chain expertise in Scotland is now exported overseas. Of the nearly £16 billion-worth of oil and gas supply chain sales in 2009, 45 per cent—just under half—or £7.2 billion, was internationally based. That is a real tribute to the people who have worked in the industry over decades.

Over the years, Aberdeen has established itself as one of the world's largest energy hubs. It has an enviable reputation around the world for engineering, innovation and excellence, especially in the subsea sector. Much of that skill and expertise has the potential to help to develop our emerging offshore wind sector as well, especially in design, installation and marine operations. I was pleased to note that that is recorded in the briefings that members have received for the debate from Oil & Gas UK and other bodies.

We have industrial and supply chain ability, research and development capacity and a highly skilled sector workforce that is second to none. It is clear that considerable opportunities remain in the North Sea and that the industry will remain an important part of the Scottish and UK economies for many decades to come. However, Government must play its part in supporting the opportunity by creating stable and effective support and incentive structures to help to make that happen.

I turn to some of the challenges. The Scottish Government recognises that we cannot take it for granted that development in the North Sea will happen without appropriate political and policy support. Strategic forums—such as the Scottish energy advisory board, which the First Minister co-chairs, the oil and gas industry advisory group, which I co-chair with Melfort Campbell and which was established by the Scottish Government, and the PILOT group, which it is chaired by Chris Huhne and which I attend on behalf of the Scottish Government—bring together the UK Government, the Scottish Government and the wider oil and gas industry to work together.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Will the minister give way?

Fergus Ewing: Certainly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Liam—

Tavish Scott: I am Tavish Scott, not Liam McArthur.

Does the minister recognise that one of the major economic opportunities over the next 15 to 20 years will be in decommissioning? In particular, Shell is now actively considering the decommissioning options for the Brent field. What assurances can the minister give me that his Government will consider carefully the potential to ensure that the massive installations come ashore at the deep-water facilities in Shetland, which are closest to the Brent field?

Fergus Ewing: I welcome Tavish Scott's point; he is absolutely right that decommissioning will present considerable opportunities for Scotland. Just yesterday we received information that Bremerhaven, which is doing work of that nature, is nearly full.

I understand that that matter is much discussed in the industry, and I have taken part in some of those discussions. I would welcome discussions with Tavish Scott on what must be done in Shetland to ensure that his constituency can avail itself of the opportunities in the years ahead, provided that the various other difficulties relating to decommissioning—particularly the removal of the reliefs that were previously enjoyed—are tackled.

The forums that I attend are an example of Government working closely with key industry players to formulate clear visions in order to maximise recovery rates, sustain jobs and develop a Scottish oil and gas supply chain that is strong, healthy and resilient enough to take full advantage of the opportunities that are still to come in that vibrant sector in the several decades ahead.

Of course, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Development International continue to support and assist many companies in the sector to grow and develop. The challenges that face the industry have their foundations principally in the supply chain, in skills shortages, in lack of sufficient finance from banks, in investment in the existing infrastructure, in lack of new exploration and appraisal, and in the adoption of innovative new technologies.

The joint forums help Government to understand industry needs and they help industry to understand Government expectations. As with most good partnerships, the collective effort becomes more effective than the individual one. The oil and gas sector in Scotland is supported by world-class supply chains, but we must do all that we can to support the growth and development of the Scottish supply chain, domestically and abroad, and ensure that opportunities are captured.

The sector has a strong and skilled workforce, but its skills needs are evolving and changing. We must work with all relevant players in the industry to ensure that the right skills are available in the right amount, in the right place and at the right time. The long-term aim must be to ensure that the oil and gas sector is viewed as a long-term attractive sector for young people to join and for diverse and exciting career opportunities. I believe that the industry is completely united on that. Skills is therefore a key issue for the industry advisory group.

I must say that I share the sentiments that are expressed in Labour's amendment—at least in the first part, which relates to the topic at hand, rather than in the very last part. I endorse Labour's explicit recognition of the importance of skills development and workforce representatives' participation in all those matters, I entirely accept those points, and I thought that I should depart from the text that is before me just to say so. I am that sort of minister. *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sure that we should be reassured, minister. Perhaps you would like to move on.

Fergus Ewing: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Access to finance is as much an issue in the oil and gas industry as it is in other industries, and oil companies are finding it increasingly difficult to access capital to explore, appraise and develop hydrocarbons in the UK—

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am grateful to the minister for giving way because he is “that sort of minister”.

My point is on fallow fields, which—as the minister will be aware—are fields for which companies have licences to develop but have not done so. When Labour was in power we introduced the licence information for trading—LIFT—policy, which allowed companies to swap licences. Is the minister concerned about that situation? There is potential in the North Sea that is not being developed because some companies are sitting on fields and not developing them.

Fergus Ewing: That is one of a number of factors that concern all members across all parties. I cannot speak for Chris Huhne, but I think that the UK Government is apprised of that issue, and the need to tackle those problems is acknowledged in all quarters. The debate and the challenge really lie in how that will be done. The simple fact is that without capital to fund exploration, discoveries will not be made and reserves will not be realised. The PILOT group is consulting the banking industry and others to try to tackle that matter.

I am just looking at the large number of remaining pages in my text, which I do not have time to cover.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can have a little more time, if you wish.

Fergus Ewing: That is very generous of you, Presiding Officer. You are that sort of Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That depends on the day.

Fergus Ewing: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Technological excellence, robust supply chains, a skilled workforce and making best use of the existing onshore and offshore oil and gas infrastructure are key in enabling recovery of the remaining reserves, which is a priority for us all. However, we have to ensure that success in the future is not dependent on the infrastructure of the past. We have to be realistic and to recognise that the majority of the pipelines and terminals were constructed decades ago and so identification of long-term and short-term critical infrastructure needs to be pursued. The energy advisory groups are working closely with industry to make progress on those issues.

Aberdeen has a strong world-wide reputation for technological innovation in the North Sea and is leading the way in many techniques. Aberdeen's strengths were recognised in the PricewaterhouseCoopers report “Northern Lights—A strategic vision of Aberdeen as a world-class energy capital”, which was published earlier this month.

I have confidence that, with the right support, Scotland's skills set and experience in the oil and gas industries will step up to the plate, but there are still challenges ahead. The recent and unexpected hike in tax was unhelpful and it is regrettable that there was no consultation of the industry. However, looking backwards will not help; we must look forward. I have sought—and will continue to seek—to work constructively with UK Government counterparts on that.

We also recognise the massive potential that the oil and gas industry has to develop the low-carbon agenda and economy. Pursuit of clean energy technologies such as carbon capture and storage have the potential to allow us here in Scotland to make great leaps forward in our ambitions for a low-carbon society. Those ambitions co-exist with, run alongside and do not conflict with the imperative of continued excellence and success in the oil and gas industry.

I shall shorten the remainder of my remarks, Presiding Officer. I look forward to a constructive debate this afternoon and I thank you for your indulgence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: My pleasure. Could you please move the motion?

Fergus Ewing: I move,

That the Parliament recognises the continued importance of Scotland's oil and gas sector to the Scottish and UK economies, its support for 196,000 jobs across Scotland and its contribution of £300 billion to the UK Exchequer over the past 30 years in real terms; recognises the long-term future of the industry, with up to 40% of the remaining total UK Continental Shelf oil and gas reserves worth £1 trillion; welcomes the strong confidence shown by recent industry investment plans announcing four new oil and gas projects valued at £10 billion over the next five years; supports the Scottish Government and its agencies in working to maintain and develop the long-term future of the oil and gas sector by improving the position of Aberdeen as a global supply chain hub, developing energy skills in the workforce and supporting collaboration between the oil and gas and low-carbon energy sectors; calls for a progressive approach to oil and gas taxation to encourage further deployment and extraction, and supports the findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report published on 3 November 2011 arguing that fiscal certainty and targeted incentives in the North Sea are required from the UK Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I call Lewis Macdonald, who has a generous nine minutes.

15:12

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): North Sea oil and gas have now been with us for a working lifetime. Other members, like me, will know people who have retired from the industry, having joined it straight from school or college—a whole working lifetime ago—as well as others who have reached retirement age but chosen not to stop.

The industry will potentially be with us for another working lifetime to come. Young people who are completing their formal education today can join the industry and expect the UK continental shelf still to be an active oil province when they are approaching the end of their career. The new Clair Ridge field west of Shetland might not be due for decommissioning until as late as 2055.

The industry defines working lifetimes for generations of working people; indeed, it has defined the political and economic context in the UK and in Scotland for probably the whole working lifetime of all members currently in this Parliament.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I thank the member for recognising the future of the oil and gas industry. Is it not regrettable that in the second session of this Parliament his ministers—and Liberal Democrat ministers—talked down the industry and said that it was “finished”, as a result of which many people have not seen the industry as a career choice?

Lewis Macdonald: To be frank, what I regret is that after the minister's constructive opening—and invitation for us to have a consensual and constructive debate—Maureen Watt has dug up what I can only assume to be a very obscure reference somewhere in an *Official Report* from the second session of Parliament. I recommend that she refer back to the first session of Parliament, when the Scottish Parliament met in Aberdeen and debated oil and gas. We had a debate similar to the one that I hope we will have this afternoon, with parties around the chamber recognising our common interest in getting the maximum economic and employment benefit from that vital industry.

Sometimes, the oil industry is debated in the wrong way, as though it were a cash cow and the oil produced itself, meaning that all we have to worry about is which Government gets the money, how much it is worth and what will happen when it is gone. The reality is that the energy and the revenues will be maximised only if the policy framework is right, and I welcome much of what the minister has said about that this afternoon.

The industry is also about the people who work in it. We must keep them safe at work and give them the skills that they need. The defining moment in the history of North Sea oil came on 6 July 1988—the day on which the Piper Alpha platform went on fire 120 miles off the Aberdeenshire coast. The disaster cost 167 lives. My friend, Bob Ballantyne, who was an electrician working on the platform on that day, escaped from the inferno by lying on his back in the burning sea, hoping that the current would carry him in the right direction. Some people who survived never really recovered from the trauma; others, like Bob Ballantyne, dedicated themselves to campaigning for a change in the culture of the oil and gas industry—a change that would put safety first. Critical to that, in their view, was that workers should have their own safety representatives offshore and access to trade union representation. In that campaign, the labour and trade union movement worked alongside the Piper Alpha families and survivors and made a difference.

Thanks also to the recommendations of Lord Cullen following his Piper Alpha inquiry, offshore safety for the past 20 years has been the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive rather than the Government department that is responsible for maximising production. Offshore workers now elect safety representatives to speak up on safety issues on their installation, with the backing of their unions.

The industry itself supports Step Change in Safety, a pan-industry body that seeks to address health and safety issues as they arise and to put safety at the centre of the agenda offshore.

Indeed, only last week, more than 70 safety representatives came together from companies across the UK continental shelf under the auspices of Step Change in Safety to address current issues in the industry.

Oil & Gas UK, the employers association, will affirm that the workforce are the people who are best placed to drive down the number of accidents and improve safety, and the majority of offshore workers are now covered by trade union agreements for contractors and construction, catering, drilling and other sectors.

So, the industry today is a far cry from the industry in the days before the Piper Alpha disaster, when there often seemed to be a wild-west mentality about the North Sea frontier, and a cavalier disregard for the first principles of safe working. In those days, trade union activists were liable to be told that they were not required again. We are living in a different world and should thank those who made the effort to make that happen.

Nevertheless, that change does not mean that there is room for complacency about health and safety or about environmental integrity in the offshore workforce. Offshore oil and gas production remains a major hazard industry that is subject to strict regulation on and off the platform. The unions remain concerned to ensure that nobody cuts corners on safety because of commercial pressures on contractors, and that workers do not find themselves unfairly penalised when lost-time incidents affect production offshore.

In recent years, even the journey to and from work has proved to be particularly hazardous. For example, 16 lives were lost when a Super Puma helicopter crashed a few miles from the beach in 2009. Following that catastrophe, urgent work was undertaken on helicopter safety, which has produced important changes in that area, too. Although the hazards still exist, the culture of the industry is very different from how it was in the early days, and that is why I believe the industry can have a productive future.

Such incidents should remind us of the human cost of North Sea oil. The sector is not simply a source of ready money for shareholders or, indeed, for Governments. We should not forget that offshore in northern waters is one of the world's most hazardous workplaces and that the men and women who work there regularly brave conditions that most of us will rarely, if ever, experience.

It is equally important that we are not complacent about skills for the offshore industries, in relation to which our amendment highlights two areas: the oil and gas industry skills development

body, OPITO, and the Scottish further education college sector.

OPITO is at the centre of identifying the skills needs of the oil and gas sector, offshore and onshore. It estimates that about 15,000 new people will be required over the next five years in the oil and gas sector alone, even without taking into account the growing demand for skilled labour for offshore renewable energy. To find those people, the sector looks to the Scottish Government and its agencies, among others, to ensure that they are delivering the skills mix that employers want. That means engagement with the post-16 education reform agenda. It means working to ensure that curriculum for excellence has enough oil and gas content to provide meaningful support for pupils who could go on to work in the sector.

That also means ensuring that training in relevant skills in further education colleges does not fall victim to what are clearly going to be significant cuts in the funding of further education as a whole. We know from the spending review that there is to be a 13 per cent cut in cash terms in funding of further education. If we add to that the impact of inflation, there is no doubt that there will be real impacts on either the quantity or the quality of further education provision, or on both.

The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is currently examining the way in which it supports units of learning in further education. Broadly speaking, students of engineering, such as those who are training as oil industry technicians, attract twice as much support as social science students in further education. That is for the very good reason that engineering students are expensive to teach, requiring smaller numbers per teacher and more equipment per class. This year, Aberdeen College, if I may use it as an example, is training a total of 89 full-time students, either on OPITO schemes or on Engineering Construction Industry Training Board schemes, and it is vital that the Scottish funding council do nothing to undermine that approach. Colleges must continue to be funded by the Government so that they can deliver the quality of training and the number of students that the industry needs. In turn, the industry must ensure that it is supporting skills providers by paying enough to meet training and employment costs.

There are important areas where the Scottish Government as well as the UK Government can act to enable the oil and gas industry to continue to produce energy, create skilled jobs and grow the economy.

As I mentioned in response to an earlier intervention, Labour led an oil and gas debate in the first session of Parliament, when we were in government. I spoke from the front bench in that

debate. I was vice-chair of the oil and gas industry body PILOT for a number of years and worked to ensure that Scotland's devolved Government was engaged and made a difference in respect of the issues that affect the industry and the people in it. We acknowledge the work of the present Scottish Government in continuing to build on that work and to stay engaged. We welcome the fact that oil industry trade unions and employers are involved in the Scottish Government's advisory group on oil and gas, as well as—at UK level—in PILOT.

There are, of course, other issues in the debate about the future of the sector on which we have views that differ sharply from those of the SNP. However, where we agree on the economic and policy priorities that are necessary in order for the industry to flourish, we will be able to work together; I hope that we will see that spirit prevail in the chamber this afternoon.

I move amendment S4M-1349.3, to insert at end:

“; recognises that health, safety and environmental standards must continue to have the highest priority in the next phase of North Sea exploration and production and in the development of a wider energy mix, including carbon capture and storage and offshore renewables; believes that trades unions as well as employers and regulators have key roles to play in maintaining these standards; acknowledges that the demand for skilled labour from both the oil and gas sector and offshore renewables will increase as the technical challenges become greater; believes that the Scottish Government should support the efforts of the offshore energy industries and of the oil and gas skills academy, OPITO, to recruit, train and retain skilled workers, and, in particular, calls for further education funding to be maintained in order to allow Scottish colleges to meet future demand for skilled labour both onshore and offshore.”

15:23

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): We have had an excellent start to the debate. The minister's speech was ministerial and helpful as opposed to partisan, and Lewis Macdonald's speech was well argued—the part about health and safety was captivating at points, and very well put.

The minister put it correctly when he said that we have to look forwards and that looking backwards is not going to help.

There is a lot to agree with in the motion and in the speeches that we have heard so far. The minister talked about exporting the excellent skills in the sector in the North Sea and made particular mention of the subsea sector. He was quite right to do that.

I note that the minister is a member of the PILOT group and has been attending its meetings. I was particularly interested to hear about the consultation of the banking industry that is going on. I wonder whether there are ways in which the

minister can keep members abreast of how that consultation proceeds, because it is critical to the future of the industry.

I am grateful for the publication of the minutes of the oil and gas advisory group, which I know Fergus Ewing co-chairs. I was extremely interested in the range of issues that the group—the cast list of which reads like a “Who's Who” of the industry—covered. It is taking forward a variety of issues, including the global context, skills, innovation, technology and future strategy.

As far as the motion is concerned, all members will agree that the oil and gas industry makes an enormous contribution to the economy. The minister mentioned the number of jobs that it supports, directly or indirectly, but it is worth restating that, in Scotland, the figure that we are talking about is in the realm of 200,000.

The motion rightly mentions the contribution that the sector has made to the Exchequer in the past, since the early 70s, and the contribution that it is likely to make over the next 30 or—if Lewis Macdonald is correct—40 years.

We must focus on the industry's potential. I read something in the PricewaterhouseCoopers report or in the Oil & Gas UK—

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I note that the member's amendment would delete all reference to the PWC report. What aspect of that report does he disagree with so fundamentally that he seeks to delete all reference to it?

Gavin Brown: In the main, it is an excellent report, about 95 per cent of which I could probably sign up to immediately. There were a couple of issues to do with proposed taxation choices, coupled with the Government's language and its use of the word “progressive”, that made me wonder what the tone of the debate would be. I was not sure what the Government was driving at through its use of the word “progressive”. On that basis, we did not feel able to agree to the motion, but I agree with the lion's share of the PWC report.

The quotation that I was about to mention says that there is a need for

“talking up the opportunities for growth and ... dispelling the perception”—

I emphasise that word—

“of managed ... decline.”

All parties in the Parliament want to push forward on that; it is something that the industry must get right if we are to extract the 12 billion to 24 billion barrels of oil that it is predicted are still in the North Sea. As has been pointed out, the value of that oil will be greater than the value of the oil that we have already extracted, which amounts to the best part of 40 billion barrels.

In an intervention, Tavish Scott mentioned decommissioning, the potential value of which, I understand from the PWC report, is enormous, as is the opportunity to export the relevant skills, if the decommissioning process is successful. I note that 37 per cent of that is set to take place by 2020.

It is worth reflecting on some initiatives that the UK Government and Oil & Gas UK have taken forward over the past few months. They are working together constructively to ensure that future announcements and future changes are in the interests of all stakeholders, Government and the industry itself. I am pleased that work is being done to attempt to resolve decommissioning uncertainties in advance of the 2012 budget. I note that consideration is being given to the case for introducing a new category of field that would qualify for field allowance, and I note the announcement, in July of this year, of an increase in the ring-fenced expenditure supplement from 6 to 10 per cent. In addition, a new fiscal forum has been set up and is due to meet in the early part of 2012.

The industry has enormous potential. It has already made an enormous contribution to Scotland, the UK and the wider world, through the exports that the minister mentioned. It is in all our interests that the stakeholders continue to work together over the coming months and years so that we can measure the industry's future not in years, but in decades.

I move amendment S4M-01349.2, to leave out from "calls" to end.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): We move to the open debate. I can allow speeches of up to seven minutes.

15:29

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): In June, I had a members' business debate on oil and gas taxation. It was a constructive debate, which was handled constructively by all parties across the chamber. It is good to see that I appear to have set the tone for oil and gas debates in the Parliament this session—long may that continue.

I agree with much that has been said by all members in today's debate thus far. Lewis Macdonald rightly referred to some of the tragedies that have taken place in the North Sea. One of the fatalities in the recent Super Puma crash, Stuart Wood from Newmachar, was in the year below me at Dyce academy and played in the school football team with me, so the issue affects many people in my peer group, with whom I grew up. I note that the report on that crash is due out soon and I have no doubt that lessons will be learned in the industry.

I agree with the minister that it is important to focus on the positives and to look forward. The Scottish Government has been engaged constructively and, I hope, productively with the UK Government on the taxation regime in the North Sea. Although one would undoubtedly have hoped that the previous decision would have been taken following slightly more consultation with the industry, one hopes that, moving forward, there will be a period of consultation, which would help to alleviate concerns in the industry caused by some last-gasp decision making. I hope that the UK Government's ears are open to that argument when the minister makes it to them.

I agree that there is a need to address skills gaps. In particular, Oil & Gas UK has highlighted to me that a gap exists in the middle between those who are graduate entrants or young entrants into the industry and those who are coming to the brink of retirement. One of the reasons why that gap exists is a subconscious mood out there that somehow the industry did not have a future. The short-termism that often defined the way in which the oil and gas industry was talked about led people to consider that it was perhaps not an attractive industry to move into. That has created something of a problem and a requirement for the gap to be filled.

The oil and gas industry advisory group has identified six priorities, one of which is skills. That is extremely important. I note that the PWC report refers to the work by, for example, Talisman and Wood Group in offering university scholarships. Indeed, the report encourages other companies in the sector to consider moving down a similar route.

Along with a number of other members, I attended the launch of Professor Alex Kemp's worthy tome on the history of North Sea oil and gas. *[Interruption.]* Bless you, Ms Boyack. It was interesting to note, in the course of that evening, how many of the students on Professor Kemp's course come from other areas of the world, where oil and gas sectors are seen as a long-term prospect, and how few people from the locale were on the course. We must do more to encourage people to believe that this is an industry that they can go into and that it will not decline within 10 to 25 years, as was so often the mantra.

I welcome the shift in focus that has taken place, which is constructive. Had some of our opponents' political predecessors perhaps had the foresight to talk up the longevity of the industry to the same extent, some of the problems might not have arisen.

We had a discussion earlier today on female employment. OPITO produced a report that suggests that there has been an increase in the

number of females being attracted to work in the oil and gas industry, which has often been viewed as very masculine and macho.

Work has been done, for example by Aberdeen College and the sector, to try to provide places for people from Kinloss and Lossiemouth, who are leaving the Ministry of Defence, on the drilling transformation training programme that is planned at Aberdeen College. The Prince's Trust has also worked on developing a new basic entry programme for unemployed and disadvantaged workers. The industry has undertaken all that positive work, which we should welcome.

I am pleased that Mr Brown was able to clarify that the Tory amendment does not seek to disregard the PricewaterhouseCoopers report in its entirety, because there is much in that report that is worthy and to be commended. The report identifies that up to 24 billion barrels of oil could be extracted from the UK continental shelf. In fact, there is some discussion in the oil industry about whether that estimate could be increased depending on further investment and exploration. The west of Shetland fields, for example, could generate upwards of \$600 billion in the next 40 years alone.

The report states that contrary to the view that North Sea production is in terminal decline, the outlook for the oil and gas industry in Aberdeen is positive. There is a wealth of exciting opportunities that will enable Aberdeen to continue prospering, through utilising new technology to extend the life of existing fields or through developing incremental reserves or greenfield sites. I am sure that my fellow members for the north-east and Aberdeen welcome, as I do, that analysis and the industry's positive vision for the future of Aberdeen. I accept entirely the chancellor's contention that investment is taking place. That is evident from BP, TAQA and Premier Oil, from the recent announcement from Talisman Energy and Wood Group and from the acquisition of ExxonMobil assets by Apache.

At the same time, though, there is a real need to focus in on the brownfield and marginal sites, which are the ones that are most affected by the tax changes. That is why I hope that the constructive discussions that are taking place will result in something a little better in the future.

A simple equation is that skills development depends on investment and investment depends on confidence. I am pleased that it appears that there will be no more short-termism and no more talking down the future prospects of the industry. Parliament should unite to say that oil and gas has a robust and optimistic future. The issue must be handled carefully. I know that the Scottish Government and the minister will be working to

ensure that the next 40 to 50 years are handled better than the previous 40 years.

15:36

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I apologise that I will have to leave for a brief period for a prior commitment with a constituent, although I will be back for the closing speeches.

I join colleagues in arguing that our oil and gas resources are precious to us. The Scottish Government's motion records the huge investment in oil and gas, and the massive resources that come from the industry, which generate revenue for public services throughout the UK.

It is important that we extract oil and gas in an environmentally responsible manner and with regard to human safety. I shall comment on both of those issues. It is also important that we use our oil and gas resources wisely and as efficiently as possible, but I suspect that that is a debate for another day, possibly next week when we debate climate change.

The oil and gas industry is hugely carbon intensive, in both the extraction and the use of gas and oil. However, there is a great deal of expertise in the industry, which is now considering how we can turn a high-carbon industry into a lower-carbon industry. As Lewis Macdonald highlighted, we need to ensure that there is sufficient training to enable the next generation to enter the industry. We must also make links with universities, so that the industry gets the best quality of research.

The minister highlighted the new opportunities for development, which are significant. However, new development is ever-more challenging, not just geographically but because of the climate in which companies will operate over the next few years. As the industry moves to deeper and deeper fields, the operating challenges are tougher and the stakes are even higher.

Last year, a report from the UK Parliament's Energy and Climate Change Committee highlighted the impact that a major oil spillage in the UK could have on taxpayers. That should concern us not just in relation to developments off our own shores—I think that British-based companies need to act to British standards wherever they operate in the world. That is important not only for fair competition in the oil and gas industry here and for workers who go from Scotland with multinational companies to use their skills across the globe, but for environmental standards.

We know that the cost of mistakes and accidents can be huge. As Lewis Macdonald so eloquently commented, Piper Alpha reminds us of the huge human cost of error. More recently, the

environmental cost of the Deepwater Horizon leakage in the Gulf of Mexico was enormous. That was a huge wake-up call to the industry throughout the world. The fact that the Gannet Alpha incident in August this year was our most serious oil spillage for 10 years reflects well on our industry, but it is also a reminder that we need to ensure that health and safety and environmental standards remain central.

I was keen to hear what lessons Scottish ministers had learned from the Deepwater Horizon disaster. I was particularly keen to hear about contingency measures. Will the minister talk about those in his concluding remarks? In particular, I am thinking about information that is given by oil companies and responses that can be made by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Marine Scotland once they have the information.

For most people, the environment is out of sight and out of mind, particularly if it is the marine environment and especially if it is hundreds of miles off our shores. However, now that our new marine acts have bedded in across the UK, I am interested to hear from the minister how the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 has delivered us a framework for a more sustainable marine environment. That is a huge opportunity and I hope that the Scottish Government is taking it forward.

For me, the underlying principle must be the precautionary principle, which means that our approach to the marine environment must be underpinned by robust science and information. That situation must be challenging for companies at the levels at which they now operate, and it is challenging in terms of transparency for both regulators and Government.

The oil and gas industry is not just about a sustainable marine environment. New technologies such as fracking, particularly in the shale industry, are now being promoted. I am keen to hear from the minister in his closing remarks what work is being done to evaluate the risks to our environment from fracking; in particular, I am keen to hear what risk assessment has been done on groundwater and water resources and whether SEPA has been tasked to examine how local carbon impacts could be assessed and the issue of hydraulic fracturing.

Fracking was mentioned briefly during themed questions on rural affairs and the environment, but the issue deserves some attention in a wider debate on oil and gas, because we need information on it urgently. Planning officers who have not been trained on the fracking issue or have not dealt with it will have to deal with it in a professional, efficient manner. There is a role for the Scottish Government in ensuring that planning authorities are up to speed on the issue.

Experience in the US has demonstrated that irresponsible use of fracking technology leads to huge environmental costs. In some areas, the water has become so contaminated that people can set it alight as it comes out of domestic taps. We do not want to see that in Scotland. In that regard, there is a major role for a regulator such as SEPA or our local planning authorities, which must ensure that they are up to speed on the issue. The Scottish Government needs to give leadership on that. I am keen to hear what discussions the Scottish Government has had with planning authorities to ensure that they can exercise their duties properly.

I want to comment briefly on health and safety in the oil and gas industry. There are major challenges in that regard at deeper depths. The comments on health and safety in Lewis Macdonald's amendment are important and need to be part of our discussion. We need to state clearly that we support the highest priority being given in our marine environment not only to environmental standards, but to health and safety. The role of trade unions and their members is important in that regard, alongside that of employers, regulators and the Government.

We need to ensure that, even with our very good track record in the oil industry in Scotland, we have a safety culture that is deeply embedded in every aspect of oil and gas production. That is crucial, because it can take only a minor mistake somewhere for tragedy to ensue. Lewis Macdonald's comments about Piper Alpha are utterly relevant for the industry now. It is important that the trade union movement plays a vital and positive part in the industry.

I hope that the Labour amendment will be supported and that the environmental aspects of oil and gas are logged. On the carbon capture and storage proposals for Peterhead, we need to take a wider approach to oil and gas, so that proposed development would be crucial in giving us the experience in Scotland of carbon capture and storage, which we could export. It is important to ensure that our carbon-intensive industry can still proceed but that it does so with a smaller carbon footprint. That technology is hugely important, not only for us in Scotland; I hope that we can export it to the rest of the world. Retrofitting existing plants is the way forward.

I hope that the minister will pick up on some of my questions in his closing speech.

15:44

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I welcome this debate, because oil and gas is a subject that is very close to my heart; I worked in the industry and went

offshore as part of my job for some 15 years. In the previous session of Parliament, Jamie Stone and I were the only members who had experience of working in the industry. I am not sure whether any of the new intake of MSPs has worked in the industry.

I welcome both the PricewaterhouseCoopers report and the motion, particularly the recognition of just how important it is to maintain and improve Aberdeen's position as an energy hub. The report is right to stress that Aberdeen will not secure that role for the future without concerted effort and it will require extensive vision, collaboration and real improvements to the infrastructure and skills development opportunities that are on offer in the area. Organisations such as Aberdeen city and shire economic future—ACSEF—the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce and the higher education institutions in the area all recognise that and are working collaboratively to ensure that it happens.

The north-east colleges are collaborating more than ever before, not least with the signing of a federation agreement between Aberdeen and Banff and Buchan colleges. However, as Mark McDonald mentioned, the report states that we must encourage the energy industry to collaborate more with Aberdeen's academic institutions to ensure that Aberdeen is home to the skills that the energy industry needs for the future. Lewis Macdonald and other north-east MSPs have been to briefings from our colleges and our universities in the past few weeks and we know that they are working hard to make that happen. A seamless education from technician training and apprenticeships through to PhDs and management skills can be provided by the academic institutions in the north-east if they work together.

That makes the first half of Lewis Macdonald's amendment very relevant. Health and safety pervades everything that the oil industry does. Indeed, if anyone goes to an event sponsored by BP or the oil and gas industry they are given a little card that says to ensure that they hold on to the rails and not to carry anything when they are going down the stairs, particularly blunt instruments or glasses. Health and safety pervades everything that is done, even onshore, and it comes from the importance of health and safety offshore.

Quality of life and good infrastructure in the city are hugely important in making Aberdeen a world-class energy capital for the future. That highlights the importance of projects such as the Aberdeen western peripheral route, which cannot be overstated. The report is right to highlight the need to ensure that the long legal delays it has endured are avoided in future infrastructure projects.

Encouraging greater air links to strategically important locations should also be a priority and there is a strong argument for devolving air passenger duty for just such a purpose. It is important that we all do as much as possible to ensure the viability and continuity of the new route from Aberdeen to Frankfurt.

The economic opportunities that are offered by the energy sector—both in oil and gas and in renewables—to Aberdeen are enormous and it is essential to the Scottish economy that efforts to secure them are fully supported. That brings me to the last line of the Government's motion, which is perhaps one of the most telling recommendations in the PWC report. The North Sea oil and gas industry needs

"fiscal certainty and targeted incentives ... from the UK Government."

Fiscal certainty and targeted incentives are, unfortunately, the direct opposite of what we got from Danny Alexander and the UK Government.

The UK Government's tax raid on the oil and gas industry came without warning or consultation and, if anything, was the absolute antithesis of the fiscal certainty that the industry requires. The Scottish Government has called for a statutory consultation period before changes to oil and gas taxation take place in the future. Surely we should all agree that such a measure would go a long way towards giving the industry confidence that it will not unexpectedly be raided again in the future.

The tax increase made no recognition of the effort required, the costs of exploration and development or the variation in how profitable different fields are. Some months ago, the Scottish Government submitted proposals to mitigate the worst effects of the tax grab by calling for a rate of return allowance before a field is liable for the supplementary charge, an investment uplift allowance or an extension of the field allowance for small or technically challenging new fields.

Those measures would encourage the industry to continue investing in exploration and the development of new opportunities. The lack of response to those much-needed proposals has been deeply disappointing to many in the industry, particularly as around a quarter of the previously planned projects have been sufficiently affected by the UK Government's actions to reduce the probability of them proceeding.

Significant investments in the North Sea have been announced since the increased tax bombshell was dropped, but they are in projects with the highest yields or the most investment already committed to them. The marginal fields are the most heavily affected. Oil & Gas UK has warned of a two-speed industry emerging on the UK continental shelf. Projects involving more than

£12 billion of investment that could have led to £15 billion to £20 billion of tax revenues have been put in doubt as a result of the UK Government's ill-considered actions.

A few years ago, a politician spoke out to condemn the then UK Government's focus on squeezing out short-term revenue from the oil and gas industry at the expense of investment that was needed to get the most out of the North Sea. That politician was George Osborne. The contrast between his comments in 2007 and his actions as chancellor can only be considered as representing hypocrisy of the worst kind. I hope that he has invested £150-plus in buying Alex Kemp's two volumes on the history of the oil and gas industry in the UK, and that he learns from them.

I support the motion.

15:51

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): A number of weeks ago, Oil & Gas UK and the French company Total organised a parliamentary visit to the Elgin-Franklin field, which is east of Aberdeen. In order to take part in that visit, we were taken through RGIT offshore survival training in Aberdeen. I confess that when Lewis Macdonald was describing his friend in the Piper Alpha events, some thoughts about that went through my mind. I was upside down in 3m of water and strapped into a seat, and was told to count to eight before I got out through the window of the mock-up helicopter. I commend the experience to Mr Ewing. I do not know whether he has had the opportunity to undertake the RGIT training yet, but it is advisable for ministerial life to do such things. A person thinks of lots of things in such moments: their friends, enemies and even people in their own party. Given that men and women who go offshore have to undertake that training every four years, it is useful for those of us who have exciting opportunities to learn more about the industry to undertake that course.

I agree with much of what the minister said at the outset. He mentioned that confidence is fairly high in the continental North Sea and west of Shetland, and that capital expenditure is strong. I agree with those sentiments and share that sense of where the industry is. I also agree that there was no consultation on tax changes with the industry. I think that he used the word "regrettable". I entirely agree with that, but say gently to him, particularly in light of the previous speech, in which we heard calls for statutory consultation periods, that it is important that the Scottish Government is consistent on that principle when it introduces tax rises to businesses in Scotland. I commend a statutory consultation period to the ministerial front bench.

Mark McDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Tavish Scott: I will finish my point.

If the minister's Government is proposing a statutory consultation period, I agree with it, but let us see it also applying that approach to tax changes in Scotland.

Fergus Ewing: I want to say something in the interests of being helpful. I am sure that Tavish Scott will wish to know that a consultation is under way on our public health levy proposals, which businesses can take part in.

Tavish Scott: I am not sure that we saw much consultation before that measure was announced. Mr Ewing might wish to reflect on that with his ministerial colleagues.

David Stewart: Will the member take an intervention?

Tavish Scott: I would like to make some progress.

I want to say something about the importance of the oil and gas industry now. In very difficult economic times—these are economic propositions, not political propositions—with the euro zone in utter crisis and meltdown, the oil and gas sector, which members have eloquently described with statistical evidence, is one of the few areas of growth in the UK and Scottish economies. As a result, it needs the support of Governments across the country.

As the minister pointed out, BP and its partners are to invest £4.5 billion in the Clair Edge developments, which will extend the field's life past 2050, and in the past six to eight weeks £8 billion has been announced for investment in continental shelf exploration. Those staggering numbers are on top of Total's £3 billion to £3.2 billion investment in the Laggan and Tormore fields. I know of no other industrial sphere in the UK that is seeing that kind of investment and the industry deserves no little credit for the work that it is doing and the investment that it is making.

Nevertheless, we should all be mindful of Sarah Boyack's powerful argument about the environment. Indeed, those of us who lived through the Braer incident in Shetland will know that we are never far away from the consequences of what can go wrong. It is important that the highest environmental standards are maintained. I have seen with my own eyes the weather conditions to the west of Shetland when one moves over the edge of the continental shelf and into intensely deep waters; those conditions will certainly be a challenge to a civil engineering project that is unlike any we have undertaken in UK waters up to now.

In recognising the economic importance of oil and gas, I commend to the minister and his Government three very brief suggestions for achieving the kind of growth in our economy that we need to keep people in and to grow work. First of all, I agree with Lewis Macdonald and other members about skills and I hope that we can help and support the minister in seeking to reverse the cuts that will be made to further education. He will know from his constituency, as we know from our own patches, the impact that such a move will have on college courses and on what can be achieved for the industry. As the Oil & Gas UK briefing for this debate points out:

“Earlier this year, an ... Industry ... survey found that more than half of firms in the oil and gas sector warned that skill shortages are their number one challenge.

The survey estimated”

that if these things could be sorted over the next five years

“the prospects could mean 15,000 more jobs”.

That presents a great challenge for the Government. Given that responsibility for skills and education is devolved, the minister and his colleagues are in a very good position to take up that challenge, plug those skills gaps and create 15,000 more jobs that the Scottish economy desperately needs. We need to do everything we can in that respect and if the minister can find some way of addressing that 27 per cent real-terms cut he will have my full support. After all, it is a very important consideration for the industry in taking these matters forward.

Secondly, given that this is one of the few industrial sectors in Scotland that is growing and has the potential to grow even more, I suggest that the minister realign the enterprise agencies, which obviously have a role to play in the oil and gas industry, to ensure that there is a firm concentration on it.

Finally, on overseas work, the minister rightly mentioned the work that Scottish-based businesses are doing right across the globe. When, this week, I visited Kurdistan with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, I found that the Wood Group was there. In fact, in the past six months alone, British exploration companies have spent £3 billion in that country, which has the fourth richest reserves in the world and represents a potentially huge area for Scottish business. I hope that the minister can find space in his busy diary to undertake visits and lead delegations to those parts of the world, which have huge potential for the Scottish businesses in this sector and where we might build on the enormous success that we have seen over many years.

16:00

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Sometimes, we Aberdonians are accused of inbred pessimism. Presiding Officer, you witnessed my pessimism this morning when, in response to someone who asked how I was, I said that I was fair to middling. That is sometimes how we look at things. I remember that, in the early 1970s, when I was a young lad at the harbour with my grandfather watching the Queen flick a symbolic switch to turn on an oilfield, a guy next to my grandfather said, “It’ll nae last five minutes, loon.” That kind of pessimism, I am afraid, has been displayed by politicians over many a decade since those early discoveries—“It’ll nae last.” I am glad that we have a major breakthrough in the chamber in the fact that everyone is saying that we have a number of decades of oil and gas to come.

In his opening speech, the minister said that there may be more than £1 trillion of revenue out there in the North Sea. Depending on what survey we look at, there may be up to 35 billion barrels of oil left out there. The income from that would be £2.45 trillion, which is a phenomenal sum. We must do our level best to extract as much as we can from the North Sea fields over the coming decades. I agree with Sarah Boyack about carbon capture and storage. Peterhead, if the CCS project goes ahead there, has a part to play, because pumping the carbon into the existing pipeline networks could force more oil out, so that we get even more revenue. Although I agree that we should be at the forefront of CCS technologies, we are now a little behind, unfortunately. We had a stall on Peterhead previously, a stall on Longannet and we are now back to Peterhead. The UK Government needs to make some decisions on this so that we can get the most we can out of the North Sea. I see Tavish Scott shaking his head, but that is the reality. We are behind because the investment has not been put in place.

Tavish Scott: I am sure that Mr Stewart will be gracious enough to agree that £1 billion of investment was available but that the industry had to meet certain criteria to obtain it. Is that not an appropriate way for the Government to behave?

Kevin Stewart: There is £1 billion available, but nobody in Westminster wants to spend that £1 billion. It is a bit like the fossil fuel levy—£200 million is available, but we are getting only half of it now, after years of arguing for it. There has to be a certain amount of honesty here. If the UK Government is going to make that investment, let it do so and not keep the money for ever and a day while other areas of the world are allowed to advance in the technology.

I agree with Tavish Scott that we also have to be prepared for the decommissioning of fields. I

want to make sure that all that work comes to Scotland.

Health and safety have featured a lot in the debate today, and rightly so. I was at the oil and gas remembrance service just the other week in Aberdeen. There are very few folk in my area who have not been touched, or who do not know somebody who has been touched, by a tragedy in the North Sea. We have made great strides, but there is further work to do and we cannot rest on our laurels.

Skills are the most important thing. We have heard today that 15,000 jobs could be created in this sector in the next five years if we get this right. We have got to get this absolutely right. Sometimes, there is a little doom and gloom in the chamber about education and providing the skills for the future, but I am extremely optimistic about some of the things that I have heard in recent times. As Maureen Watt mentioned, many of us visited Aberdeen College the other day. It is extremely exciting that the college hopes to have an oil rig simulator up and running soon. That will give the necessary practical skills to the folk at that college.

David Stewart: The member will be aware that, in the 1970s, the Offshore Supplies Office was set up to try to ensure that British industry got its fair share of work on the UK continental shelf. Sadly, it was abolished. Does the member share my view that we need the son of the Offshore Supplies Office to do a lot more to help Scottish and British industry?

Kevin Stewart: We need to encourage all of our supply chain to bid for contracts, and we must do everything that we can to secure contracts for companies here. However, I remind the member that we are bound by European Union procurement rules, so it might not be as easy as he thinks.

The greatest asset that we have is the people. I have a brother who is currently working in Perth, Western Australia, and folk I went to school with are all over the world using skills that were developed in Aberdeen and the North Sea. We must continue to ensure that the skills are developed.

What I take from the PWC report is that we need to look at having some kind of academy, which I hope would be in Aberdeen. It does not have to be forced on the educational institutions in Aberdeen, because it seems that the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University and Aberdeen College are moving that way anyway.

My key message is that we must build the skills for the future so that Aberdeen, the north-east and Scotland as a whole remain at the forefront of the

oil and gas industry, not only here in the North Sea but worldwide.

16:07

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I was getting a little nervous earlier, because at one point I thought that the minister was going to touch on every remark I planned to make during the debate.

Kevin Stewart: He is that sort of minister. *[Laughter.]*

Dennis Robertson: Exactly—and the debate has touched on just about everything else that I was hoping to say.

Kevin Stewart must be an affa canny loon, because he turned the minister's £1 trillion into £2.45 trillion and he turned his pessimism into optimism in a short space of time, which should be rewarded.

I, too, will speak about skills. It is a question of people—Lewis Macdonald said that we are talking about people, and Tavish Scott and others mentioned the colleges. I was with the other members on the visit to Aberdeen College when we were talking about the partnership between Aberdeen College and Banff and Buchan College. There is a great future.

I am also aware that Robert Gordon University and the University of Aberdeen are looking at improving the skills sector. They are very much aware that there is a skills shortage. The Oil & Gas UK brief has told them that, and there is a lot of evidence of the need for us to meet the skills shortage in the industry.

I had the great fortune to be at the Offshore Europe conference, which is the largest oil and gas conference outside the United States. During the visit, the first thing that came forward every time was the optimism for the future—despite the chancellor's taxation raid without consultation. The second thing was the message that we need to be aware of how we will fill the gap in the skills shortage. Kevin Stewart mentioned that he has a relative in Perth, Australia. That is fantastic, but that skill has left the north-east.

I have an aside. We seem to be using the term "Aberdeen" as a generic term for Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and the north-east. I know that my colleagues are not parochial when they refer to Aberdeen in that respect, but I come from and live in Aberdeenshire. The minister mentioned subsea technology; the largest subsea technology firm, Subsea 7, is in Aberdeenshire—in Westhill in my constituency.

David Stewart: On parochialism, I will also flag up the Highlands. As the member will know, Nigg,

where a facility is reopening, had a tremendous track record in fabrication, for example in making jackets. On the member's earlier point, Nigg is also setting up a skills academy, which is an example to the whole of Scotland and the UK.

Dennis Robertson: I thank the member for those enlightening comments.

In the skills sector, there are opportunities not only for Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, the north-east and the Highlands but for the rest of Scotland. Why should there not be opportunities in Paisley, Inverclyde and Glasgow, where there was fantastic engineering and shipbuilding in the past and where those skills still exist? We can encourage that, because the sector still requires fabrication and manufacturing technology. We can take the industry to the whole of Scotland and not just the north-east corner.

We must encourage youngsters at school to understand the opportunities. Lewis Macdonald said that there is still a lifetime of work in the sector. That is true, but we must ensure that youngsters who are at school understand the prospects of a career in the oil and gas sector. I was encouraged by some of the information that has been produced. Some of the statistics are impressive, but one that has stuck with me is that a recent survey found that 81 per cent of firms in the sector are looking forward to growth and that 63 per cent of them are looking to transfer some skills into the renewables sector. We have a future—there is no doubt about that. That point must be taken into our schools so that children realise that there is a future in the sector. In Westhill academy in my constituency, secondary 2 pupils are looking at the issue and engaging with the sector. The curriculum for excellence is a stepping stone towards that future.

In conclusion, I give a message to the Prime Minister, the chancellor and others at Westminster who have been talking down Scotland: Scotland is open for business.

16:12

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I speak in support of the amendment in the name of Lewis Macdonald. As the minister did, I congratulate BP on the welcome announcement about its investment in Scotland. I am honoured and privileged to represent the constituency of Cowdenbeath, in which two oil industry giants are located—Shell and ExxonMobil. Over the years, I have made it my business to understand some of the challenges that confront those companies and to work together with one of my Westminster colleagues, Gordon Brown, who also has the Shell and Exxon plants in his constituency.

In the first two sessions of Parliament, I was a good attender at the meetings of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on oil and gas. I cannot remember why that changed—the reason is lost in the mists of time—but it did. However, at that time, I visited the Britannia platform and more than one oil and gas exhibition. I also went to Norway when the UK minister Brian Wilson signed an agreement on undersea pipelines to the UK. I also met representatives of Statoil to learn how it tackled the issue of recruiting young people into the industry and making it attractive to them. Statoil did not seem to have the same problems with recruitment that we continue to have, so maybe we still have something to learn from it.

We know about the struggles of the unions to organise in the oil industry. Unite, which represents process, technical, support, contracting and engineering construction workers, is the largest trade union in the offshore industry, followed by the GMB and the RMT—the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. I should declare an interest in that I have been a member of the GMB for many years. Over the years, the unions have played a critical part in the industry, particularly with regard to health and safety.

To return to the local scene, the jobs in my constituency mean a great deal to the area. The rates income provides a real contribution to the Fife economy. Many contractors and subcontractors in the central belt benefit when the two oil giants prosper. Burntisland Fabrications, which is based in Burntisland and Methil, is a local company that is important in the oil industry. My constituents also work offshore, on the oil rigs and safety vessels.

Like many others, I was concerned about the ship-to-ship proposals for the River Forth. Aided by Catherine Stihler MEP, I took a petition on the issue to the European Parliament. I have followed the issue and keep vigilant on it.

I recently had reason to look again at photographs of the Piper Alpha disaster. The scars from that time are seared into all our minds. Whether we be company managers, trade union health and safety representatives or politicians, that disaster will ever more serve to remind us of what can happen. My husband was a full-time trade union official and was closely involved with the union firm of solicitors and the families of those who tragically lost their lives in Piper Alpha. Their trauma lives on through the people about whom Lewis Macdonald spoke so eloquently and everyone who was involved in the aftermath of that terrible disaster.

If ever we needed to be reminded that offshore oil and gas exploration is classified as a major hazard industry, the words "Piper Alpha" surely

bring that home to us. The industry and Government continue to work hard to ensure that the UK offshore legislative framework represents best practice on major hazard regulation. That is as it should be. We must never let our guard down on safety.

Against the background of the Macondo incident in the Gulf of Mexico, I note that the European Commission has been leading a regulatory review. I also note that it has now published a draft regulation on offshore oil and gas safety in a drive to reduce risk further. I understand that Oil & Gas UK is opposed to those proposals. It says that they risk undermining the current high UK safety standards by introducing a period of uncertainty and confusion, during which the industry would be required to make the transition from the existing UK regulation to the new EU regulation. Oil & Gas UK is also concerned about the shift in regulatory control away from member states to the EU.

If I can be so bold, I say to the minister that, if I were in his shoes, I would seek an early meeting with Oil & Gas UK on the issue and would meet the unions that are involved in the oil and gas industry in Scotland. I would also meet Scotland's members of the European Parliament to express concerns about the proposed directive, seek a meeting with Her Majesty's Government to express our most serious concerns and seek a meeting with the relevant European commissioner at an early date to support the concerns that the industry and others express.

Fergus Ewing: Helen Eadie makes her points well. I reassure her that I have already expressed those views to the UK Government at the recent PILOT meeting, to MEPs whom I met recently and to Oil & Gas UK. I share the sentiment that the existing regulatory regime is the best one for the job.

Helen Eadie: I thank the minister for that assurance, but I hope that he will also ask for a meeting with the European commissioner, because our voice should be heard directly in Brussels, not only via the member states.

Members: Hear, hear.

Helen Eadie: There is provision for that under the existing agreements and framework. We should work with all the trade unionists who perceive a dilution of the health and safety regulatory framework. This is not the time to move regulatory control away from the UK as the member state.

I am concerned to note from the briefing papers that we have received for the debate that more than half the firms in the oil and gas sector that OPITO surveyed warned that serious skill shortages were their number 1 challenge. We

have all said that that is a matter of real concern, but how can we improve the links with industry?

At lunch time, we heard of the huge waste of talent among thousands of unemployed young people. Why are their talents not being harnessed? What are the links between them and industry? How can we improve them? We need discussions with the industry to determine how we can shift those young people from being unemployed to being in paid employment, learning trades and skills.

Oil and gas companies are the UK's biggest investors and the supply chain is worth £5 billion to £6 billion in exports. Let us politicians make the connections for those young people. I can point the industry in the direction of some of the young people whom I know in my constituency and beyond. When we have wonderful young people in our country who are eager to learn and play their part, it is a travesty that those connections are not being made effectively and that there are more than 100,000 unemployed young people in our land.

16:20

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I speak in favour of the Government's motion. A number of colleagues who have spoken in the debate today come from the north-east, so they have obvious links to the industry. The reason why I am speaking might be because we have exhausted our supply of SNP back benchers from the north-east.

Dennis Robertson is away now, but he made the point that the motion refers to Aberdeen when it should really refer to Aberdeenshire. I will extend that a bit further—it should include my constituency of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. The industry is important throughout the country, and there are companies in my constituency that form part of the supply chain for the sector. A number of people in my constituency work in the sector. In fact, one of the individuals who lost their life in the helicopter crash that was mentioned earlier resided in the Cumbernauld area, so I know that members' points about health and safety are well made. That is why I am happy to speak in the debate.

The sector is important to all Scotland; it has been so in the past, and it is vital to Scotland's future, which I will touch on a little later. I think that it would be useful if I quantify the current position of the industry in Scotland first. As the motion states, the industry supports the employment of 196,000 people throughout Scotland. Last year, an average of 2.2 million barrels of oil and gas equivalent was produced per day from the North

Sea, and approximately 40 billion barrels has already been extracted in total.

The oil and gas industry has contributed more than £300 billion in tax revenue to the UK Exchequer, which comes out at £60,000 for every man, woman and child in Scotland. In the past year alone, £13.4 billion has been contributed to the Exchequer, and it is estimated that, over the coming five years, starting this year, £61 billion will be raised. The sector is a significant part of the Scottish economy.

Lest anyone think that the sector is in decline, OPITO—the UK oil and gas industry's focal point for skills, learning and workforce development—makes the point that 81 per cent of oil and gas companies expect their business to grow over the next five years. As Tavish Scott noted, the sector is growing. OPITO also makes the important point that 63 per cent of oil and gas companies expect to diversify into wind power in that timescale, which illustrates the link-up with the renewables sector to which the motion refers. I hope that I can return to that subject later.

I welcome the investment in skills for the industry. We have seen quite clearly that this Administration recognises the importance of a skilled workforce for the oil and gas sector, and the potential for engineering expertise to transfer into renewables technologies, to which the motion also refers.

In October, the First Minister announced 2,000 modern apprenticeships for the energy industries, with an additional 1,000 flexible training places in energy and low carbon. Jewel and Esk College announced that its new centre of excellence in engineering and clean technology will create more than 1,000 apprenticeships in the energy and oil and gas industries over four years, so there is investment in the skills base for the sector.

The debate has been very consensual, and I preface my next remarks by saying that I am not trying to inject controversy unnecessarily. However, it is important that we reflect on how we can benefit from the oil and gas revenues that accrue from the North Sea, because for far too long we have not been able to benefit here in Scotland. Given the moneys that are forecast to flow from the North Sea over the coming years, the opportunities for Scotland are significant indeed.

Quite often, we hear it said—to be fair, we have not heard it said much today, but we have heard it said often in the past—that we should not read too much into oil and gas revenues because they are fluctuating in nature and the resource is finite. I accept that that is the case, but I always think that it is ironic that we must be the only people on the planet to have the boon of oil and gas and to react

in that fashion—some people, at least, react in that fashion; Kevin Stewart's anecdote about the man at the event when he was young illustrated that point well.

We should put all this in context. We should remember that the UK Government has benefited from this resource, even though it is a fluctuating source of revenue and a finite resource. The UK Government has used it to underpin budget after budget. If it is good enough for the UK Government, we should maybe consider whether it is good enough for us.

I said that I did not want to be too controversial, lest I break the consensus across the chamber, and I am not necessarily trying to make a constitutional point. I happen to believe that the best way to achieve control over these resources is through independence. However, as Tavish Scott can tell us, Shetland has had its own oil fund for a great many years. I hear him say, "It's Shetland's oil." Indeed, it might be Shetland's oil, but that demonstrates that the argument that we should create such a fund for Scotland is not necessarily a constitutional one. I hope that we can all get behind the idea of Scotland having greater access to the revenue that is created by its oil and gas.

We should be investing that revenue in the renewables opportunity that is ahead of us. In April, total renewable energy generation capacity in Scotland was 4,417MW.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The member needs to start winding up.

Jamie Hepburn: That is significant, but we need to do much more. If we took the money that we generate from the North Sea and invested it in that sector we would provide job opportunities for people in the sector in the future. That is how we should utilise North Sea oil and gas in future years.

16:27

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Like Jamie Hepburn, I will mention my region in a minute, but first the Aberdeen half of me will speak with some passion on this subject.

It is not for me to rehearse the history of oil and gas in the North Sea and Scotland, save to highlight one event in the 1970s, when a civil servant in London—a Government adviser by the name of McCrone—advised the Government of the day that if Scotland had control of its own oil resources, it would be a very rich country indeed. We have just heard that, had that been the case, Scotland would be the sixth richest country in the world. Of course, we were told—for obvious reasons—that the oil would run out in 30 years'

time. That was scaremongering, which, in some quarters, travels a parallel road called renewables—c'est la vie.

Here we are, more than 30 years later, with £300 billion having been contributed in tax revenues—billions of pounds regrettably dissipated in consumption by successive London Governments, rather than used to create a vehicle for infrastructure investment. Here we are—it is like a second homecoming—with a further 40 years of deposits ahead of us and, as the minister said, an asset base worth £1 trillion in the North Sea, with deep-sea drilling and exploration off the west coast of Shetland.

Now comes my regional bit. Dennis Robertson mentioned the various regions of Scotland. I am trying, through a freedom of information request, to establish with the Department of Energy and Climate Change whether there are substantial deposits off the Ayrshire coast. I was told during the election by an exploration engineer who had worked in the oil fields in the early 1980s that there had been two successful drillings, but they had been capped by Mrs Thatcher—not by her personally, although I believe she could have done it—because the riggs might have affected Trident submarine routes.

As many members have said, this is not just about Scotland's oil as the raw material; it is much more about what it has spawned.

Mary Scanlon: I put it to Mr Brodie that, in the 1970s and 1980s, it was impossible to gauge the lifespan of oil fields given the price of oil at that time. More marginal fields have now come into production because of the high price of oil. Does he agree that such estimates are more accurate now than they were then?

Chic Brodie: I sincerely hope that Mary Scanlon understands that we have moved on since those days. I do not believe that price was the only criterion that was used.

Raw material supply is key to overall energy, sitting as it will alongside supply of renewables and revenue from renewables. It is key to being a—if not the—primary revenue earner. Despite the £13.5 billion that was raised in the previous tax year—a quarter of all corporation tax received by the London Exchequer—still the investment comes from BP, Shell, Conoco, Chevron and Apache. All those companies and more will produce not just the raw material, but, as members have mentioned, the skills, the jobs, the knowledge transfer and the professional supply chain skills, some of which will be totally interchangeable with those required in the renewables industry. Those are skills in services that will be exportable, as Gavin Brown said, and emerging oil exploration in Brazil and China, for

example, affords great revenue-earning opportunities for Scots-based oil and gas professionals and companies. Scotland's pioneering engineering and logistical management is also being re-burnished, with 88 per cent of operators expecting to increase their staff over the coming year and 81 per cent expecting to do so over the next five years. The important point within that is that, as was announced in October, 2,000 modern apprenticeships and 1,000 flexible training places will be created.

Leaving aside my hope that the south-west of Scotland will share in that largesse, it is accepted that, as Mark Higginson, a senior partner at PWC, said in the report:

“We have a remarkable—and potentially unrepeatable—opportunity to position the city as an international energy centre of excellence”.

The oil and gas industry, like the renewables industry, is vital to Scotland's future. In our waters, it's Scotland's oil. Even Michael Portillo said earlier this week that Scotland should have an “appropriate” share of North Sea oil and gas revenues. He is now being nudged slowly—with others—towards the inevitable. I do not believe that anyone in this chamber demurs from the principle that, going forward, this nation should secure the energy income, in all its forms, to create investment opportunities rather than allow it to be frittered away again in consumptive behaviour.

The debate has been consensual and I seek a coalition—a proper coalition—in the Parliament in which we work together to achieve fiscal stability with full political support; to crystallise our oil and gas recovery and the jobs that come with it; and to internationalise and export the skills and services from the global centre of excellence that will be Aberdeen.

The Presiding Officer: I call Gavin Brown. Mr Brown, I can give you seven minutes.

16:33

Gavin Brown: Chic Brodie has started to quote Michael Portillo as his new friend in waiting. He obviously takes seriously everything that Michael Portillo says. In the same interview, Michael Portillo said that First Minister Alex Salmond knows that he cannot deliver independence and that he is now playing

“a new game where he pretends he's after independence but hopes we settle somewhere in the middle”.

I wonder whether Mr Brodie would like to quote Mr Portillo a little further.

Mr Brodie also said that the debate has been consensual. That was probably true in the first half of the debate, when all those who spoke came

forward with ideas and propositions. However, somewhere in the middle it seemed to deteriorate slightly. After the first utterance of “independence”, every back bencher felt the need to reiterate the point and to cancel all bets about having a consensual and constructive debate.

Jamie Hepburn: Forgive me for my arrogance, but I assume that I am one of the people to whom Mr Brown is referring. Does he recognise that I firmly placed in context the call for an oil fund? It could happen under the current constitutional arrangements. Why not?

Gavin Brown: I would never describe Mr Hepburn as arrogant—I do not know what on earth made him think that.

It is interesting that Mr Hepburn did not use the phrase “oil fund” in his speech. That is because the SNP is a bit frightened of the concept of an oil fund. In 2009, it launched a consultation about how to set one up. That consultation ran throughout 2009 and 2010 and it is still running, with no progress on the issue. The reason why it has gone nowhere—and why I suspect that it would not be hugely successful in the current climate—is that, unless there is a surplus, there would be nothing to put into the oil fund. Running deficits, as we are, under a tight fiscal regime, where would the money come from to put into the fantastic oil fund that Mr Hepburn wishes to set up?

Maureen Watt managed to spend four great minutes talking about her experience in the industry, but then she just had to let go. She was unable to finish off that speech with positive contributions and started describing UK ministers as displaying “hypocrisy of the worst kind” and so on. She might want to reflect further on the question of the statutory consultation period. As Tavish Scott said, the Scottish Government is keen on statutory consultation, as long as somebody else is doing it. It is a little bit less keen on statutory consultation when it has to conduct it.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: I will take this intervention if Mark McDonald will tell us what statutory consultation is going on regarding the retail levy.

Mark McDonald: On the basis that the levy has not been implemented, we are currently consulting on it. Even if the member does not agree with me about that, does he agree that it is somewhat facetious to try to draw equivalence between the health levy and the tax grab on the oil industry?

Gavin Brown: I am not sure that it is facetious at all. Mr McDonald has an interesting interpretation of the word “consultation”. In my mind, consultation happens before the

announcement of the proposal that a Government is going to implement.

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

Gavin Brown: Certainly not.

We know exactly how much the Scottish Government is going to take as a cash grab—to use its term—from the retail sector: £110 million over the next three years. We know who is going to have to pay that, too. We know just about everything about it, yet the Government is going out to consultation on it. I would like to hear a little bit more about that.

Maureen Watt's second point concerned the Scottish Government's fantastic proposals for new oil taxes, which are covered in the detailed piece of work that it submitted to the Treasury. I read the submission. Think how complex the industry is. Think how many elements are involved in it. The submission from the Scottish Government is just seven pages long. Five of those pages explain a bit about the industry and a mere two pages explain three taxes. Mr Ewing can shake his head, but that is a fact.

Maureen Watt: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: In a moment.

Nowhere in the document does the Government say how much would be raised by the taxes and how much might be forgone by the Treasury, nor does it explain what impact those taxes would have on jobs and investment. However, perhaps at this late stage—we are into injury time—Maureen Watt is going to give us an answer.

Maureen Watt: Does the member agree that those five or seven pages are much more than Danny Alexander had before he made his decision on oil tax?

Gavin Brown: Obviously, we are not going to get answers about the detailed work that the Scottish Government has done.

Parts of the debate were a little disappointing.

Do I have six minutes or seven minutes, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: You have eight minutes.

Gavin Brown: In that case, if Kevin Stewart still wants to intervene, he can. His big criticism was that he was disappointed that CCS has not gone further faster—I think that everyone in the chamber is disappointed about that—but it is simply incorrect to say that moneys were not available, as Tavish Scott pointed out, probably from a sedentary position. The reality is that £1 billion was made available but, regrettably, the Longannet project would have cost £1.5 billion.

Kevin Stewart: I pointed out that there was £200 million in the fossil fuel levy, only half of which has been released thus far. I, too, could say that I am going to invest £1 billion in something that will never happen, and I think that that is the intention of the Westminster Government. It has said that it will invest in CCS, but it has turned down the Peterhead proposal and the Longannet proposal, and is now considering another proposal for Peterhead. Will the Peterhead project be refused funding again, with the result that the Government goes back to Longannet?

Gavin Brown: The idea of Kevin Stewart putting money into carbon capture and storage is more credible than the idea of the SNP putting money into it. I note, in passing, that the Scottish Government's level 4 figure for CCS investment is about £10 million, for which we could probably build a power station car park.

My time is almost up. The debate started well and it is important that it ends well. The industry has a huge amount to look forward to as we move forward in the north-east. It has enormous potential not just in oil and gas, but in decommissioning and renewables, which can be complementary to oil and gas for a long time.

16:41

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): This has been an excellent debate on a crucially important subject that is vital to the future prosperity of Scotland and the UK. Members from across the chamber have spoken with passion and understanding about the oil and gas sector from a variety of perspectives. For example, Gavin Brown talked about finance, Mark McDonald spoke eloquently about tax and stability, and my colleague Sarah Boyack raised the environment. Lewis Macdonald had excellent points to make on skills and training, and I was impressed by those that Kevin Stewart and Dennis Robertson made about the regional economic impact of the industry, particularly in the north-east. We should not forget, either, the eloquent contributions of Maureen Watt and Tavish Scott on health and safety.

The industry has a history and culture all its own, which were etched into the Scottish consciousness by the radical theatre group 7:84, which produced the popular community play, "The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil"—I remember watching it as a very young student in the mid-70s. On the same theme, Bill Forsyth's "Local Hero" gave a vivid account of the industry's impact on remote communities. With more tragic overtones, Sue Jane Taylor's sculpture in Aberdeen's Hazlehead park remembers the victims of the Piper Alpha tragedy.

The history of the industry has been well documented by Lewis Macdonald and Fergus Ewing, but its early history, which is less well known, has not been mentioned, so I will touch on it briefly. In the 19th century, James "Paraffin" Young had a shale-oil industry in the central belt; arguably, he was the pioneer of the current industry. Perhaps even less well known is the secret US/UK Government operation during world war two that produced hundreds of tonnes of oil in Sherwood forest in Nottinghamshire, which supplied the fuel for allied fighters and bombers. Churchill is alleged to have said that it was the best kept secret of the war.

Last week I had another look at the Tony Benn diaries, which I am sure that many members have looked at. In reading them, I was really struck by the sense of optimism and expectation that existed in the public psyche in the early 70s around the discovery of oil and, indeed, gas in the UK continental shelf. Members will all be aware that Tony Benn was the Secretary of State for Energy. It is alleged that he had been demoted to that post by Harold Wilson. I looked at a tabloid cartoon from the time, which said that, because energy was so important, his next demotion would be to the position of Prime Minister.

Jamie Hepburn: Mr Stewart mentions the UK minister at the time. Does he regret the fact that that minister did not take the opportunity to establish an oil fund when oil was first struck?

David Stewart: Surprise, surprise—I could have predicted that that would be the question that the member would ask. If I had been the minister in the 1970s, I would have had to decide whether I wanted a capital fund or a revenue fund. It might have been valid to have set up an oil fund in the 1970s, but Tony Benn came up with two initiatives that are worth looking at, on which the member may wish to comment. The first was to have a nationalised British National Oil Corporation, which was vital at the time, and the second was to set up the Offshore Supplies Office, which I referred to earlier.

Sadly, as members will know, the Tories privatised the production business in 1982 and Britoil was taken over by BP in 1998. The minister will be aware that I lodged a series of questions to him on the Offshore Supplies Office on 28 September. In his answer, the minister referred to Professor Alex Kemp, who in my view is probably the leading academic guru on the oil industry.

Kevin Stewart: Hear, hear.

David Stewart: I am glad that I got some support from Kevin Stewart. That is reassuring.

I will quote from the minister's response to my question. It states:

“the work of the Offshore Supplies Office lead to an increase in the share of the UKCS market obtained by British industry and many companies obtained benefits which enabled them to flourish both domestically and overseas in later years”,

and cites

“the development of sub-sea technologies as a particular success story.”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 21 October 2011; S4W-03020.]

My question to the minister is this: do we need a new Offshore Supplies Office to support Scottish industry and manufacturing and help them to grow and develop, particularly with a view to increasing supply chain capability? I take Kevin Stewart's point about obsolete EU procurement rules; nevertheless, I still feel that there is a gap in the market.

Gavin Brown made some excellent points about the contribution that oil and gas make to the UK economy. As we heard, oil peaked in 1999 and gas peaked in 2000. I agree with the many members who referred to the fact that vast resources remain. There is a range of views: Oil & Gas UK estimates that between 15 billion and 24 billion barrels of oil and gas remain, and the Department of Energy and Climate Change estimates that about 20 billion barrels remain—the estimates are within a range of accuracy.

As many members have said, the industry is clear that it does not like surprises from the Government and that fiscal stability is key. Members should not take my word for that—the Westminster Energy and Climate Change Committee, which has MPs of all colours, criticised the Tory-led Government for its attitude to the oil and gas industry in the 2011 budget, which included a windfall tax on the oil and gas sector.

Maureen Watt made a good point about the danger of having a two-speed UK continental shelf, which would mean that large, robust projects go ahead but marginal and difficult projects stall.

It is also vital that we talk about skills. Lewis Macdonald, among others, spoke clearly about the issue.

In an intervention, I mentioned the great example of the work that Roy MacGregor of Global Energy is doing in Ross-shire by reopening the Nigg yard. That is a very important development for fabrication in both oil and gas and renewables. We should not forget other crucial yards, such as Arnish on Lewis.

It is important to set up the skills academy to provide not only vital modern apprenticeships but skills for older workers and to create linkages with hospitality and life sciences.

In the oil and gas industry, we have a global centre of excellence; key skills in engineering,

manufacturing and technology; a significant and established provider of primary energy, employment and investments; and a key industry for exports and tax revenues.

I make a plea to the minister to reconsider his view on our amendment. He said earlier that he does things because he is “that sort of minister”. If he is “that sort of minister”, please will he reconsider our amendment? We would appreciate his support for it.

16:48

Fergus Ewing: I have thoroughly enjoyed the debate. It has been largely constructive, which is what the industry wants from the Parliament in debating its future at this important time.

I am certain that Tavish Scott meant his advice in the kindest possible way when he suggested that I could confine myself to an underwater chamber for, I think, a prolonged period, before taking myself off to Kazakhstan—

Tavish Scott: Kurdistan.

Fergus Ewing: I am happy to say to Tavish Scott that I have already met a delegation from Kazakhstan, at the Offshore Europe event earlier this year, and that, as it happens, I have also met a delegation from Kurdistan. Both meetings were very useful.

We will continue to engage with delegations from other countries, many of which are seeking, as Tavish Scott knows, to avail themselves of the expertise that exists in Scotland, especially in subsea technology. More and more countries in the world are starting to embark on subsea oil and gas extraction. Dennis Robertson pointed out the skills that we have acquired in that sector—in the interests of geographical balance, I should say that Westhill is the world centre of subsea technology—and those are the skills that are required in the world, for the reasons that have been mentioned by many members.

It has been an important aspect of the debate that many members, including Helen Eadie, have spoken, in some cases quite movingly, about their personal experience of family members and people they have known. Lewis Macdonald talked about a friend who, fortunately, survived, and Mark McDonald spoke of a young man whom he was at school with who, sadly, did not. It is a salutary reminder of the extreme, hazardous nature of deep-sea, west of Shetland exploration and oil and gas extraction.

Those dangers have not gone away. Maureen Watt pointed out companies' vigilance about safety, which is the correct approach. We can never be complacent about safety in the industry. My impression from my exchanges with people in

the industry is that that is their view, too. I will seek to meet workforce representatives in the weeks and months ahead to ensure that their perspective is fully understood and appreciated as we pursue the issue.

Almost all members rightly focused on the importance of skills investment in the sector. If there is one thing that the sector wants from Parliament, it is to ensure that appropriate priority is given to skills development and funding. Indeed, skills are one of the six strategic priorities that are being addressed by the oil and gas industry advisory group, which I chair. We support OPITO in the partnership approach to meeting the needs of the sector. The recently established college-industry energy partnership will allow us to take that work forward.

In February, the Scottish energy advisory board, which is chaired by the First Minister, endorsed a skills investment plan for the energy sector, which was published in March and which set out the potential jobs in the sector until 2020. I am pleased to say to Parliament that an industry-led skills action group is being chaired by Colin Hood, formerly of Scottish and Southern Energy. We have great confidence that the work that Colin and his colleagues are doing will help us with the extremely difficult task of ensuring that the skills are available for the sector.

As we are a majority Government, the buck stops with me. I will not seek to evade responsibility or adopt that droopy mantra, "It wisnae me." It is me. It is my job to do it. What has emerged from the debate is that I can expect cross-party co-operation in that extremely challenging task. All of us share Helen Eadie's sentiment that too many young people in Scotland do not have employment. Plainly, there are opportunities in the oil and gas sector. Matching one with the other is a difficult challenge, for all sorts of reasons. However, she made a fair point, which we take on board because all of us share those important objectives.

We are fortunate that we now have an industry that is focused on maximising recovery, pursuing fiscal certainty, securing Aberdeen's long-term future as a global energy player, seeking to ensure that the funding is more available, where appropriate, and ensuring that Government is focused on working together with it in the pursuit of our objectives.

My perspective, as the minister who has relatively recently assumed responsibility for taking forward the massive opportunities in the oil and gas sector, is that we are looking forward, not back, and that we have an alignment of objectives in the industry, in the Government, in academe and across political parties. That is a serendipitous event of which we should take full advantage.

Beneath the political interchange in the chamber is a common objective in relation to the potential of oil and gas. That potential is so large that it is difficult to contemplate it. As I said earlier, the value of the remaining oil and gas could be £1 trillion, which is a denomination that we do not hear frequently in the Scottish Parliament.

What is far more important is that, at end of the day, it is about people. We wish to ensure that Scotland's people, most especially its young people, have an opportunity to take part in this important industry. I know from discussions with Lewis Macdonald, Gavin Brown, Tavish Scott and members of my own party, such as Mark McDonald, that there is a shared view in the industry that graduates are coming forward and many people are coming up to retirement, but there is a gap in the middle. That is a very specific facet, the explanation for which is perhaps that it was thought that the oil and gas industry did not have a future. Well, it does have a future and not just for one, two or three decades but for four certainly and, I suspect, probably for five decades and many more. As John D Rockefeller said in the 1930s, the world has been running out of oil since I was a boy. The likelihood is that we will continue to see more discoveries of oil in the future.

I turn to another matter that arose in the debate and on which many members commented. Dennis Robertson led the charge by pointing out that, although Aberdeen is the oil capital of Scotland—and, we would argue, of Europe—Aberdeenshire is important, too. That led to a number of members quite rightly pointing out that the oil and gas industry plays a significant part in all parts of Scotland. Indeed, in that regard, I was pleased to attend the opening of FMC Technologies Inc's extended office facilities in Bellshill, where it is taking on an additional 240 employees.

FMC Technologies is a US company, headquartered in Houston, that decided to invest in Bellshill in Scotland after its board in the USA had considered alternatives in Singapore, South America and elsewhere in Europe. The company decided to invest in Scotland because of Scotland's expertise in subsea technology and the availability of young people who they felt would be excellent employees, as indeed they are, and because Scotland is a great place in which to invest, with—I hope this is accepted across the board—a fairly sympathetic ministerial team to whom they have ready access, assisted by an excellent Scottish Enterprise service that is fully devoted to pursuing such investment.

Whether it is FMC in Bellshill, Shell and Exxon in Cowdenbeath—as we heard from Helen Eadie—INEOS in Grangemouth, whose role is vital for the Scottish economy, British Gas in Aberdeen or, indeed, Roy MacGregor's Global

Energy Group, which is about to create 2,000 jobs in Nigg—a truly marvellous and exciting opportunity for the Highlands—the oil industry is truly a Scottish national industry of which we can all be rightly proud.

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Bill

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-01361, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 23 May 2011, as amended, relating to powers of seizure of evidence and the use of forensic data and the order making powers that would enable the imposition of enhanced measures in exceptional circumstances, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—
[Kenny MacAskill.]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on housing, if amendment S4M-01346.2, in the name of Keith Brown, is agreed to, amendment S4M-01346.3, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, falls. In relation to the debate on the role of the public sector, if amendment S4M-01348.2, in the name of John Swinney, is agreed to, amendment S4M-01348.3, in the name of Richard Baker, falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-01346.2, in the name of Keith Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01346, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on housing, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (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)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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 50, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01346, in the name of Alex Johnstone, on housing, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 23, Abstentions 28.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the pivotal role of the housing market to the Scottish economy; notes the Scottish Government's recent announcement that £460 million will be invested to build 4,300 homes as part of its commitment to build 30,000 affordable homes during this parliamentary session, including 5,000 council houses in spite of significant cuts to Scotland's capital budget by the UK Government; recognises the Scottish Government's progress in modernising the legislative framework for housing, and calls on the Scottish Government to continue with an innovative approach to housing policy and invest in all types of houses to meet the demands and needs of the population.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01348.2, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01348, in the name of Mary Scanlon, on the role of the public sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)

McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 22, Abstentions 28.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01348, in the name of Mary Scanlon, on the role of the public sector, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 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)
 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, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

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

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 92, Against 20, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the very valuable contribution that the public sector makes to the economy and society; believes that pensions must be fair, sustainable and affordable; considers that the 3.2% increase in contributions proposed by the UK Government is a cash grab that has more to do with deficit reduction than fair pensions; acknowledges that these increases come at a time when households are under financial pressure due to rising costs, and encourages the Scottish Government to continue to engage in full and extensive dialogue with trades unions and employers' representatives on the future of pension provisions.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01349.3, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01349, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the oil and gas framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 79, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-01349.2, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-01349, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the oil and gas framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (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)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 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)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 97, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01349, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the oil and gas framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 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)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 97, Against 17, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the continued importance

of Scotland's oil and gas sector to the Scottish and UK economies, its support for 196,000 jobs across Scotland and its contribution of £300 billion to the UK Exchequer over the past 30 years in real terms; recognises the long-term future of the industry, with up to 40% of the remaining total UK Continental Shelf oil and gas reserves worth £1 trillion; welcomes the strong confidence shown by recent industry investment plans announcing four new oil and gas projects valued at £10 billion over the next five years; supports the Scottish Government and its agencies in working to maintain and develop the long-term future of the oil and gas sector by improving the position of Aberdeen as a global supply chain hub, developing energy skills in the workforce and supporting collaboration between the oil and gas and low-carbon energy sectors; calls for a progressive approach to oil and gas taxation to encourage further deployment and extraction, and supports the findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report published on 3 November 2011 arguing that fiscal certainty and targeted incentives in the North Sea are required from the UK Government.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-01361, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 23 May 2011, as amended, relating to powers of seizure of evidence and the use of forensic data and the order making powers that would enable the imposition of enhanced measures in exceptional circumstances, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Heartstart

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-01067, in the name of Siobhan McMahon, on the British Heart Foundation's heartstart event in the Parliament. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges the Heart Start event that recently took place in the Parliament; considers this event to have been of significant value in raising awareness of the importance of emergency life support training; thanks the pupils from St Ambrose High School in Coatbridge and Portree High School on Skye who helped to demonstrate the procedures; understands that, for every minute that passes after a cardiac arrest without defibrillation, the chances of survival are reduced by around 10%, but that immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can triple the chances of survival; supports the campaign, led by the British Heart Foundation Scotland, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland and Lucky 2B Here, for every child to receive emergency life support and CPR training in school as part of the Curriculum for Excellence, and believes that such training would be of great benefit in the ongoing fight against heart disease in Scotland.

17:09

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):

First, I extend my warmest thanks to Ben McKendrick of the British Heart Foundation and Charles Fawcett of healthy lifestyle Scotland. They and their organisations have made invaluable contributions to furthering the case for introducing emergency life-support training in Scottish schools and have laid much of the groundwork that has helped to bring about this evening's debate. I also thank my fellow MSPs in all parties who have signed the motion and all those who are attending the debate.

As an ancient proverb has it, whoever saves a life saves the world entire. What is the value to society of creating a whole generation of potential life-savers? Life is a gift and privilege and the ability to save it transcends any quantitative or qualitative assessment. I am sad to say that many of us will have looked on powerless as a fellow human being suffers pain or a friend or loved one hovers on the brink between life and death. There can be few worse experiences. On many such occasions, there is nothing that we or indeed anyone can do to help and the cruel reality is that these are the times when we would do anything—indeed, give anything—to be able to make a difference.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Does the member agree that it is vital that a supply of defibrillators is available throughout rural areas, in particular? If so, does she support the

great work of Skye-based charity Lucky2BHere, which is providing training and defibrillators throughout the island?

Siobhan McMahon: Absolutely. I commend the member for the work that he has done on Skye on this issue.

We must not pass up any opportunity to ensure that emergency life-support training is available in schools throughout Scotland. In the most extreme situations, most of us take refuge in the practical and in what we as individuals can do to assist. However, if we do not know what to do, we cannot assist. What if someone were to have a cardiac arrest in front of us, something that happens 25 times a day in Scotland? Our natural instinct is to help, to do something to offset death or to alleviate the pain. Let us be honest: even those trained in ELS will find the experience terrifying but at least they will know what to do and they will have the skills and knowledge to give that person—who could be their father, mother, son or daughter—the best possible chance of survival. One can only imagine the rising tide of panic and desperation and overwhelming sense of helplessness that someone without ELS training will feel. I know which situation I, as a patient or carer, would rather be in.

Scotland's battle against heart disease is so well known that it feels almost trite to mention it. However, the figures still make for stark reading. Scotland has been referred to as the sick man of Europe and, to our collective shame, the label has some validity. Rates of coronary heart and cardiovascular disease are notably higher in Scotland than they are in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe. Even if we take the UK in isolation, heart disease rates in Scotland remain disproportionately high. Although over the past 20 years the overall incidence of heart disease has fallen across the UK, data compiled by the British Heart Foundation show that, in 2008, 81 Scottish males per 100,000 of population aged between 34 and 75 died from coronary heart disease, a figure that is 30 per cent higher than the UK average.

Of course, providing emergency life-support training in schools will not, by itself, solve the problem. Prevention is key and it is imperative that, as a nation, we achieve a collective and substantial change in habit, attitude, health and lifestyle. I am sure that we are all well versed in the steps that we can take to reduce the risk of cardiovascular or coronary heart disease. Indeed, most of us could recite them verbatim: eat healthily; drink in moderation; do not smoke; and do more exercise. Nevertheless, the message does not appear to be getting through and that is why I believe that information on healthy living should accompany emergency life-support training.

However, I have some good news—and I am glad to say that it is genuinely good news. Thanks to a lot of hard work by a number of individuals, there are already some excellent examples of ELS training models in Scotland. As a Central Scotland MSP, I am proud to say that at the vanguard of those is the North Lanarkshire heartstart scheme, led locally by the healthy lifestyle co-ordinator Charles Fawcett. Established in 2008, the North Lanarkshire programme provides schools with on-going support for and advice on ELS training and is supported by, among others, the British Heart Foundation and St Andrew's Ambulance Association. I am sure that colleagues will highlight other examples of partnership working for that kind of training elsewhere in the country.

What exactly does emergency life-support training involve? It covers vital skills such as assessing an unconscious patient; performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation; dealing with choking and serious bleeding; helping someone who might be having a heart attack; and providing instruction on the use of defibrillators. A model piloted in St Ambrose high school in Coatbridge and other North Lanarkshire schools offers an integrated and sustainable approach to delivering the programme within the context of curriculum for excellence.

I was fortunate enough to meet some of the pupils—namely Vicky McDowell, Monica Berry, Gemma Daly, Lauren Owens and Kerry Breen—at the event in Holyrood last month that was hosted by my colleague Helen Eadie. Along with pupils from Portree high school, they exhibited great skill and knowledge in demonstrating a range of emergency life-support techniques, including ways of using defibrillators.

For every minute that passes without defibrillation in the aftermath of a cardiac arrest, the chances of survival decrease by 14 per cent. Defibrillators are simple to use and surprisingly inexpensive, and we should act to ensure that the life-saving machines are widely available in public places—for example, in schools and workplaces, on public transport, and along major transport routes.

Thanks to the hard work and commitment of a number of partner agencies—not least, North Lanarkshire Council—emergency life-support training is now available in 90 per cent of North Lanarkshire schools. That is a shining example to the rest of the country. Scotland's local authorities have a large degree of flexibility over what is taught in their areas. I therefore hope that other councils will follow North Lanarkshire Council's lead and give serious consideration to implementing the heartstart programme.

Emergency life-support training is hugely popular with pupils, parents and teachers; it

adheres to the aims and spirit of the curriculum for excellence; it is cost effective; and, crucially, it can—it will—save lives. The heartstart campaign is now looking for other local authorities to volunteer to become heartstart councils and to move towards full affiliation in the months ahead. We can all help in that, by making the case directly with our local authority colleagues, urging them to seize this unique and valuable opportunity, which is in the best interests of all our constituents.

If necessary, I hope that the Scottish Government will provide financial support and will work closely with the campaign organisers as well as with the councils that sign up. There will be financial implications in all this, but considerable expertise and support is available from the wide array of organisations that are backing the campaign and which stand ready and willing to help.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, what is the value of a generation of life-savers? The question that we ask should not be, “Can we afford to do this?” It should be, “How can we afford not to?”

17:16

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I congratulate Siobhan McMahon on securing this important debate. I am pleased to participate in it.

The British Heart Foundation's heartstart programme is an excellent initiative that I have supported from the outset. I was strongly encouraged to do so by Charles Fawcett, who is here tonight in the public gallery. More recently, I was pleased to attend the event in the Parliament that Siobhan McMahon mentioned, where pupils from St Ambrose high school in my constituency gave an impressive demonstration of the life-support skills that they have learned. They were a credit to themselves, to their school and to Coatbridge. They clearly demonstrate the success of the scheme and are testament to what could be achieved if the programme were to be rolled out in schools across Scotland.

In a private meeting with the pupils before the event, I was impressed by the knowledge and keenness shown by the girls, who clearly were well aware of the importance of this project. I would like to welcome Gemma Daly and Vicky McDowell, who are in the public gallery this evening.

One of the outcomes under the curriculum for excellence—which Siobhan McMahon mentioned—states that pupils should know, and be able to demonstrate, how to keep themselves and others safe, and should be able to respond in a range of emergency situations. It would certainly

be advantageous if the Scottish Government were to agree that this potentially life-saving education should be included as part of the school curriculum, and to insist that local authorities find a way of accommodating the heartstart programme.

Emergency life support can be performed without any special medical knowledge, and it can take as little as two hours of a school year to teach some basic skills. As a cross-curricular activity, it could be accommodated within the curriculum of personal and social education or community involvement, or as part of the physical education course. It may be that local authorities will require additional funding in order to implement the programme initially. However, the initial costs would be a small price to pay if the programme were to help to reduce Scotland's poor record of heart-related deaths. In the spirit of encouraging preventative spending—which we are very keen on in this Parliament—I hope that the programme will save our national health service money in the long run. The prospect of someone close to us suffering from a heart attack is a terrifying one, and the more of our young people who are trained under the heartstart scheme the better.

While attending an event earlier this year in the Time Capsule in Coatbridge to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the British Heart Foundation, I saw at first hand the confidence that this type of programme can instil in our young people. There were pupils from St Mary's primary school in Coatbridge, from Coatbridge high school, and from St Ambrose high school, who had learned first aid and resuscitation techniques, giving them a sense of responsibility and confidence. This type of programme can also encourage pupils to learn further first aid and life-saving skills, which will assist in their personal development as well as benefiting our society as a whole.

The programme in North Lanarkshire has been critically acclaimed by the chair of St Andrew's First Aid, and it is an example of good practice that other local authorities could follow. In addition, the external evaluation report content is being used by Dr Barry Vallance, the lead clinician on heart disease in Scotland. That, in turn, will inform the on-going activity of the national advisory committee on heart disease.

All 24 secondary schools in North Lanarkshire are now affiliated to the heartstart programme, and there is a strong desire to install defibrillators in those schools over the next three years. That is particularly important because North Lanarkshire has high levels of deprivation, which are strongly linked to above national average incidences of coronary heart disease and related ill health.

In conclusion, I fully support the British Heart Foundation campaign and the involvement of Charles Fawcett of the healthy lifestyles project,

which is based in my constituency. I have previously written to the Scottish Government on the issue, and I encourage the minister to take seriously the proposal in my colleague's motion that every child should receive emergency life-support and CPR training in school as part of the curriculum for excellence. Once again, I congratulate Siobhan McMahon.

17:20

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure to speak in this debate, and I congratulate Siobhan McMahon on bringing this important issue before the Parliament.

Presiding Officer, I apologise to you and to colleagues in the chamber that I will have to leave before the end of the debate as I have a surgery in my constituency this evening.

The motion, which has cross-party support, sets out clearly the importance of emergency life-support training. It recognises that, for every minute that passes after a cardiac arrest without defibrillation, the chances of survival are reduced by around 10 per cent—that information is from the European Resuscitation Council's 2010 guidelines for resuscitation—and that immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, can triple the chances of survival.

Coronary heart disease and stroke are a clinical priority for the national health service in Scotland, and reducing the number of deaths from heart disease is a national priority for the Scottish Government. Therefore, it is right that we should debate what more can be done to save lives through greater awareness of and support for emergency life-support training in schools.

I add my support to that which has been expressed by other members in support of the emergency life-support campaign—a coalition of organisations led by the British Heart Foundation Scotland, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, and Lucky2BHere. All those organisations are campaigning for every child in Scotland to be taught emergency life support in schools. I recognise that the campaign has attracted significant and growing support from, among others, the Scottish Ambulance Service, the St Andrew's Ambulance Association, the British Medical Association, the Resuscitation Council UK and the Royal College of Nursing. As we have heard, the campaign has the support of parents, the public and schoolchildren.

Why does emergency life support matter? The obvious answer is that it is a set of actions needed to keep someone alive until professional help arrives. Each year, 30,000 people in the United Kingdom have cardiac arrests outside the hospital environment, of whom fewer than 10 per cent will

survive to be discharged from hospital. There are around 25 cardiac arrest calls each day in Scotland to the Scottish Ambulance Service; evidence shows that around two thirds of cardiac arrests that occur outside hospital occur in the home and that nearly half that occur in public are witnessed by bystanders.

The objective must be to teach our children and young people the valuable life skills that will remain with them throughout their lives. It is also about schools teaching children and young people how to save a life. We all want our children to learn skills, such as how to ride a bike, play a musical instrument and speak a foreign language. Why do we not add how to save a life to that valuable set of life skills? A survey conducted by the British Heart Foundation found that 78 per cent of schoolchildren want to learn how to save someone's life in an emergency, while 86 per cent of teachers agree that emergency life support should be taught in schools.

Health and wellbeing is a central pillar of the curriculum for excellence, and it includes learning how to respond in a range of emergency situations. It is important that we recognise the vital role that the NHS and charitable organisations can play in visiting schools to help to give children and young people the skills that could save a life.

The experiences and outcomes in the curriculum for excellence contain a section on physical wellbeing, which includes the statement:

"I know and can demonstrate how to keep myself and others safe and how to respond in a range of emergency situations."

It is important that schools and local authorities put in place the resources and commitment to take forward that learning.

To support Scottish schools and local authorities, officials from the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and relevant charities are working in partnership to develop a case study resource on the teaching of emergency life-support skills, which will be issued to every school in Scotland.

The vision and ambition must be to ensure that every child leaves school knowing how to save a life, creating a whole new generation of life-savers.

17:25

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I congratulate Siobhan McMahon on bringing this debate to the Parliament. She articulated very well and eloquently the continuing problems that we have with heart disease in Scotland. It is a stain on our society that so many people die prematurely from heart disease. We accept that there are long-

term issues such as those of diet, health and fitness that need to be addressed, but Siobhan McMahon clearly outlined practical measures that can be taken to mitigate the problem when someone has a heart attack. She is right to underline the contribution that defibrillators make in helping to save lives. She eloquently outlined the sterling work throughout Scotland of organisations such as the British Heart Foundation Scotland and Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland.

I want to put on record some thoughts about the availability of and access to defibrillators. There has recently been publicity about defibrillators being provided in ex-phone boxes in rural areas. In the central belt, credit must be given to the co-operative movement, which has again taken the lead. Scotmid has decided to introduce defibrillators in some of its stores and to train staff to use them. Not for the first time, the co-operative movement has been at the forefront of doing something that makes a real difference to people's lives. I hope that other retailers will copy the Scotmid model, as it definitely has value.

I signed Siobhan McMahon's motion and I believe that the sentiments that are contained therein are worthy, but I have one slight area of concern, which is about what goes on in schools. I accept that the curriculum for excellence can help to facilitate better training and more awareness and the teaching of young people to deal with emergencies. The curriculum for excellence has been designed to allow teachers flexibility in how they teach their subjects. In Scotland, ministers or education authorities have never prescribed a curriculum. Therefore, we must be cautious about wanting to add things to the curriculum. When I was a minister, I had approaches from the British Red Cross to do something similar in relation to first aid. I was also approached by organisations that were involved in financial inclusion and dealing with bullying and homophobia and which wanted something to be introduced into the curriculum. However, that is not how we do it in Scotland.

The curriculum for excellence gives us a significant opportunity, but we should be careful about trying to prescribe something and to change significantly the way in which we deliver education in schools. Our current model, which allows flexibility and imagination, is the way forward. I hope that many teachers will take advantage of the fantastic resources that organisations have produced.

17:29

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Siobhan McMahon on securing the debate. I am happy to agree that the recent heartstart event in the Parliament served to

highlight the importance of training in emergency life support. I thank the pupils from Coatbridge and Portree who demonstrated to us their skills.

The fact that I did not sign the motion in no way indicates opposition to the principle that as many people as possible, including schoolchildren, should be trained in emergency life support and cardiopulmonary resuscitation. I certainly believe that such training is extremely valuable and saves lives. However, like Hugh Henry, I am not totally convinced that it needs to be prescribed within the curriculum for excellence, although schools should be encouraged to get involved in it.

The heartstart scheme that the British Heart Foundation administers is excellent, and I am delighted that other organisations—such as St Andrew's Ambulance Association and the British Red Cross—are also working to train young people in ELS and CPR.

Before the debate, I tried to find out what is going on in the north-east in that regard. Although only 43 north-east schools are currently affiliated to the heartstart scheme that the BHF administers, that is not to say that more schools have not had training from other organisations, such as those that I mentioned. I certainly support the drive to increase the number of schoolchildren who are competent to administer ELS.

Six years ago, a group of medical students at the University of Aberdeen who were newly trained in CPR set up their own heartstart scheme, affiliated to heartstart UK, with the aim of teaching life support in local schools. They hoped to pass on their skills to younger people and give them the confidence to deal with challenging emergency situations.

They had a great deal of help from heartstart UK and university staff in setting up their scheme, and they had plans to extend it to students from Robert Gordon University—also in Aberdeen—to form a collaboration that, as well as providing a community service, would enable students from different areas of healthcare to interact and work together, hopefully building up relationships that would continue into professional life. I have tried to get an update on the scheme from the University of Aberdeen but, unfortunately, the university did not get back to me in time for the debate.

However, there is an on-going collaborative project, which may or may not be associated with the scheme that I just described. It involves the teaching of basic life-support skills by final-year medical students from the University of Aberdeen and final-year nursing students from Robert Gordon University. The recipients of that teaching project are students from the faculty of health and social care, and it has been received with enthusiasm by all students and staff involved. The

medical and nursing students are trained together and work in pairs to train their fellow students. It is hoped that, following the success of the project, the concept of peer teaching and an interprofessional approach will become a sustainable part of the curriculum for future students. I can also see how school pupils who are trained could then teach their peers the same skills.

Another collaborative project involves the Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association—a self-help group of heart-attack survivors who are doing sterling work in Aberdeenshire and with whom I have been connected. Through a partnership between St Andrew's Ambulance Association and RGU, the association's members have undergone training in CPR and the use of six automated defibrillators that they have purchased, so that they can help to ensure the continuing safety of their cardiac rehabilitation classes throughout the region.

I appreciate that I have digressed a little from the motion, but I fully endorse any moves to train people of all ages—from school pupils, to students, to citizens in general—in CPR and emergency life support. The heartstart scheme is doing a fantastic job, and I am happy to support it and encourage its expansion. I just wanted to emphasise the benefit of collaborative projects in increasing emergency life-support and CPR skills right across our communities.

17:33

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I join other members in congratulating Siobhan McMahon on securing the debate, which is worth while.

The British Heart Foundation's heartstart event, which many of us attended recently, was excellent. It raised awareness of the importance and effectiveness of emergency life-support training among Scotland's youth. Other members have referred to the excellent presentations that we had from teachers and young people in the programmes in North Lanarkshire and Skye in particular.

Siobhan McMahon mentioned the extent of the heart problem in Scotland. We should not lose sight of the fact that the number of heart attacks is down by something like 40 per cent over the past 25 years, so we are making progress. However, unfortunately, that progress is not taking us ahead of other countries; we still lag behind. Premature deaths are of particular concern because they continue to occur in significant numbers.

The British Heart Foundation Scotland, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland and Lucky2BHere have made significant strides in their campaign for

implementation of emergency life-support training in Scottish secondary schools. It is an invaluable programme that will equip as many of our young people as possible with the simple skills to save lives if they are confronted with such a situation.

Every child should leave school with knowledge of the vital skills for saving a life. Beyond that, the support education is designed to teach people not only to keep someone alive until professional help arrives, but to assess an unconscious person, to perform CPR, to respond to choking and serious bleeding and to use a defibrillator. The modern defibrillator is pretty foolproof and is not something to be afraid of, but people are still afraid because they think that it is some high-technology piece of machinery. It is, but it has been simplified to the extent that anyone can use it, and they will not do damage as long as they follow the instructions. That is a critical message that we need to get out.

Heartstart notes that the survival rate is under 10 per cent—or even less, depending on where one is; David Stewart mentioned the problems in rural areas. CPR can more than double the chances of survival, and it buys time for professional help to arrive.

Beyond that, we need to know where the defibrillators are. It is important that we map locations and use social media with young people so that they can find out immediately where the nearest defibrillator is and obtain it. The ambulance service is already doing that in an area in Argyll, and I hope that the minister will tell us that the mapping will be extended with the Government's support.

Other countries including France, Denmark and Norway have made emergency life-support skills compulsory in school curricula. I understand Hugh Henry's slight concern with regard to Scotland's tradition of not making such things compulsory, but when one hears statistics such as the 52 per cent survival rate from witnessed cardiac arrests in Norway, one has to ask what should be compulsory and what should not.

I congratulate Madras college in my region, which has trained a number of third-year students and continues to train students. However, I cannot find any schools in the Forth Valley area that are participating—I may just have been short of time for getting that information, but I will raise the issue with the health board's chief executive tomorrow.

It would be very welcome if all MSPs were to encourage their local shops—perhaps eventually a local shop on every street in their constituency—to have a defibrillator. I found it quite easy to persuade the Thistles shopping centre in Stirling to get a defibrillator, and although I am glad to report

that it has not been used in the past four years, people nevertheless feel more confident.

I welcome the motion, and I thank Siobhan McMahon for giving us this opportunity.

17:38

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Siobhan McMahon on bringing the debate to the chamber.

Last month I also attended the heartstart event in the Parliament that was organised by Lucky2BHere, a charity from Skye that has already been mentioned tonight. The charity was founded by Ross Cowie after he had a close encounter with death, but was resuscitated.

I found myself down on my knees watching three teenagers from Portree high school on the Isle of Skye demonstrate how to use a defibrillator and perform basic emergency life-support procedures on a mannequin. They soon had me practising CPR on the mannequin—which did not, for some reason, like my kiss of life. In a matter of weeks those teenagers had learned the skills to use a defibrillator and to administer basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation. When it comes to a matter of life and death, those youngsters will be well prepared.

The pupils who demonstrated their skills in the Scottish Parliament last month are part of a much larger group at Portree high school. Heartstart Skye—the team of volunteers that provide the training—has not been given a moment's peace by those pupils since the programme started.

In April this year, 145 Portree pupils were presented with certificates for completing a short course in basic emergency support. However, the keen pupils are not resting on their laurels—instead, they have invited the training team back to train the current fifth-year pupils. The hope for the future is to train first-year and second-year pupils so that by fifth year, pupils will need only a refresher course. Portree high school is a case study of the benefits of incorporating ELS into the school curriculum. Basic training can save lives. In Skye more than 200 pupils are now able to use their training to save a life, which is crucial in a rural community where an ambulance can take up to 20 or 30 minutes, or more, to arrive.

The initiative is not just a case of imposing another subject on children in an already-packed school syllabus. It is about giving them vital life skills to serve their communities, and about enabling them to care for family members, friends and strangers in a very real way. It is about tapping into their innate compassion and concern for humanity. To top it off, they actually enjoy it.

They feel useful and valuable, which is fundamental in developing a child's character.

The deputy headteacher of Portree high school, Kenny MacDonald, is a strong advocate of teaching ELS in schools, because he has seen that it is vital. When he taught at a school in Johnstone, CPR training was on the curriculum. Of those who received it, one boy had to use CPR on his grandfather and another two boys helped to revive a man who had taken ill while fishing. If only one student is able to use it, surely the training is worth while.

One of the key organisations behind the work of Portree high school is Lucky2BHere. The charity has three aims: community empowerment, education and co-operation. Since its birth in 2007, Lucky2BHere has placed defibrillators across Skye and Lochalsh and it is expanding into other communities.

The training starts when the community engages with the initiative. Communities are encouraged to raise contributory funds through healthy activities. Free emergency life-support training is then provided by volunteers of Skye heartstart team. Finally, a defibrillator is placed in a central location that is accessible to all.

Our schools are training, equipping and resourcing the next generation of Scots. Our hope for Scotland's future is to see healthier, safer and more caring communities. Teaching ELS in schools is right at the heart of that dream.

17:42

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Siobhan McMahon on securing the debate on this very important topic.

I am speaking in my capacity as convener of the heart disease and stroke cross-party group, which provides a forum for discussion on prevention, care and treatment of heart disease and stroke among members of the Scottish Parliament, people living with those conditions, the charities working in the field and the health professionals who are involved. We have the invaluable expertise of Ben McKendrick and Louise Peardon, who are with us in the gallery today. I welcome them and thank them very much for all the tremendous support that they give the group.

Since we established the group in 2008, we have had a number of fascinating and informative presentations from speakers from a variety of walks of life, but none of those has been as stimulating or powerful as our discussions around increasing survival from cardiac arrest, particularly what we heard from the speakers from the Skye-based charity Lucky2BHere, which so many other members have mentioned this afternoon. Its work

is exemplary and if any charity should get an award, it should. I hope that we all remember that when it comes to the *Daily Record* competition next year. We should work hard to see whether we can get it an award.

The current Scottish Government and the Labour-led Administration that preceded it have done a good job in cutting deaths from heart disease. Deaths from the condition have fallen significantly over the past 20 years. There is, however, much more to do. Figures from ISD Scotland tell us that 10,752 people died from heart disease in Scotland in 2009. In Fife alone, heart disease took the lives of 776 people in the same year. We can—indeed we must—do better.

One of the ways we can do better is by taking often quite simple steps to improve survival from cardiac arrest. The underlying cause of many cardiac arrests is a fast abnormal rhythm of the heart called ventricular fibrillation. That means that the heart is not beating. It can be reversed, but in that case, as well as the vital ELS skills that we have been hearing about, a piece of equipment is also required. Reversing ventricular fibrillation and therefore being able to save someone's life in a cardiac-arrest situation requires the use of automated defibrillators.

The cross-party group on heart disease and stroke heard a presentation on the myths that surround AEDs. As Richard Simpson rightly said, any new piece of equipment can be intimidating. However, AEDs are completely safe and it is impossible to do any harm with them in a cardiac-arrest situation. They can be used by anyone; all the user need be able to do is recognise the emergency. Richard Simpson is right that we need to get that message out there, and it does no harm to repeat it.

If an AED is successfully used within the first three minutes of cardiac arrest, there is a 75 per cent chance of survival. As I witnessed when I hosted the ELS event on 5 October, the pupils of Portree high school have been familiarised with an AED as well as learning the ELS skills as part of their curriculum. That has enhanced their confidence to act in any cardiac-arrest situation. In researching the issue for the most recent cross-party group meeting, I was thankful to discover that the Parliament building has AEDs available and that 25 of our staff have been trained in their use. Nevertheless, I encourage colleagues to follow the excellent example of the Portree pupils and to familiarise themselves with that life-saving equipment in case they are ever witness to a cardiac arrest. As I have learned through the ELS event and the CPG, every second counts. I urge the cabinet secretary to consider what more can be done nationally to encourage the siting of more

machines in public places where they can be accessed easily.

Before I close, I will touch briefly on heartstart training in schools.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you closed now.

Helen Eadie: I urge colleagues to encourage education authorities in their areas to work with BHF Scotland, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland and others to ensure that that training is provided as widely as possible.

17:46

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I congratulate Siobhan McMahon on securing time for this important debate. It has been a very good debate. I also welcome those in the public gallery who have come along for the debate, particularly Charles Fawcett, whose interest in healthy living goes way beyond Lanarkshire. I share his interest in Malawi and we have a shared friend in Sister Anna Tomassi.

This has been an opportunity to reflect on what more we can do to ensure that children and others in Scotland are better prepared to deal with sudden cardiac arrests. It should be recognised that there has been a 59 per cent reduction in the number of premature coronary heart disease deaths in Scotland since 1995, which is significant progress. Nevertheless, our action plan for heart disease makes it clear that we need to do more to ensure that people have access to the best possible care as quickly as possible.

So far, we have invested £7.5 million in state-of-the-art defibrillators for all Scottish Ambulance Service ambulances. We have also recognised that delay in performing defibrillation can be a significant factor in attending to someone who is having a sudden cardiac arrest. That is why we have increased the provision of automated external defibrillators, which can help to support someone at a very early stage. As Richard Simpson said and Helen Eadie acknowledged, the defibrillators are extremely easy to use. I have been trained to use one in mountain rescue and know that they are literally idiot proof—they would have to be for some members of my team. They work extremely well and must not be used inappropriately if they are not necessary at the time.

The importance of prompt action was highlighted again last week with the news that a defibrillator based in a Zurich football stadium was used to help former Scottish Football Association chief executive David Taylor after he suffered a heart attack in September. I have no doubt that colleagues will join me in wishing him well. Placing

defibrillators in stadiums is consistent with international guidelines, which indicate that public access defibrillators should be placed in areas of high footfall.

As part of its community resilience scheme, the Scottish Ambulance Service is currently improving access to PADs throughout remote, rural and urban communities in Scotland. The Ambulance Service is working with Scotmid—as Hugh Henry said—and the British Heart Foundation to map the locations of premises against response times to identify locations where PADs are likely to save more lives. It is also helping Scotmid to purchase and install in-store defibrillators in 40 shops, which involves training and supporting staff. In addition, the Ambulance Service is looking to record PAD locations so that, when a member of the public calls the service about a cardiac event, they can be directed to the closest PAD.

Community resuscitation development officers are based throughout Scotland. They are helping to build community resilience by increasing the number of community first responders and providing training in basic life support across communities. I would like to highlight the importance of community support in all of this. Dave Thompson referred to the Lucky2BHere charity in Skye, which has been rolling out CPR classes across Skye and is now looking to take those further afield. That has worked extremely successfully.

The curriculum for excellence was introduced in all schools in Scotland in August 2010. Its purpose is encapsulated in the four capacities: to enable children and young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. The Scottish Government has also set the following national outcomes: for our children to have been given the best start in life and to be ready to succeed; for their life chances and those of their families to have been improved; for us to have strong, resilient and supportive communities; and for the significant inequalities in society to have been tackled.

The curriculum for excellence has an important role to play in promoting health and wellbeing for children and young people, and all of those in the education communities to which they belong. Health and wellbeing is now a curricular area in its own right, with a prominence akin to literacy and numeracy. Learning in health and wellbeing ensures that children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding and the skills, capabilities and attributes that they will need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing now and in the future.

That learning will promote excellence, confidence and independent thinking in young

people. We also hope that that learning will establish a pattern of health and wellbeing that will be sustained into adult life and will help to promote health and wellbeing for the next generation of Scottish children.

The experiences and outcomes in the curriculum for excellence, which describe the expectations for learning and progression that children should go through, highlight physical wellbeing. The learning covers areas such as knowledge about the human body, assessing and managing risk and the ability to demonstrate how children can keep themselves and others safe.

The curriculum for excellence seeks to empower the teaching profession, enabling practitioners to teach more creatively and providing flexibility so that teachers, schools and local authorities can identify and pursue their own approaches and use their experience to deliver the outcomes.

It is for schools and local authorities to decide what measures to take and what resources to put in place to take the learning forward. I agree with Hugh Henry that we should not prescribe what particular things schools should do. However, I have no doubt that teaching children about emergency life support and CPR would fit very well into the physical wellbeing part of the curriculum for excellence. Like others in the chamber, I encourage local authorities to reflect on that and on the benefit that can be gained from the teaching of emergency life-support skills and to consider including that in their curriculums.

Meeting closed at 17:53.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

Members who wish to suggest corrections for the revised e-format edition should e-mail them to official.report@scottish.parliament.uk or send a marked-up printout to the Official Report, Room T2.20.

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by RR Donnelley and is available from:

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

For details of documents available to
order in hard copy format, please contact:
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

e-format first available
ISBN 978-0-85758-962-0

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-0-85758-974-3

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
