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Official Report

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Thursday 22 March 2012

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Scottish Parliament

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

Ferries

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02421, in the name of Elaine Murray, on ferries.

09:15

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): The island of South Uist in the Western Isles has a population of 1,950 people, with Lochboisdale being the main settlement. The port is served by CalMac ferries from Oban and Castlebay on the Isle of Barra. A ferry service calling at Mallaig, Lochboisdale and Castlebay operated from 1967 to 1974, from 1988 to 1990, and again from 1994 to 2001. The intermittency of the route seems to have been due to a combination of factors, including the upgrading of harbours, the development of new routes and ferries being withdrawn from service due to age and safety regulations. There has been no vehicular service on the route for over 10 years.

The current journey time for the vehicular ferry between Oban and Lochboisdale is approximately five hours and 10 minutes, which extends to six hours and 40 minutes if the journey is via Castlebay. I could drive from Dumfries to the south coast of England in a similar time. In addition, the timing of the Sunday service is such that it is impossible for people from South Uist who work or study on the mainland to get home for a weekend to attend a family occasion, for example. The length of the vehicular crossing also restricts opportunities to expand tourism on the island.

A direct crossing from Mallaig to Lochboisdale, which is the request, would take about three hours and 20 minutes. Western Isles Council had discussions back in 2006 with Tavish Scott regarding the introduction of such a service, in which the previous member of the Scottish Parliament, Alasdair Morrison, was also involved. I understand that the discussions were extremely encouraging, but elections intervened the following spring and Tavish Scott was no longer in a position to take things forward.

In 2008, transport minister Stewart Stevenson also seemed positive about the idea. He invited Stòras Uibhist to submit a proposal for the introduction of a service and, at that time, an offer of £1 million seemed to be on the table to support

such a service. Stòras Uibhist submitted a proposal, but unfortunately it was disappointed: the proposal was rejected because the proposed vessel, the Claymore, which belonged to Pentland Ferries but was surplus to its requirements, was considered unsuitable as it was 30 years old. Arguably, it could have been suitable, at least for piloting the reintroduction of a service on the route and finding out what demand existed.

Also in 2008, the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee undertook an inquiry into ferry services in Scotland. Two members, Charlie Gordon and Alison McInnes, visited Mallaig on behalf of the committee for two days in March that year. The notes of their visit state:

“All attendees expressed a desire to see an increase in the use of Mallaig Harbour”

and that there was a

“strong desire to see a reinstatement of the route from Mallaig to Lochboisdale”,

although the committee did not make any specific recommendation in its report about that or indeed any other route.

On 5 December 2008, Scottish Government officials wrote to Stòras Uibhist stating that a standalone ferry service between Mallaig and Lochboisdale would be considered

“in the context of the ferries review”.

However, the campaign did not stop with that assurance. In July last year, Huw Francis, the chief executive of Stòras Uibhist, lodged petition PE1394 in the Scottish Parliament, which was duly considered by the Public Petitions Committee and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee. By that time, the Fionnlagan had been introduced on the Islay to Kennacraig route, relieving the Isle of Arran on that service. That offered another opportunity at least to pilot a Mallaig to Lochboisdale service. However, Transport Scotland set its face against the suggestion, arguing that the Isle of Arran was required as a relief vessel and that, at 27, it was too old to undertake the proposed service. Graham Laidlaw of Transport Scotland did, however, provide an assurance in his letter to the Public Petitions Committee of 4 October last year that a Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry service was

“being actively considered as part of the Scottish Ferries Review”.

That was reiterated in a further letter dated 15 December, which refused to consider trialling a service.

Only a few days later, on 21 December last year, the document “Scottish Ferry Services: Draft Plan for Consultation” was published. We can imagine the anticipation of the people of South Uist as they turned to chapter 4 to find out what

the Scottish Government was saying about consideration of the vital Mallaig to Lochboisdale service link. Paragraphs 38 and 39 discuss the routes between Uist and Benbecula, but the ferry campaigners were to be sadly disappointed. Paragraph 149 states:

“we have no specific proposals for the Uists and Benbecula”

and paragraph 150 says:

“We have considered whether a Mallaig to Lochboisdale service could become the principal route for the Uists and Benbecula”.

However, that was rejected in favour of the status quo. The document goes on to assert:

“Our household survey showed that while 42 per cent of residents in South Uist were not satisfied with Oban as their mainland port, 52 per cent were satisfied and 6 per cent”

do not care. The review was published only six days after assurances were contained in the letter from Transport Scotland to the Public Petitions Committee.

Huw Francis wrote again to David Stewart MSP, convener of that committee, advising that statistics in the review document were, at the very least, misleading. In the previous March, 200 people attended a meeting arranged by Western Isles Council and only one person preferred Oban to Mallaig as a destination. Moreover, further analysis of the ferries review household survey painted a very different picture and showed that 83 per cent of the population wanted a shorter crossing time, 51 per cent wanted different harbour locations, and 72 per cent wanted an increase in the number of days that the ferry runs.

Last year, a staggering 1,500 people signed Stòras Uibhist's petition—the population of South Uist is only 1,950—calling on the services to be reintroduced. That support replicated a petition that was organised during the previous parliamentary session by my colleagues Rhoda Grant, David Stewart and Peter Peacock, which achieved 1,260 signatures. Such a massive response begs the question: why does the draft ferries plan not seek the views of the community on the route? Perhaps it is because the answer would not be the one that the Government wants.

I am aware that concerns have been expressed about the introduction of the service having a deleterious effect on the Barra to Oban service. However, Stòras Uibhist's proposal is for an additional service that need not affect the service to Barra. Indeed, it has been put to me that a direct service from Lochboisdale to Mallaig could provide an opportunity to improve the timetabling of the Barra service thus benefiting that community. I understand that visitors to Barra have to return to the mainland on a Saturday, with the return sailing the next day, meaning that

income from the Saturday night is lost to tourism businesses. So the proposal could assist the economy of Barra as well as that of South Uist.

The failure to include consideration of the service in the ferries review has added impetus to the campaign. Four community councils—Benbecula, Bornish, Lochboisdale and Eriskay—have joined Stòras Uibhist to form the Lochboisdale-Mallaig Ferry Group, describing the non-existent service as the “missing link”. Members of the group were outside Parliament this morning trying to lobby MSPs on their way in. A public meeting held on 24 February and attended by the constituency and regional MSPs attracted more than 200 local residents.

There did appear to be strong support for the campaign from local SNP politicians. Last July, the local MP, Angus Brendan MacNeil, stated:

“The need and case for a Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry gets stronger each year”,

and as recently as 27 February, Angus Brendan MacNeil and constituency MSP Alasdair Allan issued a joint press release calling for a trial run to test out a new ferry route, suggesting that it could be funded from within CalMac's marketing budget.

When the missing link campaign took its case to the SNP conference earlier this month, it reported on its website that most of those that it had spoken to, including the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell, said that they fully supported the campaign. Consequently, I was hopeful that SNP members would agree with their conference delegates, and with Mr Russell, and fully support our motion today.

Therefore, I am disappointed—but nothing like as disappointed as the missing link campaigners in the gallery must be—by the anodyne and rather self-congratulatory amendment in Mr Neil's name. At least 12 proposals for service improvements are up for consultation in the ferries plan, but they do not include the Lochboisdale to Mallaig route. That route is being treated differently from other routes. It is not even being considered for the next tender, while other routes are.

I know that Stòras Uibhist wants to meet Mr Brown, or possibly Mr Neil, and I hope that one of the ministers will accept the meeting and be prepared to discuss the proposed route in future. It would have many benefits, not just the benefit of cost to the traveller, which is significant, but benefits for carbon emissions, because journeys would be shorter and people coming south would have to drive less. The proposal would also free up about 31 hours of ferry time, which could be used to improve other island services.

I am disappointed that the proposal does not seem to be under consideration, although perhaps

we will see a change when the final ferries plan comes out. In the meantime, I beg members of the other parties to consider supporting our motion on allowing the ferry service to go forward.

I move,

That the Parliament is disappointed that the draft ferries plan does not include a new Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service; recognises the social and economic need for such a service; notes the overwhelming support in the Western Isles and Mallaig for such a service, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure its inclusion in the ferries plan and to commence the new service as soon as practically possible.

09:25

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): We welcome the opportunity to discuss our draft ferries plan and, in particular, the proposals for a Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry service. The plan has always been about the issues that matter most to our island and remote communities. We should not forget that the Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry service was terminated by the previous Labour-led Scottish Executive in 2001. If Elaine Murray is going to quote paragraph 150 of the draft plan, she should at least be honest and quote what we say at the end of it. I will quote it exactly—it states:

“We will further consider the economic viability of this proposed service in the context of other planned improvements to services to, and within, the Western Isles.”

If Elaine Murray is going to argue the case, she should at least give credit where it is due and quote exactly what is said in the document.

We want to improve Scotland's ferry services, which are key to the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of our remote and island communities. That is why this Government has been the first ever to carry out a thorough review of all ferry services in Scotland, focusing on the things that matter most to communities—fares, what services are in place, the level of services and who should be responsible for providing them.

There has been wide engagement, with opportunities for everyone who has an interest to engage in discussions on our ferry services. During a consultation period, it is not the normal practice for ministers to meet people who are lobbying for a particular point of view, but I have always made it absolutely clear that, once the consultation is finished at the end of this month, I will be happy to meet anyone from South Uist, Barra, Lochboisdale, Mallaig or any other community to discuss their concerns.

About 600 individuals, groups and organisations replied to the initial consultation in 2010 and, with more than a week to go, we have already received 1,100 responses to the draft ferries plan

consultation. I can give members an assurance that we will listen very carefully indeed to what people say in response to the genuine consultation that we are carrying out.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for clarifying the position on the Mallaig to Armadale route and for guaranteeing its future. I look forward to a visit by him and the Minister for Housing and Transport—or one of them—to west Ardnamurchan and the small isles to speak directly to local communities. In principle, I support a Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry route—

The Presiding Officer: This is an intervention, not a speech. Will you just get to the point?

Dave Thompson: Given the current financial constraints, will the cabinet secretary consider reconfiguration of existing services to allow the new service to be introduced?

Alex Neil: Based on some of the responses that we have had, we are already working on that possibility. We are more than willing to consider any viable proposition that is put to us.

Elaine Murray: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Alex Neil: Not at the moment.

This is not the first time that the issue has been studied. In 2005, the previous Labour-Liberal Executive produced a report on the reinstatement of the service that it scrapped in 2001. The report is dated May 2005. What did that Executive do between May 2005 and May 2007? Nothing—it did nothing. Did Elaine Murray mention that report in her opening remarks? No, she did not. The reason is that, as usual, the Labour-Liberal Executive commissioned a report but took no action whatsoever. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Ms Murray, please stop shouting.

Alex Neil: Then, the Labour Party has the cheek to come to the chamber with a motion criticising us when we are contemplating the options.

Let me give members the facts and explain the issues that we have to grapple with. The report showed that the annual cost of providing the service as a standalone service would have been between £3.5 million and £4 million and that the cost of introducing a new vessel would have been around £26 million—those are 2005 costs. By any standard, and given that the total ferry budget is just over £100 million a year, those are substantial figures. If Elaine Murray is going to be honest, she must tell us where the money would come from. Does she want the £26 million to be spent on a new ferry between Lochboisdale and Mallaig

instead of on upgrading the A75, which she said should be a top priority for transport in Scotland?

Elaine Murray: The Scottish Government is consulting on 12 different routes for upgrading, including the Ardrossan to Brodick service to Arran, as part of the new tender. Why is the route between Lochboisdale and Mallaig not being considered in the same way as those 12 routes?

Alex Neil: We have explained exactly why: because we have to consider what resources are available to us and how we can make best use of them. If the Labour Party wants the service—which it abolished in 2001—to be reinstated, the onus is on Labour members to tell us where the £26 million and the £4 million a year are going to come from. Are they going to come from other ferry services, from other transport services, from childcare services or from other services? If Labour is serious about it, as opposed to playing games, it must tell us how it would fund the service.

As Dave Thompson has made clear, we are considering a number of options that are being put to us and we would like the maximum number of ferry services for all our island communities. We recognise the special needs of the island communities, but we have to operate within the very limited resources that are given to us by Westminster under Labour and Tory Governments. If we spend money on this ferry service, we will spend less on something else—that is the language of priorities. We will listen to the people, not to Labour politicians, who are guilty of removing the service in the first place.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Alex Neil: Nor will we listen to Liberal politicians. The transport ministers between May 2005 and May 2007 were Nicol Stephen and Tavish Scott, but what did the Liberals do about the ferry service? The same as the Labour Party—nothing.

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, you need to wind up.

Alex Neil: We will listen to the people, not to those who speak a double language, telling one story here and another story elsewhere.

I move amendment S4M-02421.1, to leave out from “is disappointed” to end and insert:

“welcomes the *Scottish Ferry Services: Draft Plan for consultation*; in particular the focus of the Scottish Ferries Review and the draft plan on the issues that matter most to island and remote communities and their central theme of further improving Scotland’s ferry services; welcomes the wide engagement and consultation that has taken place throughout the Scottish Ferries Review; notes the Scottish Government’s commitment to fully consider the consultation responses from communities representing

their local interests, including those advocating the introduction of a service between Lochboisdale and Mallaig, and looks forward to the publication of the final ferries plan in 2012.”

09:33

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank the Labour Party for securing the debate. There is no doubt that a new Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service is a popular option for people in the Uists as well as for businesses and tourists. I am delighted to learn that the cabinet secretary is contemplating the options.

The motion states that the draft ferries plan does not include a new Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service, but it is worth restating that there is still an opportunity for people to respond to the Scottish Government’s consultation on the plan, the closing date for which is 31 March. The case for a new Lochboisdale to Mallaig service is fully supported by the local MSP and Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages, Alasdair Allan. He has stated:

“I made a strong case for the retention and development of Lochboisdale as a ferry port and continue to argue that the trialling of a service between Lochboisdale and Mallaig is an option”

that the Government “should consider” and contemplate.

There would be many advantages to the new ferry service. For a start, local people have suggested that it could be operated with a more fuel-efficient and smaller boat than some of the existing Caledonian MacBrayne ferries, which can use up to 1,500 litres of fuel per hour.

Most deliveries to the Uists come from the mainland—the central belt in particular—via Inverness and Skye, through the Uig to Lochmaddy service. That results in considerable traffic pressure on the A9 and the A82. A new ferry service would alleviate that traffic and reduce travel times. I am also told that, at the height of the tourism season, it can be difficult for fish producers to get their product on the Lochmaddy to Uig ferry.

As the Fort William to Mallaig road has been significantly improved in recent years, it would provide improved journey times from the central belt to Mallaig for onward transport and provide a quicker route for many travellers to and from the Western Isles.

As other members have said, the sea journey from Oban to Lochboisdale is 74 miles, compared with a 48-mile sea trip from Mallaig to Lochboisdale. As Elaine Murray said, a normal journey from Lochboisdale to Oban can take more than six hours.

The road infrastructure on Skye has deteriorated in recent years as a result of the high volume of heavy goods vehicles that use it.

I put all those points in a letter to the previous transport minister, Stewart Stevenson, who responded:

"Given the wide ranging nature of the draft ferries review—it will include consideration of a possible Mallaig-Lochboisdale service".

That takes me to paragraph 150 of the draft ferries plan, which says:

"We have considered whether a Mallaig to Lochboisdale service could become the principal route for the Uists and Benbecula",

instead of the Lochmaddy to Uig route. That is where the problem is. As far as I am aware, no one has ever suggested that the Mallaig to Lochboisdale route should replace the Uig to Lochmaddy service. The community—and, I understand, the Labour motion—asks for an additional, new service between Mallaig and Lochboisdale. I appreciate what the cabinet secretary said, but paragraph 150 begins as I quoted it.

Alex Neil: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: I am still discussing paragraph 150. In quoting the draft ferries plan, I am being absolutely reasonable with the cabinet secretary.

Alex Neil: As always.

Mary Scanlon: The Government says that it

"will further consider the economic viability of this proposed service".

Economic viability is critical. I received a response to a parliamentary question last week that confirmed that no ferry routes in Scotland make a profit, so none is economically viable other than those that have no taxpayer subsidy and which provide an excellent service at competitive prices—the Western Ferries (Clyde) Ltd and Pentland Ferries routes.

Alex Neil: Is the logic of the member's argument that, if no routes make a profit and—she argues—they are not economically viable, we should run none of the services? Surely the whole point is the economic viability of the islands.

Mary Scanlon: Paragraph 150 says:

"We will further consider the economic viability of this proposed service".

My point is that the answer to my written question last week said that every service needs to be subsidised, except the Western Ferries and Pentland Ferries services, which run at lower prices for passengers. Why does the Government not consider carrying out a trial, as Alasdair Allan

suggested, and asking a private operator to see how it works out?

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind members that they have a strict four minutes.

09:38

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): There can be no doubt about the crucial importance of the ferries issue to the people of South Uist in my constituency. If I had not known that much already, it would have been pretty obvious to me from the meeting that I attended in Daliburgh recently—it has been referred to—which more than 200 people attended and at which they made their views plain.

With that in mind, as local MSP I have responded—I sense from the tone from some quarters that I am criticised for it—along with many others in the Western Isles to both consultations associated with the ferries review and I have specifically mentioned the Mallaig to Lochboisdale issue.

As I said in my response to the initial consultation, if the resources can be found, we need to look seriously at having a Mallaig to Lochboisdale link. Any solution would obviously have to respect the needs and wishes of all communities in the islands, but there is a very strong case to be made for a shorter sea crossing from Lochboisdale. As local MSP, I support that case, and it was good to get a chance to speak to people from Uist at the door today who are making that argument, too. I am glad to say that I believe that they have joined us in the public gallery.

I welcome the specific recognition in the Government's amendment of the importance of listening to communities before a final ferries plan is produced and of giving consideration to the issues that are being raised in Uist. I appreciate why the Government's stance is to recognise the existence of the consultation process and not prejudice it.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am concerned about what Alasdair Allan is saying about the Government not prejudicing the consultation. If I understood Dave Thompson correctly, the Government has already given him reassurances about things that were in the draft ferries plan and told him that things will change. Why is the member not able to get the same reassurances for the people of Uist?

Dr Allan: As I understand it, the Government has said clearly that a consultation is under way and that it will consider representations, including those on the Mallaig to Lochboisdale question. I do not think that there is any need to obfuscate

that point any further than the member has just done.

As the local member, I readily see the benefits that would come to South Uist if there were a shorter sea crossing to the mainland, not to mention a more frequent one—all of us can agree that there is little point in viewing three ferry sailings a week in winter as a frequent service. That argument is certainly made frequently in the constituency that I represent. I understand the need for there to be improvements to the service, the impact of which would be felt in areas of economic activity as varied as tourism, crofting and fisheries. However, as the minister said, the debate about ferry routes cannot be isolated from a discussion of the issues around procuring new vessels, which is a discussion that we certainly have to have.

The phrase, “fragile island economy”, is often used but is less often fully appreciated. South Uist certainly qualifies as a fragile local economy. Apart from the geography, it does not enjoy anything like the highest incomes in Scotland and it faces a continual battle with the elements and with the ever-present threat of depopulation. With those factors in mind, it is right that we explore every possible means of improving connectivity, whether that be through improved broadband or improved transport links, and ensure that the solutions that we come up with are the product of a genuine conversation in the community.

I hope that we will see further progress of that kind in Uist, with more detailed discussion around the various options and costings for a shorter sea crossing, and I welcome the willingness of the minister to engage in that debate.

The Presiding Officer: The member needs to wind up.

Dr Allan: In that case, by way of conclusion, let me say that there is a surprising amount of agreement across the chamber on this issue, even if perhaps not everyone in South Uist will agree with the assertion of Elaine Murray that Lochboisdale is the primary settlement in South Uist.

09:43

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): There are not many ferry services in my Central Scotland region, but the ferries review has been topical in the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, which is why I am happy to speak in the debate.

At the last election, Scottish Labour made a commitment to turn the road equivalent tariff from a pilot into a permanent measure in the Western Isles, and we promised to extend the scheme to

the Clyde coast and Argyll. We were also clear about our ambition to bring back a passenger service between Rosyth and Zeebrugge, in order to connect Scotland with Europe. We also reminded people that, under the Labour-led Scottish Executive, older and disabled people became entitled to two free return ferry trips anywhere in Scotland.

Let me make it clear: even Glasgow-born central-belt Labour MSPs are committed to good ferry services and reliable infrastructure for coastal and island communities. That is because we need a joined-up transport network across Scotland in order to make every part of our country as accessible possible, if we are to meet the social and economic needs of all our communities. The Labour motion makes it clear that we believe that there are real social and economic benefits to be realised from securing a ferry service between Mallaig and South Uist.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Given Margaret McCulloch's concerns about that route, can she tell me why the Labour Party abolished the service in 2001?

Margaret McCulloch: We did not abolish it. If Kenneth Gibson will let me go on, I will explain why we should have that ferry service.

A well-serviced daily and direct route would not only reduce journey times between South Uist and the mainland but would help to reinvigorate the local economy. Faster and better connections to the mainland would make it easier for residents to trade, to commute and to access public services. It would bring more visitors to the area, thereby supporting local businesses and giving tourism in the Western Isles a welcome boost. We know from elsewhere that when the economic prospects of island communities improve, they can begin to tackle the problems of depopulation and of retaining and creating wealth locally.

Campaigners have also argued that a new ferry route would reduce the cost of transporting goods to the island, which members will know is a pertinent issue at this time because of the 50 per cent increase in fares that will soon come about because the RET is being withdrawn from commercial vehicles. Modern transport, especially in the Highlands and Islands, can be expensive. The rise in oil prices has increased pressure on motorists and hauliers and that pressure is often reflected in the prices that are passed on to consumers. The RET has made it more affordable to do business in and with the Western Isles; all the evidence suggests that withdrawing the RET from commercial vehicles will drive up costs and make investment by businesses in much of the Western Isles uneconomical.

The Outer Hebrides transport group offered members of the Scottish Parliament the example of a lorry on the Oban-Lochboisdale-Castlebay route that would face an 80 per cent fare increase under the plans that were originally proposed by the Scottish Government. A shorter route would be more affordable but would still be subject to higher fares. I therefore call on the Scottish Government to reflect on the impact that changes to the RET will have on the islands, and to think again.

The case for an affordable and accessible service between Mallaig and South Uist is clear. It would reduce journey times, boost tourism and support the local economy. The very least the minister could do for those communities is commit without further delay to a trial service.

09:47

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands)

(SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate because, as an islander, I know how important ferry services are and how emotive the issue can be. I welcome the Labour Party motion, but I think that the Labour Party has already forgotten that it was Labour's own Gordon Brown who was first mate and then captain at the helm of the United Kingdom ship of state when it crashed on the rocks and threw us into economic turmoil. It is cold comfort indeed that that economic shipwreck catapulted Gordon out of the cockpit only to make space for messrs Cameron and Clegg.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Will the member give way?

Mike MacKenzie: No. I have only four minutes, at most.

In the face of this economic storm and the most savage of cuts to our budget, the Scottish Government is due great credit for sticking to its promised plans for the most wholesale improvements to our ferry network in living memory.

It is entirely right that the ferries review should start with proper consultation, so it is interesting that it appears that there have been many more responses in the last round of consultation, as people realised that we really are consulting and that we really are listening. It is not a sham consultation of the kind that we were used to prior to 2007. What a pity, in that case, that both Labour and the Liberal Democrats can think of no more constructive response than to stir up one community against another: Barra against South Uist; Lochboisdale against Lochmaddy; and Oban against Lochboisdale. Lib Dem MEP George Lyon's recent attempt to instigate a European Union inquiry and to halt the whole process of rolling out the RET was truly lamentable, and was

potentially damaging for our economically fragile island communities. Tavish Scott's recent proposals for the separation of Shetland are reminiscent of that Ealing comedy "Passport to Pimlico".

The Presiding Officer: Mr MacKenzie, could you just keep to the motion?

Mike MacKenzie: Those actions are all much more about petty political posturing than about a genuine attempt to help our islands. I am delighted that cooler heads prevail in Scotland these days, that the ferries review represents a fair, methodical and consistent approach to improving ferry services for all our islanders, that the Scottish Government has given a commitment to listen to all our communities and all the consultation responses, and that it recognises and will carefully consider the wishes of the people in South Uist on a ferry service between Lochboisdale and Mallaig.

However, if for any reason that is not immediately possible, and blame must be cast, the wise and pragmatic folk whom I know on our islands will know to look to the south—to the dead hand of Westminster and successive economic mismanagement by the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Tories. For many years, they have failed to invest in our ferries, piers and harbours and have left us with a legacy of underinvestment, which will, in these difficult times, take some time to correct.

I am pleased to support the cabinet secretary's amendment to the motion.

09:51

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I am pleased that the issue is being debated today, and I welcome to the public gallery the representatives from the long-running missing link ferry campaign. It makes economic sense to have a ferry from Lochboisdale to Mallaig, if one compares a three and a half hour crossing—both the time spent at sea and the cost—with a six and a half hour crossing. A ferry is especially needed now, following the withdrawal of the RET from commercial vehicles. That policy will have a detrimental effect on all the islands, but especially on those that have the longest ferry crossings. The Government appears to have no concept of the disadvantages that can be caused by geography.

I stress that we are seeking not a rerouting of any ferry that currently serves Barra or the rest of the Uists, but a new route that runs from Lochboisdale to Mallaig. That would allow the Barra to Oban service to concentrate on that route and provide a better timetable, which would have an immediate positive economic impact on Barra and the other islands. I recently spoke to a hotelier

who told me that the ferries to the islands are full, but the hotels are only half full.

We need more routes for economic development of the whole area. The Scottish Government appeared to support the instigation of such a service a few years ago and earmarked £1 million for it. Unfortunately, however, that money was not forthcoming because the Government could not find a ferry. By the time the community—being as resourceful as ever—found one, the money was gone.

My colleagues and I have campaigned alongside the community for the route for many years, and we have 1,200 supporters signed up to our campaign. Stòras Uibhist, which is the community land owner, petitioned the Parliament with 1,500 supporters, but to no avail. It is interesting that the minister says that he is listening to the people, because nearly 3,000 people have put their names to those campaigns and he appears not to be listening to what they are asking for. It is, given that level of support, hugely disappointing that the draft ferries plan has not identified any public support for the route. The Government did not ask the community what its preferred option is.

Alex Neil: I must correct Rhoda Grant on that. We specifically said in the plan that the survey—there was a survey—showed that views were divided on the importance of the service. It is not true to say that we did not survey people and that we did not put the results of the survey into the consultation.

Rhoda Grant: People were not, as part of the survey, asked whether they wanted a Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service. If they had been asked that, they would overwhelmingly have said that they supported such a service. That is what was missing. The minister's civil servants wrote to my colleague David Stewart and said that it would have been a leading question, so it did not appear in the ferries review questionnaire.

Although I was previously aware of the level of support for the link, I recently attended—along with Alasdair Allan—a packed public meeting at which there was unanimous support. There was also real anger, because people felt that they had been let down by the Government and by their representatives, and especially by their local Scottish National Party councillor, Donald Manford. Stewart Stevenson expressed his surprise that Donald Manford was so against the development of the route when he met representatives of Stòras Uibhist—

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will Rhoda Grant give way?

The Presiding Officer: Mr Finnie—first, you do not have your card in and, secondly, the member

does not have time to take your intervention. Just sit down.

Rhoda Grant: Mr Manford urged Stewart Stevenson not to allow the ferry route to go ahead before he had spoken to him. Local representatives need to stand up for their communities, so that behaviour is unacceptable.

I am pleased to support the Labour motion. I very much hope that the Government will listen to the many people who wish for the route to be reinstated.

09:55

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): When the RET was first rolled out in the Western Isles, the Labour Party in North Ayrshire, where I am an MSP, denounced the SNP Government for subsidising the Western Isles with the taxes of the people of North Ayrshire. In Edinburgh recently, leaflets have been sent out that talk about the SNP subsidising Glasgow, to Edinburgh's detriment.

This is another opportunistic debate from the Labour Party. We still have no answers on how it would fund the services. Despite what Margaret McCulloch said, it should show joined-up thinking on how it will address the issue.

Ferry services and the implications of the ferries review are important to my constituents in Arran and Cumbrae.

Elaine Murray: Will Kenneth Gibson give way?

Kenneth Gibson: I will let Elaine Murray in once I have made some progress.

The RET will be rolled out to the Clyde islands and there will be £14.5 million of investment in the Brodick services. The proposed Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service was not prioritised in the draft—I emphasise the word “draft”—ferries review because the Lochmaddy to Uig service is even shorter than Elaine Murray's suggested service. That shorter and more easily accessible service is the principal one that islanders use. The survey of Uist households that has been referred to demonstrates that there is demand for a Lochboisdale to Mallaig service. However, although 42 per cent of Uist residents were not satisfied with having Oban as their mainland port, 52 per cent were satisfied and around 6 per cent claimed that the mainland destination port was of no concern to them.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will Kenneth Gibson give way?

Kenneth Gibson: I will let Elaine Murray in because she asked first. Perhaps she can explain where Labour would find the £4 million a year that would be needed to run the Lochboisdale to

Mallaig service and the cost of the new ferry if such a service were to be introduced.

Elaine Murray: How will the Government pay for upgrading the Ardrossan to Brodick service?

Kenneth Gibson: That service is already funded through the capital infrastructure plan. Elaine Murray's suggestion is that we take money from existing projects and transfer it. I will be glad to tell my constituents in Arran that the Labour Party does not want the £14.5 million investment to go ahead. I am sure that they will be delighted to know that.

As the December 2011 ferry services plan explains:

"The larger communities in the Northern and Western Isles do not show a personal dependency as a key dependency"

for an improved ferry service to the islands. As the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change said in 2007, the Scottish transport appraisal guidance appraisal of 2005

"noted that a large proportion of the increase in economic activities in South Uist and Mallaig would be the result of displacement from communities served by existing ferry services ... while there would be some demand for such a service the vast majority of demand would be displaced from existing services with little net increase"—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 3 December 2007; S3W-06718.]

Jamie McGrigor: Will Kenneth Gibson give way?

Kenneth Gibson: I am really sorry, but I do not have time to take another intervention in a four-minute speech.

If that displacement were to happen, we would have to switch resources from other islands that, perhaps, have only one route, which may be a lifeline service.

In many parts of Scotland, the draft plan will have a tremendously positive impact. In Arran and Cumbrae, we will have earlier and later services, which will have a great impact on the economy of the Clyde islands. It has also been suggested that the existing Ardrossan to Brodick vessel may be replaced with two, more fuel-efficient vessels, which would decrease running costs and allow people to come for business travel and personal reasons, and would allow folk to commute to the islands. That would help to bring about a renaissance on Arran and Cumbrae.

I fully understand the concerns that members have about the Western Isles, but the Scottish Government must consider ferry services in the round. If we suggest additional services from one part of Scotland to another, it is important that we consider the impact on the rest of the network and how people would be affected.

I have 20 seconds. Can I take an intervention from Jamie McGrigor, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): No.

Kenneth Gibson: I am sorry. I did not realise that I had rattled through, as I have.

I add my support for the amendment. The SNP Government is doing a great job on ferries. Long may it continue.

09:59

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): According to the Government's draft plan for consultation,

"We all know that ferries are an essential part of Scotland's transport network."

The consultation should have been published in the summer of 2010 when communities and civil servants were crying out for the Government to make clear its position on Scotland's ferry services. In an e-mail, a Transport Scotland official said:

"Our intention was to issue the draft plan last summer but Ministers were clear this should not happen before the election."

In other words, it was a blatant exercise in electioneering.

The motion is concerned with the introduction of a new Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service. The missing link ferry campaign, which has been driven by the four community councils on South Uist, is to be congratulated for its campaigning work and for making quite an impression at the recent SNP conference.

The strong feeling on South Uist is that Mallaig should be the main destination port. A journey time of three hours and 20 minutes to the mainland is clearly attractive and would give the islands an economic boost. Indeed, one Uist businessman lost out on two work contracts totalling £120,000 because of the lack of sailing opportunities. However, the statement in the draft plan that

"we have no specific proposals for the Uists"

will be a hammer blow to lobbyists. The SNP's Angus MacNeil and Alasdair Allan have both called for a trial service, saying that it would be

"fantastic to see a ferry between Mallaig and Lochboisdale".

The Government should produce proposals for a trial service and a thorough analysis of the route's success, and it should consider any unintended consequences to pre-existing routes.

Dave Thompson: Will the member give way?

Jim Hume: I am sorry. I do not have much time.

There has been £35 million spent on the ferry infrastructure on islands including Eigg, but the consultation proposes reducing that car-ferry service from five crossings a week to one. It also proposes reducing the car ferry service between Mull and Ardnamurchan to a passenger-only service, even though it is used by more than 5,000 vehicles a year. On the one hand, the Government's baffling choices in distributing money from the bus service operators grant will obviously damage urban areas and, on the other, its proposals for the shake-up of vital ferry services could undo 25 years of hard work by local communities and the Highland Council.

Elaine Murray: Will the member take an intervention?

Jim Hume: I will take a very short intervention.

Elaine Murray: Will Mr Hume confirm that in 2006 Tavish Scott, the then Minister for Transport in the Labour-Liberal Scottish Executive, discussed with Alasdair Morrison proposals to introduce the service in question?

Jim Hume: Elaine Murray is absolutely correct.

Kenneth Gibson: So what happened?

Jim Hume: Unfortunately, what happened was that the SNP Government got in in 2007.

The Government also asserts that the above-inflation hike in fares is down to the increase in fuel prices. However, when there was a previous increase in fuel prices—pre-election—the Government managed to cap fare increases at the level of inflation.

The way in which the Government has chosen to extend the RET scheme is unacceptable, so it should, in the interests of fairness, think again. My colleague George Lyon MEP, who was mentioned by Mike MacKenzie, was right to ask the EU competition authorities to investigate implementation of that extension. I note that the European transport commissioner will investigate the matter.

The fare increase for commercial vehicles might be even more devastating and could mean increases of up to 172 per cent for heavy goods vehicles on some routes. How are businesses supposed to absorb such costs?

Dr Allan: Will the member give way?

Jim Hume: I apologise that I cannot, as I have only 17 seconds left.

In conclusion, that massive increase will have a knock-on effect on the cost of living in our remote communities. When we have businessmen coming together to form the Outer Hebrides transport group in order to highlight the impact of such

decisions, it is time for the minister to wake up and smell the coffee.

10:03

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I declare that my wife works part-time for Caledonian MacBrayne, but is permanently based in Gourock.

Scotland's ferry network has been used as a political football for many years; indeed, we can trace all this right back to the long-running saga of the Gourock to Dunoon route, which predated the Parliament's establishment. Now we have the debate over the Lochboisdale to Mallaig route which, as we have heard, was abolished in 2001 by the Labour-Lib Dem Scottish Executive.

Although I am greatly interested in the economic arguments that have been made this morning, I believe that Scotland needs to get to grips with its ferry network once and for all. I am not going to stand here and propose the perfect solution for our network or, more particularly, speak to the lack of a Lochboisdale to Mallaig route that is highlighted in the Labour motion. However, Scotland needs a sustainable, robust and affordable network—which does not necessarily mean that there should be no subsidy—and I am confident in the approach that was taken by the Scottish Government in the ferries review in 2009 and that the draft plan, which was published in December and is still out for consultation, is correct and should continue.

I agree whole-heartedly that MSPs—constituency and regional—have a right to campaign on behalf of their constituents—after all, that is why we are here. It is imperative, particularly during a consultation period, that we lobby on behalf of constituents and communities and that we put forward a strong and balanced case.

The motion mentions the “economic need” for a new Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service. I do not doubt the ability of MSPs from all sides of the chamber to progress economic arguments for many things, nor do I doubt the ability of outside bodies to do the same, but I know from experience—I am sure that others do, too—that the economic argument can be the hardest part of a case to make, regardless of what the issue is. For rural and smaller communities, the economic argument can be that bit harder to make. When it comes down to a business decision, the numbers need to stack up.

We all have projects that we think, for a number of reasons, it is vital to progress, but ensuring that the numbers work is key to getting to the next stage. I stress that I do not for one minute dispute the economic argument that has been pursued this morning but, as we know, our belts have been

tightened as a result of budget cuts from Westminster. Those cuts have put added responsibility on ministers and the Scottish Government to ensure that they get the best economic returns for their expenditure.

I am sure that, across the chamber, we all wish that we had more money to spend on projects. I know that the demands that have come from some quarters in the recent past would require more than £1 billion of extra expenditure, but no indication has been given of where that money would come from. The Government and Parliament need to deal with the reality that less money is coming to us.

I am sure that the Labour Party or individual Labour MSPs will have contributed to the consultation exercises that have been held so far. If they have not, they still have time to contribute to the consultation on the draft ferries plan before it closes at the end of next week. I am sure that they, along with others, wish for a comprehensive ferries strategy that covers the country.

From a West Scotland perspective, I hope that more shipbuilding work will come to Port Glasgow, and I will certainly lobby the Government for that to happen. The recent announcement of the £20 million order for the world's first two hybrid ferries for Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd was excellent news, which will help employment prospects in Inverclyde. The draft ferries plan shows an exciting future for the ferry network, with newer ferries being required to replace older vessels, as well as the prospect of new routes. That opens up further opportunities in Inverclyde which, as we all know, builds first-class vessels of which all Scotland can be proud. After the loss of orders in the past—before 2007—for Scottish fisheries protection vessels and for some CalMac ferries, I am glad that the tide has begun to turn. I am sorry for the pun.

It has been an interesting debate and I commend Labour for bringing it to the chamber, but I support the Scottish Government's amendment, because we need a robust ferries review and a more robust network around Scotland.

10:08

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am glad that Labour has chosen to debate the subject of the long-awaited Scottish ferries draft plan and I am especially glad that it has focused on a Lochboisdale to Mallaig service.

Ferry services are vital to the people who live on our islands. As other members have done, I urge my constituents in the Highlands and Islands, including supporters of a Lochboisdale to Mallaig service, to ensure that they make their views

known to the Scottish Government by the time the consultation closes at the end of next week. It is extremely important that ministers hear loudly and clearly the views and concerns of people and businesses that use the ferries. I agree with members who have talked about the crucial nature of regular, affordable and reliable ferry services for remote and island communities. The viability, sustainability and economic development of those areas are strongly tied to the connectivity that the ferries provide.

I am aware that the Government is emphasising that the proposals in the draft plan are all just suggestions, but it is a matter of regret that quite a number of the details of the plan have caused concern and alarm in parts of my region, and that only the vaguest of references is made to introducing a Lochboisdale to Mallaig service.

As others have said, the Scottish Crofting Federation has described the review as "lamentable" and has said that its general thrust seems to be

"one of withdrawing and diminishing routes in peripheral areas."

I share the concern of the SCF and of other MSPs about the possible withdrawal of the vehicle ferry between Kilchoan and Tobermory and the review of the popular route between Mull and Lochaline, and I strongly support Mary Scanlon's comments on the Mallaig to Lochboisdale route. That service would increase choice for local residents and tourists and could be a real plus not just for South Uist but for all of the Western Isles.

I want also to emphasise the importance of the existing services from Oban to the Western Isles. May I make a special plea for my constituents on the Isle of Barra, including Angus Brendan MacNeil MP and Councillor Donald Manford? They might both vote SNP, but should they not have a better service than one that runs on only three days a week?

In addition, I will take this opportunity to speak up for my constituents in Mid Argyll, with reference to Kenneth Gibson's speech. Many of them are deeply worried about the possible removal of the ferry between Claonaig and Lochranza on Arran. That could hit the economy of both Mid Argyll and Arran and would completely remove connectivity between Argyll and Arran. It would also leave Arran without any ferry services if there were any problems at Brodick.

An additional service that is suggested in the plan can be cautiously welcomed—namely the service between Campbeltown and the Ayrshire coast. That is an idea that I and my colleague Councillor Donald Kelly have backed consistently for some years. It would be a positive move for Kintyre, given that successive Scottish

Governments have patently failed to make any progress in re-establishing the Campbeltown to Ballycastle service that existed under the Conservatives. However, local people in Campbeltown and Kintyre are very clear that a route between Campbeltown and, perhaps, Troon should run for five days a week, thereby becoming a popular service. I hope that the ministers can take that idea on board.

In conclusion, today's short debate has been welcome and useful in allowing members to speak up on behalf of their constituents' concerns on some very important issues, including the failure to recognise the potential importance of a Lochboisdale to Mallaig service. I urge ferry users and constituents from across my region and elsewhere to take part in the consultation before the end of next week. This consultation seems to have gone on for ever, but I repeat that it closes at the end of next week.

10:12

Alex Neil: First, let me place the debate in context as regards, in general terms, two of the big challenges that are faced by people in the island communities and by the Government. The first is the substantial hike in fuel duty, with a 3p hike confirmed in the budget yesterday for August, which will have a devastating impact on the island communities throughout Scotland. The Tories and the Liberal Democrats have a lot to answer for in supporting that. Secondly, the 33 per cent reduction in our capital allocation has had a direct impact on our ability to invest in new ferry services in different parts of Scotland at the speed and on the scale that we would like. Those are the challenges that we face as a Government. They are not self-made challenges, but the result of policies that were introduced by Alistair Darling and supported by George Osborne and Nick Clegg.

I want to make it absolutely clear—I hope that people will read my lips—that, as we said in the draft ferries review, we will listen to what people say in all their submissions, including on the possibility of reintroducing a Lochboisdale to Mallaig service. However, there is no escaping the reality of the cost of reintroducing that service as a dedicated service. The capital cost is at least £26 million and the annual resource cost is between £3.5 million and £4 million. If we were to make a decision to allocate money to that service, we would need to take it from elsewhere. None of the Opposition parties has in any way begun to address the cost or from where we would reallocate the funding.

The report that was produced in May 2005—an independent report by Halcrow—stated the

dilemma about the crossing very clearly. Let me quote the executive summary:

“It is also clear however that the vast majority of the demand for the new service is abstracted from existing services, i.e. the Lochmaddy - Uig and Castlebay - Oban routes. Only a small proportion of traffic is generated traffic”

and therefore the impact on other services could be quite dramatic.

Jamie McGrigor: Will the minister give way?

Alex Neil: I do not have much time, unfortunately.

We have to take what Halcrow said into consideration, because our responsibility is to consider the totality of the ferry services. I do not want to take action in one area that will have a damaging impact on other areas. The survey work that we did in the run-up to the publication of the draft ferries review showed clearly that the majority of people are satisfied with the existing service and 10 per cent fewer people want it to be replaced by the proposed service, as Kenny Gibson said.

Rhoda Grant *rose—*

Jamie McGrigor *rose—*

Alex Neil: I do not have time for interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you time, if you want it, minister.

Alex Neil: Thank you very much indeed, Presiding Officer. You are extremely generous.

I will give way to Sir Jamie McGrigor in a minute. I am always deferential to Scotland's aristocracy—and I am worried about Sir Jamie, because he might lose his housing benefit if he is living in an underoccupied castle.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps you should stick to the subject of the debate, minister.

Alex Neil: The Labour Party proposes a trial. I can see the merit of having a trial service. However, we must decide whether it would be a trial of a dedicated service, with a dedicated ferry that would run only on that route, or a trial rerouting of existing services. There is a debate to be had on that, but members should not underestimate the capital costs and resource costs or, more important, the implications for people in the islands. The rerouting of existing services, albeit well intentioned, might do more damage than good.

I give way to Sir Jamie.

Jamie McGrigor: I thank the minister for his compliment.

An enormous amount of money has been spent on the road from Fort William to Mallaig. Is it not a

shame that it cannot be connected to the islands by a ferry?

Alex Neil: It connects to the small isles and to Skye. I recognise the importance of the totality of the infrastructure. Decisions on ferry services cannot be made in isolation. Access to piers and harbours on the mainland and on the islands is important. If I had a bottomless pit of money I would invest much more—

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Not if we had independence.

Alex Neil: We will have more money when we are independent, and we will be able to do much more. After yesterday's budget, many people in Scotland will be a lot worse off. I am not talking about the millionaires on the Tory benches. Every granny in Scotland who saved for her company pension will be a lot worse off.

The reality is that we must be responsible. Any changes that are made must be properly planned and thought out. I have made it clear and I repeat that we are listening carefully to what the campaigners from South Uist and elsewhere are saying about the reintroduction of a Lochboisdale to Mallaig service and the possibility of a trial service. We will engage with them after the consultation period, on the pros and cons—because there are cons as well as pros, not least the capital costs and resource costs of reintroducing a dedicated service, which need to be addressed.

The Labour Party should at least conduct the debate in an honest way. I know from Mr Russell, who was misquoted by Elaine Murray earlier, and from other people, that the people of South Uist are pretty fed up with their comments being manipulated by the press and politicians. We need an honest debate about how we take matters forward.

David Stewart: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Alex Neil: I am happy to give way to Mr Stewart, if the Presiding Officer permits me to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I permit you, but please be brief, Mr Stewart.

David Stewart: Thank you. Does the cabinet secretary accept that Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd has the ability to lease vessels on the international market, and that it is important that the Scottish Government considers better utilisation of vessels, so that we can exploit new opportunities for routes?

Alex Neil: I absolutely agree, which is precisely why, when we publish the results of our ferries review, we will simultaneously publish a long-term

ferries investment plan. That has not been done by any previous Government.

We are at one with everyone in the community in South Uist and elsewhere on improving the ferry service. We will look seriously at campaigners' proposals for a Lochboisdale to Mallaig service. We will talk to them about the pros and cons and we will reach a decision based on the needs of all the islanders on the west coast of Scotland.

10:20

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): This is the second time that we have returned to the issue of ferry services in Labour business in the past few weeks. Once more, it has yielded a good debate on an important issue.

We have returned to the subject to highlight an improvement that we and many others wish to see in our ferry services. These are lifeline services for our island communities, which is why we oppose the removal of the RET for hauliers because, in effect, it will be a tax on island households. It is why we propose today that a new additional ferry service be established between Lochboisdale and Mallaig. Disappointingly, the cabinet secretary talked down that proposal throughout his speech.

More important than our proposal for the establishment of that route is the overwhelming support that it has locally. It is not just us saying this; it is people who have come to Parliament today from the missing link campaign. As Elaine Murray said in her excellent opening speech, four community councils—Benbecula, Bornish, Lochboisdale and Eriskay—have joined Stòras Uibhist to form the Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry group, and 1,500 people have signed a petition calling for the service to be reintroduced. As Elaine Murray said, the population of South Uist is only 1,950, so that is a phenomenal level of support. It may even dwarf the percentage of the population that is likely to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on the referendum.

David Stewart: The member will be aware that when Huw Francis gave evidence to the Public Petitions Committee he made the strong point that piloting the route on a temporary basis was an excellent way of assessing the real demand, rather than the demand that is picked up in some abstract economic report.

Richard Baker: Absolutely, and of course that point has been supported previously by SNP members. I will come to that later.

We believe that the ferry group makes a powerful case. It argues that

"Eriskay, Benbecula and South Uist are some of the most remote and economically fragile areas of Scotland"

and that

“it is unacceptable that the only direct ferry service from South Uist to the mainland of Scotland operates only four days a week and can take up to 7.5 hours to reach Oban—the worst provision of any lifeline ferry service in Scotland.”

It also makes a strong case about the benefits that a new service would bring, saying that it would

“support the local economy and boost the committed efforts of an island community that has been working towards its own economic regeneration by taking ownership of the South Uist estate in 2006.”—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 6 September 2011; c 70.]

Alex Neil: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Baker: Unlike the cabinet secretary, I will happily take an intervention.

Alex Neil: When Labour was in power for eight years in this Parliament, why did it not do any of these things?

Richard Baker: The fact is that the ferry broke down and we tried to replace it. The cabinet secretary's Government has not bothered. I will return to that later. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Richard Baker: Again and again, the cabinet secretary has misrepresented the history of the route.

We believe that the Scottish Government needs to support the local economy and boost the efforts of an island community that has done so much for its own economy.

Poor transport links continue to constrain the benefits that investment has brought to the islands. As an example, the group referred to the constraints and capacity of the current services, which deter potential ferry users from travelling to the Western Isles at all because desired sailings are fully booked. Hotel operators regularly report bookings being cancelled because potential guests cannot book a ferry to reach the islands. It is clear that the demand is there. With a frequent daily ferry service to Lochboisdale, the constraints on the tourism sector would be significantly reduced, particularly on the important Saturday changeover day. If the status quo remains, those constraints on the local economy will remain in place, too.

A new service would not only benefit island residents but boost the area economically. A Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service would significantly cut travel times for business users, tourist visitors and residents on all the major routes to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness. It would encourage more people in Scotland to visit a beautiful part of our country and increase the impact of the significant investment that has already been made in the area.

Since the community purchase of the island estate, Stòras Uibhist, in partnership with Western Isles Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Government, has directly secured more than £20 million of investment from the public and private sectors. The new service would provide a further, much-needed economic boost, and the Scottish Government would capitalise on its investment if it played a role in securing the new service for the area. The new service would also be important to the local fishing and fish farming industries in providing more routes to market.

We agree with the Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry group that the benefits of the new service are clear. That is why we are bewildered that it is not referred to in the ferry services draft plan, which refers to many other potential changes to ferry services, and that the case for the new route has not found favour with the Scottish ministers, particularly in light of statements by the SNP's Angus Brendan MacNeil. Once again, in a ferries debate, I find myself quoting what he said, which is against the Scottish Government's position:

“The need and case for a Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry gets stronger each year”.

Dr Allan has participated in the debate to refer to the case that many of his constituents have made for the establishment of the service, but the amendment that he supports makes no commitment on that; it does not even provide for the establishment of a trial, for which Dr Allan and Mr MacNeil have previously announced their support. The SNP has a track record of warm words about a new service and failing to deliver.

Under the previous Scottish Executive, Alasdair Morrison and Tavish Scott held talks on the proposal. In the incoming SNP Government, Stewart Stevenson, as the responsible minister, indicated after dialogue with Peter Peacock that £1 million was available for a new service and invited a submission from Stòras Uibhist on the new route. The SNP then rafted back. It argued that a ferry was not available and then, as Rhoda Grant said, the £1 million disappeared when the community identified a vessel that could be used. The Scottish Government's position is therefore extremely weak.

Whatever the Scottish Government's amendment says about welcoming views on a new service, the draft ferry services plan makes it clear that it does not feature, despite there being many proposals for changes in ferry services elsewhere. Indeed, as Elaine Murray and Mary Scanlon have pointed out, paragraph 150 of the draft plan goes out of its way to state:

“We have considered whether a Mallaig to Lochboisdale service could become the principal route for the Uists and Benbecula.”

It goes on to rule that out in favour of the status quo. However, we are not calling for a replacement of the status quo; we are calling for a new, additional service.

The tack that the minister has taken ignores the fact that 83 per cent of residents in South Uist want shorter journey times, as the campaigners remind us. That response is despite the call for a new route being backed by representatives of all parties. We understood that Mike Russell supported the campaign as well, but he seems to have changed his mind. He seems to have been given to doing that recently.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Will the member give way?

Richard Baker: No. There are things that Mr Russell needs to hear. I will continue.

We believe that it is very much worth the Scottish Government's making a commitment to a Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry service. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please allow the member to be heard.

Richard Baker: It would be good if Mike Russell gained some consistency in his approach to politics for once.

If the Scottish Government is serious about ensuring that there is a clear focus on economic growth in our rural areas—we hope that it is, and Mike Russell should be serious about that—the initiative that we are discussing is exactly the kind of initiative that should be supported. It has the backing of the local authority and local residents. They have not simply given their voices to the campaign; they have delivered investment in their area, and through the community purchase of the island, Stòras Uibhist has shown its commitment to the welfare and future of its community. The Scottish Government should share that commitment. It is clear that there is widespread support for the service, and the opportunity is too important to be passed by for communities that need our support.

Earlier, Alex Neil said, “read my lips”. Members should remember what happened to the politician who said, “Read my lips”. If members are genuine about supporting a new ferry service, there is only one course of action. It is perfectly clear that they should vote for the Labour motion and a vital ferry service.

Children

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02430, in the name of Johann Lamont, on children.

I will allow members a moment to find their seats and their notes. Ms Lamont, you have 10 minutes.

10:29

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Thank you for your forbearance, Presiding Officer.

In a speech to the Scottish National Party conference in Glasgow, the First Minister said that he would meet his manifesto pledge from 2007 to increase the number of hours of free nursery education for every three and four-year-old to 600 hours at some point after 2014. Given his commitment to that, I am rather surprised that he is not at his place to participate in, or at least listen to, the debate.

In that speech, the First Minister also quoted Nye Bevan. One thing that we will find out today is whether the First Minister fits the description in another quotation from Nye Bevan, in which he said of Harold Macmillan:

“The Prime Minister has an absolute genius for putting flamboyant labels on empty luggage.”

Let us see whether the First Minister has the same genius.

That promise—that reannouncement of a promise—cannot be an empty one. The First Minister has not actually promised to deliver on it in two years' time. What he has pledged is a bill in two years' time—a bill that he does not need, because he has the power to deliver today.

I am bemused by the SNP amendment to our motion, because it rolls back on the First Minister's commitment to 600 hours of free nursery education. It talks broadly about more childcare and more flexibility, but the reality is that the Government could provide that now. SNP ministers are asking SNP back benchers to vote for an amendment that dilutes the First Minister's position.

The First Minister and his SNP back benchers need to understand that children are not just for conferences. The commitment is critically important. It is bizarre that, in opposing our position, the SNP is denying the commitment that the First Minister made at his own conference.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): I do not want to shoot the member's fox so early on, but I say unequivocally and without fear of contradiction

by anybody that the commitment stands as made and will be delivered. We should get on to the substance of the debate rather than the smears of the debate.

Johann Lamont: In that case, I expect that the education secretary will join me in opposing the SNP amendment and supporting our motion. This is not a smear. Our motion makes it absolutely clear, and the Scottish Parliament information centre agrees with us, that we can do what the First Minister pledged to do right now.

Michael Russell: No, we cannot.

Johann Lamont: Yes, we can. Without getting into pantomime with the education secretary, I say that we can swap advice, but the advice that we have received from SPICe shows clearly that that can be done. One has to ask why the education secretary would be so anxious to prove that he cannot do what the First Minister said he was so keen to do.

To the Government, the seven years between the manifesto pledge and the aspiration of delivery might seem a short space of time. Perhaps that is the fastest that the First Minister can move. After all, the biggest announcement of his Administration so far is that, after its five years in government, we can wait another 1,000 days for his long-promised referendum. The First Minister likes to talk about his positivity and claim that all his opponents are negative. I explain to him that there is nothing so negative in politics as a promise not kept, however many times the promise is remade.

Let me explain why, Scotland having waited five years for the First Minister to fulfil his pledge, to wait another two years at least is not just unnecessary but unacceptable. The reality today is that Scotland lags behind our neighbours in the United Kingdom when it comes to childcare. Scots parents have fewer hours of free childcare each week. They have the 12.5 hours a week that have been delivered by Alex Salmond as opposed to the 15 hours a week that have been delivered by the hapless Nick Clegg in England—not a man known for holding to his word.

When our parents pay for the childcare that they need on top of free nursery education, they pay at rates as high as those in the richest parts of the UK. Scottish parents pay a higher proportion of average earnings than even parents in London. Our aspiration must be free nursery education within flexible and affordable wrap-around childcare. The free 15 hours of nursery education must be the next stage towards that.

I am not sure that the First Minister really understands the pressures that Scottish families are facing. Working mothers and families have busy lives, juggling the demands of work with the

nursery timetable, and they face increasing pressures on household budgets by way of increases in fuel, food and energy costs at a time of pay freezes and reduced hours. Making all of that work can be like spinning plates, and it can be achieved only through meticulous planning, careful budgeting and often the good grace of family members—often grandparents—and friends, who get children to and from the nursery gates.

Many people find that they work simply to cover childcare costs, making no significant net gain when those costs are deducted from salaries, but realising the benefits of nursery care for their children and the benefits of work for themselves. Increasingly, many people are not that lucky, and the reality is that it makes financial sense for them no longer to work and fund additional childcare.

Scotland's unemployment crisis throws up big numbers, but behind those big numbers are thousands of individual stories, each with its own complexities and challenges. The huge drop in female employment tells us that many women are leaving the job market through natural turnover, whether it be through retirement or to start a family, and they are not being replaced because it is no longer affordable for working mothers to go back to work.

Despite the generous advances that were made in the area by the Labour Government in 1997, the flexible and affordable childcare that people require simply does not exist. Here in Scotland, we face some of the highest childcare costs in the United Kingdom and the highest female unemployment rate. That cannot be by accident.

The First Minister spoke to that vulnerability last month when he offered to increase the number of free hours to Scottish families. That seemed to be a welcome gesture to help to mitigate the pressures that childcare costs are placing on Scottish families but, cruelly, the First Minister made it a referendum bribe rather than the immediate help that working mothers need today. He proved once again that he does not care about Scottish families, that he does not understand Scotland's working mums, and that the challenges that face the Scottish people are simply stepping stones to separation—his one and only obsession.

The First Minister has an opportunity today to prove me wrong, and to work with us and the other parties to tackle an issue that we all agree is a problem facing hard-pressed families. Today is one occasion on which the Administration has the chance to close the gap between rhetoric and reality. I ask all members to take that chance and start delivering for Scottish families now.

Often, it appears that the highest functioning part of the Administration is not the health department or education, and not finance or

enterprise. The highest functioning part of the Administration is its public relations department—where the relationship between rhetoric and reality is less like that of distant cousins and more like that of separate species; where the falseness of a claim does not stop it being repeated; where no link can be too tenuous; and where when failure is finally admitted, it is regarded as a shovel-ready subject that can be buried as long as the day is bad enough. The spin doctors are the highest functioning part of a Government that promises a better tomorrow, but fails to deliver today.

We want to help the Administration to stop being a *mañana* Government. We believe that the Government can and must deliver now on its promise of better childcare, without any further unnecessary delay. According to SPICe, increasing the number of hours of free care for three and four-year-olds could cost as little as £40 million, which is just an eighth of 1 per cent of the Government's overall budget. We will work with the Government now to find that cash in the budget and start delivering for families today.

The truth is that children who were born in Scotland in the year that the First Minister made his pledge will not benefit from it, and nor will those who were born the year after—or the year after that, or the year after that. Children who were born in the year that the First Minister was elected will be halfway through primary school before he starts to deliver on his nursery care promise, unless we take decisive action today.

The gap between promise and reality need not be like that. In 1997, Labour promised a free nursery place for every four-year-old by 1999 and we delivered. We promised a free place for every three-year-old by 2002, and we delivered and made that a statutory requirement in the same year.

The SNP seems to be keen to match the previous Labour Government's language of aspiration, but that is just an election campaign con if it does not match the record of delivery. Separating Scotland from the rest of the UK has been the First Minister's key aim all his political life. I do not agree with him, but I respect his view. However, he cannot put Scotland on pause while he waits for a time when he reckons he might win his referendum. He cannot take promises that he pledged to fulfil by last year, toss them into some date after the referendum, and expect us to put up with it.

Scots families need help now and it is not right to force them to wait for that help, or for the Government to pretend that it cannot do anything about it in the meantime. It is not right for the First Minister to make it a condition of that help that people will get it only if they vote in the way that he wants in the referendum.

The broken promises of today and yesterday will perhaps be made good, but only if the people of Scotland vote in the way that the First Minister wants at some point in the future. Scotland's families do not deserve to be put at the end of the childcare queue in the United Kingdom and at the end of the First Minister's list of priorities. We will work with the Scottish Government to put Scotland's families first and to deliver for Scotland's children. We will work with the Government to close the gap between its rhetoric and the reality that people in this country face every day. The First Minister has been stating his childcare aspirations for more than five years. If members vote for the Scottish Labour motion, we can turn aspiration into delivery today.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that an extension to available nursery hours for pre-5 children is an important contribution to their educational development; notes the commitment made by the First Minister to extend available hours; further notes that the Scottish Government previously extended hours in 2007 through the use of a statutory instrument, the Provision of School Education for Children under School Age (Prescribed Children) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2007, SSI 2007/396; recognises that there is no need to use primary legislation to increase the number of hours of pre-school education available to pre-5 children, and considers that the Scottish Government should give early effect to the commitment made by the First Minister by introducing a statutory instrument before the end of June 2012.

10:40

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): I am happy to have another opportunity to set out in more detail what we seek to achieve with our expanded early learning and childcare commitment and why we need primary legislation to do that. I will explain the facts to Labour. It is a pity that Labour has struck such a negative tone in the debate.

First and foremost, with our pledge to increase early learning and childcare provision to 600 hours, we intend to bring about a transformational change in the way in which provision for our youngest children is delivered. Our approach is not simply about increasing the number of hours of pre-school education that children receive; it is far more comprehensive and ambitious than that—it is about taking strides on our journey towards making Scotland the best country to grow up in. Despite the negativity, I remain hopeful that others will work with and support us in achieving that ambition.

Johann Lamont: I am positive that I can help the First Minister with his commitment, which was:

"Conference, we will place into the new Children's Bill introduced to Parliament next year a statutory guarantee of over 600 hours of free nursery education for every Scottish

3 and 4 year old and for every looked after 2 year old in our land.”

We can do that now, as a starting point and then build on that. We want to help the Government on the issue, and we can do it now.

Aileen Campbell: The First Minister also said in his conference speech that the system must be “flexible in its delivery”. I will go on to explain why Labour has kind of missed the point in the debate.

The current situation is based on three and four-year-olds being entitled to 475 hours of pre-school education a year. However, as Bronwen Cohen said in an article in *The Scotsman* last week,

“In the early years, care and education are indivisible.”

She is right, which is why we must legislate to break down the current barriers. We need to ensure that all three and four-year-olds, as well as looked-after two-year-olds, receive flexible, high-quality early learning and childcare that meets their developmental needs and the needs of working parents. We need to move beyond the rigidity of a system that is wholly tied to schooldays and terms. Increased hours are important, but the bigger prize is the flexibility that we can achieve through primary legislation.

Parents and families tell us that they require flexibility. We need to support them if we want Scotland to thrive and grow. We are legislating not to tinker round the edges but to bring about a fundamental and positive shift that delivers for families and for the children of Scotland. As the First Minister said when he announced our intentions, that is

“a statement of faith and commitment to the future.”

Last week, Labour spoke of a need for a Scottish model of childcare, which is what we seek to develop. However, we need to do it properly and we need to get it right. Primary legislation is vital to deal with the fundamental and complex issues of flexibility. By taking forward the issue through the children’s services bill, we will provide the necessary long-term focus that the children of Scotland deserve.

To deliver the fundamental change that is needed, we must engage with the people who will deliver and use the services. We will have a full and proper discussion during the consultation process and will develop our plans accordingly. We will engage with local authorities to develop a system that offers the increased entitlement and, crucially, a system that is more flexible and better integrated across early learning and childcare. At the core of our thinking will be the role of parents and the home environment.

Our proposals to legislate are bold and exciting but, in the here and now, there is much that we are doing and will do to make progress. From

April, we will deliver increased early learning and childcare provision for our most vulnerable two-year-olds and their parents and carers. This year, we will deliver community-based early learning and childcare solutions in the shape of the £4.5 million communities and families fund. As I outlined in the debate last week, we will develop a series of public-social partnerships—PSPs—that will cover a range of early learning and childcare issues to meet parents’ needs. Those include the issues of parents who are on low incomes and/or who are in poverty; parents and carers who work shifts; out-of-school care, including holiday clubs; parents and families living in rural areas; and outdoor or nature kindergartens.

I am also aware of the important role for employers in providing flexibility for parents. As John Park highlighted in last week’s debate, a lack of flexible working and childcare opportunities can impact on the ability of families to engage economically—the economic arguments in the debate should not be ignored. That is why, as I also announced last week, we will hold a national business summit in June to explore new ways of incentivising and encouraging more flexible working in the private sector, including the promotion of childcare vouchers. That is action that the Government is taking now to address childcare needs.

Our early years task force will play a critical role in taking forward our aspiration for transformational change in and through the early years. It brings together experts from across civic Scotland, including health professionals, police and our partners in local government. That body disregards political boundaries, and I am pleased that Malcolm Chisholm is a member of it, because the early years are far more important than party politics. The task force has agreed its vision and priorities, which were published on the Scottish Government’s website and issued to key local delivery partners last week. The paper builds on some of the priorities in the early years framework and restates our commitment to key strands of work including the parenting strategy, the play talk read campaign and the further development of family support, early learning and childcare provision.

The task force met on Tuesday to discuss increasing early learning and childcare provision and our commitment to expand that to 600 hours. The task force members were supportive of that, but they were very clear that flexibility in the delivery of additional provision is vital if we are to achieve the impacts that we seek. Julie Wild of the National Parent Forum of Scotland, who is also a member of the early years task force, said:

“We welcome the increase in hours, but we especially welcome the added flexibility that the new proposals will bring for children and their parents. Flexibility is crucial to

enabling parents to have a good work/life balance and to ensuring that services can be tailored towards individual circumstances. That is what families in Scotland need."

Those are words that all members should take notice of.

We have within our grasp the opportunity to make an enormous positive difference for families in Scotland. I hope that, despite some of the comments that have been made so far, we can work together to put the needs of the children and families of our nation to the fore as we continue to strive towards making Scotland the very best place for children to grow up in.

I move amendment S4M-02430.1, to leave out from "there is no need" to end and insert:

" , to provide a statutory right to more flexible early learning, primary legislation is required; welcomes the Scottish Government's intention to provide this through the Children's Services Bill to be introduced next year, and further recognises the importance of developing early learning and childcare by working in partnership with local authorities, nursery and childcare providers to ensure that both the developmental needs of Scotland's children and the varied needs of parents are met."

10:47

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

When I was doing my teacher training, which was not exactly yesterday, there was a section about skills to use in the classroom, which included a unit about how to use repetition. We were told that repetition could be both a secret weapon and the cause of our downfall. It could be a secret weapon if we used it effectively in stressing the most important points in our argument, but it could be our downfall if we were merely to repeat the obvious and lose some of the essential facts. That turns out to be true also in politics this morning, notwithstanding the fact that we are all fully agreed about the importance of the topic. We had a good debate the last time that we debated the subject, although there were—as ever—political differences. If we have to repeat ourselves a little just seven days later, perhaps that will focus our minds more carefully on the key themes and the facts.

We are all agreed that early intervention is the crucial component in determining the future health, social wellbeing and educational achievement of any child. Last week, several members pointed to various aspects of the wealth of evidence that supports that view. I reread the *Official Report* from last week and, although I agree with some of Johann Lamont's comments, I note that the main themes in that debate were the quantity of the hours on offer, the quality of provision within those hours, the flexibility to allow parents to take up their entitlements and, crucially, the need to ensure that childcare policies articulate with our other social and economic policies. The motion

and the amendment both reflect that we probably need to take slightly different approaches to the quantitative and qualitative aspects of that care. I do not see any difficulties in that. They are not mutually exclusive, and the advice that we have been given—both by SPICe and by some of the legal team—is that they can work effectively alongside each other.

However, I hope that we can probe the SNP a little further on exactly what provisions it foresees in the children's services bill on flexibility in how parents can take up their entitlements and on the use of qualified care staff, which obviously has implications for contracts and so on. Having that information before the division bell rings this evening would be helpful.

It is clear that extending the total number of hours matters not just because it is one way of ensuring that we provide more opportunities for our children but because it will allow us to catch up with and—should the Scottish Government succeed in keeping its manifesto commitment—overtake the progress that has been made south of the border. That is particularly important for parents to whom no partner or relative is immediately available to assist in raising their children.

The Liberals, who are absent today, were right last week to highlight the regional variations that we face in Scotland in the supply and the cost of childcare. We all agree that that is unacceptable.

The solution to the childcare issue will necessarily involve an effective combination of the educational experience that is on offer to the child and the convenience to the parent and the family. That challenge, which—let us be honest—is not easy, should focus our minds.

If there is one driving force, it is the need to ensure that the hours that are on offer are provided by qualified professionals and that, in adjusting the hours and the flexibility within them, we are mindful of the contractual arrangements for care staff and, for children from the age of three, the demands of the curriculum for excellence. Balancing the educational and practical needs is not easy. That is why we need to consider what is and is not helpful in legislative and non-legislative processes.

I think that the desire is felt across the chamber to focus on the most disadvantaged children who do not get what they are entitled to, which can put untold pressures on the budgets of the poorest families in our society. That is why it is important that we provide the extra choice dimension, which we debated at length last week, so that we can support those who stand to benefit most and who are most responsive to the changing focus of

Government policy, by which I mean policy in Scotland and south of the border.

I mentioned last week that we should look at ideas from other countries and down south, where greater flexibility is available—not just in how we charge for care—to try to make the situation that little bit better. The debate is important and I will be interested in listening to more comments from the Scottish Government on how we will get such flexibility.

10:52

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): When I saw that we were to debate childcare again, I was worried that I would have a sense of déjà vu, but this week's debate is taking place in a different context. It is good to see that the Liberal Democrats have followed up their strongly held commitment to childcare in Scotland by not bothering to turn up for the debate this week.

Johann Lamont said that we need somehow to learn that children are not just for conferences and implied that the SNP does not really care about Scotland's children. As a father and an uncle, I found those comments rather unnecessary. No party or politician has a monopoly on caring about or wanting the best for Scotland's children. It ill behoves any politician—particularly a party leader—to try to make such a distinction and create some sort of clear blue water between the political parties.

The minister was right to make it clear that we want a constructive debate. There were at least glimmerings of constructiveness in Johann Lamont's speech, although there were not quite enough of them.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Was the member similarly concerned when he heard the First Minister, on his platform at the SNP conference, raising childcare very much as a political issue? Did the member decline to applaud then, or does what he said apply only when other party leaders speak on the subject?

Mark McDonald: Mr Smith has clearly been taking intervention lessons from Mr Findlay. Perhaps he should stop doing so.

It has to be said that at no point in the conference did the First Minister imply that other politicians or political parties did not care about Scotland's children. That is the distinction that I would draw in that regard. As the person who governs Scotland, the First Minister is perfectly entitled to make commitments to Scotland's children in a governmental and legislative context.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Urgh.

Mark McDonald: Mr Findlay might find talking about Scotland's children tiresome—

Neil Findlay: No, it is just Mr McDonald I find tiresome.

Mark McDonald: That is personal taste, and the feeling is mutual.

The key issue, as identified by the minister in her opening remarks, is the need to transform the system. The Children in Scotland briefing, which we all received this morning, highlights examples that illustrate why a commitment to 600 hours of early education is welcome. The message has to be put across that the key consideration is reforming the system and making it work better for parents. That is why there is a legislative context for the commitment to 600 hours. It is all very well for us to increase the hours that are available to children, but we must also ensure that the system works not only for children but for their parents, which means ensuring that flexibility is inherent in the arrangements.

The Children in Scotland briefing welcomes the fact that Scotland is the only United Kingdom nation that is currently represented on the European Commission thematic working group on early childhood education and care. It urges the Government to take inspiration from successful integrated strategies that have been adopted in a number of European countries. Although the commitment to 600 hours puts us at the vanguard in the UK context, we should have wider vision and be looking at strong international examples.

I have a three-year-old son who is currently in the nursery education system. In a selfish capacity, it would be easy for me to come to the chamber and say that we should increase the hours, as that would benefit him. However, I want a holistic system to be developed—something that is meaningful for Scotland's children. Boosting hours is key and will benefit children, but it is important to consider what lies behind that so that, when my one-year-old daughter goes into the system in two years' time, we will have put in place legislation to transform the system, to make it work for her and the rest of the children in Scotland who will be entering nursery education at that time, and for the parents of those children. That is why it is important that we get this right, and I hope that we can move forward on a constructive, cross-party basis on that.

10:57

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The difficulties that parents face in organising childcare came home to me this morning when I had my own crisis in organising childcare and thought that I might not be able to attend this debate.

I welcome the announcement that the Scottish Government intends to extend early years education to 600 hours a year, even though the Government's amendment today perhaps weakens that commitment. However, we should be clear about what the commitment means. It is good news in terms of access to good-quality nursery education. It contributes towards breaking the link between poverty and educational underachievement and it contributes to the learning, nurture, care, creativity and health of all children. Labour believes strongly in that agenda, which is why we extended nursery education to three-year-olds and vulnerable two-year-olds.

Although we support moves to extend provision, the question is, why wait? This is a commitment that fell by the wayside in the previous session but, as the Labour motion says, the Government could move much quicker on the policy. Of course there will be issues to overcome—capacity issues to be resolved, funding to be met, political leadership to be shown and priority to be given—but if those issues are all to be addressed in two years' time, why not get on with it now?

There are a couple of points that I want to make about this policy. We need to be clear about what it will deliver for families. It has been described as a childcare boost but, without proper integration of the childcare system, it does not contribute to the childcare solution for many families. We can value it for what it is. From three years of age, children are brought into the curriculum for excellence. Although delivery is varied, they will have access to qualified nursery teachers. If we value early education for the benefits that it brings to the child, we might ask why it is children of the more advantaged families who get the most benefit from the current system—they are the children who have access to a greater number of pre-school hours, largely through the private sector.

Secondly, although the policy is described as "free nursery hours", for many working parents who are trying to organise childcare, it certainly does not feel free. Many parents still pay the fees of mainly private nurseries while the child attends the school nursery, because of the lack of wraparound and flexible care. The fees are considerable. They are equivalent to private school fees, and represent a level of fee that parents will never have to pay again for any part of their child's education in Scotland.

We need to find a way to make the system work for parents as well as children. We need commitment to make the arrangements more flexible, but I recognise the challenges in that. If local authorities introduce more flexibility and approve more private nurseries to deliver provision, will that affect the viability of their own nurseries? How will public sector nurseries that

are oversubscribed be able to deliver additional provision? Will the increasing number of private nurseries delivering the curriculum break links with schools?

To make all this happen, the work of the early years task force is important, but the early years change fund must be transparent. Of the £250 million that was announced in the spending review, the Government's contribution is £50 million over the parliamentary session and the rest is up to local authorities and the national health service. However, at local authority level the contribution is varied. I understand that some authorities are identifying existing work and money as their contribution, while others are identifying new money, but that is money that is contributing to the gap in their budgets. The necessary change cannot be underfunded.

School wraparound care is important and needs to be improved and to be accessible and affordable but, unless we get early years childcare right, we run the risk of excluding mothers from the workplace. It is difficult enough for mothers with one child to work, but if they have more than one, it can be unsustainable, even for well-off families, which means that we are in danger of taking talent out of our economy. As John Park highlighted last week, part of the solution is more flexible workplaces that recognise family responsibilities; other countries do it and evidence suggests that it does not affect productivity but leads to more committed staff.

What are the solutions? We can tinker around the edges of the system that we have, we can extend provision here and there and we can rightly focus on particularly vulnerable groups of children. I was encouraged by the minister's comments about looking for a more flexible system, but my concern is that a clear commitment has been made to increase the amount of free nursery provision to 600 hours and we need to move forward more quickly on that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I am afraid that you will have to conclude.

Claire Baker: We perhaps need to be more radical. The Scandinavian model is universal early years provision. That is not free, but we should recognise that, for many families in Scotland, the solution that we are working with just now is not free either.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It would be courteous if front-bench members could limit their chats while back benchers are contributing to the debate. *[Applause.]*

11:01

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): It is good to get an ovation from Labour members before I have even started.

I hope that this is an important issue for all of us, whether or not we are parents, as I happen to be. Mark McDonald's comments about the language that we employ when we discuss the issue of children in a political debate were well made. We should not question the genuine interest in the issue of anyone participating in the debate. I use the phrase "participating in the debate" advisedly because, like Mark McDonald, I could not help but be struck by the absence of the Liberal Democrats, who were perfectly entitled to bring forward a debate on this issue last week. When I hosted a members' business debate on a similar issue in December, not a single Liberal Democrat took part. Without questioning the Liberal Democrats' genuine interest in the issue, I note that a clear pattern of absence is emerging.

I will place the debate in the context of what the Scottish Government has done on childcare provision. Progress has been made over the past four years, so let us not pretend that it has not. There has been an increase in the amount of free nursery provision of the order of 20 per cent, which has benefited some 100,000 children. The Scottish Government is focusing on preventative spend in the early years to help children and is working on a non-partisan, cross-party basis with the early years task force, as the minister outlined, and with the early years change fund to strengthen support for children and their families.

Of course, there is another context at this time. We can see what the Scottish Government is doing to help families, but we hear a lot about what is emanating from Westminster and about the positive work that is being done south of the border. Let us remind ourselves of what is emerging from Westminster through the welfare reform agenda: 84,900 households in Scotland will no longer be eligible for tax credits from April, which means that 118,700 children in Scotland will be affected, potentially pushing thousands more into living in poverty. Research by Save the Children found that 150,000 of the UK's poorest working mums could lose up to £68 a week under the UK Government's new universal tax credit system. I question how that is likely to assist in the affordability of childcare.

Last week, we debated "The Scottish Childcare Lottery", which was published on 27 February. The First Minister announced the additional support for childcare—which Save the Children welcomed—just a few days later on 10 March, and the minister has said that she is committed to making progress on the issue. It is clear that action has been taken

and that the Government is moving quickly to improve the situation.

On the issue of primary legislation, there is a great deal of focus on the commitment to increase the hours of provision. I understand why that is important, but we are perhaps forgetting the other side of the equation, which is the flexibility of childcare provision. That issue was raised by Save the Children, and it featured in the members' business debate that I brought to the chamber last year. It will take a little longer to get more flexible childcare provision, which is why we need primary legislation.

Members might call me cynical, but I wonder whether, if the commitment was not being put into primary legislation, Johann Lamont would stand up today and say that it was an outrage that it was not and that members were not getting a chance to have their say on the legislation.

Claire Baker rightly raised a number of genuine issues to do with childcare provision, which demonstrate why we must take just a little bit longer to get the legislation right.

11:06

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased that the Labour Party motion acknowledges the need to extend early years education. The SNP does, too, which is why we are committed to delivering the best childcare package in these islands.

The 600-hour commitment for all three and four-year-olds and looked-after two-year-olds is just the latest milestone in a process of real improvement under the SNP Government. The pledge builds on achievements since 2007—as Jamie Hepburn just outlined—when the SNP Government moved to increase free provision by 20 per cent. That is 20 per cent more than the previous Liberal and Labour Administration in Scotland, which could manage only 400 hours, despite having considerably more financial breathing space than the Government does at present.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Joan McAlpine says that progress has been made as there has been a 20 per cent increase in free provision. However, the 2007 SNP manifesto promised a 50 per cent increase. Does she accept that we are simply not doing enough, which is why we must take action today to deliver on the pledge that the SNP made in 2007?

Joan McAlpine: The reason why we are moving to legislate—to which the Labour Party seems to object—is that we are committed to delivering. If Neil Bibby really is concerned about delivery, he should support us in legislating for those 600 hours.

Our approach is about more than simply increasing the hours of provision, although that is vital to working parents. It is part of a strategy that has been developed with some of the leading experts in the field, and which dates back to the early years framework in 2008, which set out 10 elements of transformational change. One of those elements—and, I would argue, the most important—involves using early intervention to break the cycle of poverty and inequality for our young people.

I am very proud that the Government has taken an inclusive approach to such a vital issue by inviting respected individuals such as Malcolm Chisholm and Professor Susan Deacon to help us to find the best solutions together. We must use all the talents to meet the challenge. Professor Deacon's report, "Joining the dots: A better start for Scotland's children", was clear that the time for talking is over and it is now time for delivery. I was encouraged that the Government responded immediately to that report with a £6.8 million investment in an action fund that will support the third sector to deliver the services that parents and children need.

The issue of childcare provision is all about delivery and flexibility. We can promise all the hours we want, but that counts for nothing if the care that we offer is not flexible enough to cater for the real needs of real families. If we are serious about delivering flexible childcare and early years learning, we need legislation.

I agree that "The Scottish Childcare Lottery" demonstrated some shocking gaps and deficiencies in provision in Scotland. That is why the First Minister's response was so firm and focused: within 10 days of the report's publication, he promised to legislate for 600 hours a year. Only legislation will provide the assurance that the serious gaps that were highlighted in the report will be closed. We need legislation to ensure access to quality childcare all year round, as the minister said, and not just in the school term. We need it to help specific groups such as parents in rural areas, those who work shifts and those who care for other relatives. We need legislation in the children's bill to ensure that the needs of every child, however complex, are properly addressed.

The issue is too important for us to cross our fingers and hope for the best. We cannot afford not to deliver, and we must deliver in such a way as to ensure that provision is tailored to individuals and families. I said that I wanted to consider the issue in a wider context, because it is complex and challenging. It requires creative solutions such as the public-social partnerships that the minister has outlined. Such partnerships meet the challenge of delivery and allow the Government to work with its partners to meet specific needs.

It is about more than totting up hours; it is about changing the landscape. We are changing Scotland's early years landscape and moulding our country into a child-friendly and family-friendly shape, but let us not underestimate the challenge. It requires commitment, co-operation and a change in the law to make it happen.

11:10

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am glad that I have the opportunity to speak in the debate. As I said in the childcare debate last week, I am a working mother of three children and know how essential childcare is to parents and children. The opportunity to discuss its importance again is extremely welcome.

I have spoken to countless parents in Glasgow, which I represent—and, for that matter, to parents throughout the country—and I know that affordable, high-quality childcare is a top priority, especially given the economic strains that are being placed on hard-working families. I have also noticed that, over the past year or two, it is becoming an economic issue for people who were previously able to manage financially. If people who were previously getting by are now struggling, what does that mean for the people who have always needed slightly more support?

Last month, figures were released that showed that, in Scotland, more than 200 women a day were losing their jobs. The knock-on effect that that will have on children cannot be overestimated. In addition to that, Save the Children told us last week about working parents' mounting concerns about the Welfare Reform Bill, which will affect almost 4,500 children in Glasgow. For any of those women who have lost their jobs and are trying to find other employment, the cost of childcare will be a massive hurdle.

We know that there are worries and that there are issues that must be addressed now. That is why action must be taken straight away, not in two years' time. Five years ago, the SNP made a similar pledge that it did not keep. That cannot be allowed to happen again so, although I and my Labour colleagues are glad that the Scottish Government intends to increase childcare provision, members will forgive us for being a little concerned about the timeframe.

When I spoke in last week's debate on childcare, I explained that the Labour-led Glasgow City Council had already introduced a raft of positive and progressive policies on childcare. It has shown the way by offering 15 hours a week of nursery provision and pledging to expand that provision to include children under the age of three. That move could benefit more than 7,000 children in Glasgow, but I do not want Glasgow's

children and parents alone to have that increased provision. Childcare should not be reduced to a postcode lottery. I want every family in Scotland to enjoy equal access to first-rate childcare.

This week, we witnessed an overdue U-turn from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning on curriculum for excellence. Today, the SNP has a chance to follow in Mike Russell's humble footsteps by addressing the concerns of parents of younger children.

I read last week—this may just be a scurrilous rumour—that the SNP sent out an e-card for mother's day. I ask it to match its fine words with actions and send a belated present to thousands of hard-working families throughout the country by supporting Scottish Labour's motion.

11:13

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I associate myself with Liz Smith's comments about how crucial early intervention is. The early years are incredibly important for all our children and the SNP Government is committed to accommodating early intervention for our youngsters.

We need to reassure Labour members that the commitment to deliver 600 hours is a commitment to deliver 600 hours. There is no dispute about that and I find it difficult to understand why they think that there could be any dilution of the commitment.

The Labour benches also assert that nothing is happening at the moment, but that is simply not true. A lot is happening. For example, a lot of engagement is taking place; as the minister made clear, dialogue is on-going with the early years task force. The proposed timeframe for legislation is essential in ensuring that we engage with those who are genuinely interested in giving our children the best possible future—in other words, our local authorities and parents—and that the programme is flexible enough to meet both the framework and the aspirations of all parents of young children.

In areas such as my Aberdeenshire West constituency, a large part of which is rural, these additional hours and the flexibility that the minister referred to are essential. Sometimes I think that good nursery provision is at the heart—indeed, is the lifeblood—of some of the very small rural communities in Aberdeenshire West and I hope that it will help to keep some of our rural schools open. The cabinet secretary knows my views on that matter and I look forward to hearing the results of the commission on rural education later in the summer.

Claire Baker articulated well the fact that this is a very complex issue. That is why we need to take

our time. There is no point in rushing through something that is just going to fail. We will be failing our children if we do not take our time, embark on dialogue, listen and engage. We are moving forward; commitments to deliver have been made and initiatives put in place to ensure that the most vulnerable and those who require additional childcare get that provision. I hope that the Labour benches recognise that the First Minister's commitment to give every three and four-year-old and every looked-after two-year-old 600 hours of funded nursery education was a commitment to every child in every part of Scotland and that it will be delivered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now come to closing speeches. There is a little bit of time in hand for interventions, if members wish to take them.

11:17

Liz Smith: The debate has been quite constructive, not least because it has flagged up one of the dilemmas with this particular childcare policy. The fact is that we are dealing with two very separate issues, the first of which is the number of hours on offer. In that respect, I think that we can all come up with slightly different answers to the question whether that requires primary legislation in all its guises.

The second issue is flexibility in the way parents who will have this entitlement use the hours. We must be very careful that we do not create a muddle here. If I read the legal team's advice correctly, both the motion and the amendment contain factually correct points, and it will all come down to semantics and definitions about what exactly we are driving through. For that reason, I think that Claire Baker and Dennis Robertson made valid points about the basic principles underpinning what all of us on all sides of the chamber are trying to do.

These issues come down to three things. First, we are absolutely determined that the best possible childcare be on offer in all parts of Scotland and that it be provided by qualified carers and nursery teachers. That is essential and, indeed, it is what parents want. I know that many of the people who have lobbied us on the issue are concerned about that and at the back of all this lie various debates on certain contractual issues.

Secondly, as Claire Baker said, there are issues to do with the mix between the private and the public sectors. The fact that both sectors are valuable providers of care, even though they come from slightly different perspectives, adds to the choice that is available. We should not forget that that mix is essential, particularly in an age in which we want greater choice and flexibility. We need to

make it possible for that mix to work as well as possible, and to ensure that private providers do not feel under pressure because of certain diktats from local authorities.

Thirdly, we should never forget that the policy is targeted at the most disadvantaged children. They, above all, are the priority, because it is they—and their parents—who need the greatest support. It was in that context that the minister referred to Bronwen Cohen's article in *The Scotsman* last week, in which she threw up the challenge that we all face in striving for better articulation between care services and education. As several members have pointed out, the issue is extremely complex. Cross-party support will be required if we are to ensure that we can work through the complexities, just as we have done on other social matters that we have debated in the chamber. That is important.

Johann Lamont and Jamie Hepburn rightly flagged up the fact that part of the argument is about how well the welfare system that Westminster oversees works. As I said in last week's debate, I am very conscious of some of the stresses and strains on that system and the arguments about whether the focus has been on the right places. I hope that the fact that some of the child benefit changes that were announced yesterday were not quite as radical as those that were originally planned is an example of that message having got home.

As Jamie Hepburn said, it is essential that we all pull together to ensure that we do what is right and proper for the educational, emotional, intellectual and social needs of our children. We look forward to hearing much more from the Scottish Government about the timing and the content of the legislative process that it intends to pursue. Thereafter, I hope that we can move further forward.

11:22

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): I welcome what is, as Liz Smith pointed out, the second debate on the topic in seven days. Last week's debate was called by the Liberal Democrats. It is clear that they got a surfeit of information last week and decided not to have a second shot at the issue. This week's debate has been called by Labour. I would not dispute any member's describing childcare as being "exceptionally important". It is exceptionally important. It benefits children, of course. Education and care are indivisible. Being within that process is extremely important for the youngest children. As they move towards formal schooling, the flexible childcare that we are talking about becomes ever more important.

Such childcare benefits parents, not just in their working lives, although that is clearly important. There are working mothers in the Parliament, two of whom have spoken in the debate. It also helps with parents' work-life balance and, overall, it benefits society. *[Interruption.]* I am told that there are four working mothers in the chamber. Is there any advance on four? There are quite a number of working fathers in the Parliament, too. We should not forget them. We now have five working mothers in the chamber—Angela Constance has just entered. I think that I will stop with that. Flexible childcare also benefits the economy and the overall wellbeing of society.

We have had a number of positive contributions to the debate. Claire Baker's was positive and helpful in pointing out the issues that need to be addressed, and Dennis Robertson's was exceptionally well informed and constructive. The questions that Liz Smith asked are important ones. I will come to the issue of legislation in a moment. It is important that we take a fresh look at what we are trying to do. Dennis Robertson was right to say that a great deal is happening. It is definitely wrong to represent the debate as an either/or scenario—either you are interested in the provision of 600 hours or you are, in some sense, a failure. I will come on to address the tone of the opening speech in the debate, which was unfortunate.

There is very strong concern in this Government and across this chamber—nobody has a monopoly on concern for children—about making progress on a range of issues. We have done so: early years work has been done, getting it right for every child work has been done, and quality has been driven up. For example, additional qualifications are required for childcare. Those are all important things. The significant achievement of taking the number of hours from 412.5 to 475 in the early days of the first SNP Administration was important. The number of hours delivered was lower—I will not make any political point about this—before the SNP came into office. We still want to improve and we have that aspiration to improve, which the First Minister has been right to lay out.

We need to work out how we can improve and the right way to deliver that improvement. That right way must be flexible, because this is not just about hours or sum of hours. We have moved on from there and we know that early years' care and education are indivisible. We need flexibility and we need primary legislation to deliver that flexibility. I will not swap opinions with people—that route will not help us—but this Government is committed to doing those things, wants to do so and wants to introduce the right legislation. The Government is happy to work with all parties—I make this offer—to introduce that legislation.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Russell: In a moment, Mr Henry. The Government is happy to introduce that legislation. Liz Smith has asked to discuss it and I am very happy to sit down and discuss it. I make the same commitment to Hugh Henry. I constantly make commitments to Mr Henry that he can come and talk to me, and he never does, but on this occasion he would be very welcome to do so and we might make some progress.

Hugh Henry: Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether he has the powers and competences to use regulation and ministerial guidance to introduce the increase in the number of hours now?

Michael Russell: That was an unhelpful intervention, but I am used to that from Mr Henry. I was talking about developing the way in which we deliver childcare to take account of the flexibility required, and that needs primary legislation. I make the offer again—if Hugh Henry wants to sit down and talk, or if Neil Bibby is asked by him to come and talk to the minister, I would be very happy to have those discussions. We need that discussion and debate.

A great deal is being done, and, of course, more can be done, but I want members to reflect on something else this morning. We have had two debates from Labour on interesting and important subjects. Unfortunately, the focus on the Labour side has been not on progress but on insisting on spending now—not next week or next month, but now. There was not a word, not a single contribution, about what they would stop spending the money on. That is important because of the constitutional circumstances in which we find ourselves. We live within a constrained, fixed budget and in those circumstances, if anyone is going to argue for additional expenditure—indeed, our budget procedures in the Parliament demand this—they have to say where it would come from. There has not been a word about that important aspect of the question.

It was also very telling—this was the difference between this week and last week—that there was not a word about the assault on families being undertaken by the coalition through welfare reform. The debate has simply, alas, been about oppositionalism—it is best just to say it and be open about it. It has been about naked, simple oppositionalism. The people of Scotland are not fooled by that and I will tell members how I know that they are not fooled. A year ago today, on 22 March 2011, this Parliament dissolved. We had had four years of oppositionalism from Labour members; four years of anger, bile and frustration. That frustration was not just at not being in office,

but at having their entitlement to office taken away. That has been striking.

We went through that election and there was a lot of expectation that things would change, and they did change. They changed big style. This party got an overall majority, the first time that it has ever happened. There is a lesson in that and I want to give that lesson free, gratis and for nothing to Johann Lamont. The lesson is that people in Scotland find that type of oppositionalism deeply unattractive. I have not done the word cloud of her speech, but I suspect that my estimate is pretty close, and a speech on childcare from the leader of the Opposition that uses the words “First Minister” as often as it uses the word “child” tells us something about what is taking place. A speech that attacks the Government for not caring about children is deeply unattractive, too, I must say. I speak as not just a parent, but the minister who has overall responsibility for children.

Johann Lamont: I did not say that.

Michael Russell: I suggest that the leader of the Opposition, who is shouting out as usual, and the education spokesperson who is about to sum up take a positive approach. They should come and discuss this issue. Let us get together on it, because I suspect that we are about to hear more anger and bile directed more at the fact that they are not in office than at any care about anything else.

11:30

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): It is hard to know how to start, when the Government is making us an offer to come and talk and be positive while suggesting that the talk would take place in conditions of anger, bile and negativity. If the Government wants to talk, that is no way to frame the terms of the discussion.

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Hugh Henry: Not yet. I heard enough of Mike Russell's bile a few minutes ago.

Let us concentrate on what the motion is about. Mike Russell asked why we have not spent time talking about what the coalition Government has done on welfare benefits. There will be plenty of opportunities to look at other matters; this debate is about a specific issue.

We are all guilty sometimes of confusing nursery education and childcare. Mike Russell was right to say that the issues are indivisible to some extent, but there are also significant differences between them. I do not for a moment dispute that working families throughout the country need better access to more flexible, integrated childcare, which wraps around our important core education service. We need to ensure that the

educational input can be more flexible and can link into what parents need. We perhaps also need to admit that we sometimes blur the distinctions between childcare and education.

I think that there should be more flexibility, but I also argue that we need to ensure that we do not lose the fundamental educational input into early years development.

Aileen Campbell: We are not doing that.

Hugh Henry: I am not accusing the SNP Government of doing that. I am talking generally; we all need to ensure that we do not lose that fundamental input. We need to be careful. We also need to be imaginative and flexible, so that we can match what parents need to what can be delivered.

Whether or not Mike Russell liked hearing references to the First Minister, the debate has been framed by what the First Minister said. He mentioned childcare, but—

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way?

Hugh Henry: In a second.

The First Minister mentioned childcare, but he has laboured significantly on education. That is the bit that we need to look at. Let me remind members what the SNP has said. In its 2007 manifesto it said:

“We will increase the provision of free nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds by 50 per cent”.

In its 2011 manifesto, the SNP said that it would

“ensure ... that the expansion of nursery education continues.”

At the party conference, Alex Salmond said that there will be

“a statutory guarantee of over 600 hours of free nursery education for every Scottish 3 and 4 year old.”

Jamie Hepburn: I thank Hugh Henry for giving way. He said clearly that the debate is predicated on the First Minister's remarks at my party's conference. Does that mean that if the First Minister had not made those remarks Labour would not have brought the subject forward for debate? Does that mean that Labour does not care about the issue?

Hugh Henry: I will resist the temptation to thank Hepburn for that intervention.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Excuse me. Mr Henry, please refer to the member as “Mr Hepburn” or “Jamie Hepburn”.

Hugh Henry: Oh, I am sorry; since he called me “Henry”, I was just making the point—

The Presiding Officer: And if I had heard that I would have given Mr Hepburn a row, too.

Hugh Henry: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Jamie Hepburn: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. May I ask you to reflect on the *Official Report*? I did not at any stage refer to Mr Henry as “Henry”.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Henry, continue.

Hugh Henry: Well, anyway.

The member asked whether we would have brought the subject forward for debate if the First Minister had not made those remarks. Well no, the subject would not have been on the agenda because it is about what the First Minister said. What he said—and what the SNP said—is that this is about the delivery of 600 hours of free nursery education. The question is whether we need primary legislation. Maybe in three years' time, or longer, when the bill takes effect, there will be a need to consider legislation for flexibility, but—

Aileen Campbell: Will the member give way?

Hugh Henry: No, thank you.

Primary legislation is not needed to deliver the extension to hours. The SNP has already extended the hours by statutory instrument and moved beyond what Labour delivered. I agree with Aileen Campbell that 600 hours should be the starting point for a flexible package of wraparound childcare. We do not need to wait for primary legislation to deliver it.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Hugh Henry: No, thank you.

Section 32 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 allows ministers to effect change through regulation; that is, by statutory instrument. Section 34 allows ministers to give guidance on how that will be delivered. Delivery of the 600 hours does not need to wait for primary legislation.

Joan McAlpine says that the commitment to 600 hours is a milestone. Normally, milestones tell us where we have reached in a journey. We have not reached 600 hours, so there is no milestone here.

As Dennis Robertson said in a very good speech, this is a complex issue. We do not want to do something that could fail, yet the SNP has already extended provision and has made improvements on the journey, and that has not failed—it has been positive—so why would an extension to 600 hours be a failure?

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Hugh Henry: No, thanks.

The question is whether Scotland's families and children need to wait for three years or more for

the 600 hours to be delivered. The answer is no. Ministers have the power, and they have already used it. All that Labour is saying today is that we want to work constructively with the Government. We want the Parliament to send out the powerful message that we can unite on something so important to Scotland's families. We all agree that 600 hours is a noble aspiration and that 600 hours will make a huge difference, so surely we can also agree that ministers have the power to deliver that now if they wish. *[Applause.]*

There is no bile on my part—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Minister, please do not shout across the chamber.

Hugh Henry: Why not be positive? Why not say that we can all work together? Why not recognise the powers of this Parliament? Why not recognise the powers of ministers? Why not recognise that Scotland's families could benefit now from the 600 hours rather than waiting three years or more?

The debate is about what we can do as a Parliament and not what we can aspire to as a Parliament. The debate is about whether there is a will to succeed. It is about whether we have the determination and ability to work across parties to do something now. We are offering the Government the opportunity and the mechanism not to delay nursery education provision for three years, but to implement it now and to work together to improve the flexibility of childcare and the integration of the different aspects of childcare. Above all, we are offering the Government the opportunity to make a difference now, not to postpone it to the dim and distant future.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:39

United Kingdom Budget

1. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the UK budget of 21 March 2012 will have on devolved matters. (S4O-00819)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The chancellor's budget failed to provide any substantial measures to support economic growth or Scottish households. At a time when the economic outlook remains fragile, the Office for Budget Responsibility has confirmed that the United Kingdom Government's measures will have a limited effect on its economic forecasts, and the Treasury's analysis shows that the UK Government's tax rises and benefit cuts will mean that the average Scottish household will be around £400 worse off next year. The budget provided £13.54 million in departmental expenditure limit capital consequential over the next three years, but that will do little to offset the 33 per cent real-terms cuts to our capital budget that the chancellor has already imposed over the current spending review period.

Maureen Watt: The cabinet secretary knows as well as I do how significant the impact of high fuel prices is on the people of Scotland, particularly those in rural areas, who have no choice but to use their cars. High fuel prices affect every single one of us, as higher haulage costs lead to higher prices for everything that everybody buys, including the Government and local authorities. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the plan to hike fuel duty by 3p per litre later this year is entirely the wrong move at a time when everyone's budgets are tight, and that it shows up the UK Government's complete inability to get a grip on soaring fuel prices?

John Swinney: There is tremendous substance in the points that Maureen Watt makes. The issue is significant for all parts of the Scottish economy and public services. The fact that no action was taken yesterday to mitigate in any way the prospective increases in fuel tax will put further strain on households and the development of the Scottish economy, and the fact that there were no compensating measures in the budget to try to encourage or stimulate a higher level of economic growth merely reinforces the point that Maureen

Watt makes about the damaging consequences of the decision on fuel duty.

Scottish Retail Consortium (Conference)

2. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what retailers will be included in its joint conference with the Scottish Retail Consortium that is scheduled to take place later this year. (S4O-00820)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): We want as many retailers as possible to take part in the conference, and we will work with the Scottish Retail Consortium to ensure that there is varied and broad participation.

Margaret McCulloch: Several weeks ago, I raised concerns about major retail chains because of closures in East Kilbride and Hamilton town centres. There have been some welcome developments since then, with new investment and new shops opening in vacant premises, but the overall picture is not good. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that invitations to any major conferences on the future of retail are extended to East Kilbride shopping centre and South Lanarkshire Council? Will he ensure that he addresses employment and regeneration in South Lanarkshire?

Alex Neil: I am happy to extend an invitation either directly or through the Scottish Retail Consortium to participants from East Kilbride, and indeed to people from any other part of Lanarkshire who want to participate.

The member raises the important issue of the future of our town centres. We have made substantial input on that matter over the past two or three years and we are engaged in extensive discussions with regeneration agencies, local authorities and the private sector on what more we can do to regenerate our town centres.

Female Unemployment (Fife)

3. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it is taking to address female unemployment in Fife. (S4O-00821)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government is focused on jobs and growth and is taking a range of actions to ensure that everyone who wants to work can do so. During 2010-11, inward investment activities in Fife through Scottish Development International resulted in the planned creation of 1,072 new jobs and safeguarded 69 jobs. Since April 2010, businesses in Fife have obtained regional selective assistance offers that total £9.4 million,

which are expected to create or safeguard 1,507 jobs.

Claire Baker: The claimant figures for women in Fife that were published last week show that the biggest increase in female unemployment was in North East Fife—an area that traditionally has a lower claimant count. In recent months, the figure has been steadily increasing. What specific actions is the Scottish Government taking to support women who face unemployment in rural areas? Those women often face childcare challenges as well as difficulty in accessing training, both of which are barriers to employment.

John Swinney: The Government is determined to ensure that all parts of the country are able to prosper. A concern that arose from yesterday's budget is the clear direction that has now been set by the United Kingdom Government to establish market-facing pay rates at a local level. For public sector employees in parts of the country, that means that wage rates will go down to ensure that wage rates can be inflated in and around areas of congestion such as the south-east of England. Clearly, that is difficult and unwelcome news for women in North East Fife, and for people in other parts of the country.

I say to Claire Baker that the female employment rate in Scotland is the highest of any UK nation, and our inactivity rate is the lowest. The Government is actively promoting the availability of particular training schemes for female recruitment. For example, we increased the number of women participating in modern apprenticeships from 27 per cent to 45 per cent in 2010-11. That is welcome progress in ensuring that we create the necessary opportunities for women to enter the labour market.

Machrihanish Airbase Community Company

4. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what support it is providing to the Machrihanish Airbase Community Company. (S4O-00822)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting rural communities in acquiring land to help to build independent, resilient and flourishing communities across Scotland. Through advice and financial assistance, we have been supporting the Machrihanish Airbase Community Company to achieve its aim of buying the former Royal Air Force base at Machrihanish. We are working closely with the Ministry of Defence to take forward improvements to the water, sewerage and electricity infrastructure at the base.

Jamie McGrigor: I thank the minister for that reply, but he will be aware of concerns over

problems with the water, sewerage and electricity infrastructure. What support is the Scottish Government giving MACC to tackle those problems and encourage the development of what could be a dynamic and economically important site for green excellence and a great economic opportunity for the people of Campbeltown and Kintyre?

Stewart Stevenson: We should be happy with the progress that is being made. I note the explicit request, following a meeting of the Kintyre initiative working group on 24 February, for continuing support, which we are giving. However, there was also a specific request that there should be no running commentary on the detail of negotiations at this sensitive time. The constituency member—Mr Russell—has respected that request, and I strongly urge Mr McGrigor to do the same.

The Presiding Officer: I call question 6 from Elaine Murray.

Roads (A75 Improvements)

5. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it plans to prioritise the completion of the A75 Hardgrove to Kinmount improvement scheme. (S4O-00823)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): Presiding Officer, I think that we are on question 5, not question 6.

The Presiding Officer: You are right: it is question 5, and Elaine Murray has asked it.

Alex Neil: It is a great feeling correcting the Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Do not do it twice. [Laughter.]

Alex Neil: The statutory procedures for the scheme are complete, and construction will commence as soon as funding becomes available. The First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister on 2 March with a view to further capital funding being brought forward by the Scottish Government, with the co-operation of the Treasury, for a number of shovel-ready projects, including our planned improvements to the A75 between Hardgrove and Kinmount. However, those shovel-ready projects did not form part of the UK Government's budget announcement yesterday.

Elaine Murray: I thank the cabinet secretary for his reply, although I point out that the improvement scheme was shovel-ready when his Government abandoned it a couple of years ago. However, I am pleased that it is Alex Neil who is answering this question, because, back in March 2000, he signed my motion calling for improvements to the A75. This is the last of the series of improvements, and it has not yet been commenced. Now that Mr

Neil is in a position to make it happen, I ask him how high the £10 million Hardgrove to Kinmount project is on his list of priorities. Is it number 1 of the 36 that he submitted to the UK Government, or is it number 36? When will the project be done?

Alex Neil: First, the capital cost is almost £15 million. Secondly, had our capital budget not been slashed by one third by the previous Labour Government, and had that cut not been continued by the Tory-led coalition, the project would have been completed by now. It is thanks to Alistair Darling, Gordon Brown, George Osborne and the current United Kingdom Government that we do not have the money for the project.

Roads (Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route)

6. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when work on the Aberdeen western peripheral route will be completed. (S4O-00824)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): It is hoped that the small number of objectors who oppose the AWPR will be willing to accept the recent Court of Session judgment, so that we can get on and build the road. Subject to no further appeal being lodged against the judgment, we will continue to work with our project partners to ensure that this vital project is completed as soon as possible.

Nigel Don: I concur with the cabinet secretary's thoughts about the objectors. The cabinet secretary will be aware of the suggestions for an alternative junction design at the north Stonehaven junction with the A90. Does he believe that there is some merit in those suggestions—there appears to be—and that they could yet be incorporated into the scheme?

Alex Neil: Given the procedures that we have been through, such as the public inquiry and the various appeals in the Court of Session, I can say that there will be no further changes to the design of the AWPR. The project has been delayed for long enough and we are anxious to move ahead and get it under way.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): If there are further delays to the AWPR, it will frustrate the majority of people in the north-east. Will the cabinet secretary at least give careful consideration to bringing forward the work on the Haudagain roundabout, which is a key congestion pinch point in the city, and not delaying that work until the AWPR is completed?

Alex Neil: We have made it absolutely clear many times that we will do the work on that roundabout as part of the AWPR, and we hope that we will be in a position to start the AWPR process once we know whether there is going to be another appeal. Hopefully there will not be, and

that will allow us to get on with the job of completing the entire AWPR.

Home Insulation (Energy Costs)

7. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made on insulating homes and helping to protect families from rising energy costs. (S4O-00825)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): During the past 10 years, the percentage of houses in Scotland that are rated good for energy efficiency has doubled. That represents significant progress.

In the past three years alone, households in Scotland have received more than 327,000 free or subsidised, professionally installed insulation measures. Through our programmes, we have offered advice and free or low-cost insulation to more than three quarters of a million households. To help families with rising energy costs over the next three years, we will spend £250 million on our fuel poverty and domestic energy efficiency programmes.

Gordon MacDonald: Between 2004 and 2009, the number of households in fuel poverty in the United Kingdom rose from 2 million to 5.5 million. The UK Government will shortly publish its annual report on fuel poverty statistics, which is likely to show increasing levels of fuel poverty across the UK in 2010.

Given the UK Government's failure to address rising levels of fuel poverty, does the cabinet secretary agree that the setting of the minimum wage and the power to regulate social tariffs for energy should be transferred to the Scottish Parliament?

Alex Neil: I agree entirely. I point out that there is a huge difference between our approach to fuel poverty and that of the UK Government. The Tory-led coalition is slashing the fuel poverty budgets, continuing the process that was started under Labour. In the next three years, we will invest £0.25 billion in tackling fuel poverty in Scotland.

Methadone Treatments

8. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the average length of time and dosage is for a course of methadone. (S4O-00826)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Data on the average length of time and dosage for a course of methadone is not held centrally and never has been since methadone prescribing commenced. To address that, the Scottish Government has invested in Scotland's first drugs misuse database, which will be linked to

other relevant databases such as the prescriptions database. From 2012 to 2014, the databases will start to tell us more about the types of treatment that are offered as well as their duration for each individual client.

The Information Services Division of the national health service does, however, publish comprehensive information on methadone prescriptions annually. That information includes the total number of prescriptions, the total number of daily doses per 1,000 population and the costs and fees associated with methadone.

Graeme Pearson: The Government spends more than £28 million a year delivering methadone maintenance treatment to more than 22,000 people, many of whom can be on methadone for 10 years or longer. At the same time, residential treatment units such as Castle Craig Hospital in West Linton in my region have seen a substantial fall in the number of patients who are referred to them. The hospital relies on patients from Holland, who are paid for by the private sector there, to support service provision. What strategies does the cabinet secretary have and what targets has he set to reduce drug dependency in Scotland?

Kenny MacAskill: That question relates to "The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem", which was delivered in the previous session of Parliament with cross-party support. We introduced it because we realised the great difficulties and challenges that exist and the need to address many of the matters to which Graeme Pearson correctly refers.

It is accepted that there is a role for methadone. The decision to use it is a clinical one, but far too many people have been put on it, which comes at a great cost to the taxpayer and does great damage to those people and others.

We need to allow the individual to work collectively. There is a role for organisations that take individuals from their communities to deal with the issues. However, we must remember that, ultimately, people have to go back to the community, which is why many programmes operate there. We have to challenge people's attitudes, change their views and ensure that they remain off drugs when they are in the community and not simply when they are outwith it.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): When I was on a recent visit to Barlinnie, many of the inmates told me that they had joined the methadone programme simply to get through the boredom of the day. What measures will the cabinet secretary take to address that issue, particularly in Barlinnie, which, the governor tells me, has the biggest methadone queue in western Europe?

Kenny MacAskill: We face a significant problem with drug addiction in our prisons, which we have partly addressed in two ways. One is through the McLeish commission, because we need to ensure that we address the underlying issues that result in people offending. We are trying to deal with matters other than those that arise in prison. When people are in prison, the issue has to be dealt with by clinicians. We correctly take the view that the health service in the prison system should be part of the general national health service. That ensures that, when people leave prison, they have a place to go to.

We seek joined-up working and thinking among those who face the challenges of dealing with prisoners. Many prisoners who are on methadone have to be in prison because of the nature of the offences that they have committed. We need to ensure that they are dealt with on a clinical basis. When they leave prison, we can continue to prescribe methadone, although we hope that we will have worked with them to try to get them off drugs. That is why the Scottish Prison Service tries to ensure that those who seek to come off drugs are given that opportunity.

Housing Policy (Private Rented Sector Tenants)

9. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that tenants in the private rented sector can participate in consultations and policy making on housing. (S4O-00827)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): The private rented sector does not have as widespread a network of tenant representative bodies as the social rented sector has. To help to address that, we ensure that tenant advocacy bodies such as Shelter Scotland and others are involved in policy making on private rented housing. Similarly, to obtain the views of the many landlords across Scotland, organisations such as the Scottish Association of Landlords often represent the landlord view in dialogue on policy, through membership of the Scottish private rented sector strategy group.

Marco Biagi: The strategy group includes landlords, regulators and Shelter, but will the cabinet secretary reflect on whether it is appropriate and possible to find some way of inviting someone with direct experience of private renting, such as a representative of one of the groups that exist, to ensure that their experience and expertise are given equal prominence to those of landlords?

Alex Neil: We are already attempting to do that. The private rented sector strategy group is supported by a wider virtual network of

stakeholders who are kept up to date and invited to comment on the progress of the group's work.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-00570)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will visit Irvine to welcome plans by the pharmaceutical manufacturer GlaxoSmithKline to invest £100 million and create 100 new jobs across its Scottish operations in Irvine and Montrose. That major investment reinforces Scotland's global reputation in the life sciences.

I also welcome the fact that, yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer responded to John Swinney's proposal of 7 February that Irvine, Dundee and Nigg should be granted enhanced capital allowances as part of their status as enterprise areas. I am sure that members recall the chancellor generously acknowledging that that was John Swinney's proposal when he made his budget statement yesterday. I welcome those developments, as does the Parliament, and I look forward to announcing further investment in those areas in the coming months. I will visit Nigg tomorrow.

Johann Lamont: I am sure that the First Minister will enjoy his visit. Labour always welcomes glimmers of hope for employment and investment in the interests of communities throughout Scotland.

Very few of us would agree with the approach that is taken by the Tories when it comes to our health service. I was glad when the First Minister told us, last month, that Scotland is choosing a different path. Since then, however, we have found out a little more about the path that the First Minister is taking, which seems to have been on a bit of a downhill gradient. We have fewer nurses, decreasing standards in care of the elderly, cuts to social care budgets and patients going without blankets. Even the good statistics cannot be trusted—as we found out yesterday. Before the First Minister rhymes off the statistics that he has, no doubt, already prepared, I ask why we should trust them.

The First Minister: We should look at the record of public satisfaction with the health service in Scotland, which is currently at a record level. The ultimate verdict in such matters is the people's confidence in their national health service, and that contrasts with what is happening south of the border, where many people wonder whether they are going to have a national health service worthy of the name. This Government, this health

secretary and this First Minister are totally committed to a national health service in Scotland.

Johann Lamont: The point of the Scottish Parliament is that we all aspire to better than what the Tories are offering at Westminster. We expect the Scottish Government's record to be better, too. I will talk about individuals in a moment. First, let us consider what experts have been saying over the past few weeks. The Royal College of Nursing says that there are not enough nurses to provide "basic, safe care". Audit Scotland warns that councils and health boards are failing to ensure that vital care services can be delivered in the future. The Centre for Public Policy for Regions says that, since 2006, Scotland has been lagging behind the increase in resources for England. Does the First Minister think that they are all wrong as well?

The First Minister: There are now more qualified nurses and midwives in Scotland than there were in 2006. Let us look at the figure per head of population in Scotland in comparison with the figures in the other countries in these islands. For every 1,000 people in Scotland, we have eight nurses and midwives compared to 5.9 in England, 7.3 in Wales and 7.6 in Northern Ireland. That indicates the huge priority that the Government and the Parliament give to our national health service in Scotland.

Johann Lamont says that there is not much point in comparing what we are doing in Scotland—as a united Parliament, I hope—in preserving our national health service with what is happening in England. We could look at what is happening at the moment in Wales—the sole area in these islands where the Labour Party is in government. I have great sympathy for the Welsh Government, which is under the same pressure from the Westminster Government that we are under. However, the Welsh Government decided not to protect the revenue budget of the national health service in real terms—it is due to fall by 8 per cent in real terms between 2011 and 2014—unlike the Scottish Administration, which decided to protect the revenue budget of the national health service in real terms.

The contrast is not just between the Scottish National Party in Scotland and the Tories in Westminster but between the SNP in Scotland and Labour in Wales. I think that the vast majority of people in Scotland support this Government's policy of protecting our national health service.

Johann Lamont: The Government's health budget has been cut in real terms by £319 million. The substance of the First Minister's answer was that the RCN—the nurses union—is wrong. He talks about Wales; we would like him to focus on his responsibilities as First Minister here. I assure

him that Labour members would love to be in his position.

Once again, the Government's rhetoric does not fit the reality. If the First Minister does not accept the picture that the experts paint, what does he have to say to Helen Macbeth? Mrs Macbeth is 92 years old. When she was seriously ill in the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley, she spent her first night frozen, because embarrassed staff could not get her a blanket. She had to rely on her daughter to bring one in for her the next day. Jack Barr is a great-grandfather who went into the RAH for a serious operation. He spent three nights in hospital with only his beach towel to keep him warm. Does the First Minister realise that it is not enough just to say that he is protecting the NHS—he actually has to do it?

The First Minister: The health secretary has indicated that she is prepared to look into any case in which care has not met the standards that we expect in the national health service. The national health service is a huge priority for the Government and the Parliament.

Johann Lamont should just have a care. Jackie Baillie has already partially had to apologise—I think that that is how to word it—for her scare story about a shortage of blankets in Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, which turned out to be totally untrue, as she is very well aware.

I know that the survey that was published this week, which was—incidentally—not a Scottish survey, indicated concern among nurses across the United Kingdom. That survey had no Scottish sample, but the RCN has had surveys with a Scottish sample. For example, in a survey that questioned 4,000 nurses in Scotland in April 2006—when, I remember, Johann Lamont was a minister—two thirds of nurses said that their workload prevented them from providing the standard of care that they wanted to provide. In a September 2011 survey, the number who were concerned had declined to 50 per cent. I would like no nurse to express in a survey concern about the pressure of work but, by any standards, the situation now, when the SNP is in office, represents a substantial improvement on when Labour was in office.

Let us remember that, when Labour was in office, it could not even spend the Scottish budget that it was allocated, because of its incompetence in financial management. We have protected the national health service against the most ferocious cuts for many generations. That is why we stand proudly on our record on Scotland's national health service.

Johann Lamont: It is one thing for the First Minister to repeat his version of his record, but he must confront the reality of what is happening in

people's lives. It is also one thing to attack Jackie Baillie, but it is something entirely different to attack others who raise concerns about the national health service.

We have established that the First Minister will not listen to me or to independent voices. Will he listen to people who are suffering from his mismanagement of the NHS? Mrs Macbeth and Mr Barr are sitting in the public gallery.

We have found at least seven recent cases of patients going without blankets at the Royal Alexandra hospital. We pointed out the situation, but the Government denied it. George Adam, the MSP for Paisley, called on me to investigate my health spokesperson, Jackie Baillie, for having the audacity to give voice to the complaints of her constituents. If he had just shelled out 45p for his local newspaper, the *Paisley Daily Express*, he would have seen that our claims are true.

If the First Minister will not believe me, why does he not come and meet Mr Barr and Mrs Macbeth in my office after question time to explain that we do not have a problem in the NHS and that the problem is a figment of Jackie Baillie's imagination? They will tell him, as I am telling him, what the NHS is really like under the SNP. When will the First Minister stop the rhetoric and face up to the reality of his responsibilities?

The First Minister: I refer Johann Lamont to my last answer. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

The First Minister: I said, specifically, that the health secretary, Nicola Sturgeon, would investigate any case in the NHS where treatment fell below expectations. She will be delighted to meet the patients concerned, or any other people who experience care that is of a lower level than all of us would expect. That is what I said in my last answer. I did not criticise the nurses of Scotland. On the contrary, I said that we would look to have a situation in which nurses were not concerned about numbers and standards of care and I merely pointed out that surveys show that the standard of care, according to the nurses, is in an improving situation, compared with when Labour was in power.

Of course, we should not be surprised about that. We should remember that, in 2007, before the current Scottish Government came into office, the Government that Johann Lamont was a member of said that the NHS would just have to cut its cloth, as it would get no consequential whatsoever. That was the policy of Jack McConnell. Further, on 8 September 2011, during the election campaign, Iain Gray—who is sitting a few rows behind Johann Lamont—said on “Newsnight Scotland”:

"We wouldn't ring fence the health budget."

The reality is that, thanks to the election of the Scottish National Party Government in 2007, the NHS had more money spent on it, and thanks to the re-election of this Government last year, the NHS is having more money spent on it. Given what is happening in Wales, nobody can be in any doubt that the only party in Scotland that is committed to protecting the national health service and its real-terms budget is the SNP.

Johann Lamont: Whatever that was, it was not taking responsibility. I point out to the First Minister that his health secretary wrote and said that the problem with the towels was that, although they were there, the staff could not source them. The First Minister said that the incident was isolated. However, as was reported in the *Evening Times*, Unison members have been complaining for 10 months that this is a serious issue. It is about time that the First Minister took responsibility, recognised the powers that he has to defend the NHS and responded to constituents' concerns.

The First Minister: As Johann Lamont well knows, the health board explicitly denied Jackie Baillie's claims with regard to the recycled towels, and I do not think that it is useful to return to an issue that the Labour health spokesperson should be genuinely embarrassed about.

Like Nicola Sturgeon, I have a great interest in ensuring that every patient who experiences less than satisfactory care is not just met but has their issues and complaints dealt with. I merely point out that it is beyond argument that, if Labour had come to power in 2007 and continued in office, or if it had come to power last year, less resource would have been spent on Scotland's national health service. Johann Lamont was in government in 2007 and was deputy leader last year, so she should hang her head in shame about the fact that she was prepared to underresource Scotland's national health service.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-00554)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to do so in the near future, but I think that Ruth Davidson has an appointment with the Prime Minister in the very near future.

Ruth Davidson: Indeed.

Can the First Minister say how much money has been diverted within the health budget in Scotland to fund free prescriptions for people like him, who are perfectly willing and able to pay?

The First Minister: I am not surprised in the slightest that Ruth Davidson does not want to talk

about yesterday's budget, and particularly its effect on old people across Scotland. However, let us remember the huge number of people—hundreds of thousands of people—who earn less than £16,000 who were having to pay for prescriptions in Scotland, before the charges were rightly abolished by this Government. I can tell Ruth Davidson that the idea that we should cut taxes for the richest members of the community at the expense of the provision of medicine that people can afford will be deeply unpopular in Scotland. However, deep unpopularity is nothing new for the Scottish Conservative Party.

Ruth Davidson: I am happy to talk about the 73,000 people taken out of tax altogether, the 2.1 million people who see their tax rate rise, and the biggest rise in pensions, which will benefit pensioners across the country. However, those are not the numbers that I asked the First Minister for. I will give him the numbers that I asked for.

The Government's own figure is that £130 million will have been spent on funding free prescriptions by the end of this month alone. There is £130 million to buy votes at the last election, but, as we heard last week, there is no money for a cancer drug fund. There is £130 million for free prescriptions, but the Royal College of Nursing tells us this week that there is less money for nurses on the front line and—despite the First Minister's protestations today—that the number of nurses in Scotland is the lowest for six years. There is a £130 million bill for free prescriptions, but yesterday a health board was found to be fiddling the figures because it was missing its targets. Today, the British Medical Association says that even visiting the family doctor means getting treated in substandard conditions in crumbling buildings.

Government is all about choices. Will the First Minister now admit that there are far greater needs in Scotland's health service than a free prescription giveaway, which is his choice?

The First Minister: I think that pressure on the national health service and other budgets in Scotland might be something to do with the cutbacks that are taking place because of the Westminster Government. I am surprised that even Ruth Davidson would want to defend a situation in which pharmacists across the country testified that patients had to choose which medicines they took because of prescription charges and the impost on people with repeat and regular prescriptions.

I do not think that it was a particularly good idea for Ruth Davidson to mention the BMA. As I understand it, the BMA is thinking of standing candidates against the Conservative Party in England so disgusted is it by the performance of the Tory Government on the health service.

However, I am delighted that Ruth Davidson wants to talk about yesterday's budget, because David Mundell on television last night was unable to tell us how many people in Scotland would benefit from the cut in top-rate tax and how many pensioners in Scotland would suffer because they had been punished in the budget. I can tell her that 15,000 top-rate taxpayers in Scotland will benefit and 327,000 current pensioners and half a million future pensioners will be punished by the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition.

Incidentally, I believe that the 15,000 top-rate taxpayers in Scotland would not have wanted their bonus to be at the expense of half a million pensioners in Scotland. Therein lies the difference between the politics of the Scottish National Party and Scotland and the politics of the Conservative Party. Punish the pensioners and keep the rich happy is the policy of the Tory party; devoted to all the people in Scotland is the policy of this Government.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Since the publication of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report into the waiting times scandal in NHS Lothian I have been approached by a number of patients and staff who have raised further concerns about management culture, governance and practices in NHS Lothian. Will the First Minister now instruct a comprehensive and independent review of the whole of NHS Lothian's activities?

The First Minister: In her statement yesterday, the health secretary dealt with that exact point in terms of taking forward this issue. I do not think that anyone listening to that statement or participating in the questions on it could be under any impression other than that the cabinet secretary takes the situation very seriously and is determined to ensure that it is sorted out, as it is being sorted out.

However, I do not think that the issue should deflect from the reality that more people in Scotland right now are satisfied with the national health service than ever before. We owe an enormous amount to the dedication and work of the health professionals, nurses and all the staff in our national health service across Scotland.

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): What assurances can the First Minister provide to the 60-strong workforce at Solway Precast in Barrhill, which is facing closure, and the workforce at the nearby Nestlé plant in Girvan, who are facing significant redundancies, following announcements from both companies over the past week? Will the Scottish Government work effectively to mitigate the impact on them, their families and the local community?

The First Minister: I share the member's concern about the recent developments at Solway

Precast and Nestlé and the impact that those will have on the employees affected, their families and the communities in south Ayrshire. I can confirm that we will do everything that we can to help. The local Ayrshire partnership action for continuing employment team is making contact today to offer support to Nestlé employees who will or may be affected by redundancy. I understand that the company itself is committed to providing support to employees to find new jobs with local employers.

I hope that that reassures the member that we are doing and will do everything that we can to provide support to minimise the time that those individuals are affected by redundancy and to minimise the impact on the local economy.

United Kingdom Budget

3. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the impact will be of the UK budget on the people of Scotland. (S4F-00560)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget is a missed opportunity to get the economy moving to deliver greater fairness. The budget allocated next to no meaningful new resources and contained no new initiatives to support growth in the economy. Indeed, the Office for Budget Responsibility confirms that in its budget document, which states:

"The Government has announced policy measures that ... have had limited effect on our economic forecast."

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): What about the oil industry?

The First Minister: I hear the comment on the oil industry from the member on the Tory benches. If the summit of the Tories' ambition is to undo part of the damage that they did in last year's budget—although they will no doubt blame the Liberal Democrats for last year, just as the Liberal Democrats will blame the Tories for the effect on pensioners this year—it is hardly surprising that they have been reduced to their current poor position in Scottish politics.

John Wilson: Does the First Minister share my concern that George Osborne's budget will do more to benefit millionaires than the people of Scotland?

The First Minister will be aware that the chancellor's proposal to freeze age-related tax allowances for pensioners will, according to figures from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, leave average pensioners £83 worse off in 2013-14. Can he indicate what impact that disgraceful raid on pensioners' tax allowances will have on pensioners in Scotland?

The First Minister: Yes I can—and unlike David Mundell I actually know the numbers. The

decision will affect 330,000 current pensioners. John Wilson rightly indicates the effect in 2013-14, but by 2016-17 the effect will be £220 more in income tax, and the number of pensioners affected will have risen to 500,000—[*Interruption.*] I say to Alex Johnstone that his party has punished half a million pensioners, many of whom will no doubt be watching this debate.

Finally, I say to the Conservative Party that the pensioners' allowance was first introduced by Winston Churchill when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. We have got to the stage at which the Conservative Party, in its determination to pursue its own agenda, is prepared to punish millions of pensioners across the UK, including half a million pensioners in Scotland, and reverse the policies of Winston Churchill—and Conservatives wonder why next to nobody is voting for them.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Just for clarity, does the First Minister welcome the increase in personal tax allowances to more than £9,200? Does he welcome the cut in corporation tax to 24p next month and 22p in 2014? The Government's press release and his answers today completely ignore those two very important measures for Scotland.

The First Minister: I heard John Swinney welcome a number of specific measures in the budget yesterday. It is true that we welcome taking people out of taxation, and more competitive areas in the economy. I wish that the chancellor had been prepared to acknowledge Mr Swinney's role in the capital allowances for the—[*Interruption.*] When Mr Swinney, out of the goodness of his heart, makes a proposal on 7 February, but I then find out that it was all Danny Alexander's brilliant idea, as presented by the Liberal Democrats, that should be corrected.

The serious point is this: I do not believe that the relatively few people in Scotland who will benefit from the reduction in the top rate of tax would want to have that benefit at the expense of half a million pensioners in Scotland. I do not believe that, but it is clear that Gavin Brown does. That is the difference between our two parties, which is why we are here and he is there.

Regional Pay Awards

4. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what impact possible changes by the United Kingdom Government to regional pay awards would have in Scotland. (S4F-00573)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Although Scottish ministers set pay policy for devolved bodies, we should remember that 32,000 public sector workers in Scotland are employed by United Kingdom departments and could be

affected by the UK Government's policy. Such a move could penalise public servants, damage public services, increase regional pay disparities and result in spending cuts to pay for higher public spending elsewhere. It will do nothing to promote growth for fairness, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer should think again about that half-baked plan.

Roderick Campbell: Will the First Minister outline what the Scottish Government is doing to offer the public sector workers who are under its control some security of pay, and will he expressly rule out following the Con-Dem coalition's approach?

The First Minister: The Scottish Government's policy has been consistent. We want a Scotland where a fair wage is a living wage and where work pays.

I am sure that Roderick Campbell is aware that every employee of the Scottish Government, the national health service and our agencies is guaranteed from this year at least the living wage of £7.20 an hour. Of course, almost two thirds of the thousands who have benefited from that policy have been women.

The living wage will also be introduced for local government employees in all councils, a substantial number of which will, I hope, be led by the Scottish National Party after May's elections.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): A majority of members are obviously against the UK Government's policy on pay and pensions. I will ask the First Minister about his own pension. He was part of the previous scheme, under which he would have accrued benefits on the basis of his time in service. Has he moved to the new scheme, which would be much better for the public purse but perhaps not for him?

The First Minister: John Park needs to look up the record. He will find that his question is based on a totally false premise.

Bonus Points Scheme (Hospital Doctors)

5. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will reconsider its support for the continuation of the bonus points scheme for hospital doctors in light of a reduction in national health service jobs and a general pay freeze in the public sector. (S4F-00569)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): There are huge issues throughout the public sector at present. How could it be otherwise, with our budget being cut so substantially? However, it should be noted that staffing in NHS Scotland is higher than at the start of the previous session of the Parliament: between September 2006 and

December 2011, overall NHS staff numbers increased by 3.3 per cent—that is more than 4,000—and medical and dental staffing numbers increased by 17 per cent.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy has led by example on our commitment to long-term reforms of local and national consultant bonus award systems in Scotland. Richard Simpson will be aware that distinction awards and discretionary points have been frozen in Scotland since 2010-11 and that the spend on distinction awards is now less than it was in 2007, when we came into office. *[Interruption.]* Jackie Baillie seems to be questioning the numbers, as she often does. The spend was £24.1 million in 2007 and has come down progressively to £23.8 million in 2011.

Dr Simpson: I do not know whether I can thank the First Minister for that answer, because I am talking about the bonus points scheme, not the distinction awards.

When his Government imposes a pay freeze on everyone in the national health service who earns more than £21,000, how can the First Minister justify to those on low pay the fact that there were 201 new entrants to the hospital doctor bonus points scheme last year and that they received top-ups of between £3,200 and £25,632 over and above their salaries? How can he justify the fact that more than one third of the consultants who are already in the bonus scheme—not the distinction awards scheme—were given increases at an additional cost to the health service of £2.6 million? That happened despite the promises from the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy to freeze the system to new entrants and cease increases for other people.

The First Minister: I know exactly what the difference is. I am sure that Richard Simpson would be the first to acknowledge that the discretionary points scheme—the local awards scheme that he is talking about—was in place throughout Labour's time in office. The NHS boards believe that they are contractually obliged to continue with it until a new system can be negotiated.

It is not good enough for Richard Simpson to sweep aside the distinction awards scheme. There is no contractual entitlement to those awards, so it has been possible for the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy to freeze their value. Between 2009-10 and 2011-12, 84 fewer consultants held awards—a decrease of 15 per cent. Over the same timeframe, there was a saving of £4.1 million.

I understand why Richard Simpson does not want to thank me for my answer to his question. It is an inconvenient reminder that he is complaining

about a system that Labour not only established but did nothing about in its entire time in office. It also allows me to draw attention to the area that is not contractually binding, on which the health secretary has taken decisive action.

United Kingdom (Separation)

6. John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether he considers that separation from the rest of the United Kingdom could be negotiated within a year of an independence referendum. (S4F-00558)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): If John Lamont was so confident about his position, he would not feel the need to describe the process of independence, self-determination and self-respect in such pejorative terms. I refer him to paragraphs 4.1 to 4.5 of the “Your Scotland—Your Referendum” consultation paper, which I note has now received 7,000 responses. If I remember correctly, that is a somewhat greater number than the membership of the Scottish Conservative party recently. Mr Lamont will find in that part of the document a timetable for what would happen after a vote for independence in the autumn of 2014. I am sure that in his heart he genuinely agrees that the proposed timetable is proper. Following a yes vote in the referendum, the first election of an independent Scotland will take place in May 2016.

John Lamont: Another non-answer from the First Minister this afternoon.

Given what he has said about a possible timetable, will the First Minister enlighten us as to the discussions that he has had with each of Her Majesty's Government's reserved departments on the implications of separation for Scotland?

The First Minister: I note that the member continues to use that pejorative term. What is it about independence that so frightens the Conservative Party that it dare not speak its name? Is it because the number of independent countries in the world and in the United Nations has increased from 50 to almost 200? How many of the independent countries in the UN describe themselves as separated or as having engaged in a process of separation? I look forward to the United States of America celebrating separation day on 4 July. The greatest ally of the Conservative Party—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Mr Johnstone—enough!

The First Minister: Many countries have become independent on a very timeous timescale. For example, the Czech Republic and Slovakia declared independence on 17 July 1992 and became formally independent on 1 January 1993. Every UK Prime Minister since Harold Wilson has accepted the right of the people of Scotland to

declare their independence and I am sure that that means that, after a yes vote, the Westminster Government will seek to conclude independence negotiations in a prompt and efficient manner.

Finally, I congratulate John Lamont on falling only 22 per cent in Tory Hoose's popularity poll of its members. In contrast, Ruth Davidson managed to fall by 77 per cent. All the votes went to someone we can only call the lost leader—Murdo Fraser, who increased his popularity by 37 per cent. Mind you, with his opposition to minimum pricing, maybe we should call him the loss leader, not the lost leader.

The Presiding Officer: That ends First Minister's question time. We resume at 2 pm.

12:32

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Rural Affairs and the Environment

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is themed questions. In order to get in as many members as possible, I would prefer short and succinct questions and answers.

Cycling

1. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to invest in cycling infrastructure to improve take-up rates of active travel. (S4O-00829)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): We are providing significant investment for cycling infrastructure in Scotland's urban and rural areas. On 8 February, an additional £20.25 million was announced for infrastructure to support active travel over the next three financial years. That funding is in addition to the £15 million over the next three years in the budget line for wider sustainable and active travel initiatives, a significant proportion of which supports the promotion of active travel across Scotland.

Anne McTaggart: The minister will have read Transport Scotland's report on transport emissions, which concluded that the Government's transport policies could lead to an additional 17 kilotonnes entering the atmosphere by 2022. Does he agree that the report makes it even more essential to have the infrastructure in place to encourage increased take-up of sustainable means of travel such as cycling?

Stewart Stevenson: I am pleased to say that increasing numbers of our civil servants appear to be cycling; certainly one who directly reports to ministers regularly appears with his cycling hat firmly under his arm. We want to continue to encourage walking and cycling as very important health-giving elements of active travel and to see that they are taken up by more people.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): Will the minister provide some insight into the potential use of the climate challenge fund to support take-up of active travel in rural and urban areas? One example that I am familiar with is the Bike Station, which sits on the boundary between the Edinburgh Central and Edinburgh Southern constituencies. Might such initiatives provide scope for further support around Scotland?

Stewart Stevenson: The Bike Station is an excellent example of work involving people in the community. Indeed, I visited it three and a half years ago and plan to visit it again soon to see what progress it has made in its initiatives. I am happy to update the member when I have had those discussions.

Climate Justice Fund

2. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will officially launch its climate justice fund. (S4O-00830)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scottish climate justice fund will be launched as soon as practicable.

James Kelly: I am sure that there is agreement across the chamber on the fund's objectives. Low-carbon technology can also be used in the battle against climate change in poorer countries and to bring benefits in that respect. What role can good examples of low-carbon technology in Scotland play in other countries?

Stewart Stevenson: I am happy to have the member's support—and, indeed, the support of the chamber—for our climate justice initiatives. Low-carbon technology and helping other countries to develop it form an important part of the agenda. What might seem like a rather simple example of the practical help we can give is a cooking stove designed by, if I recall correctly, Strathclyde University—I might be wrong, but I am pretty sure that that is right—that gives the same thermal input for one quarter of the wood input.

However, I must also sound a brief note of caution: as well as supplying technology, we also need to change human behaviours.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am pleased to have participated in the first ever parliamentary debate on climate justice, which took place in our Parliament on 1 March. Will the minister confirm that, when it is rolled out, a key focus of the climate justice programme will be the emphasis on locally led, sustainable programmes, particularly in the agricultural sector?

Stewart Stevenson: Decision making is at an early stage but the climate justice programme should concentrate in the first instance on sectors in which Scotland has particular expertise and it should, in any event, be about sustainable projects with strong local involvement.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the minister recognise the United Kingdom Government's commitment to climate justice? How will the Scottish Government work with the UK Government on the issue to ensure a co-ordinated approach?

Stewart Stevenson: I have found that it is perfectly possible to make common cause with UK ministers. I met Ed Davey, who has taken over as secretary of state at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, a week past Friday. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment has also met Ed Davey. We are always happy to work with the UK Government where we can make common cause, and this is an agenda on which we are in substantial agreement.

Air Quality Regulations (Breaches) (Grangemouth)

3. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many breaches of the sulphur dioxide 15-minute mean objective, as specified in the Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations 2000, have taken place since the Grangemouth air quality management area was declared in November 2005. (S4O-00831)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Between November 2005 and February 2012, 761 exceedances of the objective were recorded across the three air quality monitoring sites in Grangemouth.

A three-year INEOS-led project is expected to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions by more than 80 per cent by the end of 2012.

Angus MacDonald: I am sure that the minister will agree with me that any exceedance of the SO₂ 15-minute mean objective is one breach too many, and 761 is far in excess of that. Although local Grangemouth industry has made some attempt to reduce the number of exceedances, does the minister share the concerns of local residents that a proposed 100MW biomass electricity plant could have a detrimental effect on the air quality in Grangemouth, particularly when the cumulative effect from Longannet and other industrial plants in the area is taken into account?

Stewart Stevenson: I will not comment because of the possible role of Scottish ministers in making planning decisions on any specific proposal. However, the member has brought up a very important matter that decision makers should take account of so that a proper decision can be made in due course.

Climate Challenge Fund

4. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the total actual reduction in CO₂ tonnage has been from projects receiving grants from the climate challenge fund. (S4O-00832)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The reported

reduction in CO₂ from the climate challenge fund so far is 128,357 tonnes of savings. That figure is from community groups that are in receipt of CCF funding and have submitted final reports for the awards period 2008 to 2011. It by no means represents the total savings that will ultimately be achieved.

John Pentland: Has the minister stopped using the total that is based on estimates for projects, some of which have produced little or no actual savings, despite contributing hundreds of thousands of tonnes to the figures that have been quoted by the First Minister and others?

Stewart Stevenson: I am very optimistic that the mix of projects that we supported through the first eight rounds of the climate challenge fund, and those projects that we will support in round nine, which was announced recently, will give us a substantial figure indeed.

However, I remind members that when I was before committee in the previous parliamentary session, I made the point that not every project would deliver on its promise. We are trying to be innovative and challenging, so we will have projects that succeed—the overwhelming majority—and we will have some that teach us something negative because it is not the way forward. It is important to realise that 100 per cent success will not be achieved. The 700,000 tonne figure that we previously reported is the figure for which we are shooting.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am glad that the minister emphasises the creative, experimental and empowering nature of the fund. That is exactly what we had in mind when we persuaded the Government to adopt the policy in the first place. What can be done to minimise the risk of projects, including small projects, being left vulnerable when they lose funding at short notice? How can we ensure the sustainability of the projects that are coming through as a result of the CCF?

Stewart Stevenson: I acknowledge Patrick Harvie's not insignificant role in setting up the climate challenge fund. In considering projects through the panel, which is independent of ministers, we will always seek to identify the projects that have the greatest chance of delivering what they promise. So we have a process to minimise the risk. On the ending of funding, we stress to people to whom we grant funding through the climate challenge fund that it is a time-limited grant with no guarantee of successor funding from the same source or from other sources. The scheme, for which the member should take some of the credit, has been overwhelmingly successful.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5, by Liam McArthur, has not been lodged.

Mackerel Fishery (Certification)

6. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what contingency plans it has put in place to ensure the continuing sale of mackerel in view of the possible loss of the Marine Stewardship Council certification at the end of March 2012. (S4O-00834)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I am continuing to work closely with the fishing industry to mitigate any damage that is caused by the possible suspension of the MSC certificate. The suspension, which would affect all European mackerel fisheries, demonstrates the irresponsibility of the actions that Iceland and the Faroes have taken in the on-going mackerel dispute. They are not only threatening the sustainability of a vital stock but putting at risk the business interests of fishermen throughout Europe.

Claudia Beamish: Can the cabinet secretary give us further reassurance on what will happen to the fishermen? Can he give consumers a guarantee that there will be a good-quality and sustainable source of that popular fish, in view of the likelihood that there will be only a frozen back-up for some time?

Richard Lochhead: It is worth mentioning that the suspension might come into place at the end of this month, but existing stocks can continue to be sold as having MSC status. Only fish that are caught after the suspension comes into place will not have the accreditation. However, Scottish-caught mackerel will continue to be caught sustainably, albeit not as part of the international agreement that is required for MSC status. Of course, as I am sure many retailers are aware, that mackerel is some of the best product anywhere. The best way in which to secure its position in the market is to get the international agreement in place as soon as possible. We need Iceland and the Faroes to see sense sooner rather than later.

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware of the importance of mackerel to the Shetland fleet and the processing industry there. Will he update us on the efforts that are being made to secure a deal with Iceland and the Faroe Islands? Are trade sanctions being actively promoted?

Richard Lochhead: I am well aware of the importance of the pelagic sector to Shetland, not only for the vessels, but for the onshore processors, which employ many people. I have

just returned from the fisheries council in Brussels this week where, at the request of Scotland, the United Kingdom, with support from Ireland, put the item on the agenda for discussion. The point was made that we need sanctions to be put in place as soon as possible. I am keen to work with anyone in Europe who sees the issue as a serious one. Many member states are trying to work with the European Commission to get sanctions in place as soon as possible. Of course, the UK Government has a role, so I am making clear to it that it must accelerate its efforts to ensure that the Commission has our support for trade instruments to be put in place, which we hope will be effective in persuading Iceland and the Faroes to see sense. It is an important issue.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I understand that sanctions might not be particularly effective, because Iceland and the Faroes sell most of the mackerel to Russia—in fact, Russia is doing some of the fishing. What can be done about that?

Richard Lochhead: The member raises an important dimension to the debate. However, potentially, the trade instruments and sanctions are not solely about mackerel. We await the Commission's view on which of the range of trade instruments that are available should be used, but they do not necessarily have to be only about mackerel.

Climate Challenge Fund

7. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress the climate challenge fund is making in combating climate change by helping local communities to reduce their carbon emissions. (S4O-00835)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): On 13 March, I was pleased to announce that 43 communities have been successful in sharing £6.9 million of awards over the next three financial years. That represents the first intake of applicants since we announced our continued commitment to the Government's climate challenge fund. We will maintain the funding at the 2011-12 level of £10.3 million per annum over the next three years.

Jim Eadie: As the minister is aware—and as Marco Biagi mentioned earlier—the Bike Station in Causewayside, in my constituency, plays an important role in helping to achieve the Scottish Government's 2020 target of 10 per cent of all journeys being made by bicycle. Does the minister agree that, beyond the climate challenge fund, all Government departments and local authorities must look for innovative ways of providing and encouraging investment in active travel so that we can all reap the benefits of cycling and walking as healthy, low-carbon forms of transport?

Stewart Stevenson: I agree with the thrust of the member's question—I suspect that no one in the chamber would disagree. We all have opportunities to weave a little bit of active travel into our busy lives. Yesterday, I had enough time to walk from Haymarket to St Andrew's house. I thoroughly enjoyed the spring weather, and others can do the same.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): The minister is well aware of the good work that is carried out by the staff and volunteers of the Lambhill stables, in my constituency. By September 2011, they had reduced CO₂ emissions by just over 165 tonnes with help from the climate challenge fund. The project submitted a carefully worked-out bid for further help from the climate challenge fund, which would have reduced emissions by a further 600 tonnes, but that bid was rejected by the SNP Government. Can the minister advise what other sources of funding might be made available to that important community initiative?

Stewart Stevenson: The Government has nothing to do with whose applications are accepted or rejected—an independent panel evaluates the projects. However, I have asked that those who have not been successful in the current round of funding be given help to understand why their application might not have met the criteria that the independent panel applied. I hope that that will be helpful in enabling those who have not been successful in round nine of the funding to make submissions in round 10, which is now open for applications.

Forth Estuary (Contaminated Water)

8. Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the environmental impact on the Forth estuary was of the leak of contaminated water near South Queensferry on 14 November 2011 and what action has been taken to mitigate it. (S4O-00836)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): A range of countermeasures were deployed during and following the incident near South Queensferry on 14 November to mitigate any environmental impact, and samples that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency gathered show that there has been no significant impact on the water environment as a result of the leak. BP is currently finalising a report on the incident, which will consider the need for further action to restore the watercourse and land fully to their previous condition. SEPA will examine any such proposals in due course and will continue to review BP's activities at the site.

Colin Keir: Will the minister clarify what remedial measures are being taken by BP and

what steps are being taken to ensure that improvements to testing regimes are implemented and that any learning points are acted on?

Stewart Stevenson: The most important thing at this stage is to highlight the fact that a warning was issued by SEPA to BP as a result of the incident. If the agreed remedial actions or necessary improvements in testing regimes are not undertaken, it is possible that SEPA will take further enforcement action. I hope that that gives the member the reassurance that he seeks.

Zero Waste Plan

9. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made with its zero waste plan. (S4O-00837)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): We have made significant progress, particularly through the laying of the draft Waste (Scotland) Regulations last week to drive the separate collection of food waste and recyclable materials from households and businesses. We expect to see food waste recycling available to at least 650,000 households by early 2015. The next key step will be to reduce the amount of waste that is generated in the first place. We will shortly consult on safeguarding Scotland's resources, an ambitious programme to unlock the economic and environmental benefits of using materials more efficiently.

George Adam: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the reuse hotline that was recently launched in Renfrewshire, which allows residents to recycle their household goods by giving them to those who can use them instead of sending decent goods to landfill, is a good, practical example of how we can make a difference in our local areas?

Richard Lochhead: Yes, after careful consideration, I can tell the chamber that that is a good example. I very much welcome the reuse hotline, which I was privileged to launch outside Parliament just a few weeks ago.

I commend all the social enterprises in many of our communities across Scotland that are helping communities to reuse what might otherwise make its way to landfill. The hotline is a good initiative and I hope that members across Scotland will support it in local communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Claire Baker can ask a brief supplementary.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary provide details of investment and support that are in place and are planned to help new businesses and social enterprises—particularly in high-energy-use sectors—to contribute to the zero waste strategy?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask for an equally brief answer, please.

Richard Lochhead: Such enterprises have quite a number of routes for support. As I do not have much time, I will not go through them all at the moment, but I am happy to write to the member with details. Zero waste Scotland is involved in a number of initiatives, and other funds are available for social enterprises generally.

Justice and Law Officers

Single Police Force (Major Function Hubs)

1. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what analysis it has made of the impact of the creation of a single police force on the allocation of major function hubs across the country. (S4O-00839)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): It will be for the Scottish police authority and the new chief constable to determine how the service is organised once they are appointed. However, there is considerable scope for support functions to be located throughout Scotland, and I am keen for jobs not to be concentrated in the central belt. Our proposals create a framework that encourages resources to be located across Scotland to best meet the needs of all our communities.

David Stewart: Does the cabinet secretary share my view that the distribution of hubs across Scotland should be based on what works best for service delivery to the public? Any objective analysis of comparative advantage among police authorities would conclude that a hub in the Highlands and Islands could cover mountain rescue, corporate services, firearms licensing, wildlife crime and rural road policing. Does the cabinet secretary agree with my analysis?

Kenny MacAskill: It is not for me to interfere with the operational independence of the chief constable or the board. I am aware of the expertise and specialisms that exist in the police service in Scotland in a variety of places. It is recognised that a great deal of good work emanates from the north, as from elsewhere. I can only reiterate that the Government expects such functions to be located in a variety of places, but that will be decided by the new chief constable, whoever he or she is, in conjunction with the new police authority.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I am sure that Dave Stewart agrees that there is cross-party support in the Highlands and Islands for support jobs and back-room functions to be based in the north. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that that cross-party support will be an important factor when the

Scottish police authority and the chief constable make decisions in due course?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. I am aware that Dave Thompson has pursued the issue doggedly for some time. I give him the same assurance as I gave Unison when I addressed its conference last week, which is that we expect support jobs not to be concentrated in the central belt but to be located across Scotland.

Emergency Service Communication Equipment

2. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions it has had with police forces regarding the development and upgrade of emergency service communication equipment. (S4O-00840)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with police forces and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland on a range of matters, including the development and upgrade of emergency service communication equipment.

Liz Smith: I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware of the outstanding work by our mountain rescue teams and particularly of the generous support that they receive from Scotland's police and other emergency services for such communication equipment. Given the pressure that is placed on what are largely voluntary funds, will the cabinet secretary give a guarantee that mountain rescue service equipment will be very much part of discussions about the formation of the new single police force when they take place?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely—I reassure the member on that. It was a privilege to meet those who are involved in mountain rescue in central Scotland. I am aware that many such people are serving police officers who do mountain rescue in their spare time.

Mountain rescue is a separate matter, but its funding is an important aspect of ensuring safety in Scotland. That does not apply just to those who are out on the hills in the Highlands, as a great deal of the work involves the central belt. I give the member that assurance.

Police and Fire Services (Expenditure Scrutiny)

3. Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the need for a further level of scrutiny of expenditure by police and fire services. (S4O-00841)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We believe that scrutiny should be effective and proportionate. Responsibility for

financial oversight lies with police and fire boards, with the Accounts Commission overseeing that expenditure.

The boards of the new single services will be appointed for their skills and expertise, including financial expertise. Their expenditure will also be scrutinised by the Auditor General and their accounts will be laid before the Scottish Parliament.

Hugh Henry: I refer to the damning report on the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service that was published by the Accounts Commission. The cabinet secretary might be aware that, previously, the Public Audit Committee, with all-party support, had expressed concern that such reports could not be scrutinised in this Parliament by the Public Audit Committee or any other committee.

Given that cross-party support, will the Scottish Government give its support to an attempt to widen the remit of the Public Audit Committee to allow such scrutiny to take place in this Parliament?

Kenny MacAskill: Any changes to the committee would be a matter for the Parliament, rather than for me, in my role as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, or for the justice department.

As the member has mentioned, there are difficulties in the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service. We are grateful for the on-going good work that is being done at a local level by Stephen Torrie, who is our senior officer. He has gone in to ensure that we protect the integrity of the service that is there to cover all requirements in the north.

The appropriate role of the Public Audit Committee with regard to the issue of auditing is one that I am sure members will be happy to debate in the chamber.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the review of the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service and the support that is being given by the Government and other services in Scotland following the critical Accounts Commission report on the serious failures.

I appreciated the cabinet secretary's first answer, but I would like him to give a clear commitment to ensuring that the single force will be fully accountable to this Parliament, with the highest level of scrutiny, which, as Hugh Henry says, is not available to us at this time. Will the Public Audit Committee be able to exercise the same level of scrutiny as it does in relation to other Audit Scotland reports?

Kenny MacAskill: Obviously, these matters are being dealt with. I will be giving evidence at the Justice Committee on the Police and Fire Reform

(Scotland) Bill. We are working on the basis that the proposals will provide the necessary financial savings and the best police and fire and rescue services, and that they will improve and expand the level of scrutiny and governance at a local level. The arrangements will be a pyramid structure, with the base in our local communities. The structure will include a chief fire officer and a chief constable, and will recognise the role that Parliament will have in relation to the fire service, which was raised by Mary Scanlon, and the police service, which was raised by Graeme Pearson. I am more than happy to engage on those matters, because it is important that the current level of governance and scrutiny should be enhanced.

Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service (Best-value Audit)

4. Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it has taken to assist Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service following the recent Audit Scotland report, "Audit of Best Value: Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue". (S4O-00842)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): I have been taking a close interest in this issue, and I welcome the work of the peer support team and other services that are being offered to Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service. I understand that the service is already addressing issues that have been raised.

Dave Thompson: The important thing here is public safety. Will the minister do all that she can to help Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service to ensure safe coverage across the area until all fire stations are brought up to standard?

Roseanna Cunningham: It is the case that safety—of the community and of the officers in the service, whether they be full time, retained or volunteer—is paramount. The chief inspector, my officials and senior officers from other fire services are all in regular contact with the service to find out how it can best be helped. I spoke to the convener of the Highlands and Islands fire board not long ago.

Of course, this is primarily a matter for the board, but I am willing to consider any requests for further help that are made.

Grampian Police (Civil Contingencies)

5. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will review the support that it provides to Grampian Police in relation to civil contingencies. (S4O-00843)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government will, in 2013-14, review the support that it provides for civil contingencies work to the Grampian strategic co-ordinating group, of which Grampian Police is a key partner, as well as to the other seven SCGs in Scotland, in the light of police and fire reform.

The Scottish Government will continue to engage with SCG partner agencies to ensure that the essential elements and strengths of successful multi-agency planning and response are maintained and to build consensus around an optimum future resilience model.

Nanette Milne: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the significant challenges that confront Grampian Police in providing police protection for the royal family when they are resident in the Deeside area, policing the oil and gas sector, including the St Fergus terminal, and providing protection to the First Minister when he is in the area. What discussions has the Scottish Government had with Grampian Police regarding those extended responsibilities? What provision will be made for the future single police force to take into account those policing challenges in the north-east?

Kenny MacAskill: Those are ultimately matters for the chief constable. I met the chief constable of Grampian Police recently, and we are aware of those matters. There is a formula to address the specific challenges that Grampian Police faces, including the offshore aspects to which Nanette Milne referred and those relating to Balmoral. Such challenges are faced by other jurisdictions, such as Lothian and Borders, which has Holyrood palace and other challenges in its area.

Such issues are being discussed as we move towards a single police service to ensure that we achieve the best possible position in that regard. We will ensure that the support and skills are available for meeting challenges such as the monarch being at Balmoral. We will ensure that there is no waste of resources in that regard whenever she moves down into the Lothian and Borders jurisdiction. In general, we will ensure that we get best value from the police and that they continue to provide an outstanding service.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will recall that the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 defines areas for civil contingency preparation in terms of the existing forces. Further to his initial answer around working with partners, will the cabinet secretary indicate to Parliament today how he envisages that being structured in the future, given the police and fire service reform?

Kenny MacAskill: The short answer is that we are happy to leave it as it has been operating.

Whether that will be appropriate when we move to a single force, given that the SCGs are predicated on the force boundaries, is something that we are happy to consider. We want to get the optimum size and number in Scotland. The Government does not have a fixed view on that and will engage with the agencies concerned, such as the new single police and fire services and the local authorities, which are key partners. We could end up maintaining the current figure of eight SCGs, albeit that one would cover almost 50 per cent of Scotland, or there could be alternative structures.

I assure the member that we are not rushing into anything and that we are happy to debate the matter with him. Equally, I would be more than happy to discuss it as we proceed. However, it is fair to say that we want to ensure that we get the best possible civil contingencies and that we will discuss the structure in due course.

Police Officers (Investigation of Conduct)

6. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what procedures are followed in relation to police officers under investigation. (S4O-00844)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Police officers who have a complaint made against them, whether it alleges criminality or misconduct, may be subject to the procedures set out in the Police (Conduct) (Scotland) Regulations 1996 or the Police (Conduct) (Senior Officers) (Scotland) Regulations 1999.

If an officer is not satisfied with a decision that is made at a misconduct hearing or with the manner in which the procedures were carried out under the conduct regulations, they can appeal first to the chief constable and then to the police appeals tribunal.

Linda Fabiani: I am dealing with a constituency case in this regard. It seems to me that a serving police officer who is under investigation can be left in an intolerable situation with nowhere to turn outwith their own institution. Will the cabinet secretary clarify a point for me? Should a serving police officer who is under investigation wish to make a complaint of a criminal nature, or a misconduct complaint about how he was treated, against those who are carrying out the investigation, what rights and recourse does the officer have beyond internal procedures?

Kenny MacAskill: That matter would be addressed by the chief constable rather than by me. Such things are dealt with as part of the employer-employee relationship, in which we would not seek to interfere. I am happy to enter into discussions and write to Linda Fabiani on that issue. However, it seems that the matter would be raised first with the chief constable's office, and

the individual officer would—depending on their rank—presumably be represented by the Scottish Police Federation or the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents. If any misconduct issues arose beyond that, it would at present be open to the chief constable to have another force investigate them, and in due course it will be for the commissioner to do so.

We also have the Solicitor General for Scotland, who is sitting across from me, and any allegations of criminality can be referred to the Crown, which will be able to deal with them. It is, after all, the Crown and not I that can direct police investigations.

Police Guidelines (Children of Arrested Parents)

7. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what guidelines there are for police on how to treat children when arresting a parent. (S4O-00845)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): There are no specific guidelines for police on how to treat children when a parent is arrested. Such guidance would be a matter for the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland. Each case varies, but when a parent is arrested several different agencies, including social services and the police, often meet to ensure that the needs of the child are met. The welfare of the child is of paramount importance.

Mary Fee: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response. However, the recent Quaker United Nations Office report highlighted that children are 73 per cent more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress if they are present when a parent is arrested. Does the cabinet secretary therefore agree that clear and unambiguous guidelines should be in place for when the police arrest a parent when a child is present, and that more support and counselling should be available for children in that position? What steps will he take to ensure that support and counselling is available?

Kenny MacAskill: Fundamentally, such matters are for the police to deal with. As we go through police and fire reform, we are at pains to make it clear that there will be no operational interference by a minister, whether that is me or a successor of any political hue.

The police need to ensure that they have guidance that can be issued in training at Tulliallan for those who are coming into the service and on an on-going basis. Each and every case is different. A situation in which a police officer arrests a man who is beating his wife in the presence of their child is vastly different from a situation in which a police officer comes through the door with a drug arrest warrant or deals with

someone who is shoplifting and has their child with them. There are a variety of situations, and we need to provide guidelines for the police while recognising that police officers must use their discretion, subject to the training and guidance that they are given.

Sometimes matters are fairly clear cut and common sense dictates what should be done, but other situations—such as an assault to which the child is a witness—can be problematic. I assure Mary Fee that I will discuss the issue with John Geates when I meet him next at Tulliallan.

I will ensure that the matter is passed to ACPOS to be addressed, but fundamentally we must trust in the good sense and judgment of our police officers in doing what is necessary. In some instances in which a parent is arrested, it is in the child's best interests for the parent to be detained.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn for understandable reasons.

Scottish Prison Service (Key Performance Indicators)

9. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how well the Scottish Prison Service is performing against its key performance indicators. (S4O-00847)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Prison Service's most recent set of key performance statistics was published in its annual report in July 2011. The next annual report and accounts is due for publication during the summer. Despite the pressures associated with record population levels during 2011 to 2012, the SPS continues to perform well against all its key performance indicators.

John Wilson: As the cabinet secretary is aware, Colin McConnell has been appointed as the chief executive for the Scottish Prison Service and will take up his post on 28 May. He will be returning to the Scottish Prison Service after an absence south of the border and in Northern Ireland. What will the new chief executive's key focus be when he takes up post? Are there any proposals to review the SPS performance indicators after the next report?

Kenny MacAskill: I look forward to meeting Dr Colin McConnell next week. I think that he is due to come in for a cup of coffee. I look forward to him giving me his insight into what is necessary. There are some things that we clearly accept are necessary under the key performance indicators, but I give John Wilson a clear indication that I want to hear Dr McConnell's views.

Dr McConnell has served as a prison officer and a governor in Scotland, he has served south of the

border and, most recently, he was in charge of the prison service in Northern Ireland. He comes with an outstanding curriculum vitae and I am sure that he will provide outstanding service. I look forward to working with, and learning from, him and I am open minded as to what actions he thinks that we should take.

Fossil Fuel Levy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a statement by Fergus Ewing, which is an update on Scotland's fossil fuel levy. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement; therefore, there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:41

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I will set out the Scottish Government's intentions for the fossil fuel levy.

The Scottish Government spent more than five years negotiating with the United Kingdom Government to secure an acceptable deal to release the fossil fuel levy moneys. Members of the Parliament and colleagues in Scotland's renewables industry made a significant contribution to the debate and should be commended on the role that they played in finally securing the funding.

We agreed with the UK Government last year that £103 million would be released to the Scottish Government in financial year 2012-13, with the remaining £103 million being channelled into the green investment bank. Given the significant efforts that so many people made to secure those funds, it is important that we use them in a way that will add most value to Scotland's renewables sector. I will set out how we intend to do that.

By using Scotland's massive green energy resources and our proven track record in energy innovation, we aim to maximise the economic benefits for Scotland and its people. We have set some of the most ambitious renewable energy targets in the world. Through them, we have forged our reputation as a country that gives strong leadership on, and support for, renewables. That hard-won international reputé helps to provide the opportunity to create tens of thousands of new jobs and to secure billions of pounds-worth of investment in our economy.

Renewable industry investment will re-industrialise Scotland's communities; it is already re-industrialising them. Communities such as Nigg, and Arnish in the Western Isles, are already benefiting from key investment. In Orkney, infrastructure developments, activity at the world-leading European Marine Energy Centre and activity at our northern ports have seen the area emerge as the global headquarters of marine energy.

That is why renewable energy is a key priority for the Government. Members need only look at the spending review settlement to understand the

strength of our commitment; we have committed £200 million to renewables. That funding is focused on stimulating research, development and innovation; on accelerating the deployment of the first commercial marine renewables arrays through the marine renewables commercialisation fund; on transforming our ports and harbours through the national renewables infrastructure fund; and on encouraging inward investors to develop their offshore wind turbines using the POWERS—prototyping for offshore wind energy renewables Scotland—scheme.

I am delighted that Edinburgh has been chosen—and has been chosen on its merits—as the headquarters for the green investment bank. That decision acknowledges Scotland's position at the vanguard of the renewables industry and follows an excellent and professional bid campaign. It demonstrates the effectiveness of the unity that was built across the political, academic and geographical spectrums to argue Edinburgh's and Scotland's case. It also underlines the importance of the £103 million from Scotland's fossil fuel levy that we agreed to capitalise for the green investment bank. It is great news for Edinburgh's economy and for Scotland's thriving low-carbon sector.

The green investment bank will not cover the whole spectrum of green investment. It intends to invest in projects that are “almost commercial” and to focus on technologies such as offshore wind, energy-from-waste generation and energy efficiency—including support for the green deal.

Many attractive large-scale projects in Scotland are ideal investment territory for the green investment bank. Its activities will complement, on a larger scale, the support that we already offer through the NRIF and POWERS. Other equally important renewables sectors that are at an earlier stage of development, or that have community rather than commercial aims, also need investment to realise their ambitions. The fossil fuel levy moneys could, and should, be part of that solution.

We have considered how best to utilise the funds, and have drawn on three principles, the first of which is additionality: the funds should be additional to the £200 million of spending review funds that have already been committed, but must also be complementary to those and to other available funds, such as funds from the green investment bank. The second principle is leverage: we will use the funds to attract additional finance from other sources. The final principle is that there must be a legacy: a suitable structure will be found that allows longevity of support and ensures that the right type of investment is committed to projects at the right time.

With those three principles strongly in our minds, I today announce our intention to create a renewable energy investment fund, using the £103 million of fossil fuel levy moneys, in order to create a delivery mechanism that has the scope to attract other investors, to offer longer-term support and to offer early support to specific renewables sectors. In building on the experience of the Scottish Investment Bank model, the renewable energy investment fund will, from the next financial year, look to invest in early-stage technologies or community sectors, and to attract interested private sector investors as fund partners. I stress the word “invest”; our intention is not to replicate existing grant support. The fund will focus on investment that complements, rather than duplicates, current funding routes.

I have established to work on assessing the key sectors for investment a team that brings together the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and which includes experts from the Scottish Investment Bank.

I expect a strong focus of the fund to be on innovative renewable technologies—in particular, marine, wave and tidal renewables. We have supported technology developers—including Pelamis Wave Power Ltd, Aquamarine Power Ltd and AWS Ocean Energy Ltd—in developing and testing their prototype devices, which has built momentum across the industry. We will continue to support technologies in wave and tidal renewables as they emerge. The sector is now approaching an exciting milestone as it looks to develop and deploy arrays of devices in the water for testing. The new fund will give an extra boost to the sector to deploy more and larger arrays in the future.

Another priority area will be support for district heating. There are many benefits to district heating systems, which will offer some protection from rising energy bills and will reduce reliance on imported energy.

District heating projects such as the original one in Aviemore, which used biomass—it was fired by locally sourced woodchip—to heat more than 130 homes, and the scheme in Seaton in Aberdeen that serves more than 500 flats, including sheltered accommodation, a sports changing facility and Aberdeen City Council's beachfront complex, have delivered real benefits to their local communities. Despite that, and despite the many benefits of district heating and more than £5 million in Scottish Government grants since 2007, we still have so little of it. We expect our district heating loan scheme, which has been operating for a year, to be oversubscribed in future years. To make provision for funding district heating within the proposed renewable energy

investment fund is the right move, and will ensure that that important sector gets the support that it needs to take off.

Lastly, we are leading the way in the UK and beyond in supporting communities and rural businesses to develop their own local renewables projects. Our 2020 500MW target for community and locally owned projects could be worth up to £2.4 billion in revenue, so it represents a huge opportunity to bring the benefits of renewable resources directly to Scotland's communities, including a great many communities in rural Scotland and our islands.

We already support communities through loans to projects, but we are concerned that the market may not be prepared to offer finance for capital build to allow communities to retain 100 per cent ownership. The renewable energy investment fund will look to address that shortfall. We know that the need of the communities sector to find finance is very pressing, which is why I am making available £2 million for community projects in 2012-13. From April, the community and renewable energy scheme will provide post-planning finance to community and locally owned renewables projects, alongside a CARES infrastructure fund to stimulate innovation in connection and in demand management.

Now that we have announced our intentions, the joint team is working to design the most appropriate delivery mechanism for the renewable energy investment fund. It will engage with developers, local authorities, universities and other parties to assess the key areas for investment. I am also keen that it work closely with potential funders, including the European Investment Bank, the team that is setting up the green investment bank and private sector finance bodies, in order to ensure that we maximise the leverage that the fund can deliver.

We have a lot of work to do over the next few months, but I will endeavour to return to the chamber to provide an update on the progress that is being made. As with the recent decision on the location of the green investment bank, securing access to this part of the fossil fuel levy money was a significant win for Scotland. Through the creation of the renewable energy investment fund, we will ensure that the £103 million is used in a way that will deliver additionality, leverage and legacy, and which will provide another significant win for our renewables industry and Scotland's economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that have been raised in his statement. I will allow about 20 minutes for questions, after which we will need to move on to the next item of business.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank the minister for the advance notice of his statement and for the helpful informal briefing by his officials.

We are all pleased that the sums of money that were raised by the fossil fuel levy have been released for investment and are now available to help Scotland to make the transition to a low-carbon economy. The minister has indicated the broad thrust of his initial priorities for how the £103 million will be spent, and the mechanism that he will use—a fund to which organisations, companies and communities can apply—but it is clear that a huge number of important and detailed decisions on issues such as who will administer the fund, what criteria they will apply and how long the fund will last, have still to be considered.

I want to focus on just a couple of those points. The minister can count on our support for investment in community renewables projects—including microgeneration and combined heat and power schemes—but it sounds from the statement as though a lot of importance is being placed on attracting or leveraging in additional resources, or on the fund as an investment vehicle. Can the minister assure Parliament that community need and social justice will be important criteria in deciding on loans, grants or other fund investments? What appointments to the fund board will he make, or what other mechanism will he use to ensure that social justice policy—as opposed to commercial criteria—is adhered to?

Earlier-stage investment, particularly in wave and tidal power projects, is unlikely to attract the support of the green investment bank because such projects are riskier and less commercial. What balance does the minister envisage the fund striking between ensuring the longevity of the fund and investing in such strategically important, but inherently riskier, projects?

Fergus Ewing: I thank Ken Macintosh and the Labour Party for their support. We will continue to work closely with Mr Macintosh and his colleagues on all these matters.

I am happy to confirm that we are determined to ensure that the interests of communities will be fully acknowledged and that we consider social justice issues as part of the approach that we take. I have announced an allocation of £2 million for community renewables.

Since May 2007, there have been, for community renewables, more than 800 grants worth some £16 million, so there has been a measure of success, but there is more to do. The difficulties in making some community schemes a reality are clear and manifest and we are committed to working with all parties and with people outwith the chamber to overcome the hurdles and to make such schemes a reality.

Ken Macintosh is also right to say that the GIB is for near-commercial projects and the renewables energy investment fund is for more nascent technologies in their earlier stages. He is also right to say that because that is the case, the nascent technologies involve greater risk than those that are nearer commercial deployment. I think that that is a matter on which everyone would agree.

The purpose of the renewable energy investment fund, however, is to incentivise and assist the development of wave and tidal energy, among other methods. I am delighted that so many companies in the world have chosen Scotland in general and the Pentland Firth in particular to develop their devices. The potential benefits that wave and tidal energy can bring to Scotland and the world cannot be overstated. There are risks and we will consider them carefully, but I think that we all agree that we are embarked on a worthwhile and sensible journey.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that unless we have much shorter questions and answers I will have no chance of calling all the members who want to ask questions.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): We very much welcome the statement and the approach that is being taken by the minister, and I thank him for the time that was taken to brief spokesmen at lunchtime. I also commend the Westminster Government for releasing the money.

Given that we all want communities to benefit from the investment and that we want to ensure that Scotland gets its fair share of the manufacturing and assembling jobs that relate to renewables, will the minister ensure that existing fabrication yards and shipyards are fully utilised so that they get their fair share of jobs from renewables and energy innovation in the future?

Fergus Ewing: Yes. I am happy to give that confirmation. We spend a great deal of time seeking to ensure that Scottish companies will have the opportunity to bid for and, we hope, to obtain the necessary work, and that Scottish ports—in particular ports, harbours and businesses in the Highlands and Islands—have the opportunity so to do. I commend to Mary Scanlon the progress that has been made in Campbeltown, Arnish, Nigg, Ardersier, Kishorn, Wick, Scrabster and the Orkney ports. There is a great deal to be done, but we are already achieving a great deal and the potential is enormous.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I, too, welcome the statement. It was, of course, great news for Fife when Samsung Heavy Industries Co Ltd decided earlier this year to base its first European offshore wind project there. Can

the minister confirm whether it is likely that further projects will be brought to the kingdom through the new investment fund?

Fergus Ewing: I was very happy to visit Fife Chamber of Commerce last week, as well as to visit Methil on—if my notes are correct—19 December. Fife is in the vanguard of the progress that is being made. I want in particular to pay tribute to Burntisland Fabrications Ltd—which is leading so much of the work there—and to Samsung for its investment. Samsung has chosen to have its European location in Fife energy park and is planning to make a substantial investment of up to £100 million, which is expected to create more than 500 new jobs in Scotland.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will be aware that large renewables development companies spread risk by investigating several sites for development, knowing that their achieving a small number of consents will pay for their wider outlay. A community does not have that option, so its one project holds all the risk and all the cost. On that basis, will communities have access to the renewable energy investment fund and if so, and if their project is not consented, will they have to repay any loans?

Fergus Ewing: I have just announced that specific provision will be made for community renewables projects that follow the various projects that have been undertaken under CARES and its predecessor scheme. I acknowledge the work that Sarah Boyack and others carried out in that regard. We are continuing work that Labour Party members and their Liberal colleagues initiated, so this is an important cross-party effort.

We need to try to de-risk the process of community renewables investment. Communities often do not have financial expertise and are unfamiliar with tasks such as getting a grid connection, dealing with corporate matters, setting up as the appropriate company and dealing with other parties who are involved. It is appropriate that the required assistance and advice are provided on all such matters.

We are determined to ensure that the mechanics—if I can put it in that way—work as effectively as possible and with minimum risk to the communities involved. We have a reasonable track record of success in that regard, but we are always happy to consider further specific measures that will mean that more community renewables schemes proceed.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I whole-heartedly welcome the overdue application of Scotland's fossil fuel money in the renewable energy investment fund.

Without prejudice to the needs of the Cromarty Firth and Kishorn bases, will the fund offer support to smaller marine energy schemes, such as projects in the Pentland Firth that were rejected in the Crown Estate's third leasing round, and will it ensure that Wick and Scrabster harbours are fully fitted out to support progress towards deployment of demonstration models in the Pentland Firth, the Orkney waters and the Moray Firth?

Fergus Ewing: Yes. I had the pleasure of visiting Rob Gibson's constituency—as he knows, because he was with me—on 12 March, where we saw the great progress that is being made at Scrabster, and discussed the progress that it is hoped will be made at Wick. Both harbours are well placed to take advantage of the opportunities and both are led by people who are determined to ensure that the opportunities do not slip from their grasp.

The answer to the member's question about smaller companies and new entrants who were excluded from the leasing round is yes—we want to help them. I met one such company just yesterday. There are projects for 1.7GW of wave and tidal power in the Pentland Firth, which presents a massive opportunity for the part of Scotland that Mr Gibson represents. We fully intend to ensure that that potential is realised.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the minister for his statement, which I and other Labour members very much welcome.

Has the minister considered eligibility for local authorities or companies that local authorities set up? He was right to suggest that there is a paradox in that although some of the technology—including renewable heat and solar technology—is established, we have not yet seen its mass application. South of the border, groups of authorities have had success, but cities in Scotland have not yet made progress. Is the minister keen to explore the idea?

Fergus Ewing: Yes. I agree with Sarah Boyack and I am keen to explore the idea. I visited Dumfries and Galloway Council yesterday, which is taking an active interest in the matter, and I understand that Glasgow City Council is involved in a number of projects that could well be early candidates for consideration by the green investment bank. We want more work to be done on district heating, which I agree has been slow to take off. Once again, I think that we stand four square with the member in that regard.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): Renewable energy presents an opportunity to reindustrialise all Scotland. Can the minister give details of how shipyards on the Clyde have the potential to benefit, bearing in mind our world-renowned heritage of Clyde-built ships?

Fergus Ewing: Many of the engineering skills that are required in fabrication of the devices and apparatus of the renewables industry, and of the support vessels and equipment for the industry, can and are being used. There is a crossover between oil and gas and renewables and there should be a crossover between shipbuilding and renewables. I am keen to encourage the work that is done in—or near—the member's part of the world; for example in relation to the possibility of upgrading the dock at Westway and dredging the River Cart, which might assist steel engineering companies to grow their renewables business. There are no parts of Scotland that should not be able to benefit from the renewables revolution.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the minister for his statement and for the briefing earlier today.

I welcome the emphasis on community renewables. Will the minister ensure that the widest possible range of communities are able to bid for the scheme, including those that are already working in partnership, perhaps with a local small business, a non-governmental organisation or a public body, such as a school or hospital? Will the minister assure us that such partnership approaches will not be ruled ineligible?

Fergus Ewing: I give Patrick Harvie that assurance; we are happy to work with all the bodies to which he refers. In addition, if we can be of assistance to any scheme in the constituency of any member of any party in this chamber, we would be happy to do so.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): The minister will be aware of plans to site, off the coast of my constituency, two wind farms that will have a combined potential to power up to 1.2 million households and whose construction and servicing offer the prospect of new jobs coming to the Dundee and Angus area. Today's welcome statement follows the securing of the headquarters of the green investment bank. Will he advise what impact, if any, that might have on developments in that respect?

Fergus Ewing: It would be inappropriate for me comment on any application that may come before me for decision as a minister.

However, I can say in general terms that there are considerable opportunities. Mr Dey's constituency is close to the location of several of them, in particular in Dundee and Montrose. I visited Montrose harbour fairly recently. I know that Montrose was disappointed about not being included as a national renewables infrastructure plan port—it was the next one on the list—but it is well placed, for example for operations and maintenance. The east coast of Scotland is set to see a jobs windfall resulting in tens of thousands

of Scots and their families developing careers that will be needed for centuries.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the minister for his statement and for advance sight of it.

On the community renewable energy investment fund, I was reassured that the minister highlighted the mechanisms that will be put in place for support. However, I wish to push a little further and ask about the co-operative model, which I am meeting him next week to discuss. Will funding be available to cover the equity costs as well as loaned finance so that communities can take more control of their own power generation for the range of renewables, including microrenewables and combined heat and power?

Fergus Ewing: I was unaware that I was going to have the pleasure of meeting Claudia Beamish next week, but I look forward to it.

I am happy to confirm that co-operatives can play a vital part in renewables, as they do in so many areas of Scottish life. I acknowledge the part that is played by many banks, including the Co-operative Bank, in that respect.

There are cases in which communities that do not have vast amounts of money—or any money—are unable to proceed because they cannot get the last 5, 10 or 15 per cent. As I said in the statement, the fund will bridge that gap. It gives us the opportunity to make those schemes happen.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I note the classes of scheme on which the minister has commented, but I do not recall seeing anything about oil product replacement technologies and the idea that waste products might be converted by technologies to something that would pass as petrol, such as isopropanol. Are those the kind of technologies that might also be supported by the fund?

Fergus Ewing: Yes. I have mentioned the areas on which I think the fund is likely to focus, but we will not exclude biofuels from consideration. We have to consider each proposal carefully, but I am happy to confirm that proposals of the type that Nigel Don mentioned are not debarred from applying to the fund. I am happy to work with him to develop that further.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jim Eadie. The question and answer must be very brief.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Will the minister take this opportunity to pay tribute to the university sector and the part that it plays in developing and commercialising renewable technologies? Will he visit the University of Edinburgh to see first hand how research into offshore wave technology is helping to underpin

Scotland's reputation as Europe's green energy powerhouse?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Be as brief as you can, minister.

Fergus Ewing: Scotland has some of the world's leading experts in just about every discipline of renewable energy. I am delighted to accept the member's invitation to meet the experts at Edinburgh university

Remploy (United Kingdom Government Response)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02431, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the United Kingdom Government's response on the future of Remploy.

15:10

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): In November 2007, the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Peter Hain, approved a five-year modernisation programme, which resulted in the closure of 29 sites, including one in Hillington in Scotland. In 2010—three years into that five-year process—the current UK Government commissioned Liz Sayce of Disability Rights UK to undertake a review of specialist disability employment support by the Department for Work and Pensions. That review resulted in the DWP's decision to move Remploy out of Government ownership and close four of the nine remaining factories in Scotland, with the loss of 111 jobs and putting a further 251 jobs at risk.

The Scottish Government is deeply disappointed by that decision and the manner in which it was made. We are seeing a steady erosion of supported employment support by the UK Government. In today's challenging labour market, finding a job in any circumstances can be challenging; that is doubly so for disabled people.

It is true that most disabled people in Scotland do not work in a supported business, but it is also true that, for some, working in a supported environment may be their only chance of accessing employment. We know that supported employment can be very effective in helping disabled people into work, so we remain firmly committed to the implementation of the supported employment framework in Scotland, which we published in February 2010.

Although we recognise that many people in supported employment in Scotland do not work in supported businesses, we simply cannot underestimate the impact that supported businesses across Scotland have on those who work in them and their families. Information that Scotland's supported businesses provided last year suggested that more than 1,600 disabled people are employed by supported businesses in Scotland, including in Erskine, Remploy, Forth Sector and Haven Products. However, there is no doubt that some of those businesses are struggling, and I want to ensure that we are taking steps to support those businesses where we can.

I attended an event in February.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Fergus Ewing: I will take an intervention from the lady first.

Sarah Boyack: I want to ask about the Scottish Government's support—its strategy to procure goods from supported employment factories. Where that happens consistently—some local authorities are ahead of the game—there is fantastic support, but that is not universal. In Edinburgh, we have lost Blindcraft and we are going to lose Remploy. There is a real issue in the east of Scotland.

Fergus Ewing: I will deal with that matter in more detail later, but the member has a point. There is patchiness. At the event in February to which I was referring, I heard from a business in Lanarkshire—Beltane Products—that had excellent support. Obviously, we would like to see that level of support replicated across the way, but I will come back to that and talk more about it.

Murdo Fraser: Does the minister accept that most disability charities believe that the sheltered factory model that Remploy has pursued is now out of date and that the money could be better spent elsewhere? That fact was reported in no less a paper than *The Guardian* just two weeks ago. If the Scottish Government's position is that those factories should not close—from listening to the minister, that appears to be its position—will it step in and make up the funding?

Fergus Ewing: There are various questions there. I will deal with the first point. I recognise that charities that are involved in assisting people with a disability have different views on these matters, and it would be wrong for me to spend too much time characterising them. I hope that the rest of my remarks will address the other points that the member made.

In order to do what we can, we will shortly commission a review of Scotland's supported businesses. I have asked that it be taken forward as quickly as possible to ensure that we offer as much support as we can to Scotland's supported businesses in the coming months. The meeting in February helped—and was partly designed and intended—to determine the content of the review. In other words, the Government did not say of the review, "This is the way it is going to be." We asked people who are involved in Remploy and the other businesses to share in the construction of the remit for the review. It was clear that those who attended the meeting believed that the review should involve a mixture of individual site visits and thematic seminars to allow people to come together and share knowledge and information.

Among the support available to third sector bodies is that provided by the just enterprise consortium, which was launched in July 2011 and which involves a budget of £3 million over three years. It provides business support and learning services to enterprising third sector organisations to enable their development. To date, more than 500 organisations from all the local authority areas in Scotland have been approved to receive business support through the programme, although a relatively small number of supported businesses have applied for support—I should make that clear. Just enterprise support complements the economic development infrastructure in Scotland—Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the business gateway.

Those Remploy businesses that are looking to move to a social enterprise model could benefit from the just enterprise programme. They could also make use of the services to support the third sector and to develop volunteering through the network of local third sector interfaces. Should they show the potential to successfully adopt the social enterprise model, they could become eligible for direct funding through our programme of investment, which is expected to become available next year.

I turn to public sector procurement. It is clear that the key to the sustainability of supported businesses in Scotland is the ability to bring in business. We are certain that supported businesses can make a valuable contribution to the economy, and we have been working with them to realise that ambition. The sustainable procurement action plan asks all Scottish public bodies to have a strategy for awarding at least one contract to a supported business or factory under the provisions of article 19 of the European public procurement directive.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Is the minister prepared to mandate Scottish National Party local authorities to ensure that they use article 19 to give direct contracts to supported businesses such as Remploy?

Fergus Ewing: It is not for me to determine what local government should do at this point. I have already said that the plan asks each public body to award at least one contract to a supported business or factory. Knowing, as I do, councillors across all parties in Scotland, I am sure that every councillor in every party or none wants to do all that they can in this area.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Fergus Ewing: I ask the member to let me carry on, because I am about to cover many of the

matters that, I imagine, will be of interest to her and others.

In contrast to the way in which Westminster has handled the matter, we in the Scottish Government believe that more can be done to examine and analyse the future of supported businesses in Scotland. First, we introduced the supplier finder directory, which allows buyers to search for supported businesses to fulfil a contract. Secondly, we changed public contracts Scotland, the online portal for finding public sector work, so that buyers are automatically alerted whenever a supported business can fulfil the requirements of the planned contract, and they are offered the facility to reserve the contract under article 19. Thirdly, we have provided free tender-writing workshops to supported businesses and other third sector organisations. Those measures will not, in themselves, be the answer to all the questions, but nonetheless they are all practical, meaningful and necessary steps.

There are further steps. In 2010, we worked with the British Association for Supported Employment to publish a brochure that promotes Scotland's supported businesses. This year, we will put in place a framework reserved contract for supported businesses and factories. The framework will be open for use by the entire Scottish public sector and it will include contracts for furniture, document management and textiles, including uniforms. I am advised that the framework will be in place by the autumn.

Finally, during the current session of Parliament, we will introduce a sustainable procurement bill. In consultation, we want to consider what further measures might be appropriate to assist supported businesses in Scotland as part of that bill. That is a significant step forward. Never will it have been easier for public bodies to award contracts to supported businesses. I hope that all parties will support that measure. We expect the contract notice and invitation to tender documents to be published in the coming weeks. This is no handout or sympathy vote. If they wish to get public contracts, the firms will have to demonstrate that they can offer the taxpayer value for money. Members should be in no doubt about the professionalism, capability and dynamism of Scotland's supported businesses and factories; I have every confidence in them. I am clear that we want as many Rempoy employees as possible and the services that they provide to be a part of the process.

On the Rempoy DWP support package, the UK Government's decision on Rempoy is nothing short of a devastating blow to those who are involved. It is not just about individual employees; the loss of jobs will have a profound effect on their families. Last Thursday, I met Maria Miller to

discuss the matter. This week, I have met trade union representatives from Rempoy. At my meeting with the UK minister, I made it clear that I expect the DWP to provide every support to Rempoy staff whose workplaces might close, and to do so for as long as necessary.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

During the minister's discussions, was the issue of asset transfer raised? In Aberdeen, the opportunity to secure the building to develop social enterprise models in future would be a welcome boost. Has that been raised, or will the minister consider raising it in future?

Fergus Ewing: Those issues were broadly discussed and, indeed, that is the final major item that I will cover in the time that remains available to me.

The UK minister and I agreed that we need to work co-operatively to get the very best possible outcomes for Rempoy employees in Scotland, whether they move to new jobs or get involved in new businesses that arise on the existing sites, to answer Mark McDonald's point. When I met the trade union representatives this week, we agreed that every effort should be made to seek viable business alternatives for those sites. The DWP support is all about helping people to move out; we want to look at what is there and consider what new enterprises could be grown from the existing sites and equipment and, most important, the skills of the Rempoy workers.

To that end, I have agreed with Scottish Enterprise that, along with key partners, it will engage with those who are involved to analyse and provide support to anyone with an interest in the businesses, whether it be employees, private businesses, or social enterprise. Scottish Enterprise stands ready to consider any realistic proposal that might emerge. To support that work, I also asked the DWP to provide us with any information that could assist employees, third sector businesses and agencies in securing alternative business models or future employment for the Rempoy workforce. There might be bids from organisations to take over the sites or equipment. I also asked the DWP to make sure that the Scottish Government is part of any process to assess those bids. It remains to be seen whether the package of support that the DWP is offering will be sufficient to help those who want to find alternative employment.

I intend to monitor the work every step of the way. I want to mobilise whatever Scottish services are necessary through our partnership action for continuing employment team, and I believe that PACE could be the best conduit for the DWP support package. I believe that Rempoy will meet PACE representatives soon to discuss the offer of support, and we await a decision from Maria Miller

on that. I will meet the chairman of Remploy tomorrow and Angela Constance will meet Remploy next week.

I genuinely hope that we can all work together to get positive outcomes for everyone concerned from this very challenging situation.

I move,

That the Parliament is deeply disappointed by the UK Government's decision to close four Remploy factories in Scotland with the loss of 111 jobs and to place the future of five further factories, affecting a further 251 people, in doubt; notes that the Scottish Government has requested information from the Department for Work and Pensions that could assist employees, the third sector, business and agencies in securing alternative business models, demonstrating a sustainable future for the remaining factories and ensuring future employment for the Remploy workforce; further notes that, should alternative solutions not be found, support for individuals should be directed through Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) in partnership with JobCentre Plus; welcomes the actions taken by the Scottish Government to increase public sector contracting opportunities with supported businesses, accounting for £24.1 million in 2010-11, and looks forward to the delivery of the framework for the provision of goods through supported businesses, which includes provision of textiles and furniture.

15:24

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I am pleased that the Scottish Government and the Parliament have found time to debate the future of Remploy. For several years, members from across the chamber have raised on-going concerns but, as a result of the current highly controversial proposals that the Conservatives at Westminster have announced, the issue has now come to a head.

The recent review of disability employment that the UK Government commissioned and which was led by Liz Sayce tried to frame the debate as a choice between two models of employment—the traditional model that Remploy has offered of providing supported jobs for people with disabilities in a factory setting versus a focus on helping disadvantaged people into mainstream or open employment. The review came down forcefully on the side of the latter option and the Conservative Government has followed up on the report's recommendations through the current plans to close 36 of Remploy's 54 factories across the UK, including four in Scotland, with an expectation that the remaining factories will also close.

As campaigners, employees, trade unionists and elected representatives from all sides have pointed out, that is a false division and choice. There should not be an either/or decision between supported and open employment. Of course it is right that adults with disabilities or learning difficulties should have every opportunity to work

in a mainstream setting. In fact, although we have come a long way in recent decades, further progress clearly must be made if we are to overcome the discrimination and other barriers that stand in the way of equal treatment of all our fellow citizens. However, whatever the mainstream or open employment options, many people's active and positive choice will be to continue to work in a more sheltered environment.

Furthermore, the closure proposals ignore the role of Remploy factories as an avenue into mainstream employment. Many individuals gain the confidence, experience and training that they require to enter the marketplace through their work in Remploy factories, but that avenue is to be closed off.

Perhaps most worrying of all, the Government's decision makes no allowance for the practical reality of today's employment market, in which almost 0.25 million people are unemployed across Scotland and more than 2.5 million are unemployed across the UK. More important, in that market, despite changing attitudes and stronger legal rights, fewer than half of all disabled individuals are likely to be in a job, compared with 80 per cent of able-bodied workers. There is no evidence whatever to suggest that closing Remploy's factories will improve the employment prospects of people with disabilities in Scotland or the rest of the UK, but there is every reason to think that it will make matters worse.

As several colleagues did, I spoke to Remploy employees at their demonstration in Edinburgh this morning. I welcome those of them who have joined us in the public gallery this afternoon. What came across to me loud and clear was the fear and anxiety that the proposals have generated. This is not a consultation; it is a 12-week redundancy notice. Many of the men and women who are affected are in their 50s and have never worked outside Remploy. What chance do they have of securing employment or of competing with displaced graduates and the thousands of others who have been forced into the marketplace in the difficult economic circumstances that we all face? One of the men on the demonstration this morning thrust a letter into my hand, which is a series of questions to ministers in the Scottish and UK Governments. One of the questions is:

"if ten able bodied people are chasing the same job as a disabled person, what are the chances for the disabled person getting that job?"

The anxiety is palpable.

I draw a parallel between the current focus on mainstreaming jobs at the expense of supported employment with the inclusion agenda that was pursued in the area of additional support for learning, particularly when it was first introduced. I agree that we want to challenge the reduced

expectations of work and the limited career ambitions that we as a society have imposed on disabled people in the past, just as we have challenged that in our school system. However, rather than look on Remploi factories as segregated institutions, it might be more accurate and helpful to see them as supportive environments. Just as we rebalanced our view on inclusion and additional support for learning and recognised that there was an on-going role for special schools while giving all children the option of mainstreaming, so we should continue to support disabled people in every workplace while maintaining sheltered and specialist workshops and factories for those who want and need them.

Murdo Fraser: I welcome the tone of Mr Macintosh's speech and I find his arguments interesting. Did he raise similar arguments and concerns when Peter Hain in the previous Administration at Westminster announced the closure of 28 Remploi factories in 2007?

Ken Macintosh: I wish that Mr Fraser had echoed my tone. The point about Mr Hain's review was that it absolutely followed the model that I have set out. It considered the difficulties of modernising Remploi, bringing it up to date and making it more sustainable in today's environment, while maintaining a secure future. It was all about modernising Remploi factories and sustaining their future. There was an investment of £550 million and a five-year programme, not the 12-week redundancy notice that we have now. I hope that Mr Fraser will start his speech with an apology for the anxiety that that has caused.

Does anyone in the chamber need to be reminded of the importance of employment to not only people's income and standard of living, but their self-esteem, health, education and prospects, and their hopes and dreams for the future? Yes, we should try to improve the efficiency within Remploi—lots of suggestions for that have been made by the trade unions and others—but to make decisions about the future of the factories simply on the basis of their supposed profitability misses the point of the social and economic costs of their closure. The vast majority of former employees—more than 80 per cent—who took voluntary redundancy from Remploi three years ago are still unemployed and claiming benefits.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Does Mr Macintosh agree that many of the Remploi factories, including the one in Aberdeen, have moved forward in trying to create social enterprise hubs? They have also attracted support from private business. Does he agree that that is a way forward and something that we should be encouraging instead of closing the factories?

Ken Macintosh: I do, and I thank Mr FitzPatrick for that.

Members: Mr Stewart.

Ken Macintosh: Sorry—I beg your pardon, Mr Stewart. That is a terrible thing to do, and I have done it twice in one week now. I should know better after what happened with Mr Miliband. *[Laughter.]* I thank Mr Stewart for those comments, and I turn to what we can do practically to help.

On the basis of the evidence and past experience, it strikes me that political will is hugely important. I will be honest: when I heard that the debate was coming up, I thought that we, as the Opposition, had chosen the motion. I was slightly surprised to hear that the SNP had chosen it. I am not trying to apportion blame; however, when Blindcraft was threatened with closure, there was an expectation that the Scottish Government would intervene but it chose not to. On the other hand, when Glencraft was threatened with closure and there was a lot of political unrest, the Scottish Government intervened. There are political choices to be made.

Mark McDonald: I hesitate to say it, but I think that Mr Macintosh has oversimplified the process at Glencraft, which involved more than just the Government intervening. There was private sector and local authority support as well, which was the key to saving Glencraft—it was not simply the fact that the Government intervened.

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

Ken Macintosh: It is quite right that the Glencraft process involved the Government and the local authority; that was missing in Edinburgh's case. My point is that there are political choices to be made and political leadership can be shown.

The most obvious tool that ministers can call on is article 19 of the EU public procurement directive, which exists specifically so that contracts can be given to organisations in which more than 50 per cent of the workers have a disability. Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries is showing, through its contracts with Glasgow City Council, exactly how the sector can be led.

At the demonstration today, I met somebody from the Remploi factory in Springburn who told me that it is the sole maker of wheelchairs in the whole of the UK—not the sole supported employer, but the sole maker—and it is now, for the first time, on the list as an approved supplier; yet, it is threatened with closure.

I am conscious of the time, although I have taken some interventions.

We can offer political will. The minister mentioned Scottish Enterprise, and I believe that Co-operative Development Scotland also offers a model. The minister should work with trade unions

and the sector. That would make a huge difference not in saving money, but in generating money for the economy. By using the untapped potential of disabled workers—who are underemployed at the moment—we will improve our economy as well as improving lives.

I move amendment S4M-02431.2, to insert at end:

“; urges the Scottish Government to take the opportunity to express an interest in acquiring the Scottish Remploy factories affected by the closure proposal and, through Co-operative Development Scotland, to explore the community cooperative model of ownership for those businesses and to establish a task force comprising Remploy employees, trade unions and cross-party representatives to help secure a sustainable future for those factories and their employees, and further calls on the Scottish Government to commit to greater use of Article 19 contracts by the public sector.”

15:33

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I would have welcomed the opportunity to listen to the Remploy workers, but I was not aware that the demonstration was taking place today. I welcome the fact that the minister is working with Maria Miller, the UK Minister for Disabled People. That is very helpful and reassuring.

As Fergus Ewing said, the debate over Remploy factories is not new. In 2007, the then Labour Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Peter Hain, made the decision to close 29 out of 83 Remploy factories. He said at that time:

“The reality is that without modernisation Remploy deficits would obliterate our other programmes to help disabled people into mainstream work. With no change, in five years’ time Remploy would require £171 million a year on current trends. That would be £60 million over the £111 million funding envelope, which represents nearly the entire current annual Workstep budget.”

Peter Hain confirmed that the Government had

“managed to keep open 55 sites only on the basis of very stretching procurement targets and a tough forward plan. It will be up to everyone with an interest in Remploy—Government, management, trade unions ... MPs and other political representatives—to pull together to ensure that those factories meet their ambitious targets, otherwise they, too, could be put at risk.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 November 2007; Vol 468, c 448, 449.]

That was more than four years ago. Today, the same issues must be addressed by the coalition Government at Westminster.

As Dundee has four Remploy factories, the issues are important to us in Scotland. Two weeks ago, Maria Miller, the minister for disabled people, made a statement in the Commons in which she confirmed the protection of spending—currently £320 million—on specialist disability employment programmes over the spending review period and

her determination to help more disabled people to enter and remain in work.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: I might do so, but I have a lot to say. Let me make progress.

An additional £15 million has been made available in the spending review period for access work. The vast majority of the 6.9 million disabled people of working age in Britain could benefit from greater specialist employment support to find and retain work.

The review that was conducted by Liz Sayce, who is the head of the UK disability forum, strongly endorsed the principle that money should be used to support disabled people into employment and that money should follow individuals and not institutions.

Chic Brodie: Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: It is my choice to take the member’s intervention and not the member’s choice to intervene. I would like to exercise my choice.

The 2,200 disabled people who are supported by Remploy’s enterprise businesses cost about a fifth of the total budget for specialised disability employment. The cost of each employment place at Remploy is £25,000 a year, compared with an average access to work award of £2,900. I add that Remploy’s factory business operated at a loss of £68.3 million last year.

It is important to say that Chris Price, an independent living development lead at the Glasgow centre for independent living, has said that

“the decision to close Remploy was uncomfortable but the right one ... Remploy was an outmoded and archaic model of disability employment.”

Remploy’s closed-circuit television business is likely to continue, as are Remploy employment services, which have supported more than 20,000 disabled and disadvantaged people into work across England, Scotland and Wales, including people who have the same support needs as Remploy factory employees have. Remploy employment services provide personalised support and work in partnership with more than 2,500 employers.

All Remploy employees who will be affected by the proposals are being given an £8 million comprehensive personalised support package. Any disabled member of staff who is made redundant will receive an offer of individualised support for up to 18 months, to help with the transition from Government-funded sheltered

employment to mainstream employment. That was not available at the time of the previous closures of Remploy factories in Great Britain. The support will include access to a personal budget to aid the transition. A community fund will provide grants to disability organisations to support Remploy employees.

The proposals fit in with the Scottish Government's report "A Working Life for All Disabled People", which responded to the Equal Opportunities Committee report of December 2006 entitled "Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities". The Government's report says that one principle of supported employment is that

"The job should be in an integrated work place".

That brings me to my last point, which the minister and Labour members have mentioned. The previous Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, Jim Mather, wrote that,

"at the very least, every public body should aim to have ... one"

contract under "The Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan",

"to make the maximum ... use of reserved contracts for supported factories and businesses".

The Scottish Government must look at what it has done to award such contracts since the warning signals were given in 2006 and 2007.

I move amendment S4M-02431.1, to leave out from "is deeply" to end and insert:

"notes the UK Government's decision to close 36 Remploy factories in the UK, including four in Scotland, which make significant losses year after year, in line with the recommendations in *Getting in, staying in and getting on: Disability employment support fit for the future*, a review carried out by Liz Sayce, the head of the UK Disability Forum, which advised that disability employment services should be focused on disabled people themselves rather than institutions so that they can access mainstream jobs in the same way as everyone else; notes that the factories made a loss of £68.3 million last year, which is a cost of £25,000 per employee, and that the UK Government intends to restrict funding to those factories that might have a prospect of a viable future outside government control; welcomes the £8 million package of tailored support that will be available for up to 18 months to help Remploy employees with transition, which is about £2,500 per person and includes a personal case worker with one-on-one sessions, access to a personal budget and existing back-to-work support, including Work Choice, the Work Programme and Access to Work; further notes that many disability groups are behind this move as they regard the supported factory model as outdated; agrees with the UK Government that support should be focussed on individuals through services such as Access to Work rather than segregated institutions such as Remploy so that more disabled people can work in mainstream employment, and commends the work of the Remploy employment service, which has supported over 20,000 disabled and disadvantaged people into work across England, Scotland and Wales and works in partnership with over 2,500 employers."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now come to the open debate. There will be speeches of six minutes. As we are tight for time, that includes time for interventions.

15:40

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

The charitable thing to do following Mary Scanlon's speech would be to note that at least one of the UK Government parties has bothered to turn up to the chamber to defend its stance in relation to Remploy. Yet again, the Liberal Democrats are posted missing.

I express my disappointment at the announcement. I believe that there is a need to consider what was actually said in the Sayce review.

The DWP's response to the consultation on the Sayce review noted that the review recommended that

"by the end of the current Spending Review, the Department should have introduced a new model for Remploy".

It also noted that the review said that:

"Remploy businesses should be given the opportunity to become successful, independent businesses",

and that, where businesses were not viable,

"employees should receive a comprehensive support package to find alternative employment",

which should be delivered through access to work.

However, the DWP's consultation document also says:

"As resources are limited, it may not be possible to implement all of the recommended improvements to Access to Work straight away."

That means that although we are removing the support that is provided by Remploy, we are putting people into supported access to work, which the document readily accepts is not yet fit for purpose. I find that unfortunate. A failure to give Remploy enough time to make viable businesses is one of the key problems that I have with what is happening.

I recognise the work that is being done in Dundee, but I will focus on Aberdeen, as it is one of the sites that are specifically earmarked for closure.

A social enterprise model is being developed in Aberdeen. As Kevin Stewart rightly pointed out, the site operates as a social enterprise hub. For example, Bennachie upholsterers, which is a combination of Cornerstone and Glencraft, operates on the site beside the Remploy factory. A commercial business rents space there, and there is further commercial interest in renting space

there, too. Further, a social enterprise is expressing an interest in operating the canteen on the site.

As part of the attempts to move towards a social enterprise model, Remploy in Aberdeen has developed a textiles business, which it has established as a holistic business, trading within Remploy. However, it is in its infancy and has not yet had time to grow into a successful business and demonstrate its viability. The rug is essentially being pulled from underneath Remploy in Aberdeen, as it has not had a chance to demonstrate its long-term viability. Indeed, although there is a suggestion that a laundry business could be developed at Remploy as a possible future option, the uncertainty that has been created by the UK Government's announcement throws that into doubt. That is why I raised with the minister the point about the critical nature of asset transfer.

Where I differ from the suggestion that Labour puts forward in its amendment is that, following discussions with individuals at Remploy in Aberdeen, I do not think that moving from one model of governmental support to another is necessarily what is being sought. The same applies to article 19 funding. Individuals at Remploy in Aberdeen agree that, where that funding can be unlocked through tendering processes, it would be welcome, but they do not believe that it should be used in every example or as a way of replacing grant-aided expenditure. I agree entirely with the principle that article 19 funding should be considered—but it should be considered in the wider context of the tendering processes.

Ken Macintosh: We have suggested one alternative—the co-operative business model. Is Mr McDonald saying that that is not an attractive alternative? That is not about subsidised employment that is supported by grant-in-aid; it is about an alternative, sustainable, long-term model.

Mark McDonald: That was not what I said at all. Remploy wants to look at all possible options for the future. I said that asset transfer is critical because the opportunity for Remploy in Aberdeen to secure the building and the equipment within it would unlock a significant opportunity, allowing the new businesses that have developed to hit the ground running, and creating an opportunity for small businesses to continue to be grown and investment to continue to be attracted.

I talk about attracting investment because, for social enterprise models to be successful, there must be buy-in from the private sector, as we have seen with Glencraft. I accept entirely the analogy that Labour has drawn with Glencraft, but I think that its direction is misguided because to say that Glencraft was saved purely as a result of the

Scottish Government's intervention is to misrepresent the process.

When Glencraft ran into significant difficulties in November 2009, a range of organisations, including the Scottish Government and the local authority, intervened. However, the critical element was the intervention of Production Services Network. PSN helped to create a new business plan for Glencraft and supported it, with support from both public sector and private sector sources. PSN pledged £100,000 to find new and more suitable premises for the business. Without that support from PSN, it would not have mattered a merry jot how much support the Scottish Government and the local authority were willing to give Glencraft.

Jenny Marra: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: No. I am afraid that I am in my last 30 seconds, otherwise I would have taken Ms Marra's intervention.

Support from the Government and the local authority would not have been able to create the viable business that the intervention from PSN allowed.

I believe that there is a desire to work towards some form of grant-free scenario through the development of viable small businesses, whether under the social enterprise model or another model, and that the UK Government's decision will potentially hinder that. We must consider how we support Remploy and its employees going forward.

15:46

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I had the privilege today of being on a demonstration with Patricia Ferguson and the Remploy workers who are in the public gallery, of speaking at the same conference at which John Swinney spoke and of having lunch and speaking at the same conference that Liz Sayce spoke at.

Members who know me will know that I have given a lot of commitment to supported enterprises, especially to the friends of Remploy, and that over the years I have tried to establish with other members a cross-party group on Remploy. Sadly, that was not possible, but I understand the pressures that members are under. Although we never succeeded in establishing a cross-party group on Remploy, perhaps now people will come on board for a cross-party group on supported businesses.

I welcome a lot of what Fergus Ewing said today and I know that the SNP Government has done a lot of work on the issue. The SNP Government got plaudits at the conference this morning for a range

of activities that it has undertaken. However, I appeal urgently to it to reconsider its decision to have a review. There is no time for a review, which will take months. The situation requires urgent action because the axe will drop on 4 July for the people who are sitting in the gallery. No matter who is to blame—whether my Government or the Tory Government—the reality is that people will not have jobs after that date.

Fergus Ewing: I give Helen Eadie a cast-iron assurance that the review will not prevent us from giving help and devoting attention as required over the coming weeks and months.

Helen Eadie: I thank the minister, but I have another request for him: I ask him to create a task force. It should comprise the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the GMB, Unite and Community unions, and should have cross-party support from the Parliament. It should be chaired by a minister—as we know, it is vital to have ministerial magic dust. If we could get cross-party activity in the Parliament on that basis, it would make a difference.

Before I forget—given everything else that I want to say—I point out that at the conference this morning were people from European social fund projects who do not know whether their wages will be paid next week. That is a matter for Westminster, but perhaps the minister will take that up with Westminster—perhaps the minister and I can speak about that after the debate. One of the organisations in question is from Fife.

Supported businesses arose because people came back from the second world war who were in dire need of the support that has been described so well by colleagues. They had lost limbs or had mental health issues—they faced a range of the issues on which Mary Scanlon has campaigned long and hard. We must ensure that that holistic support is given to people with those problems.

Today, thankfully, there is not the same volume of people facing those problems as were affected by them during the first and second world wars—from which many did not come back at all. However, there remains a fundamental need for specialist supported enterprise. [*Interruption.*] I hear that members in the central part of the chamber support that view.

We must seek clarification on the closures. Not only will four factories close in Scotland, but many jobs will go in employment services, which provide advice and support. There is a lot of silence about that area, and we need to give it some consideration.

I appeal to the minister to work in partnership with the Welsh Assembly. The First Minister worked with Carwyn Jones on the European Union Council of Ministers veto issue, and we must work

together on the Remploy issue too. On 7 March, the Welsh Assembly heard an excellent ministerial statement, which was followed by a lot of questions from members.

On whether we have co-operatives or mutuals, the fundamental point is that we should have a community of interests for disabled people, whether or not that is called social enterprise. I pay tribute to the SNP Government for its work on social enterprise, which was applauded at the conference this morning.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Helen Eadie: I am running out of time now, but perhaps the member and I can speak after the debate.

We must allow for a variety of community enterprise models. I have been involved in community businesses in a hands-on, real way—I have set up a community nursery and a workers co-operative factory, and I have been involved in community cleaning—so I understand the arguments about mutuals and the need to ensure that the business is financially viable. I am not arguing with that.

On the Glencraft versus Blindcraft issue—and all the rest—I highlight the debate that took place on 12 December at Westminster and encourage the minister to look at the contribution by Paul Goggins from Wythenshawe. He showed how any one of us in the Parliament could drive forward rescue packages, and his tackling of the issue has been first class.

With regard to the core costs that have caused Remploy's downfall, the company has an office in the midlands that costs £100,000 a year to rent, and there is £3.5 million for bonuses. If those things are stripped out and replaced by mutuals run for the benefit of the disabled community, we will start to address the issues.

I was gobsmacked when I read Liz Sayce's report, in which she said that every placement at a college—there are only nine such colleges in England and Wales, and none in Scotland—costs £78,000.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if the member could draw to a close.

Helen Eadie: I ask members to support the Labour amendment, because we all have a lot in common on the issue and we should not divide on it.

I am keen and eager to help in every way that I can people in Remploy and supported enterprises. I appeal to the minister to ensure that those people are able to use the talents and skills that we all want them to bring to the workplace.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must close, please.

Helen Eadie: Thank you, Presiding Officer, for allowing us to participate in the debate.

15:53

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I wish that I had known about the demonstration, as I would have supported it.

There are more than 20 supported businesses in Scotland that employ around 1,600 people in locations throughout the country. Businesses in the Remploy group account for nearly half the supported businesses in Scotland; they employ 285 staff, of which 87 per cent are disabled. They are a highly skilled and adaptable workforce who provide a wide range of goods and services, from high-performance textiles to medical equipment and electronics. Customers include the Ministry of Defence, local authorities and private sector companies.

As the minister stated, the recent announcement means that four of the nine Scottish factories will close and nearly 40 per cent of the workforce will be made redundant. The sites that are earmarked for closure are in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Motherwell and Springburn, adding 111 skilled workers to the unemployment scrap heap.

The Sayce report, which the UK Government commissioned to review disability employment support, states:

"this is precisely the time to develop a strategy to empower disabled people to seize new opportunities when they come on stream and to enable employers to retain and take on disadvantaged people."

However, when will suitable jobs come on stream? What is the reality for disabled people?

Phil Brannan, convener of the shop stewards at Remploy, said that GMB research had shown that

"In 2008, 29 factories in the UK closed, and 3,000 severely disabled people lost their jobs. Around 18 months later we surveyed those workers and"—

as Ken Macintosh said—

"84% had not secured employment".

According to Momentum Scotland's website, only 39 per cent of Scotland's disabled adults are in employment, compared with 81 per cent of able-bodied people. The UK Government has accepted the Sayce report's recommendations, but where does it think that the replacement jobs for the Remploy workers will come from in the current economic climate, especially as more qualified individuals are applying for posts that they would not have considered before the downturn?

In an email to me, Inclusion Scotland stated:

"Disabled people feel they are usually discriminated against in accessing paid work because of their impairments, and during a time of recession, this is much more prevalent as employers consider the employment of disabled people much more risky, even if it is a fallacy".

The decision to close four Remploy units in Scotland will change employees from being individuals who feel that they are making a contribution to the community, paying tax and national insurance and not depending on benefits to being people who are left to survive on jobseekers allowance and other handouts.

However, it is not only a Scottish issue. Throughout the UK, the Tory-Liberal Government has accepted that 36 of the 54 Remploy factories will lose their subsidy from 31 March, resulting in 1,752 people being made unemployed.

Throughout the UK, 1.3 million disabled people are available for work and want to work. As Mary Scanlon said, Remploy employment services secured employment for only 20,000 in 2010-11.

A leading adult learning charity in England and Wales stated:

"there is a role for disability specific workplaces where these support the transition to unsupported employment for disabled people who face the greatest labour market disadvantage who, without these workplaces, would be unlikely to be given this transition opportunity elsewhere. Government funding should be available for these disability specific workplaces if necessary to ensure they are viable."

Joe FitzPatrick: Will Gordon MacDonald give way?

Gordon MacDonald: I would prefer to get on a wee bit.

According to press reports, the UK Minister for Disabled People, Maria Miller MP, has stated:

"it costs the taxpayer £25,000 to keep one Remploy factory worker in their job each year, and yet the factory bosses are paying many of their employees to do nothing, because of a lack of orders."

However, when I visited my local Remploy along with Colin Keir and Chic Brodie we were informed that Remploy had no marketing budget, that individual factories were not allowed to advertise, that they had nearly two dozen sales positions vacant and that there were no Scotland-based sales people. No wonder there is a lack of orders.

A recent KPMG report identified the operating loss for each Remploy site. All four Scottish factories identified for closure are making a loss. However, Springburn reported an operating loss of just over £4,000 per employee before a share of central costs was added on. We should compare that with the value of the benefits that the employees will receive when they are made redundant.

Some organisations have indicated that sheltered factories are an outdated concept left over from the aftermath of the second world war and that disabled people should be in mainstream employment. However, many Remploy employees have worked 20-plus years for the organisation. Some of them previously tried open employment but found it too stressful, leading to a deterioration in their general health. Others felt that the culture at Remploy was one that understood disability and fluctuating health conditions. That may not be the case at other employers. Inclusion Scotland stated:

"We strongly feel that closing this many factories, all at once, is an unmitigated disaster for these workers and is ill-timed and wrong".

As we were informed at our visit, the 90-day consultation period for redundancies has begun and people will begin to lose their jobs on 4 July, with complete closure expected by 17 August. Time is running out for the workers. There is likely to be little alternative employment for those who are being made redundant. The only option is that we examine all avenues to keep the factories open.

15:59

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this important debate. I, too, put on record my extreme disappointment with the UK minister's announcement earlier this month. My heart goes out to the Remploy employees in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Motherwell. I say for the record, and for the benefit of people in the public gallery, that—like all my SNP colleagues—I would have been happy to come to support this morning's demonstration if I had been aware of it.

As the SNP MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, I obviously have very serious concerns about the future of the Remploy factories in Cowdenbeath, Leven and Stirling. Although those sites have been spared the axe wielded by the UK Tory-Liberal Government on 7 March, of which we have heard much during the debate, the deeply worrying lack of clarity about their future and that of the factories in Clydebank and Dundee is regrettable.

That lack of clarity results from the fact that the sites have been labelled "potentially viable" by the UK DWP, which is not particularly helpful, to say the least; it is certainly not helpful for the 95 staff currently employed at those sites, who deserve so much better.

Perhaps we should not be too surprised to see such cavalier treatment being afforded by the UK Tory-Liberal Government to disabled people when we bear in mind the savage cuts to disability

benefits of 20 per cent across the board—cuts that were a key driver of the Tory-Liberal Welfare Reform Act 2012, which was passed in London the other week. The UK Government made no bones about the fact that the cuts were the objective of its legislation.

Indeed, the latest attack on supported employment must be seen against the backdrop of the UK welfare legislation. It is hard to imagine a more callous act at this time. As the First Minister said during First Minister's question time on 8 March:

"There are plenty of abuses of power by Westminster over Scotland ... for example, I regard the Remploy employees as suffering from such an abuse of power, I regard the cuts to the disability living allowance in Scotland as a huge abuse of power".—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2012; c 7063.]

The question is, where do we go from here? It is key that we understand the importance of the role of supported businesses and supported employment for some disabled people and the contribution that those make to securing a person-centred approach to promoting opportunity for disabled people in the workplace.

As we have heard, that is the case in relation to both access to work and, importantly, access to training, as mentioned by Mr Livingstone—I mean Mr Macintosh. I am at it again—there must be something about Mr Macintosh that leads to that slight confusion of identity.

I am not saying that mainstreaming of employment should not also be pursued. It must always be a question of what suits the individual. There can never be a one-size-fits-all approach, because we are dealing with individual human beings who have varying needs. As the minister said, the Scottish Government recognises that.

I was pleased to hear that a commission will shortly be established to undertake a review of supported businesses. I note the minister's assurances to Helen Eadie that the review will not kick the issue into the long grass and that it will run in parallel with our efforts to do what we can to help those who are in need of our assistance.

I believe that that approach is the correct way forward. In contrast, the UK Tory-Liberal Government in London is taking a draconian approach and seems intent on trying to undermine the dignity of disabled people, many of whom are beginning to feel as if they are under siege by that Government. Nothing that the Tory front-bench spokeswoman said would change the view of many disabled people in that regard or provide any reassurance whatsoever.

Notwithstanding the UK Government's position, in Scotland we must strive to demonstrate that there is a future for the remaining Remploy sites

and, in so doing, we must focus first and foremost on the workers and the contribution that they make. Any extraneous operational costs should be identified and must be dealt with. As Helen Eadie alluded to, workers have concerns about those costs. They have contacted me about their concerns, too, and I am sure that, in the light of the hard work that she has carried out over the years to further the interests of Remploy workers, she is in receipt of the same information about bonuses, overtime and so on.

The focus has to be on the workers and their important contribution, and on how we can increase sustainability. I hope that all parties will support the calls on the DWP to release to the Scottish Government all relevant information that could assist in that process. It is worth stressing that, as has been mentioned, the Glencraft example shows what can be done when the private sector, local government and central Government are involved and when we have the drive, the determination and the imagination to secure alternative investment streams and to make a go of things.

We have a task ahead of us, but I am delighted to hear that the Scottish Government will strain every sinew to ensure that Remploy workers in Scotland have a future. I hope that we will attract cross-party support for that, because those workers deserve nothing less.

16:05

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): As we have heard, the Remploy factory in Motherwell is among those that it is proposed will close. It provides storage and packing services, and employs 22 people. The factory is, in fact, in Wishaw, but getting its location wrong should be the least of our worries. The major worry will be finding another job in an area that has already been hit hard by unemployment. It should be noted with great disappointment that only 8 per cent of the staff who have previously been made redundant from Remploy have since found employment.

In Motherwell and Wishaw, there are 22 jobseekers for every vacancy, which is more than three times the national average. Unemployment is more than 50 per cent higher than the Scottish average. The 22 new jobseekers will be competing in one of the toughest job markets in the country, and the experts tell us that it will get tougher.

Naturally, employees are not optimistic. Linda Hills, who has worked at Remploy for 27 years, said:

"We are being told we're not wanted. We've always wanted to work, not claim benefits. I can't get on with my

normal life because I keep on worrying about what the future will hold."

The First Minister has described the decision as

"at best, ill-timed and insensitive."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2012; c 7069.]

I think that he was being too kind to the coalition and the relevant UK minister, who announced the decision in answer to a parliamentary question, leaving my colleague Frank Roy MP to pass on the news to the workers in our constituency. I gather that the Scottish Government was told before the announcement, but I presume that, at that stage, it was too late for its discussions with the DWP to make a difference.

The trade unions have not given up the fight, and I hope that the Scottish Government will do what it can to protect the provision of supported employment. Community, Unite and the GMB all have workers in Remploy factories. They are all working together, lobbying hard for the retention of Remploy workplaces. Community believes that there is a future for supported employment factories but that it requires the right political will. It wants the Government to target resources on the search for new owners and the creation of new business models.

The GMB points to the need for disabled people to be allowed to manage and fully contribute to the organisation and cites the fact that that has not happened as the main reason why Remploy has continued to fail over the past 10 years. Another reason that has been cited for Remploy's difficulties is the lack of orders. That is not inevitable. More could be done—for example, use could be made of article 19 of the EU public sector procurement directive, which permits contracts to be reserved for social enterprises that employ a majority of workers with disabilities.

There are a few, including Iain Duncan Smith, who have the cheek to claim that closure is a progressive solution and who portray Remploy as some sort of workhouse from a past century. In truth, that is nothing but a smokescreen for the callous, cut-and-be-damned austerity agenda.

I am sure that some factories could benefit from investment, but many have sophisticated machinery that produces quality products.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the member not agree that the same arguments were made by Anne McGuire, the then Minister for Disabled People, and Peter Hain when they set us on this path of a declining number of Remploy factories?

John Pentland: I think that Ken Macintosh has already answered that point.

Nobody would recognise the Remploy factories in their caricature as a Victorian institution. Of

course, more recent initiatives aim to support people into mainstream employment and, for those who can take advantage of such schemes, they are welcome developments whose costs make them attractive to Government. However, that does not make Remploy an outmoded model. Unfortunately, many employers are still reluctant to employ people with disabilities and the supported workplace still has a valuable role to play for many workers. Indeed, there is a strong argument for developing more social enterprises staffed and run by disabled workers. To survive, that might be the way that Remploy workplaces must go.

It might not be possible to save all workplaces, but while we fight to keep the existing workplaces open we must consider alternative means of providing and developing supported employment. I know that, in my area, North Lanarkshire Council already provides supported employment for 140 people, and will offer support through the North Lanarkshire's Working scheme to those whose jobs are now at risk.

The council has already said that it will consider the expansion of its operations. One of those, Beltane Products, is a sheltered workshop, currently providing work for 23 people. Formed nearly 50 years ago, it refurbishes and manufactures a range of furniture and furnishings. The aim would be to expand along the lines of the existing and very successful partnership between Glasgow's City Building, the RNIB and Blindcraft, which helps to protect 260 jobs. I hope that the Scottish Government can extend support for such action by local authorities and social enterprises through procurement and other initiatives.

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

John Pentland: The Scottish Government could also ask questions of the UK Government, such as what will happen to Remploy's assets—will they be sold and, if so, where will the profits go? Perhaps the Scottish Government could lobby for the equipment, facilities and land—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In fairness to others, you must close, please.

John Pentland: Instead of the cuts, could we be making better use of the money and resources for the benefit of disabled people? That could be a progressive—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. You must stop now, please.

16:12

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Remploy opened its first factory in south Wales in 1945, producing violins and furniture. Designed to

employ disabled ex-miners then ex-servicemen, it became a national and social byword for good, sound quality of products and services within its remit.

In the course of my business career, I have had several dealings with Remploy factories in Scotland and the decision last week to close four of Scotland's Remploy factories is a totem to the monumental arrogance of successive London Governments that pretend that they can successfully run social business and commercial entities. They could not, they cannot and they never will be able to. God save us from task forces.

Not only did they continue to pretend, they suggested the segregation of work for disabled people as a salve to their consciences when what was needed a long time ago was the integration of very capable disabled people into shared, profitable manufacturing and enterprise environments.

Jenny Marra: Is Chic Brodie, like David Cameron, recommending that workers in supported workplaces should be chasing mainstream jobs at a time when there are 6,000 people unemployed in Dundee, for example, and 400 job vacancies? Is he honestly saying that the workers who spoke to Ken Macintosh this morning have a hope of getting a job in the mainstream job market? Is he advocating that Tory policy?

Chic Brodie: That was short and to the point—and so was the intervention. I shall come to Jenny Marra's point.

London Governments created a focus on disparate disabled entities but did not involve them in shared enterprises. The announcement last week was a fig leaf.

I accept that Remploy—or some of its constituent parts—was not profitable. As Gordon MacDonald said, if you starve any company of sales and marketing, that is what happens. However, that does not mean that Remploy or some of its subsidiary parts could not have been profitable. Indeed, they still could be.

Joe FitzPatrick: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: I am sorry, but I do not have enough time.

The ultimate farce was to put Liz Sayce, the chief executive of the Royal Association for Disability Rights—RADAR—in charge of the Remploy review. The review came up with the conclusion that UK Government funding for Remploy should be ended so that funding could be used to support more disabled people into mainstream employment—that perhaps answers Jenny Marra's point. Of course, Ms Sayce would say that, wouldn't she? She was in charge of the

alternative stream. As it said in an e-mail that I received yesterday, it was like putting a vegetarian in charge of a review of the meat industry.

Ms Sayce, who is not a business expert but a mental health expert, was supported by the UK Minister for Disabled People, who said that a service would be provided to ascertain what was needed to get people back into work—this from a minister in a UK Government that has presided over rising unemployment because of its fiscal and monetary policies. Against such a backdrop, Ms Sayce and Ms Miller should explain why, four years after the most recent round of Remploy closures, 85 per cent of the disabled workers who were made redundant then are still seeking work. What is proposed is nasty, cynical and ruthless.

Murdo Fraser: Will Mr Brodie give way?

Chic Brodie: No, I will not.

I have had sight of the detailed and extensive consultants' report on Remploy, I have distilled some of the items in the Sayce review and I have spoken to people who know not a little about the Remploy operation in Scotland, and I think that there is scope for us to do something much more positive. I welcome the action that the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism announced today.

Members must forgive me for being a bit cynical but, when I read the reports, I noticed that of the nine factories, the five that are to be retained—or at least that are under consideration for retention—are all textile factories. We should wait for the "For Sale" signs to go up.

This week, I met heads of associated manufacturing bodies, who believe, as I do, that there is a place for at least some Remploy factories to continue. It is right to challenge the UK Government now and to say that Remploy in Scotland and its employees need more time. Although I cannot support Labour's amendment urging the Scottish Government to express an interest in acquiring the factories, because it cannot legally do that, I sympathise. Consideration should be given to the establishment of co-operatives or at least social enterprises, with which we can work to create purposeful business plans and ascertain the viability of individual factories—I am convener of the cross-party group on social enterprise, so I would say that, wouldn't I?

We must allow time for work with various funding streams, such as the social investment fund, the co-operative development fund and the Co-operative Bank, to see whether we can create employee-owned businesses or participative businesses that are not segregated disability employee communities but fully integrated social and profitable work communities. I welcome the minister's initiatives.

A distressing feature of the whole exercise, which is clear from members' conversations with Remploy, is that Remploy has had no sales, marketing or business nous to support it, while bearing the full burden of centralised management costs. It is little wonder that Remploy is in the situation that it is in. The efforts that are set out in the motion are commendable and our successful efforts to help our Remploy employees will at least demonstrate who we are and what we are in this Parliament.

16:18

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am glad that the Scottish Government brought this debate to the Parliament, because the plight of Remploy factories in Scotland is immensely important. Labour members are keen that the Scottish Government should take decisive and swift action to provide all the support that it can to Remploy workers.

We need action now in Scotland, because Remploy is more than just a workplace. It is much more than the average 9-to-5 workplace; it is a community of work and dignity for hundreds of disabled people in Scotland. As I said in my intervention on Chic Brodie, in a stagnant job market, in which so many people are chasing so few positions—there are 6,000 unemployed people in Dundee and only 400 job vacancies—we have a moral obligation to ask ourselves whether we have done all that we can before we allow Remploy workers to join the dole queue, which is what they will do.

In our amendment, we note that the Scottish Government can do more for the workers of Remploy. I welcome the tone of the minister's speech, which was in stark contrast to what we heard from his back benchers.

I ask the Government to consider some of the article 19 ideas that we have been promoting over the past couple of weeks to protect the Remploy workers in Dundee and throughout Scotland.

Joe FitzPatrick: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: Not just now, thanks.

Last week, I started a campaign, backed by Community, the GMB and the Fire Brigades Union, for the Scottish Government to take one simple step to secure the future of Remploy factories in Scotland. The campaign asks the Scottish Government to commit to procuring new police and fire uniforms for the single Scottish police and fire services in Scotland. Use of an article 19 order could lead to Scottish Government contracts to the tune of £1.25 million being given to Remploy. How good would it be if the new

police and firefighters in our communities knew that their work clothes had been made in their own communities by the workers who needed the work the most?

Two years ago, Remploy workers at the Dunsinane industrial estate in Dundee made firefighters' uniforms for the London Fire Brigade.

Chic Brodie: I hear what the member says about specific items of manufacture, but will she accept that part of the problem with Remploy is that, because it has had one stream, it has become very vulnerable. What it needs is diversification.

Jenny Marra: I have just given a very specific example. I have seen the Dundee workers make radiation uniforms for the Japanese Government. Two years ago, they made uniforms for the London Fire Brigade. Why can they not make Scottish firefighters' uniforms here in Scotland? It would be a strong signal if our Scottish Government awarded that contract to Remploy.

Joe FitzPatrick: We are on the same page here. I, too, recognise the hard work and dedication of the Dundee factory. The workers in Dundee are highly skilled and make fantastic products. However, one of the problems that they face is that, even when they have the skills to meet a public sector contract, Remploy at a senior level decides not to tender for it. They have the skills to compete against the best in the world because they are the best manufacturers in the world, but Remploy will not tender for the contracts.

Jenny Marra: I know that, like me, the member cares a lot about the Dundee factory. I have spoken to Remploy and it would be happy to tender for the contract for the new police and fire uniforms if the Scottish Government signalled its willingness to use article 19 to put the contract in place. I hope that he will back the campaign later today.

We must recognise the power of article 19. The European Union—one of the biggest free-trade zones in the world—recognised the moral and financial case for ensuring that contracts are given directly to protect our workplaces when it legislated to allow public procurement to bypass the commercial tender process under article 19. That is a power that Fergus Ewing has at his disposal and I urge him to use it.

In answer to Mark McDonald's point, I say that the campaign for Remploy to make police and fire uniforms has received widespread support. Last week, I received a call from a global oil and gas company in Aberdeen that had heard about the campaign. It told me that, if the Scottish Government secured the long-term future of Remploy factories in Scotland by committing to

using article 19, it would in turn, following that show of confidence, commit to procuring all of its personal protective equipment from Remploy. That company has today given the Scottish Government an opportunity to secure the future of Remploy and save hundreds of jobs, provided the Government is willing to take the reins of leadership and commit to using article 19.

I have written to Government ministers on the issue and I have yet to receive a reply but, in light of the significant offer that I have raised today, I would appreciate it if the minister, in closing, could say whether the Government will consider that action.

I would move to close—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): You really do need to close.

Jenny Marra: I hope that the minister will consider using article 19, as I have laid out today, to help the workers of Remploy in Scotland.

16:24

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Presiding Officer, thank you for affording me the opportunity to speak in the debate.

It was Gandhi who said:

"A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members."

I would not like to be the entity calibrating the measure of the UK in the past few months. In this chamber alone, we have debated welfare reforms that will have devastating effects for disabled and vulnerable people, and talked about payday loans and their effect on the poorest in our community. There was an £83 cut in pensioners' benefits in the budget. Today, we are debating the devastating news that Remploy factories, which were designed to help and support our society's most vulnerable members, are due to close.

Edward Heath once said:

"We are the trade union for pensioners and children, the trade union for the disabled and the sick ... the trade union for the nation as a whole."

Although, politically, I take exception to being included in Edward Heath's "We", I agree that elected politicians should be representatives and protectors of and campaigners for the most vulnerable. That should be our greatest concern.

The Remploy factory in Wishaw was opened in 2003 by the First Minister at the time, who is now Lord McConnell. At the time, he said:

"People with disabilities deserve the same opportunities in life as others in society and Remploy factories allow them to put their talents to good use, while increasing their sense of self-worth and allowing them to become more confident and develop new skills."

He welcomed Remploy to Wishaw and said that he looked

“forward to seeing their continued expansion.”

I shared that hope and ambition, but I am afraid that, when it came to delivering, the Labour Party was sorely lacking. Within five short years, the UK Labour Government and the Minister for Disabled People, Anne McGuire, would be standing in full support behind the Remploy restructuring plans, which have led us to where we are today. I say to my Labour colleagues that, if the Labour Party in government had stood in defence of workers at that time and stopped the proposals dead, we would not be where we are today and the Remploy factory in Wishaw would not be closing after only nine years' operation.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Six years ago, I was part of a GMB delegation that met Peter Hain at the Labour Party conference in Brighton. We met a Welsh secretary of state who was taking action that I disagreed with, and we were led by a Londoner, Paul Kenny, who was the leader of my union. The member's attempts to portray the issue as somehow involving a lack of concern down south and a lot of concern in Scotland are ludicrous, as are her attempts to turn the issue into a party-political issue. The debate has been consensual. The Scottish Government could use article 19 and do various things itself.

Clare Adamson: Two motions were lodged in the Scottish Parliament in 2007 on the proposed closure of Remploy factories. The Liberal Democrats lodged a motion on the campaign against Remploy closures, and Brian Adam lodged a motion against the closure of Remploy factories. No Labour motion was lodged, and only one Labour member was good enough to sign one of those motions.

Helen Eadie: Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: No, I will not take another intervention. I am sorry.

The Labour MP Mr Frank Roy campaigned to secure a reprieve for the Netherton factory. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Mr Smith, that is enough.

Clare Adamson: At the time, Frank Roy was quoted as saying:

“I am delighted Remploy have accepted my proposal to keep the Wishaw factory open by partially turning the Netherton site into a training centre to help people throughout Lanarkshire get back to work.”

The GMB said:

“We have now got to prove ourselves financially. They want us to cut costs and that makes us feel annoyed as in

five or six years we may need to go through the same process. If we don't prove ourselves, we will close. This is just a reprieve ... It will stay open for possibly five or six years.”

It did not get six years—it got five years.

The problem with what happened in 2007 is that it set us on an inevitable path. At the start of 2007, Remploy at Netherton had more than 70 supported disabled workers. By the time the reprieve was won—Frank Roy said that he orchestrated it—the factory employed 53 workers. Today, there are only 22 supported disabled workers in Remploy in Netherton.

Mr Roy is quoted as saying:

“This is the wrong plan at the wrong time. Unemployment is going through the roof, and is higher in Scotland than the rest of the UK. Back to work schemes aren't working, and the government think this is a good time to sack disabled workers. It is utterly shocking.”

He continued:

“This is a cut too far from a government that doesn't care.”

Although I agree with some of the points that Mr Roy has made, the betrayal of Remploy factory workers happened in 2007, when Labour failed to stop the restructuring plan. At that time, it was the UK Labour Government that did not care. The plan set in motion the inevitable decline of the Remploy factories, and the closures that we are discussing now are because of the decisions that were made in 2007.

Mary Scanlon made much of the cost difference between supported working places and disabled workers in mainstream employment, conflating two different types of employment that bear no relation to each other. It just goes to show that both the Labour Party and the Tories know the cost of everything but the value of nothing.

16:31

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I, too, welcome the Remploy staff to the chamber. It is unfortunate that I was unable to attend their event. I did not know that the demonstration was happening today, or I would have supported it.

Remploy workers are not just angry about losing their jobs, but angry that some UK politicians are using the veneer of support for disability organisations to justify the closure plans. I hope to return to that later in my speech.

In a tight funding environment, numerous organisations will be grateful for the cash that currently goes to Remploy, but that does not mean that support for disabled people will improve. It means that a finite resource will be used in different areas. Perhaps the question should be whether we are spending enough to protect

disability rights and employability strategies more generally, rather than how we can spend the same inadequate pot of money in different ways.

There is always a case for change and improvements to disability support arrangements, but Iain Duncan Smith's statement that the Government should not be expected to subsidise "Victorian-era segregated employment" misses the point entirely. Ken Macintosh referred to that. Not only does it miss the point, but it is an almost unbelievable insult to the skilled workers of these 21st century manufacturing operations. Like most people in the chamber, I believe that the rights and opportunities of the most vulnerable people in our society should be protected, and that is why we are being defensive of Remploy, which provides those opportunities.

If we view the Remploy proposals in the context of the UK Government's wider approach to the disabled in our society, particularly in relation to welfare reform, it is pretty clear to me who is expected to pay the price in a Tory Britain for the failures of successive UK Governments on the economy—it is the most vulnerable in society.

I would love to see all disabled people in mainstream employment of their choosing. Training, education and work opportunities should be open to all, regardless of disability. The Conservatives talk about focusing on the individual, but what about the individual who is best suited to supported employment in places such as Remploy? What about them? No Remploy worker has a preference for the dole, but that is exactly where many of them might end up if the plans go ahead.

That is why I lodged a motion recently describing the Remploy closures as ill timed and ill considered. Let us put aside the debate on supported employment for one moment.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: Let me make some progress, Ms Scanlon.

Let us imagine for a moment that the plans were for the greater good. I do not believe that they are, but if that was the case, they would need to be actioned at a time that maximised the possibility for Remploy workers to access the mainstream jobs market. Every week, I speak to constituents in Glasgow who are frantically trying to find work. They are finding it increasingly difficult, given the UK austerity cuts and the state of the economy. Unemployment is high, and Tory welfare reforms mean that it might get far higher.

Let us consider Springburn, which is where my local Remploy factory is based. There are already five jobseekers allowance claimants for every job centre vacancy that is advertised. Even the

lowest-paid jobs are attracting multiple applicants. However, Citizens Advice Scotland estimates that the number of JSA claimants there is likely to surge by a further 31 per cent because of wider reforms and cuts to disability benefits. It is that jobs market and that environment that Remploy workers in Springburn and beyond will be forced to enter. John Pentland, who has left the chamber, made a similar point about his area.

I am sure that some Remploy workers will carry themselves into mainstream workplaces by demonstrating their numerous skills and aptitude for hard work. Such success would demonstrate the success of Remploy itself and be a strong argument for retaining its factories. If the UK Government is genuinely determined to mainstream people into employment, it should retain Remploy as a gateway institution and social provider to process people into the main workforce.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: Ms Scanlon did not take any interventions. She should sit down.

Let us look at what we can do. There has been a lot of heat in the last few speeches about what previous UK Governments and the current UK Government have done. It was reasonable for Ms Adamson to set out the historical context; the UK Labour Party set the train in motion. However, on one level, that is now irrelevant. We are where we are and the majority of members want to find a way forward for Remploy factories.

I am mindful of the £4,000 figure that Gordon MacDonald mentioned when he spoke about the profit and loss margins at Remploy Springburn. When we see such close margins, we must say to ourselves that there must be a way forward such as a plan or proposal that can sustain Remploy Springburn and others into the future. I want to be actively involved in helping to achieve that on a cross-party basis.

Whether we are looking for social enterprise models, co-operative models, or better use of article 19, something has to be done. I say very gently to some members that just saying that the Scottish Government can step in every time that a UK Conservative Government messes up is not the answer to our problems. The answer to Scotland's problems is to not have any UK Government messing up in Scotland, so that we can provide a better future for all our workforce.

Helen Eadie: Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: I will work with anyone in any party, including Ms Eadie, to find a better future for all Remploy workers and all disabled workers in Scotland.

16:37

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

When I read in the *Business Bulletin* that we would be debating this issue today, I wondered whether the SNP Government had run out of ideas for issues to debate that lie within its control, given that this is the second debate in two days on a matter that is reserved to the Westminster Government. However, I was pleasantly surprised by the tone of the debate, at least during the early part. In particular, I welcomed the tone of the ministerial contribution. Mr Ewing was, as ever, extremely reasonable in setting out his arguments, and that was reflected by the other opening speakers.

Even Helen Eadie, who never misses an opportunity when she gets one to bash the wicked Tories, was extremely reasonable. I pay tribute to the sincere and deep interest that Helen Eadie has taken in the plight of the Rempoy factories over many years. That is well respected across the chamber.

It is a pity that that consensual and positive tone was not reflected in some of the later speeches, which I will come to shortly. I noticed that the Scottish Government, despite all its complaints about what is being done by the Westminster Government, made no proposal to step in and make up the shortfall in funding.

As the minister said, and Mary Scanlon reflected, the background to the debate is the Sayce review. Liz Sayce is a hugely well-respected campaigner for the rights of disabled people. I did not think that any member would stoop so low as to question her good faith, but of course I was disappointed because, right on cue, along came Mr Brodie. It is deeply disappointing that people attack Liz Sayce's recommendations, because they have been strongly supported by the responses to the UK Government's consultation and by leading disability organisations across the country.

In my intervention on Mr Ewing, I referred to the article in *The Guardian* of a few weeks ago that quoted the organisations that are in support. I note that *Third Force News*, which came out this week, referred to a number of organisations such as the Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland being supportive of the reforms. It also quoted, as did Mary Scanlon, Chris Price from the Glasgow Centre for Independent Living, saying that

"the decision to close Rempoy was uncomfortable but the right one."

He said:

"It is uncomfortable but it is the right thing to do. If it is the right message, we should not be shy about saying it, just because it upsets some people."

I appreciate that some members will disagree with those comments, but they are the comments of leading disability organisations and we should be prepared to listen to their views, even if we disagree with the majority view that has been expressed.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Mr Fraser mentions the RNIB but, in its response to the consultation on the review, it said:

"The Sayce led review raises alternative options for funding but has failed to demonstrate the feasibility of these."

Does the member not think that we should listen to the RNIB when it says that?

Murdo Fraser: Mr Eadie will know from having studied the issue that the bulk of the responses are clearly in support of the Sayce review. The Government would rightly have been criticised by all those disability organisations if it had said no to the Sayce proposals.

Mark McDonald: Will Mr Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: No, I need to make progress, but I will come on to Mr McDonald in a moment.

I entirely understand the concerns of the workforce at Rempoy, who face an uncertain future. Everybody recognises that. Mary Scanlon mentioned the £8 million package of support that is being made available for employees. Mark McDonald made a fair point about the challenges of the transition from supported employment. That is precisely why there is an offer of individualised support from the DWP for up to 18 months for those who are involved.

Mark McDonald: Will Mr Fraser take a brief intervention on that point?

Murdo Fraser: If Mr McDonald will forgive me, I will not, because I am short on time and I have two more points to make.

As I said, the tone had been constructive throughout much of the debate, but I am sorry to say that some SNP members lowered the tone. Annabelle Ewing, Chic Brodie, Clare Adamson and Bob Doris missed no opportunity to turn the debate into a party-political or constitutional battlefield. They tried to blame Westminster Governments of whatever hue for what is happening and completely disregarded the views of the disability rights organisations to which I referred. I say gently to those members that, if they are so concerned about the issue, why does not their Scottish Government do what it did in the case of Glencraft in Aberdeen and step in to provide money? When Blindcraft in Edinburgh closed, where were the SNP councillors calling for more money from the City of Edinburgh Council's budget? They were nowhere to be seen.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: There have been far too many SNP comments in the debate already, so Mrs Ewing can sit down. I have to say that there was a contrast between Mrs Ewing's tone and that of her brother on the front bench. Perhaps that explains why he is a minister and she is not.

Most of the speeches from Labour members were extremely positive. I gently remind John Pentland that it was Peter Hain who closed 28 factories because they were not viable. I do not remember motions from the Labour Party expressing deep disappointment about that being debated in the Parliament at the time.

We should focus on the positives and the way forward. We should consider initiatives to develop alternative business models. I welcome the minister's comment that he will work with the DWP and that the DWP will work with the Remploy board to find ways forward and alternatives, such as social enterprises. On that, I agree with Helen Eadie. Change is difficult. Our focus should be on supporting the employees, not on scoring party-political or constitutional points.

16:43

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): We often begin speeches in the Parliament by saying that it is a pleasure to take part in a debate. I am afraid that this is one of those rare occasions when it really is not a pleasure to take part in a debate. Having said that, I am proud to have the opportunity to stand up for my constituents and their colleagues across the country who are threatened with redundancy. It is an honour to represent people who, in spite of the adversity that they have encountered in their lives, have the satisfaction of knowing that they are doing a meaningful job and contributing to their society and communities. Therefore, I sincerely thank the Scottish Government for bringing the debate to the chamber.

Why would anyone want to take jobs away from disabled people? When 20 people are chasing every job vacancy in my constituency, why does the coalition Government think it acceptable to put another 46 people on the dole? What makes the coalition Government think that those 46 people will have a better chance of getting alternative employment than their peers in a country in which some 75 per cent of able-bodied people have jobs but in which, as Gordon MacDonald said, only 45 per cent of disabled people are in work?

We know that disabled people want to have a choice about where they work and that, for many, that will be in mainstream or open employment. However, for a substantial number of those who

work at Remploy that choice simply does not exist. Some have tried to fit into other workplaces and have encountered problems; others simply could not get work that would suit them or their disability. If the Minister for Disabled People, Maria Miller, thinks that it will be easy for those workers to find alternative employment, why does she not allow them to remain with Remploy until they do?

Ten of those who work at Remploy in Springburn are deaf, but they were not even given the courtesy of a signer when the news was broken to the workforce that their factory was to close—so much for the respect agenda. There was, however, a human resources consultant in attendance, whom we understand is being paid £300 an hour to assist the management through the closure programme.

We know that the Remploy model is a particular one with a particular history, but I do not recognise the picture that the Conservative amendment paints in talking about a segregated workforce. Nor do I see any sense in the suggestion by the minister at Westminster that by putting 1,500 people on the dole she will be helping others into work. That is perverse logic in my view.

The irony is that the Remploy factory in my constituency is in the same industrial estate as Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries, which colleagues have mentioned. That is a supported workplace that is run like a social enterprise and it has a strong future ahead of it. Its employees are supported and encouraged to learn.

Mark McDonald: Does the member share the concerns that have been expressed to me that, although the review makes it clear that businesses within Remploy should be given an opportunity to prove themselves viable, they have not been given any timescale within which to prove themselves viable and the decision has come far too early for that to be the case?

Patricia Ferguson: I agree very much with Mark McDonald. I will come to that a little later in my speech.

In RSBI, in my constituency, those who have returned from Afghanistan and Iraq with disabling illness or injury are given support and training to re-equip them for the world of work. However, today's success at RSBI required financial investment. It required support and imagination from the management and—importantly—a commitment to go out and look for work. Gordon MacDonald is correct in saying that that is something that Remploy signally fails to do. I know, from press reports, that the First Minister recently visited RSBI and was very impressed by it—who would not be? That is the kind of model that we should be looking at if we are serious about the future of Remploy.

The Scottish Government has indicated that the PACE process could be rolled out to assist Remploy workers. That is very welcome, but we hope that the Scottish Government can go further. The Labour amendment is a sincere suggestion to the Scottish Government about an alternative model that we think can work—a model that gives the community the chance to take control of the situation and which provides sustainable employment for the workforce. We also hope that the Scottish Government will consider carefully how it can further encourage Government agencies and non-departmental public bodies actively to seek opportunities to increase the use of article 19 in their procurement practices. We very much hope that the Scottish Government can support those proposals, and we would be happy to work with the Government, the trade unions and the workers at Remploy to try to secure the future of those workers.

Senior directors of Remploy's enterprise businesses met the lead officers of the GMB and Unite on Monday and indicated that the first redundancy could take place as early as 4 July, in spite of an accord that promises that voluntary redundancies should be sought before compulsory ones are made. Also, no consideration has been given to how the workers' pension rights will be protected—at least, that has not been explained to the workers. As on so many other issues, no information has been provided on that.

Mark McDonald is right: the timeframe that has been identified is wrong and gives no opportunity for a meaningful dialogue with Remploy. That is one reason why we look to the Scottish Government for assistance. What is happening is a redundancy process, not a genuine consultation.

I will not argue with Clare Adamson about the history of support for Remploy, but I say to her that we sincerely hope that, at 5 o'clock, our parties can join together with anyone else who wishes to come with us to show our support for the Remploy workers. It ill behoves the Parliament not to be united when we are all here to try to support those workers.

I genuinely hope that the Government party will join us in considering a modest suggestion of a way forward for the Remploy workers. If we really care about what is in the workers' best interests, the SNP will vote for Labour's amendment.

16:51

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The debate has been interesting. Murdo Fraser was correct to say that it is about reserved responsibilities, but members' concerns about the future of the Remploy factories in Scotland deserve to be heard in our national

Parliament. The debate has afforded us an opportunity to do that. A number of members have taken the opportunity to express their views and concerns forthrightly.

Last year, I had the good fortune to visit the Remploy factory in Edinburgh at the invitation of the staff there. Although Liz Sayce's report says that at times the factories do not have enough to do, I was struck by the amount of work that was being undertaken, from packaging through to electronics. Under the modernisation project, the factory had recently invested significantly in securing electronic document scanning and storage equipment. As a result, it had secured a contract from a local authority's archive department to scan and store its documents.

One challenge for the factory in pursuing that contract was the uncertainty about the future of Remploy factories in Scotland and other parts of the UK. Ken Macintosh mentioned the fear and anxiety that staff have experienced in recent years, which goes back to 2007, when the modernisation process caused Remploy staff considerable fear and anxiety. I know from those to whom I spoke at the Edinburgh factory that the situation has continued to cause them concern and anxiety.

I agree with Ken Macintosh that the debate is not about two alternative models of employment. Supported employment has a role to play when it is suitable for individuals, and open employment has a part to play for disabled people who choose to go down that route. It is important that we get the balance correct. What struck me most about the Remploy factory was that it is more than just a place of employment; it is a community setting in which many of the staff have worked together for many years.

Several members have mentioned the difficulty that disabled people can experience in getting into employment, because of the challenges that they face as a result of their disability. I, for one, accept that there is certainly more to be done. I suspect that all Governments of whatever shade could always do more to ensure that disabled people are treated with equality and respect in our labour market.

There are ways in which the Government can assist with that. We are pursuing that through our new equality fund, which contains £3 million per annum for the next three years. A key element of that will be support for activities to decrease the disadvantage and inequality that disabled people face in the employment setting. A good thing is that a number of the applications to that fund for the coming year focus on assisting people with disabilities in gaining employment. We hope to make announcements on that in April.

A number of members mentioned public procurement and the difficulties that supported employment organisations can have in securing contracts. The general tone of the debate has been one of recognition that progress has been made in the area. Some might feel that not enough progress has been made and that what progress there has been has not been at the speed that they would have liked.

However, one of the key elements of the work that we have been taking forward as a Government over recent years is an attempt to ensure that our public sector bodies have a better understanding of what can be provided by supported employment organisations. In order to reinforce that process, we have ensured that the public procurement contract website, www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk, automatically alerts public bodies who use the site when an item of equipment or a service can be provided by a supported employment business, which means that they will consider it as an option. The latest data confirm that we are making progress: they show that Scottish public bodies have spent in the region of £24 million on contracts with supported employment businesses in Scotland, although I accept that more could be done. Fergus Ewing highlighted that at the start of the debate. We are determined to do more where we can.

Jenny Marra: Will the minister commit to having a conversation with Roseanna Cunningham and Kenny MacAskill on the specific issue of using article 19 to procure uniforms for the new police and fire services?

Michael Matheson: I have conversations with my colleague, Roseanna Cunningham, almost every day, and I am more than happy to explore that issue with her. It is important to recognise that the use of article 19 is not new; it is already used for many public contracts. Jenny Marra asked specifically about the uniforms of the new fire and police services. She will accept that it is wrong to give the impression that, through one contract, we can secure the future of Remploy. This must be about ensuring that the Remploy businesses are sustainable. It is also important to acknowledge that the bodies that will let the contract will be the new police and the fire services; the Government does not purchase those uniforms. I have no doubt that those bodies will, in making decisions on uniforms, consider whether use of a supported employment organisation is the best option.

I regret how the UK Government has gone about making the announcement on Remploy. Several members referred to that during the debate and John Pentland talked about the limited notice that the Scottish Government had received. My understanding is that Fergus Ewing was given less than two hours' notice of the announcement.

That is regrettable and it undermines the so-called respect agenda.

From an early stage, we said to the UK Government that we wanted to be involved as early as possible, because we wanted to explore whether there were alternative models that could be developed before a final decision was made on the future of the Remploy factories. I regret that our willingness to work in partnership and co-operation with the UK Government on this matter was not reciprocated. As a result, we have found ourselves in a situation in which we now have to address the problems following the decision that has been made by the UK Government.

Patricia Ferguson: Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer: The minister is just winding up.

Michael Matheson: My colleague, Fergus Ewing, said quite clearly that the Government has to work urgently on the matter, as Helen Eadie, whose commitment to this issue I respect, has asked us to do. We will do everything that we can, in working with the various partner organisations, to see whether an alternative sustainable model can be found in order that we can retain the Remploy factories in Scotland. We will ensure that that work is driven at a ministerial level. Fergus Ewing has given a clear commitment to ensure that that happens.

I sympathise with the spirit of the Labour amendment, but my principal concern about it is that it links itself to a specific model. At this juncture, we should keep all options open to try to find a way to secure the long-term viability of the Remploy factories. The Government is committed to doing that. Moreover, I hope that we will send a very clear signal to the Remploy employees who are here today that we, as a Parliament, are united in working to address their concerns and, if possible, to find a model that can work.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is decision time. There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-02421.1—

Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: You can raise your point of order after decision time. I would have appreciated having it before decision time. However, I will take it as soon as we conclude decision time, which we have now started.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-02421.1, in the name of Alex Neil, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02421, in the name of Elaine Murray, on ferries, 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)
 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)
 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)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (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)
 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)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 37, Abstentions 13.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-02421, in the name of Elaine Murray, as amended, on ferries, 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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (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, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 35, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the *Scottish Ferry Services: Draft Plan for consultation*; in particular the focus of the Scottish Ferries Review and the draft plan on the issues that matter most to island and remote communities and their central theme of further improving Scotland's ferry services; welcomes the wide engagement and consultation that has taken place throughout the Scottish Ferries Review; notes the Scottish Government's commitment to fully consider the consultation responses from communities representing their local interests, including those advocating the introduction of a service between Lochboisdale and Mallaig, and looks forward to the publication of the final ferries plan in 2012.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-02430.1, in the name of Aileen Campbell, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12430, in the name of Johann Lamont, on children, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 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)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 37, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-02430, in the name of Johann Lamont, on children, 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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 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)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 37, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that an extension to available nursery hours for pre-5 children is an important contribution to their educational development; notes the commitment made by the First Minister to extend available hours; further notes that the Scottish Government previously extended hours in 2007 through the use of a statutory instrument, the Provision of School Education for

Children under School Age (Prescribed Children) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2007, SSI 2007/396; recognises that, to provide a statutory right to more flexible early learning, primary legislation is required; welcomes the Scottish Government's intention to provide this through the Children's Services Bill to be introduced next year, and further recognises the importance of developing early learning and childcare by working in partnership with local authorities, nursery and childcare providers to ensure that both the developmental needs of Scotland's children and the varied needs of parents are met.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-02431.2, in the name of Ken Macintosh, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02431, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the United Kingdom Government response on the future of Remploy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, 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)

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)
 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)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 39, Against 61, Abstentions 11.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-02431.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02431, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the UK Government response on the future of Remploy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and

Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 98, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-02431, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the UK Government response on the future of Remploy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 98, Against 13, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament is deeply disappointed by the UK Government's decision to close four Rempoy factories in Scotland with the loss of 111 jobs and to place the future of five further factories, affecting a further 251 people, in doubt; notes that the Scottish Government has requested information from the Department for Work and Pensions that could assist employees, the third sector, business and agencies in securing alternative business models, demonstrating a sustainable future for the remaining factories and ensuring future employment for the Rempoy workforce; further notes that, should alternative solutions not be found, support for individuals should be directed through Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) in partnership with JobCentre Plus; welcomes the actions taken by the Scottish Government to increase public sector contracting opportunities with supported businesses, accounting for £24.1 million in 2010-11, and

looks forward to the delivery of the framework for the provision of goods through supported businesses, which includes provision of textiles and furniture.

Point of Order

17:09

Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): This afternoon, the First Minister, as he has done before, dismissed reports of patients in national health service hospitals having to sleep without blankets as being scare stories and untrue. Then he met 92-year-old Helen Macbeth and 65-year-old Jack Barr, who both had to sleep without blankets during recent stays in hospital. They confirmed that their stories are true and, indeed, there are many more.

The First Minister's press spokesperson has confirmed that the First Minister did not apologise to Helen and Jack for what he said about them, but I ask the First Minister whether he will come back to the chamber and take the opportunity to apologise to members for misleading Parliament during First Minister's question time today.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): As I have noted many times before, members are responsible for what they say during proceedings. An allegation that a minister or the First Minister has misled Parliament is a matter for the Scottish ministerial code. Therefore, I refer Paul Martin to that code and suggest that he take up the matter directly with the First Minister.

Green Investment Bank

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The final item of business is a members' business debate, on motion S4M-02277, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on the green investment bank. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the announcement that the first ever UK Green Investment Bank (GIB) will have its headquarters based in Edinburgh; considers that the city of Edinburgh is ideally suited to deliver the key objectives of the GIB, which aims to encourage and stimulate investment in low-carbon technologies; further considers that the green, financial and research sectors of the capital are already well established and that the decision will strengthen the links between the financial centres of Edinburgh and London; believes that the GIB provides an ideal opportunity to put great momentum behind the green revolution and to build strong relationships with industries across Scotland, the UK and beyond; further believes that the announcement clearly showcases the strengths of Edinburgh and also the potential for the green industry to grow significantly and bring a great boost for jobs, and congratulates what it considers the sheer hard work and determination of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, which it sees as a successful driving force behind the bid.

17:12

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I lodged the motion because I wanted to congratulate everyone—in particular, the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce—for doing such a fantastic job of mobilising people to submit a successful bid for the green investment bank.

It was in no way a foregone conclusion that Edinburgh's bid would be successful. If someone had listened to our debates, they would have assumed that it was a certainty, but there were 32 bids from throughout the United Kingdom and, although we are rightly clear about the huge progress and the policy commitments that we have made on renewables, I suspect that we are not quite so aware of what is happening in the rest of the UK. The Humber, the east of England and Cornwall have ambitions not only to emulate us but to overtake us, so there was no room for complacency. That is the context for the announcement that Edinburgh has been successful in securing the green investment bank and that is why it is such a major success.

The decision is hugely helpful for allowing Scotland's renewables and low-carbon industries to prosper, because we need stability and the massive investment that come from being part of the wider UK. There would not have been such a huge expansion of renewables without the Scottish Parliament but, paradoxically, we will not fully realise the industry's massive potential

without the subsidies, infrastructure and long-term market that come from being part of the UK.

It has been announced that, alongside the Edinburgh headquarters for the bank, the main transaction team will be based in London. According to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, that will allow for the strength of the two capitals to be harnessed. I hope that it will make the bank's operation more effective, but we need to be vigilant about the possibility of the Edinburgh operation being treated as second fiddle to the main player in London. Edinburgh must be the headquarters of the GIB in substance as well as name. It is not just about a nameplate; it is about the function and operations of the bank in Edinburgh.

The big drop in Edinburgh's international ranking as a place to do business in "The Global Financial Centres Index 11", which was published this week, highlights the fact that we cannot afford to be complacent. The strengths that we debated only a few weeks ago now need to be brought into play. Our academic networks and our legal and financial expertise in putting together deals for our renewables sector must now play their part in building the momentum that is necessary to deliver the green industrial revolution that we need.

Having been the birthplace of the industrial revolution, Scotland now needs to play its part in the economic transformation that we need for the 21st century. Our target to reduce carbon emissions by 42 per cent by 2020 is now only eight years away and we need widespread application of low-carbon technologies in all our economic activities if we are to deliver on that ambition.

I will make the case in the debate for a strong green investment bank, which is empowered to take forward its goal of driving investment to address the market failures and risks that are associated with developing green industries, because there are concerns that the bank, as it has been set up, has not been given sufficient financial support to let it get on with that job.

Business leaders, economists and campaigners have all focused on the missed opportunity created by delaying the introduction of the bank's borrowing powers until 2015. Transform UK describe it as akin to waiting for a seriously ill patient to recover before administering life-saving medicine. If the bank does not have borrowing powers from the outset, we risk missing the boat as overseas countries pursue these technologies and reap the rewards. If it had borrowing powers from the start, the UK Government would provide investors with the confidence to put money into the bank and allow it to provide a stimulus to emerging

green technologies while creating jobs, promoting growth and cutting emissions.

The green investment bank is not meant to be an ordinary bank. It is meant to lead the way with investment in low-carbon technologies and it is meant to act where the traditional banks will not. Some have suggested that the bank will be little more than a pot of money and that, although it will help to fund many admirable projects, it will not provide sufficient reassurance to overcome the barriers faced when seeking finance for green developments from the traditional banks. Part of the rationale behind the bank was to provide an environment that would encourage investors to take a risk on emerging technologies. With the right encouragement and the right investment, the creation of the bank would be an ideal opportunity to put great momentum behind the green revolution and to build strong relationships with industries throughout Scotland and the UK and beyond.

Even the Confederation of British Industry is clear that the bank

“should have powers to borrow from the outset to give investors confidence.”

We need that investment and that investment capacity. I hope that the debate will add weight to the argument to ensure that we get a green investment bank that is capable of delivering on its ambition.

At a meeting last month of the cross-party group on renewable energy and energy efficiency, we discussed the superb progress that has been made in the wave and tidal sector, but it is hugely expensive work. It is eye-wateringly expensive to get from the laboratory to getting the kit into the water, but that has to happen because kit has to be tested before it reaches the stage of mass production. Huge progress has been made in the short time that wave and tidal power has been looked at. The Edinburgh-based wave energy company Aquamarine Power has said that companies need the investment now, not in two years' time.

I argue for faster and more meaningful progress. Lord Stern, the climate change economist, has argued that the bank should not operate like other financial institutions. He said that it is not about state subsidy or state aid; this is an institution that is needed because of the market failures in finance, particularly those associated with risk and policy risk.

Mark Lazarowicz, one of the key advocates of the green investment bank, argued yesterday that the ability to raise bonds would hugely increase its potential impact. After yesterday's budget, the need for the bank to be a game changer is even more critical.

The green investment bank is important, because it will sit alongside our traditional banks such as the Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS and Barclays. They need to be persuaded to do more on renewables and low-carbon industries, alongside banks such as Triodos and the Co-operative Bank, which have already started to invest in the sector. We need the bank to make that difference.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has argued that from the outset there must be clearly established criteria that the bank will invest only in projects that have environmental sustainability at their core.

It is hugely exciting that Edinburgh has been given the chance to be the location for the bank, but we must ensure that it has the political and financial support to live up to its potential. It is about not only our future but the world's future. It is about the future of low island states and less developed countries, which are already on the front line of climate change.

I attended a United Nations conference on climate change in Dhaka last week, at which we received plaudits for our work on carbon emission targets and the legislation that we put through in our Parliament. People welcomed the fact that we have taken the lead in Scotland and the rest of the UK, but we will deserve that praise only when we achieve our targets. The green investment bank is a vital part of that.

17:19

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): This is my third speech on the green investment bank in less than a year. In my first one, which I made in my members' business debate last June, I said that I would never grow tired of proclaiming from the rooftops the virtues of my new constituency. Little did I know that I was going to get so much practice at it in such a short time.

Fortunately, it is a case of third time lucky, in that we have had the great news that the HQ of the green investment bank will be coming to Edinburgh. There is nothing wrong with a bit of self-congratulation, as long as it is tempered with reflection.

The unity that was shown in the campaign, not only in the Parliament but in civic society and the private sector in Edinburgh, was a model for how we can work together in the interests of the city, the country and the environment. It is testimony to all the groups that came together—led, as Sarah Boyack's motion says, by the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, but also including Scottish Financial Enterprise, the City of Edinburgh Council, the Scottish Government and MPs and MSPs from all parties—that we succeeded in making the

irrefutable case for Edinburgh as the natural heart of the new green economy.

During that campaign, some of the minor disagreements that we had about the institution and about wider issues of green investment were put aside. Although I did not want to be a party pooper, I was going to dust those off as notes of caution but, fortunately, Ms Boyack has already done so, so I do not feel as if I am spoiling the party.

Now that the announcement that the GIB's HQ will be coming to Edinburgh has been made, we need to be sure of three things, namely that it is green, that it is an investment bank and that it is an HQ. The investment and the footprint in Edinburgh will be vital. We cannot simply have a branch of the bank. I will be interested to see the details that emerge on what, physically, will be in Edinburgh. I note that the Green Investment Bank Ltd is registered with Companies House—it has registration number 07951292—as a company in England and Wales. If the HQ is based in Scotland, perhaps it should be registered as a company in Scotland.

As an investment bank, it must have borrowing powers very early on and be able to actively act like a bank. Having to wait until 2015 seems to be an inordinate delay.

Furthermore, it must be green. We might take that for granted, and the priorities that have been set out for it include a range of worthwhile green issues in addition to offshore renewable energy in general, such as energy from waste, non-domestic energy efficiency and other measures that are vital parts of the new green economy, and which are necessary if we are to deliver the change that we need to make if we are to meet the 42 per cent target. However, the “Update on the design of the Green Investment Bank” document includes the suggestion—admittedly, it is not prioritised—that, at some future time, the low-carbon interventions that the bank might progress could include nuclear power. I would dispute whether nuclear power is low carbon, and I would definitely disagree that it is green.

Those three important caveats should not detract from Edinburgh's success in being announced as the location for the bank's HQ.

Ms Boyack mentioned the union and the market that it brings, and the ability to access English markets gives the Scottish renewables industry a great deal of strength. International trade will always happen, but I note that there have been a few instances in which the kind of investment that the bank is aiming to stimulate has been held back. For example, there is the long-running issue of transmission charging, which is still hampering investment in Scotland. Another example is the

fossil fuel levy. Although I very much welcome today's announcement, I wish that the steps that have now been taken had been possible four or five years ago. If it is bad having to wait until 2015 for the bank to have borrowing powers, it is just as bad that we have had to wait until 2012 to be able to announce that money that was raised in Scotland and was earmarked for Scotland can be released.

Overall, the GIB is a great initiative. It strikes me that it is somewhat reminiscent of what was done as part of South Korea's path to prosperity, in that it identified where the market failures were and focused public investment strategically with a view to picking a winner and, above all, to climbing the value chain. In the past, the focus has always been on generation but, in the future, the real prizes will be in the technology for marine, wave and tidal power, not simply in manufacturing, which brings many jobs, too, but in development and export. That is the objective that we aim to reach.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I am afraid that I must ask you to conclude.

Marco Biagi: Is the limit not six minutes?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The limit is four minutes in a members' business debate.

Marco Biagi: My apologies—I had thought I had six minutes. I shall be very brief.

Edinburgh can be a fantastic home for this new industry, financing it as we reap the benefits of the GIB and the renewable energy investment fund announced today.

17:25

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I, too, welcome the news that the GIB will be headquartered in Edinburgh and congratulate all those involved in this achievement.

Scotland has a unique mix of natural resources and access to cutting edge research and practical engineering expertise. It is right that the bank should have good connections to the many businesses here. The bank will be capitalised with £3 billion of Government finance over the period to 2015 and that significant level of cash is welcome, too.

A bank is one of the best ways to invest in the revolutionary changes that we need in our energy systems, the way we deal with our waste and our water infrastructure. Those changes will be a challenge. According to the UK Government's own figures we will need £200 billion of investment in our energy sector alone. How will we meet this? The GIB plans to use its £3 billion to leverage commercial money on to projects to bring into the

green economy private money that might not otherwise have had the confidence to invest here.

There are three ways we could ensure that the GIB maximises the green economy opportunity and helps us meet the levels of investment needed. Some are possible today, or will be very soon at least, and one in particular is even more possible because of the bank's situation in Edinburgh. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills—the UK Government department responsible—envisages the bank investing in “near-commercial” projects. It will then be investing along lines very similar to a normal commercial bank. I would like us to be a little more ambitious with key technologies that will help us reach our climate change targets. Early-stage marine technologies in particular should come under the investment strategy of the bank.

I recognise that there are other moneys to help develop early-stage marine renewables. The Scottish Government has pledged £18 million to fund the deployment of commercial arrays, but if the GIB is not able to invest in higher risk projects, bringing the risk down and therefore enabling more private investment, it is not maximising its potential. I hope that over the years, as the institution matures, we will see its remit grow in ambition. As it matures and graduates to a full bank, the institution will be able to raise some of its own finance. The current plans are that it will do that in April 2015. I agree entirely with the members who have already spoken and hope that that will happen much sooner.

To meet the financial challenge, it is really important that the bank can borrow and issue bonds. Future borrowing powers will only be given if the structural deficit is eliminated and that enhances the uncertainty that the bank will mature. I hope that the UK Government can give more certainty on that point soon.

Finally, to leverage private money will require good working relations with other banks. The GIB will be in a good position in Edinburgh to build relations with the RBS, which is also headquartered here. The RBS is a specialist energy financier. According to a report from Platform using Bloomberg figures, in the years from 2008 to 2010 inclusive, the RBS was involved in providing finance worth almost €8 billion to companies listed in the world's 20 biggest operators of coal mines and generators of coal-based electricity. That makes the RBS the UK high street bank that has been most heavily involved in financing the hydrocarbon industry. Obviously, I would rather see that €8 billion being diverted from fossil fuels towards cleaner energy production, but it serves to illustrate that the RBS is an energy specialist and could have a very beneficial partnership with our newest bank in Scotland. The

fact that the RBS is 84 per cent Government-owned gives that extra incentive for us to ensure that its future energy investments are green.

It is time to address the risks inherent in business-as-usual banking behaviour. Let us be ambitious and optimise the GIB's potential to provide social, environmental and economic benefits.

17:29

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): I must be honest and say that I was expecting a slightly more upbeat members' business debate. Edinburgh won, Scotland won, and by locating the green investment bank in Edinburgh the United Kingdom wins too. We all win because of the bank's being located in Edinburgh. It is worth reflecting on that. It is worth reflecting on what needs to happen next and what united us, as opposed to what might divide us in future.

I congratulate the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, in particular, and everyone who got on board, at all levels of government and in all parts of Scotland. The campaign was excellent and it was won on merit. The campaign was critical, because when it came to the crunch the decision was pretty close. If we look at the secretary of state's decision, which was published on 8 March, we find that of the 32 locations that applied, 26 were eliminated because they could not match the criteria that had been set down, which brought the number of competitors down to six. We comfortably beat Birmingham, Milton Keynes and Peterborough, which left Edinburgh, London and Manchester. The review panel gave London a perfect score in all categories, but the competition between Edinburgh and Manchester was tight. In our view and the Parliament's view that was not a close contest and Edinburgh was streets ahead, but Edinburgh ended up with 115 points and Manchester ended up with 100 points. That shows just how important it was that people united. It was the thrust and momentum of the campaign that made it happen.

The next steps are critical. We need early recruitment of a chair and senior independent director. We need the right people, but we need them early. The Parliament and the Scottish Government ought to be champing at the bit to meet the chair and independent director as soon as is practicable after their appointment.

The bank must focus on making an early and a lasting impact. As Alison Johnstone said, £200 billion of investment in the energy sector is needed if we are to meet our targets. The bank has a fraction of that amount, so it is critical that everything that it does has an impact and that it

focuses on areas in which it can make a genuine difference, instead of spreading itself too thinly.

We should all ask ourselves what we can do to speed things up and get the bank up and running as quickly as possible. What does the bank need in terms of office space, infrastructure and recruitment? Are there things that the local authority, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government can do to assist the process? How can we best support the bank's work, not just here but throughout the United Kingdom? The bank must serve the whole UK, even though there are many opportunities just in Scotland.

We all joined together to win the bid, but that was just the beginning. The work on the real prize starts now and we all need to pull together in the same direction. There is a big opportunity. We could become the epicentre for Europe's renewables, as the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce suggested. The whole must be greater than the sum of its parts, which is why I welcome this important debate.

17:33

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I warmly congratulate Sarah Boyack on securing the debate and I entirely agree with her analysis. The choice of Edinburgh as the location for the green investment bank was the result of a number of things, but above all it was the result of the unity of purpose in the campaign and in the leadership of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce and Scottish Financial Enterprise. Members of all parties in the Scottish Parliament were united, and Glasgow and Edinburgh were at one in their co-operation—that is perhaps not an alliance of natural bedfellows—and the universities all fell in behind the bid. It was truly a united campaign, although it was not one in which the outcome could be taken for granted—I suspect that it was a close-run thing. However, the case was made strongly across the board, and I congratulate all members.

Sarah Boyack's tone was upbeat, in an Edinburgh sort of way—a kind of *douce* and restrained jubilation. Just before the debate on 22 February, in which most members in this debate took part, there was a united photo call, which took place in the penthouse suite of one of the offices of Quayle Munro on a very windy day, as befits the campaign for a body that will hopefully fund some of our offshore wind developments. Sarah Boyack, Alison Johnstone, Liam McArthur and I attended that windswept photo shoot. As Marco Biagi said, we are entitled to slap ourselves on the back.

At the same time, though, we should be thinking about the future. The practical points that Mr Brown raised are all absolutely correct; I want to

touch on some of those. We have been in touch with the UK GIB, as it is at the moment. It is in the incubation stage, which I understand is the junior tadpole stage of a bank, as it transmogrifies to become a fully fledged, grown-up bank.

It will start doing business in April and it will be looking for early hits. My officials have had discussions with the organisation. We will keep fully in touch with it and I look forward to meeting the appropriate staff as soon as possible. We should keep working together in the alliance that we have formed with the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, the SFE and so on. We need some form of support group to keep that unity of purpose going. Individuals who have given leadership to the campaign and who, in the case of Owen Kelly and his colleagues, helped us to win the campaign will be able to play a strong part in making things happen. We are looking at all that and there is unity of purpose.

Alison Johnstone mentioned the large numbers for the scale of investment that is needed to achieve our ambitions—£200 billion is a figure that one sees frequently. I always mistrust large numbers, but it certainly will be a large figure in this case; we just do not know quite how large. The point is that the bank will only have £3 billion, so it needs to lever in lots of private money. Above all, the key will be to create an environment in which private sector investors have confidence to invest.

A number of factors are involved here. For example the costs of offshore wind have to be brought down, which is a challenge for the industry. It is aware of that challenge; it is up for it and it is addressing it.

However, we also need private sector finance. As it happens, I was at a Chatham house rules meeting in London this week with a number of financiers, at which I learned that there are substantial private sector funds for renewables. That is excellent news.

I met Charles Hendry, with whom I enjoy a good working relationship. We are working hard to win the vote in the referendum, and I believe that he is shortly to become a Scottish resident, although that may be an uphill struggle. However, Charles and I get on just fine. I think that we both acknowledge that one of the challenges is that we have to set the ground rules on electricity market reform. There is a danger at the moment of a bit of an investment hiatus in some sectors, for example in hydro power. We all want to move swiftly to make EMR work; that is a shared purpose. We have suggested that as part of the institutional framework for EMR, the Scottish Government and the devolved Administrations play a part in a kind of delivery committee. That proposal is on the table.

We look forward to working constructively with the Westminster Government because the Scottish National Party believes that, irrespective of the outcome of the referendum, an integrated UK energy market will be needed on both sides of the border. England needs our renewable energy and Scotland needs England's demand for our renewable energy. That mutual need is one of the drivers for a policy of common shared purpose.

Marco Biagi quite rightly referred to transmission charges. I hope that, before very long, we can have a debate in the Parliament on transmission charges and project transmit, and that we will have the same unity of purpose in persuading the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets that, although it has moved a step in the right direction with its draft proposals, we urgently require it to include a solution in its "minded to" letter—which will be issued on 19 April, I think—that recognises that the islands are part of the UK, too, and cannot be excluded from the proposals. I believe that the compromise proposal has the support of the Liberal party and SNP elected representatives, and I believe, hope and expect that it has the support of the islands councils. We are waiting for confirmation of that. I hope that we will unite so that the islands are not prevented from harnessing the potential benefits of renewable energy.

I will finish with an observation. Before I became a politician in 1999, I was a solicitor. That the method of arguing in the courts, where I used to appear before the sheriff, is somewhat different from political argument constantly has surprised and irked me—indeed, it still does from time to time. In the courts, one had to use reasoned arguments to the sheriff; if one strayed into personal comments, abuse or comments on the validity of one's opponent's arguments, one rapidly got shot down. Sometimes in politics, I have thought that extraneous arguments have far too much scope to play. The campaign for the green investment bank was won on the basis of the arguments. It was won because we united together, stood behind the arguments and did not get involved with party politics. Long may that approach continue.

I congratulate every member and person who won the campaign for Edinburgh. We look forward to working closely in co-operation with our colleagues in the London Government and the London branch of the green investment bank.

Meeting closed at 17:42.

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