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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 14 March 2013

Session 4

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Thursday 14 March 2013

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME	17761
National Health Service (Bullying)	17761
Vion Food Group (Acquisition)	17762
Independence Referendum (Civic Society)	17763
Creative Scotland (Meetings)	17764
Congenital Heart Disease (Standards of Care)	17765
Air Source Heat Pumps	17766
Energy Skills Academy (Location)	17767
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	17769
Engagements.....	17769
Prime Minister (Meetings).....	17773
Cabinet (Meetings)	17776
Disability Benefits Tribunals (Medical Information)	17777
Prisons (Contraband)	17778
Business Growth.....	17780
MINERS' STRIKE (POLICE CONDUCT)	17782
<i>Motion debated—[Neil Findlay].</i>	
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)	17782
Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	17784
John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)	17786
Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)	17787
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	17788
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)	17790
Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)	17792
Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind).....	17794
Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)	17795
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind).....	17796
Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)	17798
Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab)	17800
The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham)	17801
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	17806
<i>Motion moved—[Aileen Campbell].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Neil Bibby].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liz Smith].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liam McArthur].</i>	
The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell).....	17806
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	17811
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	17815
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	17817
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP).....	17820
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)	17822
Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP).....	17824
Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)	17827
Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab).....	17829
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)	17831
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	17832
Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)	17834
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)	17835
Liam McArthur	17838
Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con)	17840
Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab)	17842
The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell).....	17846

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (SCOTLAND) AMENDMENT ORDER 2013 [DRAFT]	17850
<i>Motion moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Sarah Boyack].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney)	17850
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)	17852
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)	17855
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)	17856
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	17857
Sarah Boyack	17859
The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay)	17860
DECISION TIME	17863

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 14 March 2013

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 11:40*]

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 1 is in the name of Hanzala Malik, but I note that Mr Malik is not in the chamber to ask it.

National Health Service (Bullying)

2. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what further measures it will take to combat bullying in the national health service. (S4O-01916)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Culture, values and behaviours will be a fundamental cornerstone of the 2020 workforce vision, which we aim to launch at the NHS event in June. That will present a further opportunity to restate our commitment to providing a working environment in the NHS that is free from bullying and harassment.

Jim Eadie: Is the cabinet secretary aware that the national confidential alert line that is soon to be launched, which is independent of the NHS, is being keenly awaited by NHS staff and trade unions, as it will provide an additional level of protection in the workplace, and that NHS staff who have any concerns over standards of care, patient safety or the treatment of staff, including bullying, will be able to make a complaint over the phone to the whistleblowers helpline, secure and safe in the knowledge that their complaint will be taken seriously, fully investigated and acted upon?

Alex Neil: I am aware that the national confidential alert line is keenly awaited. The contract to provide it has been awarded to Public Concern at Work, and I am pleased to say that we are making excellent progress in preparing for the launch of the freephone service on 2 April this year. I am confident that the service will support and enhance existing procedures by providing an additional level of support for staff who wish to raise concerns about practices in NHS Scotland.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will know that I have constituents who are members of Patients First, which was established in England and Wales and is now developing in Scotland. In the main, they are NHS staff with an interest in whistleblowing and other issues in the NHS. What could the cabinet secretary do to support Patients First and those involved in it as the organisation develops?

Alex Neil: In preparing the tender document for the alert line, I consulted Dr Kim Holt, a founding member of Patients First, to get her input and feedback on her experiences in London, particularly with Great Ormond Street hospital, to ensure that we were covering all the right angles for the tender specification. I received positive and helpful input from Dr Holt, and I will continue to talk to Patients First about the development of a policy to ensure robust implementation of our intention to eliminate bullying and harassment in the NHS in Scotland.

Vion Food Group (Acquisition)

3. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the 2 Sisters Food Group regarding the acquisition of Vion Food Group's United Kingdom red meat and poultry businesses. (S4O-01917)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Scottish ministers and officials have held extensive discussions with representatives of the 2 Sisters Food Group in recent weeks regarding the proposed acquisition of Vion's UK businesses.

Maureen Watt: Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that the safeguarding of 280 jobs at the McIntosh Donald facility in Portlethen was essential for the employees, the local community and the economy, as well as supporting a trusted red meat and poultry brand that is renowned for its quality and responsible sourcing, and which has remained steadfast throughout the mislabelled meat scandal?

John Swinney: I acknowledge and very much endorse the points that Maureen Watt has made. The acquisition of Vion's UK operations in Portlethen, Coupar Angus and Cambuslang and of the supporting infrastructure in the agricultural sector has been very important for ensuring stability of ownership of major elements of the food chain in Scotland.

On the point that Maureen Watt makes about the quality and traceability at all those operations, those are at even more of a premium in the food-processing sector now given the other issues with which we are wrestling at the moment. I certainly assure Parliament of the keen interest of the Government and of our agencies, such as Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International, in working closely with 2 Sisters to ensure that the company has a strong and effective foothold in the food-processing market within Scotland. We will continue that dialogue in the months and years to come.

Independence Referendum (Civic Society)

4. Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how civic society is engaging with the process involved in the lead-up to the independence referendum. (S4O-01918)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Civil society is already a central part of the debate and is discussing the opportunities that would be generated by and for the people of an independent Scotland. To cite just one example of that, the Scottish Trades Union Congress's work "A Just Scotland" is a wide-ranging consultation between the STUC and its members throughout Scotland's communities on our constitutional future. We certainly welcome such engagement. It is absolutely right that civil society should be centrally engaged now because, following a vote for independence in the 2014 referendum, civil society would have a key part to play in taking Scotland forward.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the cabinet secretary join me in welcoming the decision of the Scotland number 2 branch of the Communication Workers Union to back our country's independence?

Does the cabinet secretary regret the language used by the leader of the Liberal Democrats in Scotland, who described the branch's decision as "turkeys voting for Christmas" because, he said,

"One of the big strengths of the UK is the universal service"?

Surely such language is unbecoming of any parliamentarian, let alone a party leader, and is somewhat ironic given that the Office of Communications has already concluded that

"There is a very real risk to the universal service".

Surely the threat to the universal service comes not from independence but from the United Kingdom Government, of which Mr Rennie's party forms part.

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Jamie Hepburn for that question. I warmly welcome the vote by the members of the Communication Workers Union. Let me quote from the motion that the branch passed, which states:

"We recognise that under consecutive governments the gap between rich and poor has widened and that the UK remains one of the most unequal societies in the developed nations of the world. ... To this end we believe that the only way forward for workers in Scotland is to ensure a YES vote in the referendum and we agree to do all in our power to secure such an outcome."

I thoroughly agree with that conclusion.

In response to Jamie Hepburn's question about the comments of the Scottish Liberal Democrats

leader, as Willie Rennie is not in the chamber I will confine my comments to saying that his position is one of many that have resulted in him being the leader of just five MSPs. Perhaps the biggest problem that he faces is that his colleagues are propping up a Tory Government in Westminster that the people of Scotland did not vote for and do not want.

Creative Scotland (Meetings)

5. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met the board of Creative Scotland and what issues were discussed. (S4O-01919)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government attends regular meetings of the board of Creative Scotland as an observer, most recently on 28 February 2013 when strategic matters were discussed. I am next due to meet the board on 21 March.

Patricia Ferguson: In her future conversations with Creative Scotland, will the cabinet secretary ask Creative Scotland to think again about how it supports our film and television industry? I have received several reports that indicate to me that support for those who wish to produce new work is sadly lacking, that the process that is used to decide which project is funded is convoluted and that potential producers have found it difficult to engage in the conversation. The cabinet secretary's intervention in the issue would be most gratefully received.

Fiona Hyslop: I know that the member has regularly raised issues about film and television, which is a sector that I am keen to support. I am more than happy to ensure that the points that she has made are raised in my discussions with Creative Scotland, and I am looking forward to positive news about progress in that area. The action plan that Creative Scotland produced only last week sets out a review of funding streams more generally. I will ask specifically what that will mean for film and television in particular.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will recall her visit to Fife in February to meet representatives of Fife Council, Creative Scotland and elected representatives to discuss the future of the Byre. Can she advise what recent discussions have taken place with Creative Scotland about its general review of its funding approach in Scotland that will be of particular relevance to the future of the Byre?

Fiona Hyslop: As outlined in my answer to Patricia Ferguson, part of the action plan relates to a review of funding models to enable as many organisations as possible and appropriate to

benefit from stable multiyear arrangements, which includes an end to the plans for strategic commissioning. Changing the perceived funding hierarchy will be helpful and that stability will be important for a number of organisations.

In relation to the Byre theatre, important discussions must take place with Fife Council and the new Fife Cultural Trust in particular. I will encourage—as I did at the meeting that Rod Campbell attended—those discussions to take place. I thank Rod Campbell and all the Fife MSPs who attended that meeting for their positive suggestions and constructive support.

Congenital Heart Disease (Standards of Care)

6. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to improve the standard of care for adults with congenital heart disease. (S4O-01920)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): I recently approved the establishment of a national managed clinical network to promote the improvement of high-quality, safe and person-centred services for children and adults with congenital heart disease in Scotland. The Scottish congenital cardiac network will be launched on 1 April 2013.

Malcolm Chisholm: I recognise that survival with congenital heart disease is a success story of modern medicine, and I welcome the establishment of the managed clinical network. However, does the cabinet secretary understand the serious concerns of those with congenital heart disease about the absence of national standards or the particular difficulties that they encounter frequently when attending accident and emergency departments? Will the cabinet secretary ensure that national standards are established and implemented as soon as possible, along with A and E protocols, including 24-hour phone access for A and E doctors to the specialist service at the Golden Jubilee hospital?

Alex Neil: I am actively pursuing all the issues mentioned by Malcolm Sturgeon. I am sorry—I mean Malcolm Chisholm. That is an easy way to answer a question. [*Laughter.*] My mistake was, of course, deliberate, Presiding Officer.

We are doing so in consultation with our colleagues south of the border. As the member probably knows, the Department of Health set up a review of the 2006 commissioning standards for England and Wales. We will take cognisance of the review when developing our own national standards.

Air Source Heat Pumps

7. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to encourage the use of air source heat pumps. (S4O-01921)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): When Fergus Ewing, Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, launched the “Microgeneration Strategy for Scotland” in June last year, he announced an increase in the budget for our energy saving Scotland home renewables loans. That increased the loans available for renewable heat to £10,000 for each installation, which has resulted in a six-fold increase in the rate of applications. We also provide small business loans for energy efficiency and microgeneration, and the £50 million warm homes fund can help registered social landlords and local authorities to install renewable technologies such as heat pumps on their properties.

The funding is supported by free and impartial advice and information from the Energy Saving Trust in Scotland, which we sponsor to advise householders, businesses, communities and local authorities through its network of local energy saving Scotland advice centres.

Alex Fergusson: I acknowledge those steps. However, why is it the case in Scotland that planning permission is required for the installation of air source heat pumps when it is not required across the rest of the United Kingdom and has not been for some time? That requirement adds a cost of at least £150 to each installation and can act only as a major disincentive to householders, social landlords and others who are seeking to decrease their carbon footprint. When will the Government remove the requirement and catch up with the rest of the UK?

John Swinney: To be honest, I do not think that Alex Fergusson has substantiated his point. The fact is that there has been a six-fold increase in the rate of applications. What has been slowing up the move to air source heat pumps is the lack of clarity around the financial arrangements, particularly those relating to the domestic renewable heat incentive, which have taken some time to emerge from the UK Government.

We have taken steps to encourage the development of that. The increase in applications is a reflection of the increase in support that the Scottish Government is making available.

I assure Mr Fergusson that, if he has particular examples that he wishes to cite to me in which the necessity to secure planning permission has been an impediment to such development, ministers will consider them. However, we should welcome the fact that we are making more progress because

we have put in place a regime that is of some assistance to householders throughout Scotland.

Energy Skills Academy (Location)

8. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government when it will announce the location for the energy skills academy. (S4O-01922)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Discussions with industry and with skills providers have taken place and an announcement on the energy skills academy approach will be made in the next few weeks.

Richard Baker: On 28 February, the first Minister said that detailed announcements on the energy skills academy that Labour members would welcome would be made in the near future. As the cabinet secretary knows, I am always keen to welcome good news from the Scottish Government when there is any, so can he tell me in more detail when an announcement will be made so that I can prepare to welcome the Scottish Government's decision to base the academy in Aberdeen?

John Swinney: I did not think that I would come to the Parliament today to experience a revelation, but I have certainly experienced one if Mr Baker is lining himself up to be somebody who celebrates good news. It is not something of which I would ever have accused him at any stage in the past. Of course, he has some football connections that make it difficult for him to experience or celebrate much good news, which he and I have a mutual interest in sharing.

I assure Mr Baker that very good discussions are going on with the industry. The First Minister and I took forward some further discussions in that respect on Monday in Aberdeen. We look forward to the announcement and, of course, to the welcome that Mr Baker will accord it in due course.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the work that has already been done by the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University, along with Aberdeen College and the Banff and Buchan College, which will become the new regional college.

As an Aberdeen member, I hope that the energy skills academy will be based in Aberdeen, but is it not essential that other further and higher education institutions come on board with the project? There are not enough skills within the north-east, and we must encourage students from other areas—such as Fife and Renfrew, where there are already oil-related jobs—to come on

board in the oil and gas industry, which has an exciting future.

John Swinney: Maureen Watt makes a number of correct and appropriate points. Although the focus of energy activity has clearly emerged in Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland and although a tremendous critical mass of activity and the global centre of expertise are located in the city of Aberdeen, there are also opportunities in the oil and gas sector and renewables throughout the country.

Part of what the energy skills academy approach must achieve is the capture of innovative thinking from the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University, Banff and Buchan College and Aberdeen College. However, we must take that forward in consort with all aspects of the energy sector, whether the oil and gas sector, renewables or the wide cross-section of other areas of activity that we have.

There are some real issues with congestion of activity in the north-east of Scotland. Some players within the industry are already resolving those by undertaking activity in other parts of Scotland. That is to be welcomed, because it strengthens Scotland's overall proposition as a major centre for energy activity.

As the First Minister and I heard from Oil & Gas UK representatives on Monday, the industry has a strong and buoyant future. We look forward to strengthening that yet further with the commitment under the proposals for the energy skills academy that the Scottish Government will take forward.

The Presiding Officer: Before we come to First Minister's questions, I am sure that members would wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery the Deputy Chairman and members from the Consultative Assembly of Oman. [*Applause.*]

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-01241)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I am sure that the whole chamber will want to join me in sending our warmest congratulations to Pope Francis—the first ever Pope from Latin America—on his election. His election will be a great encouragement to our Catholic community, who are such an important and highly valued part of the fabric of Scotland. The Pope's first message, in which he urged greater bonds of understanding between peoples and nations, is one that will resonate around the world. We wish the church well under the new leadership of Pope Francis. *[Applause.]*

Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Johann Lamont: I join the First Minister in welcoming the new Pope and send him every good wish in the times ahead. We recognise the particular importance that the Pope's election has for the Catholic community in Scotland.

Last week, a document that the First Minister did not want the people of Scotland to see revealed that what he and his ministers say in private is different from what they say in public. It was revealed that his finance minister and his chief economic adviser think that forecasting oil revenues is so difficult that, privately, John Swinney questions the affordability of pensions.

John Swinney's private words holed the First Minister's public position below the waterline so, after a feverish weekend and a hastily arranged press conference, the First Minister declared—from nowhere—an oil boom. Does the First Minister not think that we can see the join?

The First Minister: I am glad that Johann Lamont thinks that the powers of the Scottish Government are such that it can present the detailed "Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin" in the course of a weekend.

Unfortunately, Johann Lamont does not seem to remember that, two weeks ago at First Minister's question time, I said:

"The Scottish Government will shortly publish the first in a series of analytical bulletins on oil and gas. The new analysis demonstrates the vast potential that remains."—*[Official Report, 28 February 2013; c 17161.]*

Much as I welcome the accolade that the Scottish Government is so efficient that we can produce such a serious and detailed analysis over the course of a weekend, I have to say that the statement that I made two weeks ago should have given people a clue—if they had been listening—that the oil and gas bulletin was about to appear.

Why do not we leave it to the independent, impartial commentator, Douglas Fraser of the BBC, to comment on the matter? On 12 March, he said:

"If, as his critics claim, it was conjured out of thin air as a response to last week's events, then some of the first minister's team are not bad at magic."

Johann Lamont: Our problem is that, too often, we listen but never hear an answer to the serious questions that the First Minister's own document challenges us with. He says one thing in private and something else in public. Whatever he said on Monday does not address that problem.

The oil boom that was announced on Monday drowned the credibility of the First Minister's chief economic adviser, Crawford Beveridge, and of his finance minister.

Let us move on to another of the First Minister's advisers, Professor John Kay. He said:

"Scotland should be ready to adopt an independent currency."

He also said that a new currency would have to be adopted quickly, or people could move their money out of Scotland before it was launched.

Does the First Minister agree with his adviser, or will he now rule out a separate Scotland having its own currency?

The First Minister: In my answer to the first question—from which we have quickly moved on, I notice—I pointed out that, two weeks ago, I told the chamber that the oil and gas bulletin was about to be published.

From her second question, Johann Lamont does not seem to have read the report of the fiscal commission that was assembled over the course of a year and which has two Nobel laureates on it. That report explained exactly the best policy for Scotland on the currency and a Sterling area. I think that it was published four or five weeks ago, so I must conclude that not only does Johann Lamont not listen to what I say at First Minister's question time, but she has not bothered to read the fiscal commission's report.

That is exactly why we commissioned that serious piece of work: it puts forward the Government's policy in a serious and comprehensive way.

I say to Johann Lamont that her difficulty is in trying to give the impression or to argue that,

uniquely among the countries of the world, this nation of Scotland—with its immense natural and human resources—is somehow incapable of running its economy and society rather better than the disaster that is emanating from Westminster.

Johann Lamont: It says quite a lot about what the First Minister thinks an answer to a question is if he imagines that what he said even began to respond to the question that I asked. We are arguing not about Scotland's resources but about the First Minister's risk-rich, assertion-rich and fantasy-rich plans for our country.

I note that the First Minister has not ruled out the question of a separate Scottish currency, which he used to want. Then he wanted the euro. Now the line is that we will keep sterling.

Professor Kay has made the point that any new currency would have to be launched suddenly; otherwise, wealth might flow out of Scotland before it was launched. It would be a gift for spivs and speculators. In a sense, perhaps it is something that the First Minister could not commit to publicly. Has he had any private conversations about a separate Scottish currency with Professor Kay or anyone else?

The First Minister: I have had conversations with a range of people, including the fiscal commission. It came up with what it believes is the best policy for Scotland, which is the policy of the Government and has been for a considerable time.

Johann Lamont says that we have changed our policy over the years. Yes, I can remember someone—what was his name again? He was a shadow secretary of state and Secretary of State for Scotland—he was called Alistair Darling. I remember him telling the House of Commons that not joining the euro would impose extraordinary costs on the economy. I remember Tony Blair saying that it was time to join the euro. I even remember Kenneth Clarke arguing for that. I remember all those things, so I think that Johann Lamont is on shaky ground in suggesting that we should look for policy consistency over 20 years from the Labour Party. It has not been evident.

The policy that the Scottish Government puts forward is that of being part of a sterling area, which we have debated many times. The fiscal commission—with its two Nobel laureates—consolidated and put forward that policy. That seems to be a great deal more examination and presentation than has ever been managed by the Labour Party or its unionist friends in Scotland.

Johann Lamont: Despite the touch of amateur dramatics about that, the First Minister still did not answer the question. We know that Alex Salmond is known for his insults, but the problem—which is

worse—is that he is insulting the intelligence of the people of Scotland.

Let me get this right. In private, the First Minister and his colleagues question whether there will be a state pension; in public, he cannot tell pensioners—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

Johann Lamont: Obviously, Scottish National Party members have still not read the document that was leaked to the rest of us.

In private, the First Minister and his colleagues question whether there will be a state pension; in public, he cannot tell pensioners what currency it would be paid in if it existed. He asserts—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Johann Lamont: The First Minister asserts that we could keep sterling, but what would he do if the deal that was on offer from the Bank of England was unacceptable? What would he do if the fiscal constraints were too tight? What would he do if strings were imposed by London? [*Interruption.*] Would he go for a separate Scottish currency? [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. [*Interruption.*] Order—we will hear the member. [*Interruption.*] Order. Ms Sturgeon.

Johann Lamont: It is astonishing that asking serious questions creates the degree of derision among SNP back benchers—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order—there is too much shouting.

Johann Lamont: Of course, we know that they are never allowed to ask any of those questions of their front benchers, even if they know in their heart of hearts that their front benchers are incapable of answering them.

Would the First Minister go for a separate Scottish currency or join the euro? His own advisers say that he would need a plan B, and we are entitled to know what that is. He must have one in private; it is time that he made it public.

The First Minister: I differ from Johann Lamont in that she does not have a plan A, never mind a plan B.

On the reason for the hilarity about the strings pulled from London, I say seriously to Johann Lamont that I suspect that she voted for the Iraq war because strings were pulled from the Labour Party in London.

We are in favour of Scotland continuing in a sterling area, and we set out the reasons for that in the fiscal commission report, which, by any

estimation, is a huge and serious piece of analysis.

That is the third time that I have answered Johann Lamont's question. The key point that she has made and the scaremongering attack are about pensions. I point out three things to her. First, Scotland currently spends less on social protection as part of our total national product than the United Kingdom as a whole. In other words, we are better able to afford welfare and pensions than the UK at the moment.

Secondly, does Johann Lamont have no awareness of what is happening to pensions in the United Kingdom? Private sector and public sector pensions are being seriously jeopardised and undermined by the current Administration.

The third point is the key one. What other country in the world would have a unionist coalition suggesting that the immense wealth to flow from Scotland's natural resources is somehow a handicap and a problem, instead of what every other country in the world sees it as: an opportunity to combine our natural and human resources to be used in an economically successful and prosperous Scotland?

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): I associate myself and the Scottish Conservative Party with the First Minister's welcome to Pope Francis.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-01240)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): No plans in the near future.

Ruth Davidson: Last week, we saw in the Swinneyleaks document that the finance secretary accepts the Office for Budget Responsibility's projection that North Sea oil revenue would halve in five years. The First Minister's response—although he denies that he moved it up or rushed it out in any way—was a barely six-page long fantasy report that asserted a new oil boom in Scotland. The smoke and mirrors of that report were compounded by taking an average of four cherry-picked examples and conveniently leaving the OBR's respected projection to one side.

The First Minister mentioned his own fiscal commission with its two Nobel laureates. That commission warns that

"The Scottish Government should plan budgets on a cautious estimate for oil revenues".

Can the First Minister tell us why, against his own experts' advice and his finance secretary's acknowledgement, he has ignored the

"unchallenged, independent, more cautious estimate"?

The First Minister: We have not. I am sorry that Ruth Davidson has also not accepted what Johann Lamont refused to accept, which is that the "Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin" had been in preparation for a considerable time, as the evidence indicates.

Ruth Davidson claims that we put forward an ambitious estimate for oil prices, but that is simply not the case. We have assumed a declining real-term oil price over the term of the forecast: \$113 in nominal terms, declining in real terms. Incidentally, if we take an average of the figures from the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the United States economic agency, the Economist Intelligence Unit, the Ernst and Young ITEM Club, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research and the OBR, we come to a figure that is exactly that in 2017 and 2018.

I have a range of quotes from people who make reasonable estimations. Professor John McLaren, for example, has said:

"The Scottish Government's Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin is a very welcome addition to the statistical landscape, especially with the referendum approaching."

Any reasonable estimation of the analysis in the "Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin" has led to it receiving a strong welcome—from those who do not have the vested interest that the Conservative Party has.

I repeat the point that I tried to make to Ruth Davidson last week about the industry estimates. The OBR estimates assume that oil production will decline to 1.5 million barrels a day and keep going down. The industry—the people who are investing £11 billion this year and £13 billion in the coming financial year—says that, as a result of those billions being spent, production will go to 2 million barrels a day. Is it not reasonable to follow the people who are investing the money, rather than the OBR? Incidentally, the OBR did not publish six pages of oil forecast, because it did not publish any pages at all.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister's figure of £48 billion from 2017-18 takes account of only the four projections that the Scottish Government used and leaves out the OBR projection. Let us look at the projections. We asked the Scottish Parliament to ask the Scottish Government whether we could see the sums behind the document, and this is what the Scottish Government had to say:

"The scale and complexity of the models we use, combined with the fact that some of them rely on firm-level data and subscriptions to commercial data sources means that we are not in a position to make them publicly available."

In other words, the Government is saying, "We made up these projections and we're not telling

you how. It's too big and too complicated to let the Parliament or the people of Scotland know. Just take us on trust." After the European legal advice fiasco, we know exactly how far to trust the Scottish Government. By ignoring the OBR and fiddling the figures, is it not true that the First Minister is asking Scotland to take a massive punt with a dodgy bookie who is fixing the race?

The First Minister: I note that we had no further conversation about relying on the industry estimates on what will happen if it invests £100 billion, as it intends to do. Why does the member think that the industry is investing that money? Is it doing that to reduce oil and gas production? The reason for investing that money is to increase oil and gas production. Therefore, let us just assume and accept that the industry's figure of 2 million barrels a day is a better and more reliable guide to production than the OBR estimate of falling production. Let us just say that that is reasonably solid information.

Ruth Davidson again claims that, in assuming an average price of \$113, we excluded the OBR's figure. The DECC, which incidentally is another department of the UK Government, estimates an average of \$133 by 2017-18—that is the mid-term estimate. The United States economic agency estimates \$112; the Economist Intelligence Unit, which is not known for forecasting high oil prices, estimates \$115; and the NIESR estimates \$114. The OBR estimate is \$92. The average of those estimates is \$113. We did not exclude the OBR estimate in calculating an average.

No one seriously believes that assuming a declining real oil price over the next five years is somehow an ambitious estimate rather than a cautious one. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures that were published just last week talk about oil prices over \$150. None of that was included in the analysis, because we followed the right line of assuming a reasonable production forecast and a cautious oil price forecast.

We must accept that, contrary to the extraordinary remarks of Mr Rennie that I heard on television suggesting that the OBR has a good record on forecasting oil revenues, the OBR has an extraordinarily bad record on forecasting. It has never got a single forecast right in forecasting oil revenues. Indeed, if we are to believe sources in the Conservative Party, the OBR does not get anything else right in forecasting.

Let us accept that the bulletin is a substantial contribution to the debate that has been widely welcomed by those who are interested in the debate and that suggests to the Scottish people that the natural resources of Scotland will be flowing from the North Sea for generations to come. Having lost out on the last 40 years, let us

make sure that Scotland gets its share from the next 40 years.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware that it emerged this week that some 50 patients at Gartnavel general hospital had their surgery postponed because surgical instruments from the central decontamination unit, which is based at Cowlares in my constituency, were not safe for use.

We are advised by press reports that consultants have been complaining for years about the standard of the service that they receive from the decontamination unit. Although press reports identified a particular problem at Gartnavel, the decontamination unit serves all 120 of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's operating theatres. Can the First Minister advise members when the Scottish Government was first made aware of the problem, what action it has taken to resolve it and what checks have been undertaken across the health board area to ensure that the problem is not more widespread?

The First Minister: I thank Patricia Ferguson for her question and I will ask the health secretary to write to her about the exact detail. I can tell her that the information that was supplied by the health board shows that the particular issue was the breaking of the sealed packaging on the equipment that was delivered. Quite rightly and properly, the doctors concerned did not proceed with operations under those conditions—that is, incidentally, part of the patient safety guarantee in the health service in Scotland, which has been praised domestically and internationally; it is part of the charter of patient safety that people do not proceed unless they are sure of the integrity of the equipment.

Arrangements are being made to ensure that all the patients concerned are treated within the waiting time guarantee. Surely it is right, when there is no assurance that medical equipment has been properly sterilised, that operations do not take place. The patients do not suffer in terms of their entitlement to the patient guarantee. However, because of the seriousness with which we take the issue, I will certainly ensure that the health secretary gives the member a comprehensive reply, for her constituents.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I join the First Minister in congratulating the new pope. In this turbulent world, Pope Francis has a heavy burden. I think that all members wish him well in his endeavours.

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-01244)

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

Willie Rennie: The First Minister will have heard that the Prime Minister is proposing to act on press regulation next week. The Prime Minister has ended the cross-party talks and will table amendments on Monday. He said this morning:

"There's no point in producing a system that the press won't take part in."

Does the First Minister agree with the Prime Minister? Will he say how the Scottish Government intends to respond to the developments?

The First Minister: I saw the developments just before I came into the chamber. I was disappointed, because the indications that we had yesterday were that the all-party talks had a positive air to them.

As Willie Rennie knows, we are engaged in all-party talks and discussions ourselves. We have a further meeting this afternoon with the press, and I think that we will be able to take account of recent developments and try to find a joint way forward.

It would be hugely to be welcomed if we could find a joint way forward in the Parliament and—if not absolute agreement on everything—a consensus on some of the main planks of what needs to be done. I will certainly pursue things in that spirit and I know that Willie Rennie will, as well.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister is right; we will work constructively. I, too, am disappointed by the Prime Minister's actions this morning.

The First Minister's expert group is currently considering how Scotland should implement Leveson. Is there any prospect of the First Minister being able to bring forward the group's report, so that it can influence the decisions that might be made in Westminster next week?

The First Minister: The report is due to be published by the end of this month. In fairness to everyone else who will be at the talks, I should perhaps update Willie Rennie on that at the meeting this afternoon. I think that he will find that the work of the expert group is well advanced.

Disability Benefits Tribunals (Medical Information)

4. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government seeks to ensure that all relevant medical information is available to support patients who appeal to the disability benefits tribunal system. (S4F-01248)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government will do everything that we can do to facilitate a better outcome for people who are affected by that aspect of the United Kingdom Government's flawed welfare reforms. The simple fact is that the UK Government's work capability assessment is flawed and has not been improved, despite no fewer than three reviews, thus far, of its operation. That is evidenced by the fact that no less than 37 per cent—I repeat, 37 per cent—of disability benefit rejections are overturned on appeal.

Bob Doris: There are concerns over how and when the Department for Work and Pensions and Atos both request and use information that is provided by general practitioners in relation to work capability assessments and the resultant need for tribunals for constituents who are wrongly assessed by Atos in the first place. Significant concerns also exist that additional pressures are being placed on GPs in relation to sharing information due to the shameful and unjustifiable bedroom tax.

Will the First Minister support my call for the DWP and Atos to review urgently this flawed process to ensure that medical information is requested from GPs on a consistent basis and, more important, that it is used appropriately to assist my constituents in getting the support that they need from a deeply flawed United Kingdom benefits system?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree. I should point out that an important piece of information that was sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer as part of the Scottish Government's barrage of information to the UK Government to persuade it to change its mind on the bedroom tax, which I agree is iniquitous, was a submission from the finance secretary on work that has been carried out by Scottish Government economists showing that, as well as being socially iniquitous and causing enormous disruption to families, the bedroom tax will, in simple economic terms, reduce economic output over the medium term. Even arguing for the bedroom tax as the UK Government has done in terms of simple financial calculation is wrong according to that analysis. We are hoping for further—and this time substantial—concessions from the UK Government, as it should realise and recognise the amount of social damage the bedroom tax is going to inflict.

Prisons (Contraband)

5. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to tackle contraband in prisons. (S4F-01257)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Government and the Scottish Prison Service are

committed to the prevention and detection of contraband coming into our prisons. We have invested in body scanners for each prison. We have doubled the number of prison detection dogs in the past 12 months. We have rolled out the prison watch scheme, which in particular helps to combat drugs being thrown over prison walls. I am pleased that, as a result, we have been able to intercept more drugs that otherwise would have been destined for our prisons. Finds have increased by 14 per cent since 2011-12. Together with the £120 million a year investment in building modern prisons, that means that levels of security are higher than ever, but this remains a serious problem.

Lewis Macdonald: The First Minister will have read in the *Daily Record* and elsewhere how smuggled phones are used to boast about smuggled drugs and to intimidate victims and witnesses on social networking sites. Does he agree with the prison officer who wrote to me the other day calling for phone-blocking technology to be used in Scottish prisons? Given that Westminster is now passing a bill to allow that, will the First Minister undertake today to use those new powers to protect victims, witnesses and prison staff from the consequences of prisoners illegally using mobile phones?

The First Minister: I will look carefully at what Lewis Macdonald has to say, but he should remember that we changed the law in 2010 to allow for the prosecution of those who introduce mobile phones into prison or prisoners who have in their possession a mobile phone. That has resulted in 47 convictions of prisoners in 2011 alone. In 2012, there were 110 convictions for the illegal possession of mobile phones in prisons. I will make those figures available to Lewis Macdonald, because they indicate the stepping up of the attempt to drive drugs from the prison estate. I can also make available statistics that indicate that, although the position is still serious, there is no doubt, from the examination of prisoners when they leave prison, that the methods and measures that have been used have resulted in a decline in what is a serious problem. From those prosecution statistics, Lewis Macdonald can see that the 2010 changes in legislation are being rigorously enforced.

The one aspect of the press coverage that I did not agree with was that some of it looked at the increase in drugs finds as if they were a bad thing and part of the problem. The increase in drugs finds is of course directly related to the measures that I outlined. It is because of the increased security measures that we are finding more of these harmful substances in the prison estate.

Business Growth

6. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what actions the Scottish Government will take to assist growth in the business sector. (S4F-01243)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is supporting and will continue to support business growth and innovation to the full extent of our current powers. Support for schools, colleges, universities and skills provides business with a skilled workforce and world-class research. A total of £564 million of relief has been awarded to Scottish businesses since the introduction of the small business bonus scheme, which I believe has been a lifeline for many of our small businesses across Scotland.

Stewart Stevenson: Has the First Minister noted the contrast between the growing optimism that is expressed through this week's purchasing managers index, and international sentiment, which led to the downgrading of the United Kingdom's credit rating? Can he indicate what that and the recent "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" report might have to tell us about Scotland's prospects now and after independence?

The First Minister: We can confidently assume that the initials "AAA" will not be used by the bitter together campaign for a substantial time to come.

The purchasing managers index is a helpful and welcome sign of economic recovery in Scotland. However, there are still serious problems across the economy, which is why it is important that next week focuses the mind and attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on following the consistent advice from this Government, the Welsh Administration and the Northern Irish Administration to bring about the investment, particularly the capital investment, that this economy badly needs to bring us out of the present economic conditions.

Now that one bit of the Tory-Liberal Administration is—well, I was going to be nasty, but I will not. "Better some sinners repenteth," is what we have to say to the calls for increased capital investment by members of the coalition. Let us hope that they can carry their Tory members with them in the budget next week and that we can look for serious investment to get us out of economic recession.

The Presiding Officer: That ends First Minister's question time. I will now allow a short suspension to allow people to leave the public gallery and others to enter before we move to the members' business debate.

12:31

Meeting suspended.

12:43

On resuming—

Miners' Strike (Police Conduct)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-05152, in the name of Neil Findlay, on lessons from Orgreave. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern the revelations regarding the actions of South Yorkshire Police and the alleged duplication of statements and fabrication of police reports and witness accounts at both Hillsborough and Orgreave; further notes that South Yorkshire Police has referred itself to the Independent Police Complaints Commission for investigation, and wonders whether there is a need for concern in relation to arrests and convictions in Lothian and across Scotland during the 1984-85 miners' strike and as to whether miscarriages of justice took place.

12:44

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I wish that this debate did not have to take place. I wish that we still had a vibrant coal industry with skilled engineers, geologists, face workers and all the necessary ancillary staff in work supplying coal as part of a balanced energy policy—but we do not.

The reason why we do not is the deliberate policy of the Thatcher Government, which took revenge on the National Union of Mineworkers, and had as its ultimate aim the destruction of the trade union movement and organised labour.

The 1984-85 strike was without doubt one of the biggest social, economic and political events of the second half of the previous century and its impact is still being felt across Scotland and the United Kingdom. Late last year, the Hillsborough inquiry reported and exposed the alleged corruption, lies and falsification of witness statements by South Yorkshire Police. It explored how officers are alleged to have perverted the course of justice to cover up their failings in relation to that tragic event.

That inquiry was followed by a BBC Yorkshire "Inside Out" documentary on events at Orgreave in South Yorkshire, which was one of the main flashpoints during the strike. The documentary exposed how the police are again alleged to have duplicated statements, to have had statements dictated to them by senior officers, to have perverted the course of justice and to have been responsible for a host of other unacceptable practices in relation to arrests and the recording of evidence and witness statements, all amounting to misconduct in public office. Such was the seriousness of the allegations that South Yorkshire Police referred itself to the Independent

Police Complaints Commission for investigation. We await the result of that investigation with interest.

The revelations from Hillsborough and Orgreave motivated me to lodge the motion for today's debate. Across the mining communities of the United Kingdom, people know about the politicisation of the police during the dispute, about the involvement of the security forces and about the snatch squads that were established to target individuals—usually influential trade union officials and activists—and they know that thousands of people were arrested on bogus or exaggerated charges.

One of those people was a miner who worked at Polkemmet colliery, in Whitburn, who was on a picket line and a few rows back in the crowd. He was pushed over by the police, he fell and was dragged off the road, arrested, charged and sacked. Another miner was peacefully picketing at Hunterston power station when he was dragged from the crowd and charged with police assault. He is adamant that he did nothing wrong and has never committed a crime in his life. Another man—a strike leader at Bilston Glen—was targeted and picked out from a peaceful picket by a police snatch quad, again having committed no crime before or since.

These are the words of a man who worked at Castlehill:

"I was in a village with 4 others when the bus went past carrying"

strikebreakers—he did not quite use that term. He went on:

"A group of kids 50 yards down the road stoned the bus. The police returned and arrested all 5 of us—we had nothing to do with what happened. The next day a sixth man was also charged despite the fact that he was actually 3 miles away and in his bed at the time of the incident."

Time allows me to provide only those few examples of the 1,400 cases, but there are many more like that. Of course, it was not just a criminal record that those people received: more than 200 were sacked and lost their redundancy entitlement, and found it difficult to get work afterwards—no doubt because they had been blacklisted.

Of course, they were the fortunate ones. Some men had nervous breakdowns and became ill both mentally and physically or died as a direct consequence of those life-shattering experiences, because of the crime of trying to defend their communities, their jobs and their right to work.

Given what we now know about police activity in Yorkshire, I think that we have a moral duty to look at that evidence and to reflect on what happened here in Scotland. We have to ask: was it only South Yorkshire Police officers who, it appears,

lied and fabricated evidence? Was it only South Yorkshire Police officers who, it appears, perverted the course of justice? Was it only South Yorkshire Police officers who duplicated statements that led to convictions? I find that difficult to accept. We need to establish the truth about whether the arrests and convictions were legitimate or miscarriages of justice.

Since the launch of this campaign in December 2012, more than 900 people have emailed the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the chief constable of Lothian and Borders Police demanding an inquiry. I know that the cabinet secretary was involved in the dispute and that he supported miners in Fife and elsewhere, and I congratulate him on that. He will therefore be aware of the allegations that have been made over the years since 1984. He will also have constituents in his own Edinburgh East constituency who were directly affected, having worked at Bilston Glen or Monktonhall. I therefore hope that he will reflect on the emerging evidence and use his personal knowledge. Although individuals may have to take their individual cases to the appropriate body, he could do as has been done in other cases in which police misconduct has been suspected—for example, the Shirley McKie or Chhokar cases—and set up an independent review. He has the power to do so. There is a deep feeling that the convictions are unsafe and that there must be such an inquiry.

The cabinet secretary has a choice. The fact that he is not here today is absolutely dreadful, and will be noted in the mining communities across the country. He can use the powers of his office to establish an inquiry, or he can do nothing. However, we have to be clear that if he does nothing, innocent Scots will live the rest of their lives as victims of an appalling, politically motivated miscarriage of justice. We need an inquiry.

12:50

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Neil Findlay on bringing the debate to the chamber. It is vital that the matter is highlighted in this way and that the sentiments of the motion are progressed to the highest level. I know that Neil Findlay will not give up until that happens, and I assure him that his colleagues on the Labour seats will give all the support and assistance that we can give in order to make that happen.

As I was born in 1984, I cannot remember the miners' strike of 1984-85. Some would say that I am lucky in that respect. However, that miners' strike and the strikes of the 1970s are not lost on me and have gone a long way in helping to define my politics.

As I have lived in Lanarkshire all my life, I know how important the mining industry has been and continues to be in my part of the world—be it Shotts, Harthill, Gartsherrie, Greengairs, Allanton or my home town of Bellshill. Lanarkshire had nearly half of Scotland's pits in 1910 and continued to thrive until the last pit closure in the 1980s. I am an MSP for Central Scotland, so I am acutely aware that not only Lanarkshire benefited from the industry; Falkirk also has a proud history in the field, and Larbert, Bo'ness and other towns are testament to that.

My grandpa was a miner and was very proud of his profession. He was determined that his grandchildren would know the sacrifices that men like him had made. That resulted in many family visits to Summerlee when I was younger—visits which I know many families in Lanarkshire and beyond continue to make. My grandpa was working in one of the two pits at Auchengeich in 1959 when disaster struck and killed 47 men, leaving many families and communities in Lanarkshire devastated, even to this day. That is the sacrifice that miners make—they give their lives.

Only by knowing of that tragedy and others like it can one truly appreciate how truly galling was the treatment of miners by South Yorkshire Police at Orgreave. Despite the fact that 95 miners were awarded compensation in 1985, no police officer—or anyone from the Government—has ever been held to account.

It is beyond belief that people were persecuted for simply exercising in their democratic right to strike. More than half the country's mineworkers chose to strike as a result of the significant job losses that were occurring at that time. Let us remember that 20,000 jobs were under threat. Strike action is never an easy option, but such was the concern over the future of the industry and the other industries that depended on it, that it was the only option available to the men and their families. Brenda Procter, who was chair of National Women Against Pit Closures, said:

"I am proud to have been involved. It wasn't about money or hours or pay, it was about communities and jobs and the future of our children for generations to come."

That is why I support those who are calling for a Hillsborough type inquiry, which must look at the whole of the UK. I do not believe that the incidents at Orgreave were isolated, so it is now time for the Scottish Government to take action. The Scottish Government should not only add its voice to those who are calling for an investigation, but should carry out its own investigation for the 900 miners who have already emailed Kenny MacAskill and the many more who will follow.

Too many miners have died with a criminal conviction to their name. It is for those men and

their families that we should do all that we can to clear their names and join our own loyalty parade, albeit that we are 29 years on from the original events. I hope that the Scottish Government will now do the right thing and order an investigation here.

12:54

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests and I add my congratulations to Neil Findlay on initiating and securing this members' business debate.

It is extremely important to recognise, as the motion intends, the value of integrity of due legal process with regard to potential miscarriages of justice. Neil Findlay is right to identify what happened in South Yorkshire and the fact that South Yorkshire Police referred itself to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. There can be no doubt that after the allegations surrounding Orgreave and, in particular, Hillsborough, there are lessons for policing not just in Yorkshire but elsewhere, including Scotland.

The debate is important. It should be remembered that next year will be the 30th anniversary of the miners' strike. Scotland has an industrial heritage that was built on the work of miners and we must realise that we owe them a legacy that is open and honest. I do not want to be accused of being misty-eyed; in all industrial disputes there can be wrongdoing on both sides, but this was no ordinary industrial dispute. The allegations of widespread collusion by police officers at Orgreave do not inspire confidence, especially when miners were sacked as a result of being found guilty of breach of the peace charges while they were on picket duties.

The "Coal not dole" slogan during the strike became a reality of "dole" for many thousands of sacked miners after the dispute. Miners suffered real hardship, and not only in financial terms. Many families and relationships were lost during that time, which is a longer-lasting cost.

One of the lasting images of the miners' strike is of Yuill & Dodds Ltd lorries, which looked more like armoured personnel vehicles, flying through picket lines at Ravenscraig. The strike and its aftermath have a particular relevance for Central Scotland; nearly 300 people who were protesting at the entrance of the site were arrested on 3 May 1984 at Ravenscraig.

Neil Findlay is rightly looking for justice now and in the future. It is a moot point whether the Scottish justice system is robust enough to take criticism, particularly when—as has been highlighted by various media outlets—a significant number of those who were arrested did not have

any previous convictions to their names. I am encouraged that Scottish Government ministers have advised people that they can take grievances about alleged miscarriages of justice to the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland or to the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission.

Some people might wrongly see this debate as an attack on the police. It is not. We do not know with any degree of certainty whether the alleged practices employed by South Yorkshire Police and others were active in Scotland at the time of the miners' strike.

Neil Findlay: Does John Wilson support the call for an independent investigation into the convictions?

John Wilson: I will respond to that towards the end of my speech.

We need to embrace the possibility that the miners were wrongly arrested, with police officers moved throughout the UK to deal with the strike. I look forward to the ministerial response to the issues that are being raised in this debate. I hope that we can right any wrongs that were perpetrated during the miners' strike, and clear the names of those who were wrongly convicted as a result of defending their jobs, industry and communities.

I support the call for an independent inquiry that will take us forward and I hope that people in the mining communities and other communities can be confident that the Scottish legal system can defend those who were wrongly accused and convicted during the miners' strike.

12:58

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank my colleague, Neil Findlay, for securing the debate, and I welcome the members of our mining community who are here today in Parliament to highlight the grave injustice that was perpetrated by police against our mining community. In the light of the South Yorkshire Police post-Hillsborough cover-up, there is now an Independent Police Complaints Commission investigation into a similar attempted cover-up by the same police authority at the Orgreave plant clashes.

We now know that statements were altered either to remove or change negative comments about policing on the day that 96 Liverpool supporters lost their lives in April 1989. Five years earlier at Orgreave, 8,000 picketing miners and 4,500 police clashed at a British Steel plant. Compensation of £500,000 was paid to 95 miners who were arrested during these clashes, but no officer has ever been disciplined in relation to the events.

Provisional estimates by the National Union of Mineworkers suggest that 60 per cent of the charges that were brought for picket-line offences were bogus or exaggerated. Most worrying is that, as NUM leader Chris Kitchen has said, the police corruption may have been more widespread, so it is important to look beyond Hillsborough and Orgreave.

The possibility that such practices were used during the miners' strike in Midlothian and across Scotland—I know that Neil Findlay MSP has received information that that is the case—surely means that the Scottish Government and police have a duty to look again at the cases of the 500 men who were convicted during the miners' strike. The allegations against the police range from fabrication and duplication of witness statements to perjury and misconduct in public office. Such actions may have led to the arrest of pickets on bogus or exaggerated grounds.

The refusal of the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to review the criminal records of those men is very disappointing; after 28 years, those men deserve justice. I call on the cabinet secretary, Kenny MacAskill, to launch a full, comprehensive and independent review of all the convictions that were brought against those who were involved in the disputes.

The men who received criminal records inevitably found it incredibly difficult to get work after the strike. That is the real human cost of those potential miscarriages of justice. I urge any miners and others who were arrested and who feel that the charges against them were unjust to contact my colleague Neil Findlay MSP, whom I applaud for all the good work that he has done on the issue. It appears that the true story of the miners' strike is just beginning to be told.

With the creation of the new national police service of Scotland, it is as important now as it has ever been that we have proper scrutiny of policing operations. Although the police in Scotland have not been involved in the same scandals as the police service in England, the experience of picketers in Scotland during the miners' strike shows us that we must never be complacent.

In closing, I say that I feel passionately about the issue because I was born and brought up in a mining community. I will await with keen interest the progress of today's debate and developments thereafter.

13:02

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this afternoon's debate. I find myself in agreement with much of the motion in the name of Neil Findlay, but not all of it.

The October 2012 BBC “Inside Out” programme that alleged the fabrication of police reports on the Orgreave miners’ strike, alongside the findings of the Hillsborough independent panel, are concerning and should be taken very seriously. They paint a worrying picture of the actions of South Yorkshire Police some time ago. It is right that that English police force has referred itself to the Independent Police Complaints Commission for investigation.

The findings of the Hillsborough independent panel were truly shocking. I welcomed the Home Secretary’s announcement shortly afterwards of a new inquiry, which will be led by former Durham chief constable, Jon Stoddart. Hillsborough was a tragedy, in which 96 Liverpool fans died because of overcrowding and poor crowd management, and we now know that some of the police reports were fabricated. I hope that lessons will be learned from the forthcoming inquiry and that the families of those who died get the information and the justice that they deserve.

However, part of my difficulty with the motion is that Hillsborough was very different to what happened at Orgreave and that, if I may be forgiven for stating the obvious, neither event took place in Scotland. Orgreave was an illegal strike involving crowds of picketers, some of whom attacked and caused injury to police officers. That is a very different situation to a group of peaceful football fans being injured and killed through no fault of their own. Additionally, there were no miscarriages of justice at Orgreave for the very simple reason that the cases of all those accused of rioting were dropped. Although South Yorkshire Police agreed to pay compensation to some miners, it is important to note that no officers were disciplined for misconduct and no charges against the police were ever proven in court.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie McGrigor: Hold on a minute.

The allegations that were made at the time and those that were broadcast during the October 2012 BBC “Inside Out” programme remain allegations that have yet to be independently proven.

Those points are not made to detract from the seriousness of the claims. However, we should note the important differences between the events. Most important, there is little or no evidence that miscarriages of justice or police misconduct occurred north of the border. Is Neil Findlay saying that allegations of police misconduct in South Yorkshire automatically mean that Scottish police forces have behaved inappropriately?

Neil Findlay: The UK strike was highly politicised—as Jamie McGrigor will know as a

member of the party that politicised it. The fact that it was a UK-wide strike leads me to the conclusion that the tactics that were deployed in Yorkshire were not unique to Yorkshire. That is what we need to find out.

Jamie McGrigor: If there has been injustice, I agree that we need to find that out. However, the simple fact that convictions occurred in Scotland, many for breach of the peace, does not in itself point towards miscarriages of justice; the miners’ strikes were so political in nature does not mean that those who acted unacceptably and were convicted in a court of law should have their convictions quashed.

Does Labour want inquiries to be carried out for every single strike that took place in 1984 and 1985, regardless of the lack of evidence suggesting miscarriages of justice? One of the main grievances of those who were convicted was their subsequent loss of employment. However, that is a matter for employment law and does not relate to the original criminal conviction. In many cases, those who lost their jobs subsequently received unfair dismissal awards.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McGrigor, you must come to a conclusion.

Jamie McGrigor: I note that Neil Findlay appears to have toned down his language in the motion, and that he

“wonders whether there is a need for concern”

rather than demanding a full independent and comprehensive review. I agree.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Malcolm Chisholm, due to the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Neil Findlay.*]

Motion agreed to.

13:07

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Neil Findlay on securing the debate. I welcome the many miners to the gallery. Their action, dignity and struggle will never be forgotten.

I have the highest regard for the police—I am sure that other members do, too. However, as Vera Baird QC rightly says in a “Huffington Post” article from October 2012,

“most police officers behave blamelessly in their duties ... But we do them and society no favours if we flinch from honestly assessing controversial events.”

That is why trust needs to be restored and justice delivered.

I am afraid that events at Orgreave and Hillsborough tell a dismal tale. At Orgreave, the negative propaganda machine worked to portray a scene of chaos so that those who were arrested could be accused of engaging in a riot. The BBC documentary "Inside Out" detailed how, when the trial of the miners from Orgreave collapsed due to unreliable police evidence, it was found that many key phrases in officers' statements were given verbatim by a number of different individuals, suggesting a far-reaching cover up of the real circumstances of the picket. When—five years later—the Hillsborough disaster took place, we witnessed similar conduct, which is now being addressed by the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

In the light of what we have seen happening in Yorkshire, it is necessary to ensure that the Scottish strikers have their cases re-examined in a full and comprehensive review.

Brian Docherty, who is chair of the Scottish Police Federation, has "accused the politicians" who are involved in the campaign

"of jumping on a 'bandwagon', saying that re-opening historic investigations would impact on present-day policing."

I must say that it is entirely unclear to me how that would be the case. What is the case is that 1,424 miners and others were arrested in Scotland during the 1984-85 strike. As Neil Findlay highlighted, 202 of them were subsequently sacked and paid no redundancy.

Those who were picketing legitimately and understandably in Scotland—people who had never committed an act of violence or aggression—passed through the prison system and emerged with convictions based, in all probability, on adulterated evidence. Those convictions have stayed with them. They are not a temporary affliction, because criminal convictions affect every part of life and have a palpable impact on families and communities when individuals struggle to gain access to employment.

I also emphasise that the debate is about respect; it is about respect for the rights of individuals in a democracy to be given a fair trial regardless of how many years may have passed in the interim. It is not about "jumping on a 'bandwagon'", but about ensuring that justice is done for our constituents and citizens. It is also about respect and trust for our police force because, if justice is not seen to be done, the vast majority who serve our communities with diligence and integrity may be tarnished by indiscretions that are seen to go unpunished.

I understand some of the concerns that have been expressed about the cost of a review in Scotland, but to suggest that the call for one is simply a case of backing a bandwagon does an immense disservice to the people who have had to suffer with a black spot against their names throughout most of their working lives. I also do not think that the expense would be a significant factor. It is certainly outweighed by the injustice that has been done to so many.

I stand with Neil Findlay and the miners who are present with us in asking for renewed efforts from the Scottish Government to initiate a review so that those who acted within the law in rightful protest may have the opportunity to clear their names.

I will finish with the statement of Alex Bennett, a former miner who was convicted of breach of the peace during the strike. He said:

"The judge found me guilty, the next thing I got through the door was my P45 and I was blacklisted for three years. I was left with a criminal conviction when I had done nothing wrong.

You don't forget that. What they did to us was an outrage."

The miners will not forget it and neither should we. I support the motion.

13:11

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Neil Findlay on bringing the motion to Parliament and commend him for the diligence that he and his Westminster colleague David Hamilton have displayed in pursuing the issue.

Deep mining was more than a job in the communities of Upper Nithsdale: it was the core of the community and the reason why some of its villages, such as Kelloholm, existed at all. When, on 9 March 1984, thousands of local miners came out on strike, they did so to protect the jobs on which their communities depended, their way of life and the cohesion of their communities.

Those miners were aware of the Conservative Government's determination to destroy the power of the trade unions, and of the National Coal Board's plans to close 20 pits with the loss of 20,000 jobs. The NCB planned to develop a number of superpits using new technology with less manpower—a move that signalled the end of mining in Scotland, Wales and many parts of England.

I and my colleagues John Syme and Jim Dempster, both of whom are Upper Nithsdale councillors and former Upper Nithsdale miners, were happy to sign up to Neil Findlay's campaign for an investigation into cases against striking miners who were prosecuted by the police in

Scotland. We were advised by our local chief constable of the procedure for individual complaints. John and Jim have been asking local ex-miners about their experiences. So far, no one has come forward, although I believe that there is a story of someone who ended up in a police cell wearing his pyjamas because he just happened to go for a pint of milk at a time when a lot of miners were picked up.

I well remember the miners' strike, but I did not live in Scotland at the time. I had been living and working in southern England since 1976, and my role during the miners' strike was to go round the doorsteps in Slough, where I lived, collecting money for the striking miners and their families on a Sunday morning. Although Slough was not a mining area and was an extremely diverse community, I am sure that the miners would have been encouraged and touched—as I was—by the generosity towards them, and the solidarity with them, that was displayed by members of the community, who did not have much money themselves but were glad to make donations in support of the miners.

I do not want to imply that there is widespread corruption in the English or Scottish police forces, but I have personal experience, going back to 1979, that individual police officers believed that they were above the law.

I was active in the Anti-Nazi League when the National Front was active in the run-up to the general election in 1979. Some members may remember the death of Blair Peach, whom 14 witnesses saw being struck by police officers. That case was never taken to court. The day before that, I was at a demonstration in Leicester, where I observed an agent provocateur encouraging demonstrators to throw stones and then being ferried off—quite happily—in a police van. I also observed fleeing protesters being pursued by police dogs and mounted police officers. On one occasion when I was on a picket line, I was assaulted by a police officer who, on seeing a small and—in those days—thin and slight lady, believed that he could drag me in. If I had been dragged in, I dare say that I, too, would have ended up with a criminal conviction.

That happened in 1979. A Conservative Government was then elected, which, in 1984, described trade unionists and socialists as “the enemy within”. Like the miners, we were the enemy within. I believe that there were miscarriages of justice. Miners lost their employment, got criminal records, were blacklisted and lost their pensions. They were persecuted for political reasons. That might have happened many years ago, but they still deserve justice, and they deserve an inquiry in Scotland, just as they deserve an inquiry elsewhere in the UK.

13:16

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): I beg the Presiding Officer's permission to sit, as it is not a very good day for me.

I do not want to congratulate Neil Findlay; I want to thank him and give him a great big hug for getting the issue on the agenda and for getting so many people to give up their lunch time, which, after all, is not that much to give up. During the miners' strike, I was a reporter and I saw a lot of families give up a great deal that they did not want, but were forced, to give up. I was supposed to be neutral because I was broadcasting but, as one Bob Young will testify, I helped to conduct the forum for the miners that gave out news about what was happening where and when.

At that time, I saw a great deal of humanity in the mining community. I also saw a difference—Malcolm Chisholm will know what I mean—between the leadership of the miners on the two sides of the border, which perhaps gave rise to the difference in attitude that existed. As far as I could work out, south of the border there was a 50:50 social split, more or less. In Scotland, you had to move much further to the right before you came to the split. I think that that had a great deal to do with the leadership of the miners in Scotland. Mick McGahey knew what he was doing; frankly, I do not think that Arthur Scargill did—he took the miners into a strike that they could not win at a time of year when the stocks were high and summer was blazing.

However, that is in the past now. Why has it remained in the past for so long? That is because we do not find out about Cabinet secrets and do not get to know about secrets such as what happened in such an important social and industrial event as the miners' strike until about 20 years afterwards, when memories have faded just a bit and events can be tackled more objectively. That is why we are right to say that we should have an inquiry now. It is possible to get justice now without hurting people unintentionally.

I will give an example of how people were hurt unintentionally. It might sound daft, but this happened; I hope that Jackie Aitchison does not mind me taking his name in vain. The police wanted to have a line to keep the miners back, so someone got a bit of chalk and drew a line on the road. Jackie Aitchison—for devilment, I think—stepped over it and back again, and he was lifted. That was stupid—it was futile to try to have a line that would be respected by the miners. There was a wee bit of a breakdown between the miners and the police in Scotland, but it was nothing like what took place in Yorkshire. We must be grateful for that and acknowledge that it was the case.

However, that is not to say that there are not genuine grievances that should come out in an inquiry and should be explained to people. I am very pleased to support Neil Findlay's motion.

13:19

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I join other members in congratulating Neil Findlay on securing the debate.

Although it is not a good idea to revisit historical events to do nothing other than pick at old sores, there are some events that are important enough to re-examine in order to learn lessons and, if possible, rectify wrongs. That is clearly the case with the issue that we are discussing, and Neil Findlay is absolutely right to ask the Scottish Government to consider looking into the manner in which the miners were policed in Scotland and to clear the names of those who were criminalised for doing no more than engaging in industrial action in defence of their industry, their livelihoods and, indeed, their heritage.

In 1984, I was the GMB union's representative on the Scottish Trades Union Congress youth committee. Being part of that body helped me to gain a wide knowledge and understanding of many domestic and international issues. However, nothing taught me more than what I experienced and learned in supporting the miners at that time.

Hard as many of the lessons were to take, nothing angered me more than the fact that some police officers conducted themselves so badly across the country. That was even more the case in how the dispute was dealt with in my community in Lanarkshire, which was divided between supporting the miners and protecting its steelworks at one and the same time.

To this day, I recall with horror the sight of sneering police officers waving £10 and £20 notes in the faces of miners who picketed the Ravenscraig steelworks to stop the scabbing Yuill & Dodds lorries entering the complex and breaking the tripartite agreement between the miners, rail unions and steelworkers. Well do I remember Tommy Brennan scuttling out of the community centre in Newmains to avoid the miners from Polkemmet pit lobbying him to plead with him to stop undermining their struggle by taking the scab coal that was being driven into the Craig each day.

Seeing trade union colleagues so at odds with one another was not a pleasant experience, but what lives with me most is the litany of harassment and victimisation that was visited on a friend of mine—a fellow trade unionist who worked at the Polkemmet pit and whose life was made a misery by the local police in his home town of Shotts.

He was constantly stopped in his car as he drove about and he was regularly obstructed in the street as he went about his community to drum up support for the dispute. He was a young man who had never been in trouble with the police in his life up to that point, but he found himself with road traffic offences against his name and a string of trumped-up breach of the peace arrests, which had been carried out for no purpose other than to break his spirit and undermine his efforts to act as a committed trade union activist.

I know that the police do a good job on the whole, and I value and support the efforts that they make to secure our communities, but there remains the ability for the power that they wield to be a destructive force when it is allowed—or even directed—to be unleashed against groups in society who are deemed to be a threat to the designs of the Government of the day. We need therefore to look back at what happened during the miners' strike and learn the lessons of history, so that we do not allow them to be repeated today.

There is no justification for individuals and groups—other than those who might genuinely pose a direct threat to our country's security—to be subjected to surveillance. No one in Scotland today should face trumped-up charges and organised police harassment for having nothing more than political views that do not suit the Government of the day.

To show that those lessons have been learned, we must say to those who were wronged during the miners' strike that we know that to be the case and that the stains that were placed on them by the past mistakes are to be removed. We need the inquiry that Neil Findlay has called for—nothing less will do, minister.

13:23

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I, too, congratulate Neil Findlay on bringing the matter to Parliament. It is important for everyone who is elected to represent the public to articulate the concerns in their communities. Genuine and heartfelt concerns are properly being addressed today.

The motion asks whether lessons can be learned, and it is clear that they can be. I will not go over a lot of them; I will approach the issue from a slightly different and—given that Graeme Pearson is not here—perhaps unique position. I am a former police officer and former full-time official of the Scottish Police Federation, where my role was to defend people who were accused of misconduct and disciplinary offences.

What have been alleged are serious offences, which would be outwith the remit that I described and which the courts would—rightly—deal with. I

certainly do not condone any wrongdoing, not just on a personal basis but because to do so would undermine the fabric of the criminal justice system.

There were 1,424 arrests, which is a significant number. Were they all superbly executed? That is highly unlikely. Neil Findlay asked in his questionnaire about fabricated, bogus or exaggerated charges, which are possible when emotions are high.

I found targeting of strike leaders to be perhaps the most concerning aspect. When we hear of the pernicious influence of the UK security services—the people who decide who the goodies and the baddies are—and subsequent events such as blacklisting, there is every likelihood that targeting took place.

I am keen to defend workers' right to strike. I favour the reversal of some of the anti-union laws on matters such as secondary action and picket numbers and locations. We must try to look ahead.

The situation in Scotland was different from that in South Yorkshire, but the situation in North Yorkshire was different from that in South Yorkshire. The Metropolitan Police's negative influence was often a factor. However, there was United Kingdom co-ordination. People will say that that was about mutual aid and communications, but there was clearly politicisation of the police role, and that causes understandable concern to many people, including me.

I have a number of queries about having a review of all cases. I certainly favour—and I have briefly discussed this with Neil—due process being exhausted. That has been outlined. The questionnaire that was issued covers appeals, but does not say how many complained to the police and what the response was. Having said that, I well understand that miners would have good cause to believe that there would be little value in complaining, with the state having been involved in the miners' dispute to the extent that it was.

What form would a review take? Would competent witnesses be compellable? The right to not self-incriminate would apply to not only police officers, but miners. The relationship with the criminal justice system cannot be bypassed. If someone has done wrong, we have courts, not reviews, to deal with that. There is also the right to defend accusations that have been levied against someone who is dead. That applies to officers and mineworkers.

I am not reticent about challenging the authorities; indeed, I have been pursuing the issue of how one make an individual complaint against the Lord Advocate acting as an individual. Do I accept that there are issues to be addressed? Yes—if the process is exhausted. Do I think that a

review of the whole event would help? Given what we have heard, it clearly would. Do I support an independent inquiry? Well, it depends on what that would mean.

My personal preference is for clarification of events rather than recrimination. Events elsewhere, whether in the north of Ireland or South Africa, show the benefit of truth and reconciliation, but that approach might be very challenging in this instance, because it is clear that the concerns that have been voiced are not going away. For that reason, I have reviewed my position and support an independent inquiry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to speak through the chair and to use each other's full names.

13:27

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I, too, support the call for an independent inquiry, and congratulate Neil Findlay on his work in that regard. I pledge to him my support in anything that I can do to help the Fife collieries.

We have to remember that there was a particular culture at the time, when the police were given the nickname "Maggie's army" across the United Kingdom because of the politicisation that John Finnie has just spoken about. I congratulate him on his contribution. The only thing that he said that I disagree with was his conclusion that there should not be an independent inquiry, as we are talking about criminal records that should be cleared.

John Finnie: For clarification, my conclusion was that, for all the reasons that I outlined, there should be an independent inquiry.

Helen Eadie: Thank you for that clarification.

Last Saturday, I heard from miners who were lifted from the Comrie pit and other pits in Fife on bogus charges. The situation that Margo MacDonald described in the area in which she worked was exactly the same as the situation in some Fife collieries. As we have heard, there was a culture of state manipulation of the police. The Fife miners recalled how the police provoked many of those on the picket line by pulling out wedges of £10 notes and saying to the striking miners, "I'm getting my new kitchen on the back of your strike." That did nothing to help the morale of the miners.

One miner had his door battered down in the middle of the night. Why could he not have been lifted during the day or at a civilised time? Why were his family and children frightened and intimidated? Those issues were brought to my attention on Saturday morning when I spoke to those people. The police bragged about having

holidays and many other luxuries while miners' families were poverty stricken and starving.

There have been allegations of collusion in South Yorkshire over witnesses' statements relating to the battle of Orgreave during the miners' strike. As we have heard, the force has been accused of falsifying officers' accounts about what happened on the day and when fighting broke out between the miners and the police.

The police culture of divisiveness at the time is all important. To see that, we need only read the book that Elaine Murray mentioned, "The Enemy Within", in which Seumas Milne revealed for the first time the astonishing lengths to which the Government and its intelligence machine were prepared to go to destroy the power of Britain's miners' union. There definitely was an enemy within. The British state's secret services operated inside the NUM and used phoney bank deposits, staged cash drops, forged documents, agent provocateurs and unrelenting surveillance by MI5 and police special branch to discredit the miners and their leaders.

I support Neil Findlay. The issue is an important one that we should not lose sight of in the months to come.

Jamie McGrigor: Personally, I welcome the response that was reported last week of a test case being lodged with the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission, which can look into whether miscarriages of justice have taken place. Does the member think that that is a good idea?

Helen Eadie: It is one step in a journey. We will need to reflect on that once we know the verdict.

On the first day of the strike, I started work in the High Valleyfield social work office in my capacity as the newly appointed manager of West Fife Enterprise. There was no better place to hear, almost instantaneously and blow by blow, about the moments when miners on picket lines were lifted. Former miners who were lifted in those days still tell of their experiences. I also had inside comment from my father-in-law, who had been a minister in Tony Benn's team. Alex Eadie had been a minister for coal in the Labour Government prior to Thatcher's Government, so I heard about many of the machinations that were taking place.

Numerous books have been written about the experience of the miners and their families. One such book, "Chicago Tumbles: Cowdenbeath and the Miners Strike", was written by the late Councillor Alex Maxwell of Fife Council, a communist who subsequently became a member of the democratic left.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mrs Eadie, I must ask you to begin to conclude.

Helen Eadie: I commend the book to those who want to find out chapter and verse on what happened to various miners in Fife.

If I have one worry about the state police force it is that, as Anne McTaggart said, we must never allow it to be politicised in the way that happened during Maggie Thatcher's time. We have a duty to expose what happened during that time. I congratulate Neil Findlay once again.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Drew Smith.

13:32

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Thank you for your forbearance, Presiding Officer. I had not intended to speak in the debate, as I knew that Neil Findlay and others would do the subject justice but, having sat through it, I felt that I could not leave without adding my name into the *Official Report* of the meeting.

Like Siobhan McMahon, I do not remember the 1984 and 1985 strike well although, being a bit older than her, I was around then. I was born into a prosperous town in the West Lothian coalfield. Perhaps "prosperous" is overstating the situation in Whitburn, but we had the Polkemmet colliery and Levi's, and British Leyland was along the road. I was a toddler at the time of the 1984-85 strike, and I often think about the changes that were going on in the world then and what a trial it was for parents bringing up children in those communities. They knew that the world that they had enjoyed was slowly disappearing and that the life chances of my generation and those who came after me were about to change so much. Those communities are still changed.

Many members of my family were miners, although I will not list them all. As I am speaking without notes, I hope that I can do justice to their experience in the pits and their contribution. As I grew up in that community, it became a very different place from the one that I had been born into. I remember many uncles, family friends and others whom I knew around the town who never worked again.

One of my proudest moments in the Parliament was taking part in a debate on the upper Clyde shipbuilders. That was one of the first debates that I took part in and I was glad that my grandfather, who was a miner, was able to see me elected to the Parliament and to speak to me about that debate. In the debate, we celebrated the success of men and women taking part in industrial disputes to save their industry and transform their communities and their families' life chances. That is what happened on the Clyde. We are proud that, as a result of the stance that they took, we are still building ships on the Clyde. O that the

miners had been able to achieve the same thing. However, the dignity of the miners' fight is no less for its having been unsuccessful.

I see that the minister has been taking notes throughout the debate and I know that she is perfectly capable of throwing away the cabinet secretary's previous speeches and remarks on the subject. Given that we are creating a new police force, police Scotland, she might take the opportunity to acknowledge that this is absolutely the time to examine whether there is a case to answer, particularly in relation to Lothian and Borders Police, and to ensure that the new police force genuinely polices communities by consent, in the knowledge that the charges of the past have been answered.

The miners' strike of 1984-85 was a UK dispute—uncles of mine in south Wales were involved, and the issues there will be similar. Given the collusion that went on in relation to the strategies of police forces around the UK, I have no doubt that there was an element of co-ordination from the centre. I do not believe that there could not have been such co-ordination.

The issue is probably the biggest remaining sore in industrial relations in Scotland. It is unique in that sense, but we need to ensure that what happened can never happen again. That is why it is right that we have an inquiry at the outset of police Scotland's operation.

We need to reflect on which side of history we are on. The right thing to do is to ensure that the dispute is thoroughly examined and that people are held to account. I hope that the Scottish Government can do that for us, and I hope that my party will commit to doing that in government if the Scottish Government does not step up to the plate in the current parliamentary session. An inquiry and its results should come while there are still mineworkers and their widows who should know the truth and receive compensation.

13:37

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): I congratulate Neil Findlay on securing the debate.

We have heard from members who represent communities and individuals who are scarred by the traumatic experience of the miners' strike. Unlike younger members, I remember the strike only too well. I remember its extended nature and its huge impact on mining communities and on the wider community. As I recall, despair was felt far beyond the mining communities and very many people were emotionally caught up in the dispute, quite rightly. It is scarcely believable that it is nearly 30 years since the strike took place. The aftermath continues to linger.

The motion refers to issues to do with the actions of South Yorkshire Police during and after the Hillsborough tragedy and to the procedures in England for referral of complaints about the police. It also refers to possible miscarriages of justice in Scotland during the miners' strike.

On police conduct, it is important to emphasise that there are specific and distinctive arrangements in Scotland for considering and investigating complaints against the police. Complaints that predate the establishment of the police service of Scotland on 1 April can still be raised with the new chief constable for investigation. Following an investigation, if people remain unhappy about how their complaint has been handled, they will be able to ask the independent police investigations and review commissioner to undertake a review. In the event that there are allegations of criminality on the part of members of the police operating in Scotland, whether from a Scottish or other UK force, such allegations can be referred to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

The Scottish ministers, rightly, have no role or right to intervene in those processes for considering complaints against members of the police. It genuinely is not clear to me from the speeches in the debate whether specific complaints have been made. It would have been helpful to know that. In any case, even a successful complaint against the police would not in and of itself result in a conviction being overturned; one thing does not automatically follow the other.

If the desired end is the actual overturning of convictions, I need to remind members that there is a proper path for that, which is not via the police complaints process, although I accept and understand that individuals might wish to utilise both paths.

Convictions are dealt with differently. There is in existence a Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission. The crucial role of an independent criminal case review commission was recognised by the then UK Labour Government back in the late 1990s, with the commission being established in 1999. It provides precisely the route and potential outcome that I presume that Neil Findlay is seeking: the capacity to overturn criminal convictions and the possibility of doing so.

Neil Findlay: We understand the routes that are available. There is no reason why the Scottish Government could not set up an inquiry similar to the Hillsborough inquiry; at the same time, people could pursue any complaint via the routes that the minister has explained.

Roseanna Cunningham: What Neil Findlay is asking for is rather more difficult to establish for

some of the reasons that John Finnie outlined. Such an inquiry—I will come back to the couple of specific examples that Neil Findlay used—does not necessarily deliver the result that the member is looking for. It is the commission that has the responsibility in our system to investigate potential miscarriages of justice. It operates entirely independently of our courts, the police, prosecutors and Scottish ministers, which is as it should be.

Michael McMahon: Does the minister recall that previously in this Parliament we heard similar arguments from the previous Administration in relation to calls for an inquiry into abuse in care homes? The Government at the time gave all the reasons that the minister is giving and said how difficult it was to have an inquiry and that no outcome would be forthcoming. Eventually, the Government relented and an inquiry was held. There are precedents in this Parliament for that to happen; it could be done again on the same basis.

Roseanna Cunningham: There has been no indication of any specific complaints made to the police. I come back to the possibility of going to the commission: as I understand it, there has not even been any specific attempt to use the current processes that are available.

Neil Findlay: Will the minister give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: I really must get on; I have only a minute and a half left. I am sorry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will extend your time if you need it, minister.

Roseanna Cunningham: Thank you. Right, I will take another intervention.

Neil Findlay: I just want to be clear. Is the minister saying that if complaints come forward—they are being accumulated as we speak—she may agree to have an inquiry?

Roseanna Cunningham: That is not what I said—Neil Findlay ought to listen carefully. It is about using the existing processes that are available to people to pursue either complaints against the police and/or claims of miscarriage of justice and attempts to overturn convictions. Ministers cannot overturn convictions. If overturning convictions is the required end, I have to say that that is not something that a Government minister is capable of doing.

It is right that members raise awareness of important concerns that are being raised within their communities.

John Finnie: Will the minister give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: Can I just make some progress? We have heard Neil Findlay and a range of other members all talk eloquently about the history of all this, and—understandably—about

the impact on communities and individuals, and the lingering anger and resentment about what happened. However, it is also important to be clear that we do not want to go back to the time before we had the commission, when Government ministers had a direct role in deciding whether to quash criminal convictions. Ministers simply do not now have the power to quash convictions. That was not a healthy or appropriate state of affairs, and it is far better to have an independent review commission, which has completely depoliticised that critical part of our justice system.

John Finnie: Will the minister give way?

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Roseanna Cunningham: I want to get on. I have taken seven and a half minutes and quite a few interventions already.

The commission has a special power to refer back to court for an appeal cases that otherwise have exhausted the normal legal process. It will refer cases when it considers that a miscarriage of justice might have occurred and that it is in the interests of justice to refer the case for an appeal.

Ultimately, only a court can now determine whether a miscarriage of justice has arisen and quash the original verdict. The established procedures are there to be used when necessary, and I am aware that recent press reports have indicated that at least one well-known legal firm—this might be what Neil Findlay was referring to—is seeking to bring together information from a number of people who were arrested and convicted during the strike, with a view to a possible application to the commission. Obviously, those are—rightly—matters for the individuals involved, their legal representatives and the commission. However, I strongly recommend that approach to individuals who allege a miscarriage of justice, to their legal representatives and to members of this Parliament. That is the right way to proceed; that is how convictions can be overturned, which I understood to be the actual outcome that is desired.

Neil Findlay referred to other inquiries. I point out to him that the McKie inquiry took place after all other due process had been completed. That is, in a sense, what we are saying should happen now. I commend to members that way of proceeding.

To sum up, in Scotland, we have robust procedures in place to investigate complaints against the police and to review historical criminal convictions and possible miscarriages of justice. We should rely on those tried and tested impartial processes to be used as needed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. Before I suspend business, I apologise to the minister and members for the delay in starting the debate. I have asked for an explanation of what happened with clearing the public gallery and bringing in those who had tickets for the debate.

13:47

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Children and Young People

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-05934, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on Scotland—the best place to grow up.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): We want to make Scotland the best place to grow up. It is bold and ambitious, but we should never shy away from ambition when it comes to our nation's children and young people.

We believe that all children and young people in Scotland should be safe, happy and healthy, and supported throughout their childhoods and young adulthood to be confident and healthy individuals who are ready to succeed. The Government cannot achieve that on its own, which is why the motion celebrates partnership working across the parties in the Parliament and with our partners in the public and third sectors, because despite any differences we may have, ultimately we are all united by the desire to ensure that each and every child in Scotland has the best start in life.

We want all children and young people to become achieving, responsible adults who are ambitious for themselves, for their neighbours and for their country. Parents, families and carers want to do their best for their children, as do the professionals who support them. We in Government must do our best too, to help create a society where the wellbeing of every child is safeguarded and supported, and where no child is left behind.

The evidence that links early intervention and investing in the crucial early years to the achievement of positive outcomes in later life is incontrovertible. However, early intervention does not equate to acting only in the earliest years and as the minister who is also responsible for Scotland's fantastic older young people, I am keen that we focus on the whole life course of children who are growing up in Scotland.

Overarching all our work for children and young people is the getting it right for every child approach. It is important to remember that the E in GIRFEC stands for "every". GIRFEC is for every child—for each and every baby, toddler, primary school pupil and teenager in Scotland.

GIRFEC is a personalised approach. It considers all the needs and risks of individuals and what is going on in their lives. It expects professionals to engage with children and young people and their families, to discuss what might help improve their wellbeing and their outcomes. It

applies equally to all our children and young people. In some cases, that means getting it right for children who need extra help and support—for instance, ensuring that we support our young carers and children with additional and complex needs.

We must ensure that, as corporate parents, we are giving the right support to children who are under our care. As part of the wider work on child protection, we will be looking at how services respond to protection issues and circumstances that are faced by vulnerable young people. Work on that will be taken forward by the ministerial working group on child sexual exploitation.

The whole system approach in youth justice exemplifies how multidiscipline partnership working improves outcomes for young people as well as for victims and communities. That approach works across all systems and agencies, bringing together the Government's key policy frameworks into one holistic approach for young people who offend. Through early intervention and robust community alternatives, many can be diverted from statutory measures, prosecution and custody.

Working alongside our GIRFEC approach are our educational ambitions for all children and young people, as set out in the curriculum for excellence, which provides a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from the ages of three to 18 and improves standards and attainment for all children and young people. Both GIRFEC and the curriculum for excellence are policy approaches that we should have pride in in Scotland.

The early years framework was published by the Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in 2008. It was an important milestone, setting out a shared commitment to the early years and to the importance of preventative spending. To step up the pace of change, the early years task force was established and it is leading on the development of an early years collaborative. It is the first time in the world that such a quality improvement approach has been tried in a multi-agency context, attracting international attention and interest.

The objectives are to deliver tangible improvement in outcomes and to reduce inequalities for Scotland's vulnerable children; to put Scotland on course to shifting the balance of public services towards early intervention and prevention by 2016; and to sustain this change to 2018 and beyond.

It is clear that we have the commitment and the will to deliver, and a strong evidence base about what works to make improvements. Up until now, we have lacked a method to scale up the pockets

of excellent practice across Scotland. A few months ago, I had the pleasure and privilege of speaking to Bruce Perry from the Child Trauma Academy, who pointed out that small developed nations such as Scotland have a great opportunity to be at the forefront of progressive social policy. This collaborative will give us the platform to collectively drive the transformational change that we need and make it much easier for partners to learn from one another.

Community planning partnerships will be the main vehicle for delivering this, because the real change will happen at local level. The collaborative's first learning session, which was held in January, brought together more than 700 people from Scotland's 32 CPPs and demonstrated that, as a small developed nation, Scotland is extremely well positioned to enable all relevant stakeholders, motivated by the collective will to do things better, to come together in one room and work together to do just that.

Although the work of our dedicated professionals is critical, we know that parents are the greatest influence on children. I want to ensure that all parents feel empowered, valued and supported; indeed, that is the main aim of the national parenting strategy, which covers the parenting of children and young people of all ages, starting with preconception, and anyone else in a parenting role including kinship carers and the corporate parent of children who are looked after by the state. The views of parents lie at the heart of the strategy, which aims to champion the importance of Scotland's parents, highlight the positive difference that they can make and strengthen the help and support that are on offer to them.

We have already announced funding of £18 million from the early years change fund to help local authorities work with partners to provide access to high-quality, co-ordinated family support. Linked to that is the family nurse partnership, an early intervention programme that provides support to first-time teenage mothers and is making a valuable difference for vulnerable children in six health board areas. Indeed, the First Minister has announced an additional £11 million over the next two years to continue rolling out the programme across Scotland.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): How many mothers will benefit from the roll-out of the family nurse partnership in those six health board areas?

Aileen Campbell: I am happy to provide the member with that detail, but nevertheless we should recognise the improved outcomes for the teenage mothers who are already benefiting from the partnerships' early intervention approach and celebrate the fact that we in Scotland will be rolling

that out across the rest of the health boards in the next two years. It is a very welcome move.

If we want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up, we need to work to increase opportunities for children to play. After all, play is fundamental to a happy, healthy childhood and we are investing £3 million over three years in outdoor play opportunities to help children have fun, be physically active, learn to assess risk and foster links to their local environments and communities. I had the pleasure of listening to Dundee-based academic Suzanne Zeedyk, whose comments about babies being relationship-ready illustrate how crucial it is for parents to interact positively and to play with their babies from birth onwards.

Evidence shows that 75 per cent of brain growth happens and 50 per cent of language gets put in place in the first three years of a child's life, and we have been promoting such messages through our successful play talk read campaign, to which I am delighted to say we have committed £1 million per year over three years for its further development. That investment in play will help to provide a platform for our national play strategy, which will be published this year and will articulate the seriousness of play as a fundamental right for all children and young people.

I have outlined some of the significant non-legislative work that is under way across Scotland to help to ensure that every child has the best start. I have also outlined the critical role of partnership working in realising our ambition. The children and young people bill, which will be introduced this year, provides a legislative framework to accelerate that change and ensure consistency. Through the bill, we aim to embed in legislation key elements of GIRFEC by defining the meaning of wellbeing; to reflect the important role of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in influencing policy, practice and legislation through a series of new duties on ministers and the public sector; to ensure better permanence planning for looked-after children; and to increase early support for children, parents and families by expanding the amount—and, in turn, flexibility—of early learning and childcare to 600 hours per annum. That signals an increase of 45 per cent in Scotland since 2007, and we will also extend that access to our most vulnerable two-year-olds. Last year's consultation on the bill drew 300 responses from a diverse range of stakeholders, and our programme of engagement included activities with 2,400 children and young people. Feedback and analysis indicate broad support for the proposed changes.

I turn briefly to some of the challenges that we face in our pursuit of creating the kind of country that we want our children to grow up in and the opportunities that they deserve. One of the

greatest barriers is poverty. Research shows that family disadvantage, in terms of income, education and area deprivation, can have a negative impact on children's health and cognitive, social and behavioural development. However, research shows that a rich home learning environment, positive relationships, good communication and family meals can act as protective factors, counteracting some of the negative outcomes that are associated with a disadvantaged background. It is, therefore, clear that we must do everything that we can to resist the poverty trap.

Sadly, poverty undermines parents' efforts, so the poverty trap is no easy challenge to overcome. This Government firmly believes that children in Scotland deserve the best possible start in life. We do not want to see any child, never mind 17 per cent of them, born into or condemned to live a life of poverty. Unfortunately, poverty also undermines our best efforts to support parents and families. The current levels of poverty in Scotland, particularly among children, are unacceptable. We know the damage that poverty causes and none of us should be content to allow it to continue.

The Scottish Government is doing everything that it can to tackle poverty and inequality in Scotland with the devolved powers and resources that it has at its disposal. Only last week, the Deputy First Minister outlined her vision for a fairer and more equal Scotland. Against the backdrop of a recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, she articulated this Government's aspiration to go beyond softening the blows of punishing welfare reforms from London and to gain the powers to prevent the blows in the first place. It will never be easy to tackle the headline poverty figures while personal taxation and welfare benefits policies are reserved to the United Kingdom Government. We want a welfare system that is simpler, that makes work pay and that lifts families out of poverty. For us, on the Scottish National Party benches, it is clear where the solution lies: our Parliament should have control over such matters for the benefit of families and communities in Scotland.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister says that the Deputy First Minister outlined that in response to the JRF report. However, she will be aware that the JRF report said that poor children in Scotland cannot afford to wait for independence and that the Scottish Government should redouble its efforts using all the levers that are currently available to it. When will the Deputy First Minister respond to those points?

Aileen Campbell: The Deputy First Minister made her speech against the backdrop of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report. She also made it clear that we cannot wait for Labour to become the Government at Westminster, which seems to be Scottish Labour's position on tackling

the persistent inequality that exists in this country. We are using all the powers that are currently devolved to our Administration to tackle the persistent poverty that exists in our very rich country. It is a real pity that Drew Smith cannot see that.

I have outlined how we aim to realise our ambition of making Scotland the best place to grow up, working with partners. With full control of our tax and welfare system, we would be able to make the choices that would enable us to realise our ambitions far more quickly. A partnership approach to ensuring that we have the best place in the world for children to grow up in is key. Therefore, I look forward to working with colleagues across the chamber as we bring our children and young people bill to the Parliament and I extend my thanks to our partners beyond the Parliament, who are doing a fantastic job for Scotland's children and young people.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the Scottish Government's ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up; recognises that early intervention and an approach that builds on strengths are essential; welcomes the Scottish Government's actions to speed up the pace of change; supports Getting It Right for Every Child, the Early Years Task Force and the *National Parenting Strategy*, and agrees that Scotland's children and young people deserve nothing but determined action to achieve the best outcomes for them from the Scottish Government, the Parliament, public services and the third sector across Scotland, all working in partnership.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are very tight for time today, so exact timings are essential.

14:43

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I state from the outset that there is consensus in the debate. The Labour Party shares the ambition for Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up. I am sure that everyone in the chamber shares that aspiration.

We all want our children and grandchildren to have a safe, nurturing and enlightening childhood. As legislators, we also want to ensure that our laws protect the rights of all children and young people, set out the responsibilities of public bodies, agencies and Government, and support families. As I have said a number of times, we will support and work with the Scottish Government when it is doing things right and challenge it when we believe that it could be doing more. It is right that parties work together to create better life chances for our children.

We need to ensure that the rhetoric is turned into reality. Everything in the garden is not rosy. However, despite the somewhat self-congratulatory tone of the motion, we will not vote

against it, because we agree with a lot of the Government's strategies, such as early intervention, prevention and multi-agency working. We will offer constructive suggestions on what more can be done.

We enthusiastically believe that strategies such as GIRFEC are an effective way for agencies to work together in the best interests of the child and with parents to plan collegiately for the best future for children. We welcome the recognition that comprehensive implementation of GIRFEC needs funds for staff training if it is to work effectively. We know that some authorities are at a more advanced stage than others in the implementation of GIRFEC as standard practice. We also recognise the need for teachers to be trained, as they are staff who have day-to-day contact with children. However, I am hearing concerns that a one-off, two-day training event belies the need for on-going training in the sector. As with other initiatives, GIRFEC will not stand still. New teachers will come into the system, people will need to refresh their knowledge, and other staff such as admin staff and classroom assistants will require training. Will the minister consider what more can be done to support that important area of work? GIRFEC is very real in many authorities and regular training is needed now.

I want to put to the minister a number of points on the provision in the children and young people bill to have a named person. How will the proposed role of teachers be divided in a school? Will class teachers in primary schools be responsible for all children in their class? As well as the issue of high pupil teacher ratios, there is the problem of school holidays. Will teachers be expected to maintain their named person duties during those periods and, if not, who will take them on? I would welcome further details from the minister on those points and on the role of a named person in general.

In health, as in education, across services we need to ensure that we are meeting our children's needs. Liz Smith's amendment mentions health visitors. Specific issues around health visitors are in need of clarification, particularly with regard to their proposed role in the children and young people bill as the named person until a child reaches the age of five. From the people to whom I have spoken, I understand that many health visitors carry large case loads and do not necessarily see children regularly. What reassurances can the minister offer regarding those concerns?

The Scottish Government's aspiration is for Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up—a noble aspiration. However, we need to ensure that the reality matches the rhetoric. In my area, the rhetoric is unfortunately nowhere near

the reality of life for many children. In the communities that I serve, deprivation, which already affects far too many, is deepening and widening. As End Child Poverty's child poverty map shows, too many people are income deprived and disadvantaged. Health inequalities abound, with two communities just 3 miles apart having a difference of 15 years in male life expectancy. The number of children who are looked after as a result of substance abuse or neglect is rising. Welfare reform is hitting and is set to take millions out of the economy. Shops are selling single eggs because families cannot afford a box of six. According to some charities, children are using tomato sauce sachets to make themselves tomato soup.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Neil Bibby rightly mentioned the challenge that is posed by welfare reform. One of the reforms that will offer particular challenges to families with children is the bedroom tax. Does Neil Bibby share my disappointment that during the week, Helen Goodman, a shadow minister in the Labour Party in London, in essence accepted the bedroom tax?

Neil Bibby: The Labour Party has made its position clear: we want to bin the bedroom tax. I cannot be any clearer than that.

One in five children in Scotland is living in poverty. Those children are being denied their basic right to a decent standard of living and opportunities to thrive and reach their potential.

We know that poverty damages children's experiences, stunts their achievements and all too often determines the chances that they will have in later life. We know that to support vulnerable children, we need to look again at our priorities and support vulnerable families. There will of course be concerns over welfare reform from the UK Government but, as Drew Smith said, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report tells us that we need to focus here on what we can do to help vulnerable families with education, health, housing and childcare.

On the subject of childcare, the Labour Party, which introduced free entitlement to early education as a matter of urgency in 1997, welcomes the Scottish Government's proposed increase in entitlement to free early education to 600 hours. We welcome it, but we would have liked it to be introduced much sooner. It will make a difference, but as I have said before we will not solve the childcare problems of 2013 with a six-year-old policy that has still not been implemented and which will not be implemented until 2014 at the earliest. We need a model of childcare in which costs are reasonable and under which parents know that their children are well cared for and are receiving high-quality care.

The Government could do much more to provide support for vulnerable two-year-olds; that is covered in our amendment. Although we do not agree with the Lib Dems on the exact details, we are sympathetic to their amendment. We welcome the increase in hours and the extension of support to some two-year-olds, but the Labour Party believes that the Scottish Government is lacking in ambition. The proposed children and young people bill guarantees provision only to looked-after children who are two. Many of those children will already be in nursery, and estimates suggest that no more than 800 two-year-olds will be affected. In England, more than 250,000 two-year-olds—which is 40 per cent—will have a place by 2014.

I have heard the First Minister state that he will not increase that guarantee for two-year-olds in Scotland because staff to child ratios are being increased in England. Is the Scottish Government really saying that it cannot increase early learning and care for two-year-olds without changing staff ratios?

Aileen Campbell: I would be interested to know why Labour did not propose an amendment to the budget. Furthermore, in the plans for the devolved budget, what would the member like to be cut in order to fund such an increase?

Neil Bibby: The Government's budget was inadequate in its entirety, and we would want investment in early years to be prioritised more in the future.

I have heard the First Minister state that the Scottish Government will not invest additionally in early learning and care because it is investing in family nurse partnerships instead. Why does the choice have to be between the two? It does not need to be—family nurse partnerships exist in England, too. In fact, they were introduced by Labour in 2006, and the pilot projects seven years ago reached 6,000 people there. The recent pilots here in Scotland enrolled just 148 young women, and I would be keen to know how many people will benefit from those partnerships. Along with a number of children's charities, I urge the minister and the Government to consider extending the proposed support for vulnerable two-year-olds.

The Labour Party shares the aspiration and ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. Our amendment makes it clear that we need additional effort and investment to support children in poverty. We have made a number of constructive suggestions, which we believe the Government needs to take on board if progress is to be made in turning rhetoric into reality.

I move amendment S4M-05934.3, to insert at end:

“; notes with concern recent reports by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and End Child Poverty that more than one in five children in Scotland are living in poverty; believes that more effort and investment need to be put into education, health, housing and childcare for children living in poverty, and further believes that there needs to be a specific focus on additional support for vulnerable two-year-olds.”

14:53

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In this age when a great deal of robust debate is taking place about the financing of tertiary education, we should not forget the fact that there is almost universal acceptance—not just in the UK—that the greatest focus for additional resources should be in the earliest years, just as there is universal acceptance that, if we can get policy making right for the earliest years, we can not only improve the lives of a great many children but address many other educational and social issues that tend to develop in later childhood and teenage years.

On that basis, we warmly welcome the moves that have been made by the Scottish Government, which I think date back to Adam Ingram’s time as Minister for Children and Early Years, to ensure a greater focus in this area, and particularly the adoption of a much more coherent and collaborative approach, as the minister spelled out.

At this stage, although we have a couple of reservations about some aspects of the proposed children and young people bill, we warmly welcome its underlying principles because of the collaborative approach that is being adopted, which is so important.

It is a given assumption that children will fare very much better when they grow up if they have a loving, caring and well-balanced environment, as Aileen Campbell has said, in which family life is very much the centrepiece and where they can flourish, both socially and academically, in the company of their family, teachers and school friends. We are all very much aware of the fact that there is no ready mix of those factors, and that success can never be prescribed merely by the actions of any Government. The family matters very much, but so, too, does the community in which that family lives and works.

Of course, Government has a role to play. I appreciate that a delicate balance must be struck between allowing parents and families to decide on their own responsibilities and providing intervention by Government. That is a very difficult issue, with which the Education and Culture Committee is grappling in its inquiry into decision making on when children should be taken into care. That is perhaps the most difficult issue that we face, as it is all about the balance between the

individual and the state and whether the balance that we are working towards is correct.

I distinctly remember that, when my colleague Annabel Goldie first put the issue of a drugs strategy at the top of the political agenda, some said that it was far too complex a problem. However, what we saw was a real determination within Parliament and the wider community to tackle the main issues head on. I suggest that we need to do exactly the same for the parenting strategy. In that respect, I think that the Scottish Government has made a positive start and we support that work very much.

In particular, we want to see a political environment that encourages parental responsibility and choice but balances the rights of children with those of families. In an article in *The Herald*, Maggie Mellon made the important point that the children and young people bill must address that as a centre point. We should take on board that issue when we debate the bill. That is the reason for our amendment today and why we are so keen on a universal health visitor system, particularly for those aged zero to two.

We need to have a much closer look, as Barnardo’s has argued, at how we secure the most effective involvement of the voluntary sector. Given that many charities and voluntary sector bodies are firmly rooted in their local communities, about which they have expert knowledge, they are often the best placed to provide the help that struggling families need. We all know of first-class examples of such groups and charities in our constituencies, but we also know only too well that they frequently complain that they are not always part of a joined-up policy-making approach. Therefore, it is good to hear that the Scottish Government will have that joined-up approach at the centre of the bill.

Aileen Campbell: On the need to ensure that the third sector is part of early years policy making, I am sure that the member will welcome the fact that, among the 700 folk who turned up at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre for the early years collaborative’s first learning session, there was a heavy representation from the third sector both as part of the local CPPs and from the national third sector organisations.

Liz Smith: I entirely endorse that. However, many of the voluntary sector groups are arguing for a joined-up coherent approach. Many good things are happening across the country, but they do not always happen on a joined-up basis, which is what the third sector is pushing for. All our efforts will need to be put into that as we go on to the bill.

Neil Bibby made a good point about the role of teachers. Obviously, there is a firm case to be

made that all teachers and support staff should be given the training to enable them to recognise special needs at the earliest possible age. That is an important point.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): If I may, I just want to draw the member's attention to the important work that has been done on that by Sir Jackie Stewart, who has tried to influence the work of teacher training colleges. The steps that the colleges have taken in recent years have been immensely impressive, but we need to keep spreading that good practice.

Liz Smith: The cabinet secretary is absolutely right that we need those sorts of pioneering works, but there is still more to be done. We still hear comments from teachers that they feel that we are not quite there yet. The more that we can do on that, the more that we will be on the best front.

To sum up, this is an exceptionally important issue. We are very content to support the Government's motion and the Labour and Liberal Democrat amendments.

I move amendment S4M-05934.2, to insert at end:

“, and agrees that one of the best ways to ensure that there is the earliest identification of problems is the introduction of a universal health visitor system, particularly for children aged from 0 to 2.”

14:59

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Scottish National Party ministers have a tendency to assert all manner of things, and there was a concern that a debate on “Scotland—the best place to grow up” would be just the latest such assertion. However, in her motion and in her generally consensual opening remarks, Aileen Campbell has made it quite clear that that remains an aspiration, which I know is shared by members across the chamber. There may be disagreement both about how far we are from reaching nirvana and about the best way of getting there, but there is no disagreement at all that we should set that as a goal, nor that we need concerted collaborative action to achieve it, as the minister suggested.

I should also make it clear that we are working from a decent foundation. In highlighting areas in which we are falling short, we should not lose sight of the great strengths that we have. Indeed, I note with pride, though less surprise, that Orkney consistently comes top in quality of life assessments.

Making Scotland the best place to grow up is an aspiration—we all accept that it remains a work in progress. I want to focus my remarks on two issues on which we are falling short. The

shortcomings need urgent attention but, most important, that can be done by this Government in this Parliament using the current powers that we have at our disposal.

I start by highlighting the issue of nursery provision and childcare, which is the focus of my amendment. A year ago, I led a Liberal Democrat debate on that issue, making the case for why the Government needed to be more ambitious. All the evidence shows that it is the earliest years of a child's life—even the interventions made prior to birth—that shape and determine their development into adulthood. Get it wrong at that stage of a child's life, and the consequences can be largely irreversible, and the costs—social and economic—exceptionally high. Get it right, on the other hand, and the benefits are locked in and long term.

I unequivocally welcome the steps that are being taken to extend to 600 hours pre-school nursery provision for all three and four-year-olds. However, as Scottish Liberal Democrats have consistently argued—indeed, we argued this throughout the recent budget process—that fails to recognise that, by the age of three, it is often too late. Nobel laureate Professor James Heckman argues that the highest return in education is derived from the investment in the pre-birth to age three group. By the age of three, children in poverty are lagging a full year behind their better-off peer group with regards to cognitive development, social skills and readiness for school.

The Government, of course, has pledged additional support to looked-after two year-olds and those in foster care. However, as Bronwen Cohen of Children in Scotland recently pointed out, although valuable

“it is markedly less generous than what is being offered in England and Wales.”

Thanks to Liberal Democrats, a £380 million investment is being made in 260,000 childcare places for 40 per cent of two-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds south of the border.

Aileen Campbell: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: In a second.

That dwarfs what is planned in Scotland, where 24,000 parents of two-year-olds will lose out as a result.

Aileen Campbell: I point out to Liam McArthur that our focus is on quality childcare provision in Scotland. Evidence suggests that, unless there is quality for two-year-olds, the outcomes that he mentioned will not necessarily be realised later on. Will he consider what Naomi Eisenstadt said to the

Education Committee in the House of Commons about the Lib Dems' proposals? She said:

"I do not think we are in a position financially to offer a free good to 40% ... I do not think that we have the quality in place to offer those that will make a difference. What we know from the evidence of the evaluation of the two-year-old pilot was, unless it was high quality, it did not make a difference."

We are concentrating on quality. What is Liam McArthur's response, given the backdrop of increasing child to staff ratios?

Liam McArthur: My response is that the minister has taken the mickey. That was not a brief intervention.

The minister is right that the focus must be on quality, but there is no getting away from the fact that what is being provided south of the border offers more than what is being provided north of the border.

Investment in family nurse partnerships is welcome, but it is not a case of either one or the other. The SNP has pushed through its budget, but I plan to return to that issue during the scrutiny of the children and young people's bill.

The other issue that I want to touch on relates to those who find themselves looked after or in care. All of us acknowledge that, despite the efforts of successive Administrations and the collective and herculean efforts of those working in the field, the outcomes for far too many looked-after children and young people remain unacceptably poor. The reasons are complex; identifying solutions is not straightforward. However, I welcome the Education and Culture Committee's focus on that matter.

I want to reflect on one aspect of how we, as a country, discharge our corporate parenting responsibility. The consultation on the bill defined corporate parenting as

"the collective responsibility of all public bodies to provide the best possible care and protection for looked-after children and to act in the same way as a birth parent would."

That is entirely reasonable. However, imagine the reaction if a birth parent were to present their child on their 16th birthday—on the eve of school exams, perhaps—with a bin liner full of their clothes and an instruction to get off to the local homeless shelter or bed and breakfast. I can think of few birth parents who would be unable to tell where all their children were within a year of them leaving home. It is inconceivable that, if one of their children were to die within a year of leaving home, any birth parent would not seek answers about why that tragedy had happened. However, that appears to be the plight for many care leavers in Scotland, who are often expected to leave care

at 16—almost eight years earlier than the average age of a young person leaving the family home.

Aberlour insists that we need to guarantee that young care leavers receive after-care support into their mid-20s. Barnardo's calls for a systematic process for investigating deaths of young care leavers, which is what would happen were they in care. Both can be achieved through the proposed children and young people bill; both would help to make Scotland at least a better place to grow up for young people.

There are many issues on which I have not touched, although I may have a chance to address them in my closing remarks. Meantime, I again welcome the debate. I support the call for partnership action to deliver our shared aspirations and I hope that we might be able to put aside our constitutional differences long enough to help to make that happen.

I move amendment S4M-05934.1, to leave out from "welcomes" to "change" and insert:

"; considers that the evidence shows that investment in the under-3s gives the biggest return and the best chance of reducing the attainment gap and believes that free early education should be extended to 40% of two-year-olds, focussing on children from deprived backgrounds, to give them the best start in life".

15:05

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I very much welcome the debate. I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and other members because I may need to leave the chamber briefly during it.

I cannot think of a more important topic to debate in the Parliament than securing the future of our children. We recently debated Sarah Boyack's motion on the enough food for everyone if campaign. I said in that debate that it is a human imperative for all parents to do their best for their children. That is certainly my perspective with my children.

The Scottish Government is doing good work in that regard. I cannot think of anyone else who I would rather progressed that work than my friend Aileen Campbell, because I know of her personal commitment to it.

The Scottish Government is doing work to achieve the ambition of making Scotland the best place to grow up. The £270 million early years and early intervention change fund has been established. The early years early action fund has also been established to work with the third sector for early years and early intervention activities. That work is focused on what we are all talking about—the preventative spend agenda—because we know that early intervention is key to that.

A number of programmes have been established in the years during which the Scottish National Party has formed the Administration. The early years framework was launched in December 2008. The early years task force was set up in 2011. Only last year, the early years collaborative was launched, bringing those two strands together.

The early years collaborative has been welcomed across the board. Indeed, I saw that Sir Harry Burns, who is of course the chief medical officer, said of it:

“This is nothing less than saving the human race”.

Those are dramatic words indeed, but they show the depth and importance of that ambitious initiative.

The Government also intends to introduce a children and young people bill, which I welcome. It will be about establishing children's rights at the heart of everything that the Government does. I am aware that, in preparing for that bill, the Government consulted some 2,000 young people. That is as it should be: the bill is about them and they should have their say. I look forward to that bill being introduced and welcome the minister's commitment to working with others across the spectrum to make it work.

All members have received some briefings from stakeholders who welcome the children and young people bill. Children in Scotland suggests that a duty be

“placed on all public bodies to ensure that their policies and services are consistent with the UNCRC”.

That was also picked up by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. It would be interesting to see how it tallies with what the Government plans. I am sure that the minister will be able to respond in her closing speech and speak a little about that.

The children and young people bill will be an important opportunity because, although good work has gone on, we still have a set of challenging circumstances.

The minister rightly spoke of the challenges of poverty. We should reflect on the fact that child poverty is at its lowest since devolution was instituted—it is now at 17 per cent. Although it is, of course, welcome that we have the lowest figure since devolution, it is still too high.

I will not rehearse all the likely outcomes of poverty because the minister went into great detail about them. However, we know that the life chances of those who are born into poverty are influenced significantly by those early circumstances. Save the Children provided a

detailed briefing that set out some of those challenges.

I turn to the Labour amendment, which suggests that more needs to be done in education, health and housing. The point was made in an intervention that no indication is given of where that additional investment is meant to come from. Labour's amendment also implies that nothing is being done in the first place, but we know that work is being done in those areas. For example, we have the family nurse partnership programme, which has been awarded extra money. We know that the national health service is one of the partners in the early years change fund and that a working group is looking at health inequalities. We also know that additional funds are being invested to help local authorities to target fuel-poor households and that the Government plans to do more on childcare. Therefore, it is completely wrong to suggest, as Labour has done, that nothing is being done with the powers that we have.

We are not saying that people must wait for independence, but independence can make the difference. Frankly, Mr Bibby's response to my intervention was far from reassuring. It was almost as if he was not aware of his party spokesperson's position on the bedroom tax. That is a further indication of why we need this place to be invested with the necessary powers. The welfare reforms that are being brought in will make it hugely difficult to achieve the ambition of making Scotland the best place to grow up in, so we need to have those powers.

15:11

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I suggest to Jamie Hepburn that he follow LabourNoBedTax on Twitter.

I welcome the fact that there are large areas of general consensus when it comes to the early years agenda. I also welcome the fact that the Government has taken such an inclusive approach, particularly through the early years task force, of which I have been privileged to be a member.

Over the past three or four years—I think that I am going to have problems with my throat today, for which I apologise—I have noticed an increasing acceptance in the Parliament of the importance of the early years and particularly, but not exclusively, the very early years. I have also noticed an increasing acceptance that early intervention is a necessity.

However, there are some issues that we must explore to do with the nature of that intervention and the balance between universal and targeted services. On the latter, I welcome the fact that the

Government is to reinstate, very soon, the universal checks by health visitors of children when they reach the age of two and a half. That is a welcome reversal of the previous policy, which was brought in by the Administration of which I was a member. It was introduced with laudable intentions, but it went too far on targeted health visiting. The change of policy will mean that extra health visitors are required, and that issue must be addressed.

As far as targeting is concerned, it might well be the case that the Government has gone slightly too far in the direction of targeted services in its proposal on two-year-olds in the consultation on the early years bill: instead of being defined more broadly, vulnerable two-year-olds are defined as including only looked-after two-year-olds. That issue might be explored when that bill comes before the Parliament.

The nature of interventions is crucial. Evidence-based parenting programmes are extremely important, because they have a very good evidence base. When it comes to evidence and good practice, the creation of the collaborative that the minister described fully is an extremely important development, because collaboratives have been highly successful in the field of health policy, most recently in relation to the patient safety programme. I believe that a large number of practitioners coming together to ensure that good practice is disseminated will be crucial to achieving progress on the early years.

On support for families more generally, I welcome the parenting strategy that was published a few months ago. We discussed aspects of that in quite a lot of detail a couple of weeks ago when, on successive days, we had a debate on lone parents and a debate on the role of fathers. As the issue of the bedroom tax has been raised, I would like to move beyond the party-political point with which I started my speech and say that one of the most worrying things about that tax is that, where the care of children is shared by two parents, one of those parents will be affected by it. A father who typically has his children at the weekends will not be allowed an extra room for them. If the Scottish Government can make interventions to alleviate the problem of the bedroom tax, I hope that it will consider looking at that.

Jamie Hepburn: Does the member agree with the proposition that, if a family refuse to move to another property that has been identified for them, they should suffer the bedroom tax? That was the position that Helen Goodman, from his party, advanced.

Malcolm Chisholm: I will not enter into any more party-political arguments, because I have made my position clear, and Labour's position was clear at the beginning of the debate.

Another way in which I and many others have become aware of the importance of support for families is through the excellent projects in our constituencies. In previous debates, I have mentioned Circle, Stepping Stones, Home-Start Leith, Dr Bell's Family Centre and North Edinburgh Childcare.

I will mention one other project today, which is LicketyLeap—I know that the minister is to launch a symposium by that project in the near future. It is a participative drama project that has worked in schools in the Granton and Pilton areas of my constituency. I took part in a session one morning, which was an amazing experience. I saw the transforming effect on the nursery school children who were involved. The evaluation has shown that 60 to 70 per cent of the children who have been involved—not just in my area but in other parts of Scotland—have shown improvement in various outcomes, such as confidence, social skills, resilience and emotional literacy. I hope that that project can be supported in the future.

In my last minute, I must mention the other issue—apart from vulnerable two-year-olds—that the Labour amendment refers to, which is poverty. In Scotland, 21 per cent of children live in poverty. The figure has gone down by 100,000 since 1997, but it is now going up again. Responsibility for that is divided. Childcare is important, but the UK Government has made that much more difficult through reducing the childcare tax credit, and further negative changes are to come. The Scottish Government must do as much as it can to support childcare in our communities.

As we all know, work is the best route out of poverty, but that must be work where childcare is provided and which is family friendly. That has been an increasing theme in various articles this week. It is most important that parents, who are key to the early years agenda and to children's development, have time for their children as well as time for work.

15:17

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I will pick up on a theme that a number of speakers have raised, which is that there has been progress on tackling child poverty since devolution. That is a consensual basis from which to start.

In 1999, 28 per cent of children lived in poverty. As Mr Hepburn said, that figure is estimated to be about 17 per cent today, so dramatically fewer children are living in poverty. When the figures are calculated in the same way, I notice that the UK figure is 18 per cent.

I draw that comparison for a reason. I am not quibbling over a percentage point, but I raise the idea of competition across the UK and beyond on

tackling child poverty. Let us have competition—absolutely—because the only winners when we tackle child poverty, anywhere in the UK or in the world, will be the children. Let us have some good old competition to raise the bar for life expectancy and the quality of life that children in Scotland and beyond experience.

I will focus for a bit on the UK context, because we cannot and never will be able to deal with Scotland in isolation, whether we are independent or otherwise. We must look at welfare reform. It has been said that 50,000 children face being plunged into poverty because of the UK Tory Government's welfare reform proposals. In the process, £2.5 billion will be taken from Scottish households—households that often do not have enough money currently, never mind after further cuts from the UK Government. We cannot deny that that is the context in which we seek to improve the lives of children in Scotland.

In its briefing for the debate, Children in Scotland urges

"Parliament to act together to persuade the UK Government to abandon proposed legislation on welfare reform which will worsen already unacceptable levels of child poverty."

I completely agree with that sentiment from Children in Scotland. The issue that I have is that the UK Government is simply not listening.

Mr Hepburn mentioned some quite alarming facts in his contribution. A Labour spokesperson at the UK level is also not listening now on the bedroom tax. I heard Mr Chisholm talking about a Twitter account called LabourNoBedTax. Perhaps that should be LabourNoConsistencyOrHonestyOnTheBedroomTax. Perhaps Labour should change its Twitter account.

Such situations drive me towards thinking that it is not a matter of waiting for independence, but that only independence can guarantee that the Scottish people and Scottish families see the future that we need for our children. I believe in powers coming to the Scottish Parliament so that we do not have to face the dreadful situation that we currently face under the UK Government. I want to improve the lives of children in Scotland, but I also want to improve their aspirations.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I appreciate how passionately the member feels about welfare reform, but many millions of families will be better off with the universal credit. The Department for Work and Pensions has estimated that 350,000 children and 500,000 adults will be lifted out of poverty. Therefore, I am not quite sure whether the member is arguing that there should be no welfare reform. Does he not accept that there are helpful aspects of welfare reform?

Bob Doris: It has been well established that, where the UK Government seems to be giving money with one hand in welfare reform, it is taking away far more with the other hand, and is doing more harm than good.

Children in Scotland says in its welcome briefing for the debate:

"The Scottish Parliament has shown that it can set aside political differences and we urge Parliament to work together to use its full range of powers to combat child poverty in Scotland."

On a consensual note, I completely agree with that.

I believe in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's right to say, "Look, we have powers over health, housing and education," and I say gently to Labour that no one is waiting for independence. My goodness, we need it, but no one is waiting for it. We are getting on with the job as best as we can right now.

That is exactly what the early years collaborative is all about. I have seen family nurse partnerships in action and have spoken directly to young women who attend a special teenage pregnancy unit at Wester Hailes education centre. The City of Edinburgh Council is putting a lot of focus and attention on those young girls. I spoke to a young girl who benefits from the family nurse partnership and she said that it has been absolutely transformational and really important in helping her.

I look at the third sector and organisations such as Blochairn Housing Association and Spire View Housing Association in the north of Glasgow, which work quite closely with the local primary schools to support families and education and learning, and reward positive behaviour and outcomes in classrooms. A lot of collaborative work is going on.

There is much more that I want to say, but I will finish by talking a little bit more about the third sector, which will be crucial in early years collaborative work. Last week, we had a debate on health and social care integration, and I had a great concern that the Labour version of health and social care integration was to let the councils run it all. That was what Jackie Baillie put forward in that debate. We need a greater role for the third sector, not the dominance of local government. There is a lot of money out there that can be used better, and that will happen only by combining health and education services and local authorities and the third sector as an equal and valued partner. That can really deliver for the children of Scotland.

15:23

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I rise to speak as a father of two children. I do not want it to be simply a political aspiration for Scotland to be the best place in the world for children to grow up in. All parents aspire to that for our children.

I was interested that Mr Bibby's speech focused on the need for reality to match rhetoric. He went very big on how we need to support children in our most vulnerable communities, but he may want to look at the reality of places in which his party has some locus of control. In my home city, for example, his party is currently in the administration in Aberdeen City Council and is consulting on closing Bramble Brae primary school. That school is situated in the Cummings Park community of Aberdeen, which is one of Aberdeen's most deprived communities. Perhaps Mr Bibby should talk to his local councillors in Aberdeen and ensure that their reality matches the rhetoric that he is putting forth in the chamber.

Along with Mr Doris, I am a member of the Health and Sport Committee, which has been undertaking an inquiry into teenage pregnancy. We are also about to embark on what I suspect will be a significant inquiry into health inequalities. One interesting point that came out of the scoping exercise for that is that the application of the word "health" is almost a misnomer because, in essence, we are dealing with an agenda around inequalities in income and educational outcomes. All those issues work together to produce the inequalities in society.

In the teenage pregnancy inquiry, we have heard strong evidence on the benefits that have been realised in the family nurse partnership pilot areas. We have also heard great enthusiasm from the communities that are about to receive the benefits of the family nurse partnership when it is rolled out. Through that programme, the Government is taking an extremely strong step forward to support young mothers, who often need additional support at the beginning of pregnancy to help them as parents and to ensure that their children are given the most appropriate support. That is not to say that young mums are automatically bad mums—that is absolutely not the case—but it is a recognition that young mothers often need additional support early on to ensure that they become the best mums that they can be.

There is a recognition that more needs to be done, which is why the Government is, in partnership, bringing forward the strategies and actions that the minister outlined, such as those on the early years collaborative, to ensure that we continue to deliver for Scotland's young people. However, it is extremely depressing that,

whenever we talk about our aspirations and ambitions, we find ourselves hitting against a glass ceiling of reserved powers, which in many areas have a direct impact on our wish to develop the kind of Scotland that we want. That is why I find it difficult when Labour members on the one hand talk about wanting to tackle child poverty, but on the other hand beg us not to have the full range of powers here in Scotland. To me, that is simply a rhetorical mismatch.

I recently saw some internet traffic around supposed comments that had been made by a Labour Party spokesperson on the bedroom tax, so I looked at the "Daily Politics" interview with Helen Goodman MP. I encourage those Labour members who have not watched it to go and do so, particularly the point at which Helen Goodman says that the Labour Party has said that the bedroom tax should apply only in certain circumstances. To me, that is not being against the bedroom tax; it is being in favour of a different kind of bedroom tax. The Labour Party needs to have a look at that.

There is a notion that our aspiration for the Parliament is that we should simply act to mitigate the effects of bad decisions that are taken at Westminster, whether by the current Tory-Lib Dem coalition or by the hypothetical future Labour Government that Mr Smith and his colleagues wish for. If Labour comes into government in 2015, Liam Byrne will have his hands on the controls of the welfare system, and he has said repeatedly that Labour will continue to cut the welfare budget if it wins the election in 2015. No doubt, if Labour does that, Mr Smith will tell us that we need to take action to mitigate those welfare cuts, rather than argue for us to have the powers here to shape a fairer welfare system for the people of Scotland.

In my final minute, I will focus on the issue of additional support needs, which as members will know is extremely close to my heart. I have spoken to a number of parents in the north-east with whom I come into contact as a result of my son's additional support needs. They told me about their aspirations, one of which is that

"young people need to be nurtured, challenged and accepted in an environment that works together to support the whole child."

One parent said:

"I consider myself and my son to be fortunate in that his needs were picked up and identified early on and a programme of early intervention is put in place."

I found myself in the same position.

Early intervention is crucial, as is the ability to get the right support at the right time. We must recognise that welfare reform presents significant risks, especially for disabled children and other

children with additional support needs. That is why I aspire to secure welfare powers for this Parliament. I do not want independence for independence's sake; I want independence to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up.

15:30

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Like all other members, I support the Scottish Government's ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up.

For me, Scotland was the best place in the world to grow up. I love my country and the people who live here, and I love my community in Kilsyth—that is the reason why I am a member of this Parliament. However, that is not why Scotland was the best place in which to grow up. I am sure that a number of other places in the world would serve as the best place in which to grow up, because the place itself does not matter that much; what matters is the support that a child gets as they grow up.

I grew up in a family of four, supported by loving parents, grandparents and 11 sets of aunts and uncles—I have lost count of the cousins. My dad was a welder, and throughout our time as a family he was made redundant only once and found work again relatively quickly. I am extremely lucky to have grown up in a stable and supportive environment, and I am grateful to my family for that.

People throughout Scotland will identify with my brief comments about the environment in which I grew up. It is unfortunate, however, that to some people my story will be entirely alien. There are children in our communities who are living in families that are affected by drug or alcohol abuse, imprisonment, unemployment or low pay. There are children who live with the effects of some or all of those issues, and there are children who no longer live with their families as a result of such issues.

Ultimately, those symptoms all point towards one thing: poverty. In my region, Falkirk Council, North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council have child poverty rates of 17, 21 and 18 per cent respectively. Almost one in five children lives in poverty across the whole region, but there are startling variations at council ward level. In Cumbernauld North, 8 per cent of children live in poverty. That is far too high a rate, but if we take a two-minute walk over the footbridge over the M80 we come to Cumbernauld South, where the rate of child poverty jumps to 23 per cent. A two-minute walk takes us from a ward where child poverty

affects fewer than one in 10 children to a ward where one child in every four lives in poverty.

I do not doubt that the children in areas that are affected by poverty live in loving and caring families, but they cannot help but be affected by the stress and strain that their parents or guardians must be under as they try to provide for them, particularly if they are dealing with issues such as drug or alcohol abuse or imprisonment, which often blight families and communities in such areas.

I support the Labour amendment, because it recognises that we need targeted, intensive support and investment for children who are living in poverty. The most effective way of providing that support—as is reflected in the motion and all the amendments, in different ways—is through early intervention. We know that the longer we leave things and the older a child in poverty becomes, the harder it is to reverse the effects of the inequality between that child and one who has a relatively affluent lifestyle.

Poverty affects a child's health and wellbeing and it dramatically affects healthy life expectancy. Educational attainment is also affected—the very thing that can equalise the opportunities for children, whether or not they are born into poverty. The cycle of poverty is perpetuated for entire communities, because the attainment levels of children who have grown up in poverty are lower on average, as is the number of such children who go on to university. Opportunities to get highly skilled, highly paid work are, to a large extent, limited to people whose parents were able to follow such a path.

It is just not acceptable that health, life expectancy, educational attainment and opportunity can be determined to such a large extent in a community that I represent by the side of a bridge someone grows up on.

I welcome the Government's stated aim of speeding up the pace of change and the initiatives that are in place, but there cannot be any complacency. Those programmes will have to evolve and be refreshed, in line with what my colleague Neil Bibby said regarding getting it right for every child and other initiatives.

There is agreement in the motion and the amendments and throughout the chamber from all the members who have spoken so far that ensuring early intervention is the course of action that we should take. That means that there should be intensive support and investment for our vulnerable two-year-olds.

15:35

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): It would appear that we are aiming for a consensual debate this afternoon. I sincerely hope that, as I take members through a journey, we can remain consensual.

The minister said in her speech that the aim of making Scotland the best place to grow up is ambitious and bold, but she is to be commended for not shying away from the fact that there are challenges. She acknowledged that we need to address poverty.

I had the very great fortune last night to visit the Royal Blind School, which I was a pupil at—quite a number of years ago now—to attend an investiture of scouts. The reason I mention that is to do with GIRFEC. The minister said that E stands for every—every child. Many of the young boys and girls who were being invested last night had complex and challenging needs, but they were becoming part of the community and family of scouting, which, with the support of volunteers and leaders, will aim to give them opportunities and challenges that they would not otherwise have. It is not always up to statutory provision to ensure that our young children are given opportunities to aspire to achieve certain goals.

In my 32 years in the social care sector, the one thing I learnt is that partnership matters, partnership achieves and partnership is always the key to moving forward. That is perhaps where we should go with our young children.

I agree with Malcolm Chisholm that it is fantastic that assessments will be done of 27 to 30-month-olds, which will ensure that any additional help that is needed will be identified at that young age. However, it is about not just the early years but the early days and weeks. Health visitors go out to visit parents of newborns within 10 to 14 days, which is extremely important because that is quite often when problems arise, perhaps because parents are looking after their first child or because they have a large family and cannot manage with a newborn. Health visitors play a vital role in the early days, weeks and years.

We have to congratulate the Government on the additional hours of nursery provision for three to four-year-olds and for looked-after two-year-olds, which ensures that children are getting the best possible start that is affordable.

Moving on to schools, I think that the excellent work of curriculum for excellence has opened up opportunities by individualising the needs of the children. Teachers are acknowledging that the idea of children as individuals needs to be brought forward and that they should find out what their aspirations are and what opportunities are available for them as young people.

I congratulate Aberdeen council—I mean Aberdeenshire Council; I am not congratulating Aberdeen City Council—on the sterling work that it does within the curriculum for excellence. In some primary schools in Aberdeenshire—I am thinking of Gordon primary school in Huntly in my constituency in particular—children around the primary 4 or 5 level get an opportunity to go out for Wednesday in the woods. Regardless of the weather, they are out there, experiencing the outdoors. They not only write small essays and stories about their experiences, but they think about what science can tell them about what they have seen outside, in the environment in which they live. What a wonderful opportunity.

Is Scotland the best place to grow up in? Of course it is. However, we need to ensure that it remains not only the best but also the most wonderful place to grow up in.

We must also ensure that, as children follow the curriculum for excellence into secondary schools, there are opportunities for employment. In my constituency, there are opportunities in the oil and gas and renewables sectors. Modules such as the your future, your energy course give children the opportunity to realise that there is a future and that Scotland will indeed be the best place for them to grow up in.

15:41

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): It is ironic that I find myself speaking after Dennis Robertson because, when he was at the Royal Blind School yesterday, he met a young man from Renfrewshire, Harrison Lovett, who sees Dennis as a role model—a hero, if you will. Harrison has faced similar challenges to those that Dennis has faced. That shows us that, in the kind of Scotland that we want, we need to have people we can aspire to be like.

I welcome this debate and share the minister's ambition for our children and young people. Who would disagree with the minister when she says that she wants Scotland to be the best place to grow up? Jamie Hepburn has already highlighted the importance of the issue. As parents, our children's future is one of the most important things to us. When I make a decision as a corporate parent, I always think about the decision that I would make for my own child.

Our children give us many sleepless nights and difficulties—sorry, strike that; I mean challenges—over the years, and there are good days and bad days for every family. I have two children, James, who is 21, and Jessica, who is 19. One of our happier days will be this Sunday, at the Scottish communities league cup final, when we all go the national stadium to see St Mirren. However, in that

stadium will be people from Paisley's Ferguslie Park, which is one of the areas in Scotland with multiple deprivation and issues with child poverty.

We have been talking about child poverty for as long as I have been involved in politics. It is one of the things that I believe can be dealt with only with the full powers of independence. It has been debated for a long time. Although, as has been mentioned, child poverty levels have fallen substantially since devolution—they are at 17 per cent—we still need to do much more.

That can happen only with the powers of independence. Westminster is pushing through welfare reforms that will put 50,000 children in Scotland into poverty by 2020. The Scottish Government is trying to do things at one end, but the Westminster Government is making things even more difficult. For me, that is the difference.

The reduction in benefits will take away more than £2.5 billion from Scottish households. That will have an effect not only on those families but on the economies of towns throughout Scotland. In my area, people are saying that welfare reform will make a big difference in the retail sector on the local high street.

Only the full responsibilities of independence will make a difference in relation to child poverty. The Scottish Government is working hard to ensure that Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up in but, as I said, Westminster hampers those efforts. Eight out of 10 Scottish members of the Westminster Parliament voted against the Government's benefit cuts, but the Government went ahead with them anyway.

The Westminster democratic deficit is having an effect on all the young children in Scotland. The Scottish Government is taking forward the preventative spend agenda, and it is improving childcare provision throughout Scotland. Much more could be achieved if only Westminster's disastrous welfare reforms did not keep hampering that progress.

Only last week, the Deputy First Minister said that our argument is that

"instead of looking to the Scottish Government just to soften the blow, we need a Scottish Government and a Parliament with the powers to stop the blows in the first place."

Who would disagree with that? Who would disagree that we need those powers and responsibilities to make a difference?

We all know that the Scottish Government has proven on numerous occasions that it is more progressive than its Westminster counterpart. When we are looking at the Scotland that we want to build in the future for our children, therefore, the only way forward is with the powers of

independence. Otherwise, we will be sitting here having the same debate in 20 years, talking about child poverty and asking what we are going to do about it. I, for one, am not going to be sitting here doing that, because I take my role as a corporate parent seriously.

The Scottish Government's proposed children and young people bill will take the ambition to make Scotland the best place to grow up and make it real. The Scottish Government will legislate for a rise in early learning and childcare provision from 475 hours per year to a minimum of 600 hours per year. It will strengthen how we support children and put their rights at the heart of everything that we do. That is important in relation to empowering families and making sure that they see a benefit to the political process, with politicians who listen to them and give them opportunities to express themselves.

Parents are always extremely ambitious for their children. I am ambitious about what my children can achieve and I am also ambitious about what this Scottish Government can do for the children of Scotland. Every time we make a decision in this chamber, we must remember the families in areas such as Ferguslie Park in Paisley—families that we represent. We have to make sure that we make their life choices and their life chances a lot better in the future.

Independence is the only option if young people in Scotland are to have the future that we all want them to have. We all agree on many of the issues. How we get there—how we create the Scotland that we want—seems to be the main difference. The only way to do it that I can see is through independence.

15:47

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am keen to contribute towards the debate on the quality of the lives of children in Scotland—most importantly, on how we can continue to improve the services and opportunities that we offer to our youngest citizens. As a mother of three children, I know full well that Scotland is often an exceptional place for young people to grow up in. However, I also know, through my work experience in the voluntary sector and with statutory organisations that work with young people, that it can be much better.

It is a tragic reality that 22,000 children grow up in poverty in Scotland and that these children are likely to have significantly reduced life expectancies, poorer qualifications and poorer health compared with their peers. The impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms will not help the situation of struggling families in Scotland; instead, it will compound the disadvantage and inequality that already exists. That is why it is so

important that this Scottish Government does all that it can to tackle child poverty.

I welcomed this Government's commitment to provide 600 hours of free nursery education to children in Scotland every year, but I am concerned that that has still not been delivered. It is no longer enough to pay lip service to the needs of children and families. It is now imperative that the Government delivers on its promises and supports those families who are least able to provide financially for their children.

Barnardo's Scotland has been working to highlight the difficulties that are faced by children and young people who are leaving the care system for the first time. It has campaigned for a range of resources to support those in that situation, who have no immediate family of their own.

As Barnardo's has recognised, the voluntary sector plays a crucial role in providing that necessary support but, all too often, charities are restricted by a lack of funding and resources. It is incumbent on the Scottish Government to recognise the third sector's invaluable work and its own responsibility to ensure that those organisations are well supported in delivering for the most vulnerable young people.

Both Barnardo's and Save the Children acknowledge that there are severe educational and health inequalities between children who are in poverty and those who are not. According to Save the Children, children brought up in poverty are three times more likely to suffer mental health issues and children from deprived areas are twice as likely as their peers to be unemployed after they leave school.

Poverty is clearly the biggest issue that our children can face and it falls upon us to tackle its root causes. I am determined that no future generations should have to grow up the way so many of today's children grow up, and I strongly believe that this Government should do all it can to limit and ultimately end the disadvantage and inequality that many children in Scotland face.

15:51

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): As members have already pointed out, making Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up is a tall order but, as the Deputy First Minister said last week, it can be one of the "prizes of independence". A good many initiatives that are already under way and about which members have offered some detail are taking us towards that goal; in my speech, I will re-emphasise some of them and share with the chamber a glimpse of what life can be like for

some of our children who live in my Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley constituency.

To start with, I think that we should contrast our efforts in Scotland with what the UK Government is about to do with its welfare reform agenda. Here, we are shifting much of our focus towards the early years, early interventions and preventative spending and so far the results are encouraging. The £270 million investment in the early years and early intervention will help communities that need help and, through our partnership with the health boards, the councils and the voluntary sector, we are beginning to put together teams of people who not only have the right skills but who actually care about getting it right for every child and will work tirelessly to achieve that.

In just over 10 years, child poverty levels in Scotland have dropped substantially from 28 per cent to about 17 per cent; although that is still too high, it is heading in the right direction. However, child poverty levels are much higher in my constituency and the Scottish Government's measures will help—they have to. There has also been a significant improvement in the number of mothers giving up alcohol during their pregnancies, and satisfaction rates with health visitors are very high at more than 80 per cent.

We should contrast such measures with the UK Government's imminent welfare reforms which, as colleagues have already pointed out, could condemn another 50,000 children in Scotland to poverty over the next few years. Those reforms must be one of the most disgraceful attacks on the poorest in society since the poll tax; there is not even a counterbalancing policy that targets the £2.5 billion savings that will be made on tackling anything else. It is a blatant attack on the poor to bail out a failing and financially downgraded Government and will hang around the necks of the Tories for years to come.

Liz Smith: Notwithstanding his comments, does Mr Coffey not accept that one aspect of the need for welfare reform that has been accepted across this Parliament is that the current system is far too weighted towards those who are out of work and that there is an incentive to be out of rather than in work, which is actually more damaging to children?

Willie Coffey: I hear what the member has said, but how on earth does the bedroom tax solve that and lift people out of poverty? It puts more people into poverty.

The proposed children and young people bill will provide 600 hours of free early learning and childcare support to three and four-year-olds and looked-after two-year-olds. That is a big increase on what was already in place and will mean that,

on average, these youngsters will get about two to three hours of quality support every day of their young lives. Researchers tell us that, during the first three years, a youngster's brain growth is 75 per cent complete and by the age of three 50 per cent of our language is already in place. That is why it is so important to intervene positively in those early years, and for parents to read and talk to their children as often as possible.

The 600 hours are a wonderful opportunity for parents and youngsters, but we must also do what we can to ensure that parents take up their entitlement and use it. Offering a service is one thing, but helping parents and making it easier for them to take up the service can also be a challenge. Through the various initiatives we must look for ways to support vulnerable families and build capacity in whoever the main carers are.

I want to share a few thoughts on poverty in my constituency. From time to time over the years, I am sure that we have all noticed that some kids at school rarely, if ever, go on school trips with the rest of the children. Even on short trips to the museums in Glasgow, the safari park at Stirling or Edinburgh zoo, it is the same kids who are always missing and never have that experience. Going to another country on a trip with the school is no more than a dream for some of Scotland's children, because their parents cannot afford even a modest contribution towards a day trip and certainly cannot afford to pay for a trip to another country.

I know some children who are now 15 years old and who have still to set foot out of the town that they live in. That cannot be right in this day and age. Those youngsters stay silent about the issue, and so do their parents, but we all know the reason why. If we are tackling poverty and Scotland is to become the best place to grow up, I hope that we can do something about that issue. It can last from the first day a child goes to school right through to sixth year. No youngster should be excluded in that way. Our schools do what they can, but even in these very tight economic times I ask the ministerial team whether there is anything that can be done to offer a glimmer of hope to those families.

Lastly, members can surely see that we can do much more for our children if we are not hampered by a Government in London whose only mantra is to cut budgets and make savings from its citizens. If there was only one reason to back independence, then this is surely it. The United Nations Children's Fund said that the mark of a nation's standing is how it treats its children. Let us strive to be that nation and lift all Scotland's children out of poverty.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): We move to closing speeches.

15:57

Liam McArthur: The debate has been interesting and generally constructive. It has ranged widely, and members across the chamber have had a chance to develop their thoughts on how we ensure that Scotland is the best place to grow up. There were very thoughtful contributions, notably from Malcolm Chisholm, Dennis Robertson and Mark Griffin, who is demonstrating himself to be more than just a half useful footballing centre-half.

However, I am bound to say that the debate has also provided further evidence as to why delaying the referendum on Scotland's constitutional future for three and a half years is in no one's interest, quite probably not even the Scottish National Party's, although that concerns me less. When one considers the remarkable assertion by the Deputy First Minister that separating Scotland from the rest of the UK would help bring about an end to our child poverty, it is astonishing—as Drew Smith observed—that the SNP appears so reluctant to just crack on. The details of how Ms Sturgeon believes that would be achieved and what the costs would be are frustratingly vague—in fact, they are fairly non-existent—but the problem with that approach is that it risks distracting the attention of ministers and the Parliament away from the task of using the powers that they and we have to make a real difference.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: I am sorry, but I am not going to give way.

To be fair, Aileen Campbell generally tried to steer clear of that divisive approach and justifiably outlined many of the things that the Government is doing. In my own remarks I touched on nursery provision and the support that we provide to those leaving the care system, and I will return to those issues shortly.

First, let me reflect on some of the points that have been made by members during the debate. Understandably, a key theme was poverty and the impact that it can have on the life chances and experiences of children and young people in Scotland. That is self-evidently the case. A number of members noted the decrease in the rate of child poverty in recent times and, although Bob Doris will take satisfaction from knowing that I did not agree with an awful lot of what he said, his observation on having a competitive race to see who can improve the situation the fastest is a salient one.

Malcolm Chisholm and others referred to the parenting strategy, which is an important strategy that the Government is taking forward. It requires a delicate balance between focusing on early intervention and the support that we provide, and

emphasising individual and collective responsibilities.

Liz Smith and a couple of other members referred to the voluntary sector's importance. The minister intervened to make the point about a more joined-up policy approach there, which is fair. However, one of the themes that are coming through the evidence that the Education and Culture Committee is taking is that there is a need for the voluntary sector to be more involved in strategic commissioning. I hope that the Government will take that on board.

The Tory amendment makes a helpful point about the importance of health visitors. I might have a reservation that the amendment glosses over the importance of a joined-up approach from the social, education and health frameworks, but there are important points in it.

I do not think that it was fair of Jamie Hepburn to suggest that the Labour amendment implies that no advances have been made. Each of the Labour speakers has been prepared to acknowledge where progress has been made, while laying emphasis on where we all believe that further progress is needed.

In both those amendments and, indeed, the Liberal Democrat amendment, there is a focus and emphasis on early intervention. Adam Ingram, in absentia, has been given some credit for his efforts in developing a collaborative and integrated approach, although we should not treat 2007 as somehow being year zero.

On the Liberal Democrat amendment, as I pointed out earlier, all the evidence suggests that by the age of three children in poverty lag a full year behind their better-off peers. That gap is rarely closed, which is why Scottish Liberal Democrats—with the support of members across the chamber—have long argued that Scottish ministers should look to extend free nursery provision to two-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in Scotland. I appreciate that the fact that the coalition Government is making that provision to 40 per cent of two-year-olds south of the border is inconvenient to the Scottish Government's narrative, and I recognise that family nurse partnerships provide valuable support to many of those families, but it should not be a question of either/or. I hope that the Government will rethink its opposition and use the children and young people bill as an opportunity to extend such provision to two-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Another area in which I have already highlighted that the Government's bill can make a difference is the support that is provided to care leavers. None of us would dare suggest that, as things stand,

Scotland comes close to being the best place to grow up for many of our children and young people. The outcomes for that group remain desperately poor: only around 2.5 per cent of care leavers make it through tertiary education and 25 per cent of the prison population has been through the care system at one time or another. Tackling that scandalous situation will require many things, including improvements in the way in which children and young people come into the care system in the first instance, which the Education and Culture Committee is currently looking at.

At the other end, we need to provide better support for those who leave the care system. As Aberlour Child Care Trust and Barnardo's point out, present arrangements fall significantly short of what would be expected of birth parents. That is not the fault of any individual or Government, but we all need to face up to it. It is not acceptable, in terms of our corporate parenting role.

There is agreement on the aspiration to make Scotland the best place to grow up. There is agreement, too, on many of the areas where we need improvement. I hope that the consensus that has just about survived this afternoon's constitutional bickering will help us achieve it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I remind members to use full names in the debate.

16:03

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): The motion for the debate speaks of an aspiration

"to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up".

Let me try to bring a smile to Mr Russell's face. If I were a querulous polemicist of dyspeptic demeanour, I might observe that the motion implies that Scotland is not already the best place for children to grow up—indeed, Mark Griffin and Dennis Robertson alluded to that aspect. That implication would be unfortunate, because I, like many others in the chamber, grew up in Scotland and I could not have grown up in a better place or had a better upbringing. That is not the same as saying that I am well brought up—an assertion with which many would take issue, I am sure.

If the motion exhorts us to do better, so that more children can enjoy what many of us were fortunate enough to enjoy, that is an entirely worthy aspiration that I whole-heartedly support, as, it is clear, do other members across the chamber. There have been some notably thoughtful contributions.

The unpalatable truth is that too many young people in Scotland do not get the start that they need, the stability to which they are entitled or the supportive love that is so essential in their lives.

Those are uncomfortable truths, but we need to acknowledge them. The debate has been a welcome opportunity to discuss those issues in a frank and open manner. However, we must recognise how much is already positive in Scotland for young people. The majority of children in Scotland grow up in a loving, secure and stable family environment. Of course, more of those young people need to know the reality of what a loving, secure and stable family environment is. That is why I applaud the increased focus from successive Governments on targeting spending on the earliest years. The importance of early childhood development and the impact of early intervention on determining future health, social wellbeing and educational achievement cannot be overemphasised. Quite rightly, that is seen as a priority.

It is a sad fact that too many children are affected by a background of lack of stability, substance abuse, alcoholism or poor school attendance. Any one of those problems can seriously prejudice a child's development. Those problems span two or three generations disturbingly often and cannot be solved by the will or policies of one Parliament or one Government. Solutions may come from a variety of sources—some from within politics, others not. I welcome the Scottish Government's recognition in the motion of the role of the third sector. Aileen Campbell referred to the collaborative approach that is already being adopted.

I will consider some of the issues that have arisen and some possible solutions. Health visitors are people close to my heart. We cannot underestimate the role that those professionals perform in their significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of families and communities across Scotland, which is why Liz Smith lodged her amendment. I remember visiting a health centre in a part of Glasgow facing many challenges, where one of the GPs eloquently described how a health visitor could both gain the confidence of and enter a household into which that GP might not be invited. The GP was clear about the twin benefits of the health visitor, first, in being seen as a help to the household—not a threat, or part of officialdom—and, secondly, in being able to identify at an early stage any possible cause for concern in the household. The children and young people bill will be a chance for my party to reiterate our commitment to health visiting, which is a vital preventative service in the early years. My party has advocated extending universal health services to all children, with particular emphasis on the first three years.

Many members have referred to parenting. The sad and stark fact is that, in some cases, we have seen three generations where either there has been an ignorance of parenting skills or the

parenting role has been fundamentally prejudiced by other issues, such as substance abuse or alcoholism. Instead of seeing an example of good parenting, children have grown up with parental chaos and have had no good model of parenting to adopt and pass on to their children. As members have suggested, even when many new parents want to do their best, they may not have a full understanding of the demands and responsibilities of their new role. Mark McDonald referred to that aspect of parenting. Those problems become more acute when there is no support network of family and friends.

I have long since argued that we need a wholesale review of parenting. To that end I whole-heartedly welcome the publication of the Scottish Government's national parenting strategy. Charities and voluntary groups have a vital role to play, and it is good to see that recognised in the motion. I have previously referred in the chamber to street stuff, which is a project in my area that I think George Adam is familiar with. It does fantastic work with young people who come from very challenged backgrounds.

Another important area is the particular and significant problems facing children in care, to which Liam McArthur referred. I am delighted about the renewed focus on GIRFEC; the philosophy underpinning it is admirable.

We must also support and encourage young carers themselves. Those committed and brave young people are doing a wonderful job. It is all too easy for them to slip off the radar screen. We have heard reference to childcare. My party would extend free childcare provision to all two-year-olds, starting with the most deprived. It is also important that we bring more flexibility to the provision of childcare. We need hours that suit the parent; that would be an enormous help to many parents, particularly women, and would give them the opportunity to re-enter the workplace.

It has been a helpful debate, which has highlighted a number of interesting ideas. We all want to do more to ensure that all children in Scotland can enjoy at first hand the experience of this being a great place to grow up.

16:10

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): In opening the debate, the Minister for Children and Young People referred to the Scottish Government's ambition that Scotland should become a great place to grow up for every child. Like members across the chamber, Labour members have made clear that we share the minister's aspiration and welcome those initiatives that play a part in transforming the rhetoric in this chamber into

realities in our communities, including the lived reality for children in every part of Scotland.

In his opening remarks, Neil Bibby said that there was a consensus across the parties on the main points of substance. At times, we heard that consensus, particularly in the speeches of Malcolm Chisholm, Dennis Robertson, Mark Griffin and Willie Coffey. Although we disagree on the constitutional points, I thought that Mr Coffey made a series of important points, particularly about the experience in his constituency.

In order for Scotland to be a great place to grow up, Scotland must become a better place to raise a family. Too many parents are struggling to find work to provide for their families. Those parents need access to appropriate education and training—that includes places at college—to maximise their opportunities. Malcolm Chisholm was absolutely right that, for those in work, we need to ensure that work pays and is of a decent quality. Public transport is also important for getting there. Perhaps most important of all, we need to provide for every family in Scotland access to high-quality flexible and affordable childcare.

Those supports for families are vital to improving the chances of all our children. There is no trade-off between a focus on children and children's services and all the other policies that support the good society. Labour's amendment and our contributions today have sought to make that clear by including an explicit reference to health and, crucially, housing as well as education. It is important to note that our amendment would delete nothing but seeks simply to add that emphasis.

In moving our amendment, my colleague Neil Bibby made it clear that Labour also believes that our focus must genuinely be on the life chances of every young Scot. For the children that Mr Bibby and Mr Adam represent in Ferguslie Park in Paisley, for the children whom I know Anne McTaggart spends time with in Drumchapel and for the children that Mr Doris and I represent in Glasgow—for all of those children across Scotland—our focus must be on their life chances. We must recognise that the support that is required to make a difference will not be the same in every part of town or even for every family living on the same street.

We also know that the inequalities that children face because of the financial circumstances of their parents are increased when a child is looked after by another family member or by the state. For children with disabilities or for children in families where someone else experiences a disability, a health problem or—as Annabel Goldie and Mark McDonald quite rightly reminded us—an addiction issue, the challenges of life are greatest.

Those children are in need of support that targets their specific needs.

Labour's amendment also makes reference to two specific reports, which we were disappointed were not highlighted by the Scottish Government. The first of those is the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report "Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland 2013", which highlights the 14-year life expectancy gap between a child from a poor home in my region and that of a child born to a more affluent family. I attended the launch of that report in Glasgow, and Scottish Labour has tried to use the opportunity of today's debate to remind ministers of the JRF's clear conclusion that children in poverty should not have to wait for independence, which was mentioned as the solution by some SNP members—I think that George Adam even described it as the only solution to child poverty.

Mark McDonald: Does the member seriously contend that Scotland not having control of welfare or the taxation regime is compatible with removing child poverty?

Drew Smith: I will interpret that as Mark McDonald agreeing with George Adam that the only solution to child poverty is constitutional change. That will be disappointing to those outside the chamber who are following the debate. I will come in a moment to the actions and the difference that a Labour Executive in Scotland was able to make.

The second report to which we seek to draw the Parliament's attention is the map of child poverty in Scotland, which was published even more recently by End Child Poverty. That shows that one in five children across Scotland lives in poverty.

As Neil Bibby indicated, we will support the Scottish Government's motion at decision time, but in our view it is remiss for it not to cover the issues of poverty. Although we may have provoked a boisterous reaction from some SNP back benchers, I think that we have succeeded in putting the issues of poverty into the debate.

As Neil Bibby said, we will welcome the actions of the Scottish Government where we can, but we will perform our role as an Opposition group by challenging the Government wherever it could do more. On getting it right for every child, we have argued that more needs to be done to ensure that that is genuinely happening in every local authority, town hall and school across the country. I know that the minister shares that ambition.

We on this side thought that there was too large an element of self-congratulation in the motion, which seasoned observers of the Scottish National Party will have no doubt been shocked to see. The Government talks about the pace of change. We

on this side are not reticent about reminding ministers of our record, which was to introduce free entitlement to early education way back in 1997, just months after winning an election. After six years of the SNP in power, parents are still waiting for those 600 hours of provision. The reality is that too many of Scotland's children will have grown up in the time that it takes the SNP to deliver on the promises that it has made.

The Scottish Government is fond of measuring itself against England; indeed, comparisons with the Tories are the SNP's favourite measure of social progress—although, on this side, being less bad than the Tories is the least that we expect of the Scottish Government. However, it is its boasts in relation to two-year-olds that ring the most hollow. I think that all the Opposition parties made that point.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member take an intervention?

Drew Smith: No, thank you.

Labour members have sought to contrast rhetoric with reality. We have no problem judging ourselves against the same standard that we ask of the Scottish Government. In the past week, Nicola Sturgeon has claimed that, in an independent Scotland, child poverty will be not only abolished, but banned by the constitution. On this side, we represent the party that legislated to abolish child poverty. Achieving that aim has not come from an act of Parliament, but progress has flowed from the policies that we used the machinery of Government to pursue. The previous Labour Government lifted 600,000 children across Britain out of poverty and gave them a chance in life. I say to Mark McDonald that it was through the previous Scottish Executive working with and in the UK that child poverty was reduced further and faster than in any other part of the country. That is exactly the type of competition that Bob Doris seemed to be calling for.

Enshrining progressive ideas in law is not a bad idea, as long as the record matches the rhetoric spouted. Irrespective of the pressures facing families in my city or in any other part of Scotland, child poverty figures have flatlined recently. That is not all the SNP's fault—I never said that it was. It is also not the result of coming welfare reform changes—the Government's record cannot be the result of changes that are only now coming in. However, that flatlining is happening on the SNP's watch, which is why we must test the Government's rhetoric against the reality outside the chamber. I therefore urge members to support Neil Bibby's amendment.

16:17

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): We were doing so well until Drew Smith spoke. Unfortunately, the debate sank back into what I suppose I would call a McArthurite approach to the constitution—given what we heard on that from Liam McArthur. I want to see if we can avoid getting into those matters because there are so many things that we could and should agree on.

Let me start with an assertion that perhaps even my worst enemies—some of them are in the chamber, apparently, judging by the noise—

Jackie Baillie: Never.

Michael Russell: I am glad to hear that Jackie Baillie is not one of my worst enemies; she would be doing well if she could spread that kindness and enlightenment to the Labour front benches.

The Scottish National Party—individually, collectively, up, down and round about—is against poverty. We are against child poverty and all forms of poverty. We are in favour of equality. We are working for that type of Scotland. We are, indeed, working to have Scotland as the best place to grow up. I think that Labour members and almost every other member believes the same things—that we are against child poverty, that we want to see better services for children, and that we want to have that country that is the best place to grow up. I do not believe that members on the Labour front or back benches support the bedroom tax. I know that they want to, in the words of Neil Bibby, bin it. We all want to bin it.

Therefore, the debate is about means, not ends, because we are agreed on the ends. The means by which we achieve those ends are what we must examine. There have been some very good and positive speeches in that regard. Mark Griffin's speech was very much worth listening to. In essence, he took us to the heart of the matter. The definition of the best country to grow up in is generic as well as particular—it is to do with families and communities, how we are treated, one to another, and the geography in which we live. We should all be concerned that a lottery with regard to poverty and community remains. He was entirely right to remind us about that. Nobody would disagree with it.

Annabel Goldie also made that point, although I will go on in a moment to say how profoundly I disagree with some of the things that her party represents. Dennis Robertson used a particularly good word to describe it: wonderful. The concept of wonder while a child is growing up, excitement, discovery and awe—all those are things that we should encourage, feel excited by and seek to inculcate in others.

Anne McTaggart's speech was interesting, too. I think that she wanted to have a positive view of what was taking place this afternoon but was dragged down by the politics of the occasion. She asked what the Scottish Government has done—Mr Henry, as usual, is sneering; I cannot do anything about that although I regret it, because the issue is serious and we could and should debate it seriously.

The Scottish Government has contributed £272 million in the early years change fund and £20 million in the early intervention fund. It match funded the Scottish Television and Hunter Foundation child poverty appeal in 2012. It is spending more than £250 million on fuel poverty and energy efficiency programmes in 2012-13 and 2014-15. Since 2009, it has invested £2.74 million in innovative advice projects that have generated more than £29 million in financial gains for more than 100,000 households.

We could do more. Everybody could do more. Labour could have done more when it was in power. We could all do more, but we can work together and acknowledge what is happening. There is a shared aim, which is to help our young people and to get rid of poverty. However, the means question will always detain us in Scotland.

Mr Chisholm and I have been around a long time. We have been through many organisations, such as constitutional organisations that fought for change in Scotland. I feel that we have always butted up against a problem. That problem is that, no matter how much we want to do in Scotland, the argument in the end becomes that we cannot do it because we do not have the powers, but we should just wait until there is a different Government at Westminster. I have stood on platforms in Scotland and heard that said. I have seen genuine people, such as Mr Chisholm, say that it is better to wait for a different Government at Westminster because what we want to do will come along.

What do we see today? The figures are stark and I have to say that Annabel Goldie is wrong, because there will be an increase in child poverty in Scotland. The Institute for Fiscal Studies confirms that there will be an increase in child poverty. Although, as she said, the long-term effect of universal credit may be to reduce relative poverty, when other changes such as the switch from the retail prices index and the indexation of means-tested benefits are introduced, they more than offset that impact.

We will see, as a result of Westminster Government policies, an increase in child poverty in Scotland. We need to have all the tools at our disposal to deal with that.

Anne McTaggart called upon us to tackle the root causes. I entirely agree—we must tackle the root causes—but to do that we need all the tools and implements to get at the root. If we do not have those tools and implements, we cannot get at the root.

It is a matter of means and ends. If we are united on the end that we really want to see—and we are united, if we strip out the argy-bargy of politics and the sneering—that unity should drive us towards an inevitable conclusion, which is that, at the very least, the real powers in respect of tax and benefits must be decided upon in Scotland. If our aim is to have a more equal society in Scotland, which it should be, and if our aim is to eliminate poverty in Scotland, which it should be, we need those tools.

Members cannot casually dismiss the idea that there is no connection between the constitutional question and progress on those matters. They must look at it head on. Members can come to the conclusion—I am sure that they can—

Annabel Goldie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Russell: No, I would like to finish this point.

Members can come to the conclusion that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. That is a legitimate point of view, although I disagree with it, and we should debate it positively. However, they should look at the issue directly; they should not glance away from it, because it exists.

The motion talks about quickening the pace of change and high-quality, flexible early learning and childcare. Right across the chamber, we believe that those are the right things to do. Of course it is the role of the Opposition to say that we are not going far enough or fast enough or that they can think of better ways to do it. I have been in that position; I have been in opposition. However, today we should unite on what our ends are: they are about having the country that is the best place to grow up in.

We should acknowledge the successes. GIRFEC was not invented by this Government. One of the most profound experiences that I had when I became education secretary was to go to Fort William and see a family centre in the Highland pilot for GIRFEC that was doing a remarkable job for the hardest-to-reach young people. All those things can unite us.

Unfortunately, in the country that we live in, we sometimes get absorbed in the minutiae. The amendments to the motion show how that can often go wrong. Instead of unifying us, all three amendments find something to divide us. They say, "My idea is better than your idea"; "Bring a

bigger bit of money to the table, which you should spend in this way"; and "Why aren't you doing enough?"

That is a legitimate question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your final minute.

Michael Russell: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The right way to tackle the issue is to say that we agree on the ends and want to succeed in achieving them. Therefore, I ask members to support the motion. Let us try to do it, instead of wasting our time on other, much less important things.

Local Government Finance (Scotland) Amendment Order 2013 [Draft]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-05924, in the name of John Swinney, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument—the draft Local Government Finance (Scotland) Amendment Order 2013.

16:26

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): On 7 February, Parliament approved the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2013, which enabled Scotland's local authorities to set their revenue budgets for 2013-14. In setting their budgets for next year, all local authorities were asked, in return for the full funding package that was available, to freeze council tax levels for a sixth consecutive year and to maintain teacher numbers in line with pupil numbers, while securing a place for all probationer teachers who required one. The Government indicated to local authorities that those were the conditional elements of the local government finance settlement that was available, and that if any local authority did not wish to meet those conditions, it should advise the Government that that was the case. I am pleased to confirm to Parliament that the deadline for receipt of such communications was 11 March and that I have received no indication that any local authority does not wish to take forward the provisions that I have outlined.

Therefore, I am also pleased to report to Parliament that the budgets of all 32 local authorities in 2013-14 should contain full provision to enable the commitments to freeze council tax levels for a sixth consecutive year, to maintain teacher numbers in line with pupil numbers, and to secure a place for all probationer teachers who require one, to be applied in local authority areas. The continuation of the council tax freeze will be particularly welcome news for hard-pressed council tax-paying households across Scotland, given the wider economic challenges that the country faces.

In view of the 2013-14 budget process having been concluded, the amendment order seeks approval for the payment of each local authority's share of the £70 million that has been set aside to compensate councils for the council tax income that has been foregone as a result of the continued council tax freeze.

The amendment order also seeks parliamentary approval for payment of £37.9 million for the newly formed Scottish welfare fund, which has been set

up following the transfer of the former social fund from the Department for Work and Pensions, as part of the UK Government's welfare reform programme. The successor arrangements are intended to offer grants or support in kind for two purposes: the crisis grants will provide a safety net in an emergency when there is an immediate threat to health and safety, and the community care grants will enable independent living or continued independent living, thereby preventing the need for any form of institutional care.

That new service represents another example of the Scottish Government's having to face up to the consequences of the UK Government's welfare reform programme and the limitations of the transfer of resources that has been made to accommodate such issues. The money that was transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions represented a real-terms cut in funding, but I have been able to top up the grant funding in 2013-14 with £9.2 million to provide additional protection to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. That £9.2 million is included in the overall support figure of £37.9 million.

The third and final change to the 2013-14 funding allocations that Parliament approved in the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2013 on 7 February is the distribution of an initial £10 million of the £37.6 million that has been set aside but not yet distributed in the 2013-14 local government finance settlement in respect of the teachers induction scheme. The initial allocation has been included with the prior agreement of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Taken together, those three changes will add almost £118 million to the amount of general revenue grant with which we will provide local authorities next year. That means that the total revenue funding in 2013-14 will be almost £9.8 billion and that the overall total funding, including capital, will be £10.3 billion.

I would like to take the opportunity to make further minor adjustments to the 2012-13 revenue funding allocations that have arisen since the 2013 order was approved on 7 February. I have set out the funding for 2013-14 for the newly formed Scottish welfare fund, but I also confirm that local authorities will receive more than £2 million for the new service's set-up costs. Similarly, I am providing almost £4.2 million for the council tax reduction scheme set-up costs, and £400,000 for the associated software costs.

I am also making £1.1 million available to West Lothian Council as part of the recovery plan to deal with the closure of the Vion Food Scotland Ltd plant in Broxburn. The City of Edinburgh Council will receive a further £90,000 for the cities alliance project, which will be shared by the city councils, and Moray Council will receive £52,000

as its share of the money that is being provided to planning authorities to help them with the number of wind turbine applications with which they are dealing. Those final additions mean that local government will have received a further £7.8 million this year, on top of the £58.5 million that was included in the February order.

The approval of the amendment order will authorise the distribution of a further £117.9 million for 2013-14 and a further £7.8 million for this year to local government to support the essential services that our local authorities deliver for all our communities.

It goes without saying that the passage of the order is significant to the local authorities of Scotland; the funding that the order includes has already been taken into account by authorities in setting their 2013-14 budgets. The loss of almost £126 million in funding would have serious consequences for all local authorities, the communities that they serve and the people of Scotland, who rely on the vital services. It would also undermine the constructive relationship that has been developed between the Scottish Government and local government in taking forward a range of shared priorities. Given that context, the amendment order is essential to enable Scotland's local authorities to implement their approved budgets. I therefore commend the order to Parliament and invite Parliament to agree to the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Amendment Order 2013 [draft] be approved.

16:34

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): In my speech in the debate on the draft order last month, I said that that was our chance to comment on the Scottish Government's priorities and to highlight our unhappiness about its centralisation agenda and its budget allocations. On the day, Scottish National Party spin doctors had to work really hard; they had to work overtime to finesse the damage that the impact of the settlement caused in Aberdeen.

We do not see today's order as being a cause for celebration, but we understand that the money needs to go to local government today. We understand that every council leader would rather accept the proposed deal than no deal, and we know that local authorities have no real option but to sign up to it. There will be negative consequences in every part of Scotland. One academic has noted that it is a tighter squeeze with even less flexibility than the Tories ever managed. We live in tough times, and local

authority finances face an unprecedented squeeze.

Today, we have an Accounts Commission report that identifies a significant rise in the level of debt that is being sustained by local authorities. Their challenge is that their capacity to service that debt and the repayments has not increased, but their need to build new infrastructure to support services still has to be met year in, year out.

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

Sarah Boyack: I will give way briefly on the point about debt.

Mark McDonald: Does Sarah Boyack regret that, in trying to get more money for local authorities, she led her party to vote against the order, which would have resulted in the local authorities receiving no money whatever?

Sarah Boyack: If Mark McDonald had read his agenda on the day, he would have noted that that was the draft local government finance order. Today, we are discussing the actual finance order. There is a distinction, and it is important to log that point. As I said in my speech, we had a chance to make our points. Today, we are resolutely focused on what needs to be done now to improve the quality of life in our communities and to protect people who are suffering the impact of economic uncertainty.

The council tax freeze of which John Swinney is so proud is underfunded, and the strings that come with today's package mean that the Scottish Government does not just set the money for every authority; it also requires a commitment on how revenue is actually spent. It sets the parameters.

In his report to the Parliament's Finance Committee, Professor Bell highlighted the uncertainty around local government funding, and his recommendations focused more on local government funding than anything else.

John Swinney: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I will not. I will get on.

It is a great pity that the Local Government and Regeneration Committee did not invite ministers to talk about the local government element of the budget.

Pressure on local government services will continue to grow over the next year. Only last week, members debated the growing challenge of demographic change and the need to improve health and social care services. We all know that the Christie commission identified the need to focus on tackling social inequalities and to build capacity in our communities, but the combination of the UK Government's austerity and welfare policies has meant that times are hard for people

on low incomes. Child poverty is rising, families are being hit by dramatic rises in fuel costs and 25 per cent of our young people are unable to get a college place or a job.

That is the context of what we think is a constructive amendment. We want to work to ensure that every opportunity is taken to help people through these tough times and to provide the resources to provide practical support.

John Swinney: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: I will give way on the point about a constructive approach.

John Swinney: I am interested in Sarah Boyack's amendment. Can she explain to members why, in all the discussions that I had with the Labour Party prior to the budget, no mention was made of funding of local government services?

Sarah Boyack: That is because we were focusing on housing, which is crucial to local government. I will come on to that, Mr Swinney, because your underfunding of housing is creating the problem that we are attempting to address. If you speak to local government officers, they will tell you that the funding system for social housing is broken—end of story. We need to tackle that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please.

Sarah Boyack: Across Scotland, advice services and councils are, as we speak, redeploying staff to gear up for the impact of the bedroom tax, but more needs to be done. That is why, in our amendment, we ask the Scottish Government to do more to

"mitigate the impact of the ... bedroom tax".

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No. I have already taken interventions.

There is another squeeze that is being caused by the transfer of council tax moneys minus 10 per cent. The Welsh Assembly Government met that shortfall in full. In Scotland, local authorities had to find £17 million this year, and there is no promise of funding going forward. Last month, Scottish council leaders called on the Scottish Government to make up that shortfall. I am told that their decision to do so was unanimous, which is significant. Council leaders are looking at their budgets, and they know that there will be shortfalls as a direct result of the UK Government's decision to pay housing benefit directly to tenants. Yesterday, the BBC reported that the pilots show that there will be a massive 30 per cent increase in arrears. That should concern all of us. It is bad

news for councils and tenants, and it is a huge financial problem.

As a Parliament, we need to focus on what we can do together now. I ask the SNP Government to work with us across the chamber. There is much that we can agree on: we need to support people through these tough times and enable our local authorities to get the financial support to do what they need to do.

I move amendment S4M-05924.1, to insert at end:

"but, in so doing, considers that the Scottish Government should mitigate the impact of the so-called bedroom tax and respond positively to COSLA's call for the Scottish Government to fully fund the replacement scheme for council tax benefit as the National Assembly for Wales has done."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to speak through the chair.

16:39

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

The order will amend the level of central revenue grant that is payable to each local authority by distributing the full £70 million of council tax holdback funds to councils that will freeze council tax for 2013-14, as well as assorted other funds. Although today's debate on the order gives us another opportunity to discuss the financial settlements for Scotland's local authorities for the coming year, it has to be said that the other opportunities have, to date, failed to provide any answers to the questions that have been posed to the cabinet secretary and the minister on non-domestic rates income.

Therefore, I will cut straight to the chase and ask once more: How much has been collected under the business rates incentivisation scheme so far? *[Interruption.]* If the cabinet secretary would do me the courtesy of stopping his conversation and listening, he might be able to answer that. It should not be difficult for him to do so, given that we are less than three weeks away from the financial year's end.

In addition, I would like to know what the Scottish Government's prediction is for the year's total. Again, that should not be difficult to answer because the cabinet secretary receives quarterly updates on collection rates. If he wants to intervene and give me the figures at any time, I will be glad to take an intervention.

We hear a deafening silence. Okay. Taking into account the above two requests, I would like to know how many of Scotland's 32 local authorities are likely to receive money back. To conclude on that subject, I put on record again that today's order is another opportunity lost to extend the business rates incentivisation scheme to allow

councils to retain 100 per cent of the income surplus above the centrally set targets, rather than 50 per cent, as is the case under the Scottish Government's scheme. The obvious advantages of that are that it would provide a greater incentive to councils to support business growth while maintaining the certainty, predictability and administrative simplicity of a national poundage rate for businesses.

This is the sixth year in a row in which all of Scotland's councils have agreed to freeze council tax. The Scottish Conservatives welcome the fact that Scottish households will have certainty that at least one bill will not rise in the coming year.

On Labour's amendment, the spare-room subsidy simply seeks to address the serious problem of underoccupancy in the social housing stock in an effort to free up accommodation for those who desperately require it. If there are mitigating reasons why someone should live in a property that at first seems to be too large for their needs, those will be taken into account and they will be exempted from the tax.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): Would Margaret Mitchell consider the fact that it is the person's home to be a mitigating factor?

Margaret Mitchell: Linda Fabiani states the obvious, but that does not get over the problem that, if the property is too big for the person, they are in effect taking up property that could be used for another person who desperately needs it. *[Interruption.]* No amount of barracking will get away from that fact.

In effect, the Labour amendment expects the public to pay for people to live in homes that are too large for their needs. I therefore confirm that the Scottish Conservatives will support the order but vote against Labour's amendment.

16:44

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I welcome the order. It is worth repeating what I said when we discussed the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2013. Between 2007-08 and 2012-13, the resources in the Scottish Government's control increased by 6.4 per cent while, over the same period, local government's budget increased by 8.9 per cent, which demonstrates the strong financial settlements that have been agreed with local government during these challenging times. We should not forget that.

I welcome the sixth year of the council tax freeze, which will help hard-pressed families throughout the country. I also welcome the maintenance of teacher numbers in line with pupil numbers and the fact that probationers will get jobs as part of the teacher induction scheme.

I am an Aberdonian, so I welcome the funding floor that this Government implemented, which benefits Aberdeen and Edinburgh. I still wish that there could be a review of the funding formula. I hope that COSLA will initiate a review, and I hope that it has listened to what ministers said recently about the door being open.

I say to Ms Boyack that Aberdeen City Council is getting more money than it previously got and faces no significant cuts. That will not last, because the careful financial management of its SNP administration is no longer in place. It is unfortunate that what we have now looks like a hotch-potch of what we had previously, which almost led Aberdeen to financial disaster.

I find Ms Boyack's amendment somewhat bizarre. Social security is still a reserved matter and it seems that the Labour Party is quite happy for that to continue; I have to say that I am not.

The Scottish Government has committed £23 million, with local government providing a further £17 million, to support nearly 560,000 people, through the council tax reduction scheme. When Ms Boyack sums up, will she say why, when the Council Tax Reduction (Scotland) Regulations 2012 were laid before the Parliament last year, the Conservative and Labour members of the Subordinate Legislation Committee voted together to report that the regulations were potentially outwith devolved competence? Was the Labour Party trying to put the kibosh on the scheme?

Mrs Mitchell came under attack on the bedroom tax and I have no reason to believe that my colleagues were wrong to attack her on that. However, her view is shared by Helen Goodman, who serves in the shadow Cabinet, no less. Helen Goodman said on "Daily Politics" on 11 March:

"We've said that the bedroom tax should only apply if people have been offered a smaller place to live and turned it down, because obviously it is better to use the housing stock more efficiently."

What is the true Labour position on the bedroom tax? Is it Scottish Labour's position, or is it the position of the Westminster Labour Party, which—let us face facts—will continue to control social security if Labour has its way?

16:48

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I spent part of my career in local government, so I have seen at first hand its power to drive change, improve communities and provide opportunities for residents. Local authorities are at the forefront of tackling poverty and regenerating many of our neighbourhoods, and they deserve our support, but increasingly we are asking them to do more with less. I welcome any additional funding that the cabinet secretary announced today, but Sarah

Boyack was right to remind members that last year the Scottish Government passed on 83 per cent of all cuts to local government. Of course, the proportion this year before the adjustment is 50 per cent.

At the same time, there are new burdens on the shoulders of local government, particularly as a result of welfare reform. What the UK Government is doing does not deserve to be called reform. It is making savage cuts, which impact on some of the most vulnerable people in our society. It is doing so at a time when it is rewarding its millionaire friends with tax cuts. The majority of members in this Parliament think that that is simply obscene.

Much of the responsibility for picking up the pieces falls to local government and the voluntary sector. As the cabinet secretary said, local government will be responsible for community care grants and crisis loans, at a time when claims are likely to increase. Local government is contributing to the council tax reduction scheme alongside the Scottish Government, but no agreement is in place on how the funding will be provided in future years.

The overwhelming burden of the bedroom tax—some £50 million—will fall to councils along with housing associations. They have expressed serious concerns about the impact on housing revenue budgets and repairs, and some housing associations fear that they might even go to the wall.

Jamie Hepburn: The amendment before us says that we should

"mitigate the impact of the so-called bedroom tax."

To echo the point that Kevin Stewart made, does Ms Baillie seriously argue that the Labour position, as expressed by Helen Goodman, which essentially accepts the premise of the bedroom tax, is about mitigation?

Jackie Baillie: I say to Jamie Hepburn that the SNP missed an opportunity. We should be uniting to get the Tories to bin the bedroom tax, but instead the SNP sees everything through the prism of the constitution. Everything is about the contrast with Westminster—frankly, that is depressing. The Scottish Government has the power to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax, but the louder the SNP members shout, the greater they intend the diversion to be. The people whom they ignore are the most vulnerable in our society. Shame on them for that.

It is the impact on people that should concern us all. In many cases, people will not be able to contribute additional funding for their rent. They will inevitably struggle to manage and will fall into arrears. Simply to suggest that somehow they can just move house demonstrates a complete and

utter misunderstanding of the housing market in Scotland. I say to the Tories that there is a shortage of social rented housing—one-bedroom properties are just not around. Already our surgeries are full of people who are concerned.

Simply saying that it is all Westminster's fault and "We share your pain" is just not good enough. It is exactly for times such as these that devolution was created. We can and should do something. The Scottish Government has the power to help local authorities mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax and we will support it if it is brave enough to do so.

A number of creative solutions have been suggested. The Scottish Government should look at them and consider how it can help people. My local authority, West Dunbartonshire Council, is not going to evict tenants provided that they engage with the council's debt counselling and repayment services. It has also added the maximum allowed to the discretionary housing payment pot, but it simply is not enough to cope with demand.

Local authorities need help. Communities across Scotland need help. It is truly the worst kind of politics to have the power to protect people now but to suggest that they simply wait until 2016 before anything is done. This is about people's lives. The SNP needs to raise its game.

16:52

Sarah Boyack: No one has really argued effectively against our amendment, with the honourable exception of Margaret Mitchell. Today, the issue is that we have a very tight set of constraints on local government. Today's Accounts Commission report is a real wake-up call. That is the context for our discussion. The Accounts Commission reports a 39 per cent increase in local authority debt levels in the past five years. That is on the cabinet secretary's watch. Does he have concerns about that? How does it square with this year's whopping £52 million capital spend cut for local authorities? That will simply make a bad situation worse.

How sustainable is local government finance? Given the financial straitjacket that the Scottish Government has put local authorities in, what does it intend to do to tackle that problem?

The Accounts Commission recommends more financial and project management skills, and particularly business planning skills, in local government. When we debated the draft order last month, I highlighted the loss of staff across local authorities. Local authorities have taken the biggest hit in staff numbers—disproportionately so—in the public sector. What impact has that loss of expertise had on the quality and terms of

service delivery? The need for effective service delivery becomes even more acute when there is less money around. The predictions are that there will be less money next year, too.

Does the SNP have concerns about the ability of local authorities to employ sufficient staff to provide the crucial financial expertise and project and risk management skills that we urgently need? What of the impact of last year's loss of 14,000 staff from local authorities, given that the same is predicted again this year? Quite apart from the human impact of that on families, there is also an impact on hard-pressed communities. It means less money in our local economy, less money being spent on local goods and less money for our local businesses.

Since the SNP came to power seven years ago, it has made great play of its partnership with local authorities, yet this has been a centralising Government, as is demonstrated by the order before us today.

The concordat has failed our local communities. It is a way for the Scottish Government to control local authorities' purse strings and to pass all the blame to them when things go wrong.

The proposal in our amendment would be a small but significant step towards allowing local authorities to manage their cash more effectively, and it would have a huge impact on our constituents and the people who will suffer from the iniquitous bedroom tax and the welfare reforms that the Tories are pushing on us. We must do what we can do. It is a dented shield, but it is still a shield. Let us use that shield properly.

16:55

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): My opening remark concerns construction. I thought that the Labour Party's philosophy was to invest in capital projects to stimulate the economy, but the spokesperson has this afternoon disowned that strategy.

The order is about extra resources: some £70 million to make the council tax freeze real across Scotland, which will be warmly welcomed by hard-pressed families; and the £37.8 million for the Scottish welfare fund, which will protect many of the most vulnerable people in this country in the face of UK actions.

On local government finance, the Labour Party has said that we should do what is being done in Wales. I inform members that the share of local government expenditure as a proportion of Government expenditure in Wales is 30.4 per cent. In Scotland, thanks to the actions of this Government, it is 37.6 per cent.

On the issue of centralising Governments, it is this Government that has reduced ring-fenced funding from £2.7 billion to £0.2 billion in 2013-14.

On the council tax freeze, which is fully funded, there is £70 million compensation out of a £10.3 billion budget. That overbearing centralisation amounts to 0.7 per cent of local government finance.

As Kevin Stewart said, over the same time that the Scottish budget has grown by 6.4 per cent, the local government budget has grown by 8.9 per cent under this Government's watch.

I know that the Labour Party was not very good when it was the Administration, but it is not very good as an Opposition, either. It was revealed today that Sarah Boyack did not realise that, only a few weeks ago, the Labour Party voted against a £10 billion settlement for local government. Imagine the impact that that would have had on front-line services across the country. Labour thought that that was a draft order, but it was the order that released resources, just as the order that we are discussing today releases resources.

I do not recall Kenneth Macintosh saying during the budget debate that local government should get one more penny. No such amendment was forthcoming from the Labour Party. It named three priorities, but local government was not one of them. There was no alternative budget, but there is empty rhetoric. Warm words from the Labour Party on the bedroom tax and other welfare issues are no substitute for the action that this Government is taking to mitigate the impact of decisions taken by people whom the people of Scotland did not elect.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Derek Mackay: No, I will not; I have one minute to go.

This Government has acted to protect more than 560,000 council tax benefit recipients, through our reduction scheme. SNP members are right: if it were left to the Labour Party—or the Conservatives, for that matter—the scheme would not be in place and those people would not be protected from the consequence of the actions of the Conservatives.

Mitigation is the best that we can do with the powers and the resources that we have at our disposal. However, the best way in which to mitigate the impact of the pernicious and cruel policies of a Government that this country did not elect is—*[Interruption.]* I see that Labour members know what is coming. They know that the answer is a single word: independence. That is the best way in which to protect the people of this nation.

The order reflects partnership working with local government, which we will continue to engage in

to defend our front-line services and the people of this country.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-05934.3, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05934, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on Scotland—the best place to grow up, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy 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)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 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 Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-05934.2, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05934, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on Scotland—the best place to grow up, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 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)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)

McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 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

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 83, Against 0, Abstentions 32.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next vote, I remind members that if they do not wish to agree to an amendment they need to make that clear.

The next question is, that amendment S4M-05934.1, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05934, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on Scotland—the best place to grow up, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)

MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 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

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 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)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 19, Against 62, Abstentions 35.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-05934, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on Scotland—the best place to grow up, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament supports the Scottish Government's ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up; recognises that early intervention and an approach that builds on strengths are essential; welcomes the Scottish Government's actions to speed up the pace of change; supports Getting It Right for Every Child, the Early Years Task Force and the *National Parenting Strategy*; agrees that Scotland's children and young people deserve nothing but determined action to achieve the best outcomes for them from the Scottish Government, the Parliament, public services and the third sector across Scotland, all working in partnership, and agrees that one of the best ways to ensure that there is the earliest identification of problems is the introduction of a universal health visitor system, particularly for children aged from 0 to 2.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-05924.1, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05924, in the name of John Swinney, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy 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)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 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)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)

Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 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)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 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)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
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 Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 35, Against 81, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-05924, in the name of John Swinney, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Amendment Order 2013 [draft] be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:05.

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