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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

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Thursday 29 November 2012

Session 4

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Thursday 29 November 2012

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME	14109
Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 (Implementation).....	14109
Sewer Network (Guidance to Scottish Water).....	14110
Commercial Radio (Office of Communications).....	14111
Trunk Road Maintenance (South-west Scotland).....	14112
Crofting Townships.....	14114
Common Agricultural Policy (Reform).....	14116
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	14118
Engagements.....	14118
Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings).....	14122
Cabinet (Meetings).....	14125
Local Government (Structure).....	14126
National Health Service (Serious Incidents).....	14127
Oil Industry (Role in Economy).....	14129
SCOTTISH MEDIA PANEL	14131
<i>Motion debated—[Christine Grahame].</i>	
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP).....	14131
James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab).....	14134
Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP).....	14135
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con).....	14137
Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP).....	14138
The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop).....	14140
REMPLOY	14144
<i>Motion moved—[Fergus Ewing].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Patricia Ferguson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Mary Scanlon].</i>	
The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing).....	14144
Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab).....	14149
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	14153
Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP).....	14156
Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	14158
Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP).....	14161
Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab).....	14163
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP).....	14166
Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab).....	14168
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP).....	14170
Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP).....	14172
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab).....	14174
Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP).....	14176
Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab).....	14179
Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP).....	14181
Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP).....	14183
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind).....	14185
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	14187
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	14189
Fergus Ewing.....	14193
BUSINESS MOTION	14197
<i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.</i>	
The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick).....	14197
DECISION TIME	14199

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 29 November 2012

General Question Time

11:40

Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act 2011 (Implementation)

1. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress there has been with the implementation of the Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act 2011. (S4O-01546)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): A range of important provisions in the act have commenced, including increased fines for offences under houses in multiple occupation licensing, and landlord registration. Section 32, which clarifies the law on premiums, will commence tomorrow. That means that landlords and letting agents will be permitted only to charge a tenant rent and request a refundable deposit.

In the near future we will produce a strategy for the private rented sector, as well as introducing the new mandatory tenant information pack to improve the accessibility of information available to tenants.

James Dornan: Does the minister agree that local authorities must continue proactively to ensure that landlords are registered properly and that they understand their responsibilities to the communities in which they let properties? Will she assure me that the Scottish Government will continue to monitor the implementation of the legislation and take further action if and when required?

Margaret Burgess: I agree with James Dornan that both local authorities and landlords have a responsibility to improve standards in the sector. The Scottish Government has also offered support to local authorities in their work to tackle the issues in the private rented sector. For example, we have recently provided a third year of funding to Glasgow City Council for landlord registration enforcement activity in Govanhill and surrounding hotspots in recognition of the unique combination of issues in the area. We are also in dialogue with the local authority to ensure that it has the powers that it needs to address the issues.

I assure James Dornan that the Scottish Government continues to monitor the implementation of the legislation and that it will take further action when required.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Apart from meetings of the implementation group, what steps are being taken to increase public awareness of the legislation?

Margaret Burgess: The Scottish Government has undertaken communication activity to raise awareness of the legislation. That includes working with local authorities to ensure that landlords are aware of their duties relating to housing, houses in multiple occupation and landlord registration.

We recently highlighted in the press that the new legislation on the charging of premiums in the private rented sector comes into force from 30 November. We will work with stakeholders, including advice agencies, to ensure that people are aware of what the legislation means for them.

Sewer Network (Guidance to Scottish Water)

2. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what guidance it provides to Scottish Water regarding any problems with the capacity of the sewer network. (S4O-01547)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Sewer flooding resulting from lack of capacity in the sewer network is important. In the 2010 to 2015 investment period we have directed Scottish Water to tackle instances when properties are at risk of internal sewer flooding. Scottish Water has made good progress with that programme and it has reduced the numbers of affected properties by more than 60 per cent since 2002. Other improvements in the investment programme mean that a further 300 properties at risk of external sewer flooding have been addressed.

I very much recognise that there is much more to do and we, along with stakeholders, are considering how future investment programmes should address those problems.

Patricia Ferguson: The minister may be aware of the severe flooding that has been experienced by my constituents in Elmvale Row in Springburn over many years, and my constituents have experienced a similar situation a short distance away on Hawthorn Street. I am also supporting constituents who have experienced flooding in Scaraway Street in Milton. All those incidents have occurred because of incapacity in the sewer system and, although not all result in internal damage to properties, many of those properties are being damaged externally, as are outbuildings and cars, for example. Is the guidance on the prioritisation of internal flooding appropriate? Are sufficient resources being provided to address the problem?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I said in my initial answer, over the 2010 to 2015 investment period we have prioritised internal flooding, but that is not in any way to diminish people's real concerns about external flooding. I am aware of the particular issues in parts of Patricia Ferguson's constituency, including in Scaraway Street and Elmvale Row. I understand that Scottish Water has written to her in respect of both those locations to provide her with information on the investigations that it has carried out. If the member would like to discuss the matter further with me, I would be very happy to meet her—and I am sure that representatives of Scottish Water would be happy to attend as well—in order that a discussion about what more may be possible can be taken forward.

Commercial Radio (Office of Communications)

3. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Ofcom regarding the rebranding of commercial radio stations in Scotland and the level of Scotland-specific content that they broadcast. (S4O-01548)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government regularly meets Ofcom to discuss a range of media issues. Earlier this week, I met Global Radio to discuss its plans for Scotland, particularly in light of its recent acquisition of the Real Radio stations. In those discussions, I pressed Global Radio on its plans for local content, music and news.

Joan McAlpine: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. My concern is indeed the ownership of Real Radio by Global. As she will be aware, Global already owns what started life in Scotland as Beat 106, which was a distinctive Scottish radio station, but now the only Scottish content that it broadcasts is its drive-time show and breakfast show. Does she agree that Maria Miller was wrong not to refer Global's bid for Real Radio to the Competition Commission and that Ofcom should be doing more to ensure that Scotland has its own distinctive commercial radio?

Fiona Hyslop: I believe that Ofcom should carry out its duties appropriately. Currently, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government do not have powers over those areas.

More specifically, I think that we should hold Global Radio to account, and not just for its specific Ofcom obligations. The member may be interested to know that Global told me categorically that it was not closing down any of the radio broadcasting licences in Scotland that it currently owns, nor will it close down any of the radio stations that it plans to acquire. Global intends to operate the licences as distinct services, with dedicated Scottish programming

and news content, and it wants to continue broadcasting peak-time programmes presented by Scottish presenters seven days a week on all its local radio stations. An important point for the Parliament is that Global will continue to operate news services for its Scottish stations that are staffed by journalists based in Scotland making editorial decisions for the benefit of listeners in Scotland. The member may want to reflect on previous decisions by a United Kingdom Government minister, but I think that she and all members in the chamber will expect me to hold the station to account on its word as well as on its specific Ofcom obligations.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): I have worked in most of those stations. I hope that the minister is aware that the assurances that she has been given about Scottish content means only a Scottish presenter; it does not actually mean that Scottish words will be spoken. The news content is usually trimmed to news bulletins on the hour, which means that there is a very small news staff. I think that she must do more in pressing for much more advantageous decisions by Ofcom as far as Scotland is concerned.

Fiona Hyslop: Clearly, if we had powers over Ofcom in respect of radio obligations, we could certainly do that. I will absolutely hold Global Radio to account on its content and its news content, and I think that the member is absolutely right that this is not just about the presentation of news that is made elsewhere, but about Scottish words and Scottish content. That is why I took an early opportunity to meet Global Radio—precisely to press it on its commitments in that regard.

Trunk Road Maintenance (South-west Scotland)

4. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it will be in a position to confirm which company will be responsible for trunk road maintenance in south-west Scotland for the next contract period. (S4O-01549)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): On 28 November 2012, I announced that Scotland TranServ had been awarded the trunk road maintenance contract for the south-west unit. The commencement of service is 1 April 2013.

Alex Fergusson: I am grateful to the minister for that reply. He will be as aware as I am that, of course, that is under legal challenge, so I cannot ask any further questions about it.

However, the minister will be aware that that has resulted in a delay of what will be—by the time the next contract comes into force—almost a year. I am sure that he is also aware that many

subcontractors, many of which are small businesses in my constituency, need assurances that the Scottish Government will continue to monitor and maintain the trunk road network in the region. At this time of year, that obviously includes gritting. Can he give me an assurance that normal service maintenance and repairs will continue to be carried out, and that small businesses in my constituency will not be forced out of business while no formal contract is in place?

Keith Brown: The formal contract is in place. It is not subject to a legal challenge that could prevent it from going ahead. The suspension has been lifted by the court, so the contract will go ahead. An action to seek compensation may still be taken by one of the bidders, but that will not prevent the contract from going ahead. I can give the assurance that the contract will go ahead. The current provider of those services is bound by contract to provide them right through until April next year, so there should be no threat to the local businesses that Alex Fergusson mentioned.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): Trunk road maintenance is a key issue not just in south-west Scotland, but throughout Scotland. As we come up to the winter period, when roads can come under severe pressure because of inclement weather, what discussions has the minister had with councils about providing them with support for road gritting as part of road maintenance programmes?

Keith Brown: A great deal of support has been provided and a great deal of joint working has been done to ensure that we have the salt stocks that we require. The Government holds strategic salt reserves in case any council or other body gets into difficulties with stock. Along with councils, we currently hold in stock more salt than we used during the entire winter two years ago, which was an extremely severe winter.

Beyond that, regular discussions take place with local authorities and others. A lot of joint working is being done with councils through various processes such as the road maintenance review, and the discussions that have taken place have led to commitments to increase joint working in the future. Therefore, I am confident that the work that is being done will mean that each of the organisations that looks after different parts of the road network—whether we are talking about the local authorities that look after local roads or the trunk road operators that look after the trunk roads—is well placed to cope with what we expect to happen over the winter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Question 5 has not been lodged. We regret that no explanation has been provided.

Anne McTaggart was to have asked question 6, but it appears that she is not in the chamber.

Alison McInnes has not lodged question 7, but she has provided an explanation.

Crofting Townships

8. Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made with the development of crofting townships. (S4O-01553)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government is committed to the development of crofting townships through increasing the number of crofters in a township and supporting townships' plans for growth. Highlands and Islands Enterprise has helped townships across the region in planning their growth development. Implementation of those plans is currently being delivered by various townships. The Crofting Commission has encouraged the development of new crofts through better regulation.

Jean Urquhart: Does the minister agree that the Crofting Commission and HIE need to have a close working relationship to further the interests of the crofting community, particularly in the light of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and the fact that some notices of eviction are being served?

Paul Wheelhouse: I agree with Jean Urquhart that it is important for the Crofting Commission and HIE to engage in good partnership working, and I am confident that that will be the case, particularly with the appointment of Susan Walker as convener of the Crofting Commission. From her experience in her community of Camuscross and Duisdale, she has good knowledge of the importance of the community development function that HIE has now taken on responsibility for in relation to crofting. I am very confident that the partnership working between HIE and the Crofting Commission will help to address the issues that the member rightly raises.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I remind members that all parties supported the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. Will the minister ensure that communications between the Crofting Commission and crofting townships as regards development proposals and an exchange of views on neglect and absenteeism are straightforward, so that a sustainable future for croftlands and crofters can be supported?

Paul Wheelhouse: I agree with Rob Gibson that good communication channels are needed. As I set out in my response to Jean Urquhart, we have a great opportunity, because the Crofting Commission's convener, Susan Walker, is keen to

engage with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, given her experience of development issues.

As for absenteeism and the sustainability of croft land, the control of the development of land in the crofting counties is primarily the responsibility of local authorities, which support developments that promote crofting activities. In assessing any development proposals, local authorities—in consultation with the commission as a statutory consultee—undertake careful assessments to ensure that proposals will not be prejudicial to wider crofting community interests.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise has a role in unlocking the potential of rural communities through its development function, as I said. It uses that role to offer opportunities to selected communities in fragile parts of HIE's area that are willing to take forward ownership of community planning.

When crofters have specific concerns about crofting neglect and absenteeism, they can contact the commission directly, and I encourage them to do that.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister give an update on the progress that the Crofting Commission is making on creating a simple and practical template form for grazings committees to use as part of their duty to report under the 2010 act?

Paul Wheelhouse: I recognise the issue that Jamie McGrigor raises and I know that there have been tensions in relation to common grazings. Discussions are on-going between the Crofting Commission and my officials with the aim of having a streamlined process and reducing the perception that the duty will be onerous on grazings committees. I would be happy to meet him to outline the action that we are taking to progress the issue.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): There is concern in townships that, if grazings clerks are seen to police activities, that will break down the working relationships between grazings clerks and other crofters. Will the minister take that seriously and, if need be, change the legislation to remove the onerous task from grazings clerks?

Paul Wheelhouse: As I said in reply to Jamie McGrigor, I recognise the point that Rhoda Grant makes about tensions and the grazings committee members' perception that an onerous task has been put on them. I am confident that we can reach a conclusion that will mean less risk that the situation is a problem, but I am happy to meet Rhoda Grant along with Jamie McGrigor to see whether we can address their concerns.

Common Agricultural Policy (Reform)

9. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the European Commission regarding the reform of the common agricultural policy. (S4O-01554)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead, has had a number of meetings with Commissioner Ciolos—the most recent was in Edinburgh on 20 September. There is also regular contact between Scottish Government officials and European Commission officials.

As I am sure Bruce Crawford is aware, Scotland has distinct needs that differ from those elsewhere in the United Kingdom. However, for the present round of negotiations, in which Scotland does not have a seat at the top table, Scotland relies on the UK to negotiate a fairer settlement on our behalf.

Bruce Crawford: I understand that Ireland receives over £500 million more in financial support for its farmers from the CAP than we in Scotland receive. Will the minister explain why that is the case? Can the imbalance between what happens in Scotland and in Ireland be changed in the forthcoming negotiations? If not, why not?

Paul Wheelhouse: Bruce Crawford is right: like the vast majority of the other countries in Europe, Ireland receives a far better deal through the CAP budget than Scotland does. We receive the fourth-lowest share of the pillar 1 budget, which is the single farm payment, and the lowest pillar 2 payment. Given Scotland's distinct agricultural needs, that issue must be addressed. The cabinet secretary is doing his utmost to gain the UK Government's support for making that a priority. I hope that the whole Parliament and not just my colleagues in government will support the cabinet secretary's efforts to ensure that our farmers and crofters have a future in agriculture.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): Given what the minister just said, will he please explain why Scottish National Party members of Parliament in Westminster voted to slash the CAP budget?

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): He won't find that in his notes. [*Laughter.*]

Paul Wheelhouse: The Scottish Government supports the European Commission proposal that would mean a real-terms cut of about 10 per cent in the CAP budget. However, we oppose the additional cuts that the UK Government and now Mr Van Rompuy want, which would mean further cuts to CAP receipts.

Direct payments and rural development funding play a vital role in supporting food production and preventing land abandonment in Scotland. As I

said, Scotland already receives the fourth-lowest pillar 1 payment and the lowest pillar 2 payments anywhere in Europe. It is worth stating that, if the UK gains any additional funding through convergence proposals, it will be because Scotland's payments are so low, and we expect the UK Government to reflect that in an allocation to Scotland.

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-01012)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): For the rest of the day, I suspect that, like many members, I will be reading the Leveson report with great interest.

Johann Lamont: Indeed. I look forward to reading the report myself.

As the First Minister mentioned, Lord Leveson will publish his report on the regulation of the press in the next hour and a half. After the excesses of phone hacking, including into the phone of Milly Dowler, there has to be change. However, as we try to restore the public's confidence in the press, we also need to protect press freedom, and we need to know that those who implement the Leveson recommendations will do so in the interests of the whole nation, not just themselves.

In that context, when did the First Minister last personally complain to a newspaper about its coverage?

The First Minister: I will check the record and see whether I can help Johann Lamont with that.

On the substance of the Leveson report—which is a hugely important matter—as Johann Lamont will realise we cannot pre-empt the recommendations of a report that we have not yet seen, but we can assume that it will take a serious and considered view of the regulation of the press and of other, related matters that are devolved to Scotland, such as criminal prosecution, defamation and the functions of the police service.

I have made it clear that, personally, I favour not the state regulation of the press but a strengthened press council that has the support of the print media industry and—more importantly—the confidence of the wider public, who have rightly been angered by recent episodes concerning phone hacking, blagging and potential illegal activity. Such a system needs to ensure redress for people with no great resources, and a link to statute is also possible, as in the model that has been pursued in Ireland.

It is entirely possible that Lord Leveson may propose a more thoroughgoing statutory underpinning of regulation. It is therefore important that we in the Parliament have a proper process for considering how we will take forward the

Leveson report in the Scottish context. I would like to set out a proposed process that the Parliament may wish to follow.

First, as I have already indicated, members of the Scottish Parliament will rightly have the opportunity to debate the Leveson report in further detail next week.

Secondly, I will invite all the other political parties in the Parliament to meet me to seek their views on the report. It is important to achieve cross-party agreement in Scotland on the best way forward.

Finally—and if agreed to—I propose the establishment of an independent implementation group that is chaired by a current or recent Court of Session judge with five non-politician members. The purpose of the group would be to consider how best to implement the Leveson proposals in the context of Scots law and the devolved responsibilities of the Parliament. That will allow the process and any proposed changes to go through the normal parliamentary procedures.

Johann Lamont: There was a great deal in that, and I wonder whether it might have been more beneficial if, post Leveson reporting, we had had a full statement from the First Minister in that regard. I also note that the First Minister did not answer my question.

Politicians and press owners having an unhealthy close relationship is a big issue. I have no doubt that the First Minister will be able to give us a list of examples of various people in my party and others who have attended events that have been hosted by the Murdochs. We know that there was an unhealthy close relationship, but we also know that the First Minister is the only leader of a mainstream political party to host Rupert Murdoch since the stomach-turning revelations that one of his newspapers hacked Milly Dowler's phone. Does the First Minister understand that his relationship with Murdoch undermines any confidence that we can have in him to set up a regulatory system for a free press?

The First Minister: I had hoped that Johann Lamont would rise to the occasion and the issues that are before us.

We know the frequency of meetings with various political leaders. We could debate the issue in terms of Gordon Brown's 17 meetings with Rupert Murdoch over three years when he was Prime Minister, against my five meetings in five years. We could talk about going in the back door of Downing Street, rather than releasing a press statement immediately after a meeting. We could do all that, but is it not rather better to address the big issue facing the country and the Parliament?

The question is whether we in this Parliament can find a process to deal with the issue. Incidentally, that looks unlikely to happen at Westminster as my understanding is that the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister will make conflicting statements in response to Leveson, but might it be possible in this Parliament, given all that has happened and given our responsibilities, to actually find a way forward?

Johann Lamont said that there is a lot in what I said, and I welcome that, but could we at least have a response on all-party talks and on finding a process to take forward Leveson's recommendations and to look at them in a Scottish context? We might actually find a solution. Because of the importance of the issue, and in deference to the victims of the illegal and potentially illegal activities, might we just rise to the occasion and point a way forward?

Johann Lamont: Perhaps in deference to the victims of all those horrific activities and in an attempt to rise to the occasion, the First Minister might have apologised for being the only mainstream politician to meet Murdoch after the revelations came to a head.

The First Minister says that he does not want to pre-empt Leveson, but he then does exactly that by saying that he wants Scotland to have a separate regulatory system with a separate Scottish ombudsman. Considering that he would ultimately be responsible for their appointment, and given his track record, can he understand why the rest of us might fear that he sees Leveson as a chance for him to exercise control over the Scottish press on an unprecedented scale?

The First Minister: Let us see what Lord Leveson has to say. I just point out that one reason why I referred to the Irish system is that ministers in the Irish Government do not appoint the ombudsman. Some elementary checking of the system that I alluded to—which I certainly feel has some currency, considering the evidence to the Leveson inquiry—would perhaps have reassured Johann Lamont on that matter. Furthermore, in what I said earlier, I invited not just Johann Lamont but the other party leaders in the Parliament to a discussion about the issue to see whether we can find a way forward.

I have another point that is important to reassuring people in Scotland. The first occasion on which the police and prosecution authorities in Scotland had the information about Scottish victims was when they requested it from the Metropolitan Police in July last year. The Metropolitan Police had held that information since at least 2006. On receiving the information, Strathclyde Police immediately informed the potential victims of phone hacking and set up operation Rubicon. Since that was set up, as has

been well publicised, three people have been detained on allegations of perjury or attempting to pervert the course of justice, and another four people have been questioned in relation to breaches of data protection law.

Those are responsibilities of the Scottish police and prosecution authorities. It should be reassuring for the Parliament to know that, as soon as the authorities in Scotland had information that pointed to abuses of Scottish citizens, the authorities took action. On that basis, we should have no doubt about the firmness of intent to uphold the criminal law in Scotland.

Johann Lamont: I am keen to urge the First Minister to recognise that, in considering any regulatory system, he should not imply that, somehow, the problems in Scotland are different from those in the rest of the United Kingdom and that there cannot be a United Kingdom-wide solution.

The First Minister alludes to the Irish system. We need rigorous scrutiny of that option and any other options. As he knows, and as we agree, the Leveson process has been an attempt not just to regulate the press better but to restore the public's faith in the press, which has been severely dented after the horrors that the Dowler family, the families of the Hillsborough victims and countless others went through.

I am sure that we can agree that this cannot be a debate in which politicians just talk about our relationship with the press and that there must be an understanding of the deep anger and concern that ordinary citizens feel, right across the United Kingdom.

It is important that we get this right, not just for this Parliament but for Parliaments to come. The First Minister has invited us to all-party talks. Will he commit himself, first, to building consensus throughout the country on how we regulate the press and, secondly, to being bound by the conclusions of the all-party talks?

The First Minister: I would not be inviting Johann Lamont and the other party leaders to all-party talks if I did not want and see the importance of getting a consensus on the issue.

What are the terms of what requires to be done? First and foremost—and my reason for mentioning the position of the police and the prosecution authorities—the law must be upheld and people must have confidence that criminal law will be upheld. I do not think that we have any reason, given what happened, to criticise the prosecution authorities and the police of Scotland for a lack of action as soon as they had the information on which to act.

Secondly, freedom of the press is hugely important within that context of law, as is the behaviour of the press. Thirdly, individuals—or groups, for that matter—who have no resources must have access to redress if they are wronged by the press. That is why the idea of an ombudsman is significant and attractive.

In terms of what we do, surely the key thing that has come out of the controversy, for all parties, is the publication and transparency of meetings with editors and newspaper proprietors. That is good.

Lastly, we have to point to a solution. We have to get beyond who did what to whom and when, and point to a solution that gives redress to victims of malpractice and illegality. That is why I hope that all parties in the Parliament will rise to the occasion and try to build all-party agreement.

I cannot promise all-party agreement, because I am not certain that that agreement exists, but if there is good will on all sides, surely the Parliament can devise a particularly Scottish suggestion and solution that meets our responsibilities, which include the prosecution authorities, the civil law of defamation, the criminal law of contempt of court, and press regulation. Those responsibilities are devolved to this Parliament. Other things are not devolved, such as broadcasting, the internet and the protection of information, but the matters that I set out are our responsibilities. For goodness' sake, let us rise to the occasion, try to meet the circumstances and find a solution for the Scottish people.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): I welcome the First Minister's offer to me to meet him and other party leaders when we have all had the opportunity to read and digest Lord Leveson's report. I look forward to taking that forward at the earliest opportunity.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-01022)

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

Ruth Davidson: This week's official national health service figures have confirmed what members already knew: there are 2,000 fewer nurses in Scotland now than there were when this man came to power. Can the First Minister tell us how much the Scottish Government has been spending on agency and bank nurses to cover for all the posts that he has cut?

The First Minister: I will have the precise figures sent to Ruth Davidson, but I know that there has been a reduction in spending in those areas. I also know, because we have the staff

figures—Ruth Davidson will want to acknowledge this, as other members have not done—that there has been an increase in staff in the national health service since the Scottish National Party took office.

I know that Ruth Davidson will want to do two other things: she will want to acknowledge the defence of real-terms spending and revenue spending for health boards across Scotland as part of the Government's programme and, finally, she will, I am sure, want to congratulate all workers in the national health service—ancillary staff, nurses, doctors and consultants—on the extraordinary performance that we see in the health service annual report and the magnificent responses in terms of waiting times and the reduction in hospital-acquired infections. We can be extremely proud of our national health service. That is something else that should be shared across Parliament.

Ruth Davidson: I thought that I heard the First Minister say that there had been a reduction in the figures. In fact, we spent £94.5 million on agency and bank nursing this year. That is up £4 million—or about eight Ryder cup visits—from last year, and is more than 160,000 extra agency and bank nursing hours this year alone, compared with last year. That cost is far in excess of the staff equivalent.

I see the former health secretary whispering to the First Minister, whom he moved to fight his referendum for him. Perhaps he might want to speak to his current Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing.

That is happening at a time when nursing vacancies in Scotland are at a three-year high. There are currently 1,400 posts for nurses lying empty in hospitals and health centres across this country. Why are nursing vacancies at a three-year high? Why is this Government seemingly unable to recruit nurses? Why is it spending over the odds on bank and agency staff, thereby diverting valuable resources away from improving front-line priority care? Those are more NHS failings from a Government that seems rapidly to be losing its grip.

The First Minister: Ruth Davidson should not mix up and confuse agency and bank nurses. It is actually a good thing that the NHS has a bank of available nurses to meet patient demand.

I will reiterate two things to Ruth Davidson. I say first that, in the face of the extraordinary pressures on spending that have been dictated by her colleagues at Westminster, the fact that we have more than 4,000 more people working in the national health service in Scotland than was the case when we took office some five years ago is a very substantial achievement.

There is an even greater achievement, though. Did Ruth Davidson actually look at the annual report of Scotland's national health service? Does she not think that the progress on waiting times, the progress on cancer detection and the progress on reducing hospital-acquired infection are fantastic achievements? Does she have a scintilla of confidence, given what is being said by virtually every independent commentator about the destruction of the national health service south of the border? The other thing that the SNP unites behind—as well as support for our national health service—is our having a national health service that serves the people of Scotland.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): The First Minister is aware of the situation that is faced by workers at the Rempoy factory in Springburn in my constituency, who have been told this week that they will be made redundant. He may also be aware of the flawed process that has been pursued by Rempoy and overseen by the Department for Work and Pensions, and which we will no doubt discuss and debate this afternoon. I ask the First Minister whether, even at this late date, his Government might consider adopting a support scheme for workers, similar to that which is available in Wales, or might, indeed, consider taking in-house to the NHS that manufacturer of NHS wheelchairs at a time when the waiting times for NHS wheelchairs are still far too long.

The First Minister: As Patricia Ferguson knows, Fergus Ewing has been extremely active on the issue and is extremely sympathetic to the plight of the Rempoy workers. I fully support what she said about the process that is being followed and I fully support the calls that have been made for an investigation.

The debate that will, I believe, take place later today, will give a further opportunity for Parliament to explore a range of ideas about how it can help the workers in their extremity. I look forward to that debate and I am sure that Fergus Ewing, as minister, will approach it with a very open mind.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): In June, the First Minister advised me that the temporary closure of the children's ward at St John's hospital in Livingston was "unsatisfactory" and that steps were being taken to ensure that it did not happen again. Guess what, Presiding Officer: less than five months later, the 24/7 status of the ward is again under threat and there is genuine fear for its long-term future. Can we today get a cast-iron commitment that the First Minister will instruct the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to step in if there is a further downgrade?

The First Minister: The Scottish Government and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing have already made it clear to NHS

Lothian, NHS Fife and NHS Borders that we expect them to engage fully with the public and other stakeholders to ensure that children and babies get the best services across the south-east of Scotland. Neil Findlay can be extremely confident that the health secretary is extremely active on the matter.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

A fuller statement on the Leveson report later today would have been appropriate, but I will engage constructively in what the First Minister plans.

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-01016)

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

I point out as gently as I possibly can to Willie Rennie that the Government asked for the same sight of the Leveson report as the United Kingdom Government. That request was denied by his colleagues—in combination—at Westminster. We asked to see the report yesterday; if we had seen the report yesterday, we could have given Willie Rennie, as leader of a party in opposition, the same access to the report as the Opposition at Westminster is getting and we could have made a statement this afternoon.

I find it difficult to understand how Willie Rennie believes that we could have made a statement while we are reading the report and when he would not have seen the report at all. Perhaps he should have a word with the Deputy Prime Minister, who may or may not be at one with the Prime Minister on the matter. I do not know whether we could have matched the two statements at Westminster, but if we had been given proper access to the report, Willie Rennie could certainly have had his statement this afternoon.

As it happens, there might well be advantages in having the debate next week, because that enables everybody to have a proper look at what is a lengthy and, I am sure, considered report, and to come to a considered way forward.

Willie Rennie: I was trying to be constructive.

On Tuesday, we saw the new chief constable and the police board chair sitting side by side, but facing in opposite directions and in direct conflict on the running of the new police service. Did the First Minister envisage that sort of disarray when he planned the new Scottish police force? Is the problem the people whom he has put in charge, or is it his legislation?

The First Minister: I think that I would describe the situation as they did themselves—as “creative tension” which we want and which will be fully resolved in good time for the establishment of the police service. Willie Rennie’s opposition to the police service of Scotland—the national police service—is well known and has been well ventilated. At some point—given that just about everybody else in the chamber recognises the huge benefits that will come from having a national police service—Willie Rennie and his party will have to explain how they would have achieved the savings that will be made, and the more effective policing of the communities and public of Scotland that will be effected, had they stuck to the existing system with all its inherent inefficiencies.

Willie Rennie: I am glad that the First Minister can joke about this, because it is barely 100 days since royal assent was granted to the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and already the plans are in turmoil. Currently 6,000 people work for the police service in civilian support roles—everything from scene of crime officers to headquarters administration staff. We know that hundreds of those people will have to change jobs, move jobs or take redundancy. Does not the First Minister think that those people deserve to know who is taking the decisions about their future and with whom they should try to negotiate? This is his law and it is his people. What is he going to do about it?

The First Minister: I was not joking to Willie Rennie: I was pointing out that both parties told the Justice Committee on Tuesday that they fully expect to resolve any differences in good time to progress. Sections 17 and 21 of the act are clear in terms of the chief constable’s direction and control of the police service, and I fully expect that any remaining differences will be ironed out and solved in good time for effective implementation—as, indeed, both parties said to the committee. In that light, I regard Willie Rennie’s description as being somewhat overblown, which is a departure from his normal calm and reflective way of asking questions.

Local Government (Structure)

4. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Government has to change the structure of local government. (S4F-01018)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We have no plans to merge local authorities or to change the structure of local government.

Nigel Don: I am delighted to hear that and I thank the First Minister for his comments. The Christie commission encouraged the Government to look at better integration of services. Can the First Minister confirm that that is how the

Government proposes to continue its reform process?

The First Minister: Yes, I can. The necessary reform of local government does not necessarily mean changing boundaries, on which I have stated the Government's position. It also involves the integration of services, better co-ordination and some of the significant changes that are being made to Scotland's public services. All those things are being done, which is fully in line with the calls from various commissioners to find a more effective way forward. Nigel Don is exactly right to point to the significant changes that are being made in the co-ordination of vital services for the people of Scotland.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Did the Cabinet Secretary for Justice not let the cat out of the bag on the sustainability of local government services, given the thousands of jobs that have been lost over the past few years, and given that the Scottish Government's funding regime is not delivering sustainable public services in Scotland?

The First Minister: Sarah Boyack may want to look properly at the local government funding settlement. She will then recognise—I do not know Labour's current position on this—that, if we allow for the real-terms increase in the revenue funding of the health service, which presumably Labour now supports, despite not supporting it at the previous election, local government has a significant rising share of the rest of the available public spending in Scotland. When Labour gets down to acknowledging that, perhaps it will agree with a number of local government leaders, including—most famously—the former president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, who is a member of the Labour Party and who was neverending in pointing out that the settlements that this Government and this finance minister are arriving at are significantly better than what local government faced under previous, less enlightened Administrations.

National Health Service (Serious Incidents)

5. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what lessons the Scottish Government has learned from the serious incidents in the NHS reported in the BBC Scotland "How Safe is Your Hospital?" investigation. (S4F-01021)

The First Minister: My sympathies—and, I know, the sympathies of other members—go to the patients and families who have experienced care that fell short of the standards that we all expect. On our instruction, Healthcare Improvement Scotland has begun a systematic review of adverse events management across the NHS boards. Once those reviews are completed, HIS will outline a national approach to reporting,

measurement and learning from adverse events next year.

I can confirm that we will pilot a confidential alert line for national health service staff who wish to raise concerns about practices in NHS Scotland. That telephone line will support and enhance existing procedures. We will continue to support and accelerate the Scottish patient safety programme, which is a world leader in delivering the safer care that has helped to reduce the hospital standardised mortality ratio by 11.4 per cent in the past four and a half years.

Jackie Baillie: The First Minister has touched on one of the issues that the programme raised, which is the appalling treatment of staff who report serious incidents. That was the experience of Robert Wilson, a staff nurse at NHS Ayrshire and Arran. He called for a whistleblowing helpline, as did we in December, February and May. I am delighted that the First Minister has now come to the chamber to announce that there will be a helpline. Why was there a delay? Will he ensure that the whistleblowing helpline is independent of the NHS? How will we monitor the follow-up from the helpline?

The First Minister: First I say, as I have before, that Rab Wilson is a personal friend of mine; I should put that on the record in relation to anything that is said about him. The helpline will be independent, and I am delighted that Jackie Baillie is delighted that we are taking that initiative.

In terms of the serious matters that I communicated to Jackie Baillie, I know that she will welcome those initiatives. I hope that she and other members will want to view these matters in context. The protection of people who want to reveal bad practice in the national health service must happen, and it must be a confident part of a confident national health service. Of course, we must drive to reduce the number of adverse incidents in every way that we can.

One aspect of the BBC programme looked at the international experience. It is relevant that we remember that the highly respected and independent Commonwealth Fund carried out an international sample survey last year—it was only a sample, of course—called the "International Health Policy Survey of Sicker Adults". That survey showed that Scotland had the lowest number of medical errors in comparison with all the other countries in the sample: our rate was 3 per cent, in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom at 9 per cent and the United States of America at 20 per cent.

Although all of us should drive for perfection, because one adverse incident is one too many, we should balance that by looking at how our health service is performing, as indicated by what is

admittedly a sample survey but which nonetheless comes from a respected organisation. It is something of a corrective to the suggestion, which I know that Jackie Baillie would not make, that somehow our national health service suffers unduly from adverse incidents, the number of which we would like to reduce, if we could, to absolute zero.

Oil Industry (Role in Economy)

6. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government considers that the Scottish economy is overreliant on the oil industry. (S4F-01026)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): No. The oil and gas sector is a major Scottish success story that we should all be proud of. The industry supports almost 200,000 jobs in Scotland and, of course, increasingly sells its expertise around the globe. North Sea oil and gas exports contribute £40,000 million sterling to the United Kingdom balance of payments, and international sales from the supply chain reached £7.5 billion in 2010-11. With more than half of North Sea reserves by value still to be extracted, we can have every confidence that the industry will make a major contribution to the Scottish economy for decades to come.

Maureen Watt: Sir Ian Wood said recently in an interview that the oil and gas industry still has many years ahead of it but that, for the north-east to remain as an energy hub of Europe, it is important that we encourage new oil-related industries to locate and stay in the north-east. Does the First Minister agree that this Parliament must have economic levers at its disposal to ensure that we encourage investment in our vital industry so that Scotland remains a world leader in this field for many decades to come?

The First Minister: This gives us an excellent opportunity as a chamber to pay tribute to Sir Ian Wood, who of course recently retired as chairman of the Aberdeen-based oil services firm the Wood Group. It has been a fantastic success story, built on an exceptional leadership team and talented and committed people. Sir Ian deserves huge credit for the manner in which he has led the company over the past 30 years or so.

I heard Sir Ian saying two things on the radio, one of which was a call for young people to join the oil and gas industry and its tremendous future. It was a rallying call for entrants to the oil industry, which I think is a significant and welcome thing for him to do. Secondly, he pointed out in the same interview, with a rapid calculation, the enormous wealth, running into trillions of pounds sterling, that remains to be extracted from the waters around Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): That concludes First Minister's question time. Before we move to the next item of business, I will allow a short pause to allow members who are not participating in the next debate to leave the chamber quickly and quietly. I urge those leaving the public gallery to leave quickly and quietly as well to allow the next debate to proceed.

Scottish Media Panel

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-02899, in the name of Christine Grahame, on a Scottish media panel. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament would welcome a panel of experts to provide advice to ministers on Scotland's media industry to help identify a strategy and direction, to help enable stability and growth and ensure that there is no democratic deficit in reporting on the Parliament and politics at what it considers this most important time of social and political change in the Scottish Borders, Midlothian and elsewhere in Scotland; while acknowledging that this is a time of financial restraint, believes that funding such a panel would have longer-term benefits for both the industry and democracy, and understands that such a proposal is currently under consideration by the Welsh Assembly Government.

12:34

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank all who signed the motion for what is a timeous debate, given that the findings of Leveson are due this afternoon—I thank him for his timing. I will refer, if I have time, to the First Minister's comments on the issue at First Minister's question time.

The stimulus for my debate is a report to the Welsh Assembly Government on the future outlook of the media in Wales. Two main issues faced Wales in terms of radio and television coverage: first, that Wales is underprovided for by media coverage, which is not beneficial to the reporting and accountability of its civil structures; and, secondly, that media control takes place largely outside Wales or is reserved. For "Wales", we can substitute "Scotland".

In relation to public broadcasting, I pray in aid of my case the BBC's "News at Ten", in which Scottish news is reduced to five minutes, and "Newsnight", which is often pruned—and not always neatly—to fit in with London-centric priorities. The success of the recently launched "Scotland Tonight" in the more sociable 10.30 pm slot demonstrates that there is an appetite for longer coverage of topical Scottish issues.

However, timing is not all. Content is frequently skewed to the south-east of England, and a snowfall of a few inches on the London streets can displace international headlines.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Grahame, can I stop you for a moment? Will people who are leaving the gallery please do so quietly? Thank you.

Christine Grahame: Other offenders in the dock are the 24-hour BBC News Channel, which also churns out news items of a domestic nature with ne'er a regard for the devolved Parliaments, and Radio 4, which I enjoy but which seems to be deeply rooted in the politics and culture of the south-east of England. It is as if we all had the Archers for our neighbours.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I will give way to the member in a moment.

As for accountability to Scotland through its Parliament, I note the refusal of BBC executives to attend the Education and Culture Committee to answer union charges that cuts and plummeting staff morale could threaten coverage of the historic independence referendum in 2014. Former Radio Scotland producer Peter Murray branded the BBC "irresponsible" over cutbacks in Scotland and said that they have led to a fall in the "breadth and depth" of programmes. He also warned that they could take their toll on coverage of the 2014 vote. If devolution had just arrived, there might be an excuse for those failings, but 13 years on, I think not.

Margo MacDonald: I speak as a former broadcaster and one who worked with the BBC when there were proper crews on the ground to cover stories. Just now, there are not the crews in Scotland to cover stories to feed into the BBC News Channel or the main news bulletins. That is where we must start.

Christine Grahame: I think that I touched on that in what I said about the cutbacks, but others might deal with that point, too.

Following the publication of the report in Wales, a broadcasting advisory panel was set up in September. It reports directly to the First Minister of Wales and it gives advice on how to maximise the impact of broadcasting there.

For the avoidance of doubt, I include radio, community radio and local television in my proposal. However, I also suggest that a media panel should include the print media. The sales figures for some of our titles tell their own story. Here are some examples of plummeting circulation in Scotland. Between October 2011 and October 2012, the *Daily Mirror's* circulation dropped by 8.2 per cent to 21,000; the *Daily Record* had an 8.7 per cent drop to 243,000; *The Scotsman* had a 14.8 per cent drop to 32,500; *Scotland on Sunday* had a 17.7 per cent drop to 38,000; and the *Sunday Post*, that stalwart of the decades, had an 18.7 per cent drop to 181,000.

Even if we take account of online readership, those figures make for dismal reading and they

present democrats such as us with a real challenge. If we add to the mix the troubles of local papers, a huge and growing democratic deficit is exposed at the very time when, with Scotland's future up for grabs, no matter which team we play for, we need a full and informed debate across all our media. Heaven forbid that we rely on Facebook and Twitter.

The last thing that print media companies need, be they large or small, is heavy-handed statutory regulation. Here, I make the necessary distinction between statutory regulation and a statutory body such as the ombudsman in Ireland, which the First Minister mentioned. He has stated that he finds that system attractive; later, I will mention the other things that he said in his response today. Certainly, given the misgivings of some editors and proprietors, the Press Complaints Commission is well past its sell-by date, but the wrongs, which in some cases undoubtedly amount to criminal activity, must not blight the print media at large, which reports with integrity.

I unashamedly quote from one of my local papers, *The Southern Reporter*, which got in touch with me about this debate. It states:

"Our readers trust us and look to us not only to report on the great things happening in our region, but also to challenge those things that are wrong or where standards fall below what we should expect.

No reporter from *The Southern Reporter* has ever hacked a mobile phone, nor have we paid the police—or anyone else—for a story."

That is true of the vast majority of our print media. Whatever the remedy, we must defend—most of all, the political establishment must defend—robust reporting, because we all need media that are strong, combative, professional and testing of our politicians. The fourth estate, national and regional, did not earn its soubriquet without merit.

I note what the First Minister said about a meeting of politicians to discuss a way forward following Leveson and what he said about an independent implementation group. I respectfully commend to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, and, indeed, the First Minister, the establishment of a Scottish media panel, which would comprise respected, experienced journalistic professionals to advise—I stress "advise"—on all matters pertaining to the media, both electronic and print.

The print media is devolved, so the Leveson report could be the first issue on the agenda of that advisory panel, because the last thing that we need is an off-someone-else's-shelf, knee-jerk solution. The panel would balance that meeting of politicians and show that those seeking a solution are not just politicians, but the journalists and media themselves. There has to be that coming together.

12:40

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing this important debate, which is almost synchronised with the publication of the Leveson report. It is quite timely, but it might have been overtaken by events to an extent. If we listen closely to the First Minister's statements, we can tell that he clearly has a proposal for a way forward that might not involve a Scottish medial panel, although I think that the idea is certainly a worthwhile contribution to the debate.

In considering whether we should have a Scottish media panel, the First Minister's alternative or another way forward, it is important to take proper cognisance of the adverse effect that some media coverage has had on ordinary people. One of the most powerful advocates at the Leveson inquiry was Margaret Watson from Glasgow, who sadly lost her daughter when she was murdered more than 20 years ago. There was coverage in the newspapers, and some disparaging remarks in newspaper columns resulted in Mrs Watson's only remaining child—her son—taking his own life. Newspaper cuttings were found around him when, sadly, he was found dead. Listening to Mrs Watson, I could tell that that clearly had a devastating impact on her family. We saw a line-up of celebrities and VIPs at the Leveson inquiry, and I do not want to downplay the adverse effect that media coverage has had on some of their lives. However, we all represent constituents throughout Scotland and we must ensure fair and transparent media that properly stick up for people.

Christine Grahame made some very relevant points about how the media have changed. She quoted figures about some of the Sunday papers—I think she said that *Scotland on Sunday's* sales are down to 32,000, and I believe that *The Sunday Herald's* are even lower than that, at 28,000. That shows how newspaper sales have changed over the years. Sales will continue to go down.

We have to be aware that people are getting their information from other sources—and not just online versions of newspapers. I smiled wryly to myself when Christine Grahame was a bit disparaging about Facebook and Twitter, but the reality is that many people—particularly young people—who will be looking to engage in the referendum debate will get their information through Twitter.

Margo MacDonald rose—

Christine Grahame rose—

James Kelly: I will give way to Margo MacDonald as she was on her feet first.

Margo MacDonald: James Kelly is absolutely right about papers going online—it is happening already, very quickly. Just as broadsheet papers dumbled down a bit to meet the market, so online papers will dumb down to meet the twittersy twits and so on.

James Kelly: That is a very relevant point, which the Carnegie UK Trust made in a submission. As well as ensuring a voice for people throughout Scotland and taking into account changes following papers going online, we need proper standards in journalism so that the debate can be informed.

I give way quickly to Christine Grahame.

Christine Grahame: My point about Twitter and Facebook is that they are totally unregulated; indeed, I think that they are almost impossible to regulate. Whatever happens to the press, if we are going to start regulating, we must have balance. As a result, we cannot get our news from totally unregulated sources.

James Kelly: That point is probably worthy of a debate itself, but the reality is that Twitter and Facebook exist and are going to grow, and any examination of the media will have to take those issues into account.

I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate, which, with this afternoon's publication of the Leveson report, is only going to develop over the next week. I look forward to taking part in it.

12:45

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I am extremely pleased to contribute to the debate. Vibrant media that reflect our nation's current affairs, local aspects and culture are important. However, I am worried by some of the signs out there.

In the two years since I left the field of newspaper journalism, the industry in Scotland, particularly the print side, has become unrecognisable. As advertising revenue has gone down on the back of the recession, the cuts agenda has kicked in across our print media. Experienced journalists, both reporters and sub-editors, have left the industry, albeit in many cases with voluntary severance deals, and standards—and with them circulation—have undoubtedly declined. As mentioned, the circulation figures, with the honourable exception of *The Press and Journal*, are on a worrying downward spiral. Although that is largely because of the availability of more up-to-date news sources, there is no doubt that the quality of the print product is in some instances also a factor.

The lack of experience and the overburdening of reduced reporting and subbing pools leads, especially in instances where terms of employment and income levels might have been eroded, to poor morale, the making of mistakes and reporters cutting and pasting from press releases or other sources instead of writing properly researched stories. As for the establishment of contacts that happened in the old days of newspapers, time simply does not allow for it.

I recognise that such issues might appear relatively trivial when over the past year there have been far more dramatic developments at the very top level of the media, including a red-top Sunday paper having to close its doors over phone hacking and Justice Leveson's inquiry, the outcome of which we are awaiting. However, if we want a healthy written press, these things matter.

The motion calls for the development of a long-term strategy for all aspects of media in Scotland to "enable stability and growth". I do not pretend to know how that might be delivered, but the establishment of a panel of experts to advise and help drive such a process would be a starting point. It would be all too easy for us as politicians, who inevitably will feel on occasion that we have had a raw deal from a newspaper or radio or television station, to leave those news providers to their fate, but we have to be bigger than that and recognise the importance of a thriving broadcast and print media that entertains, informs and—yes—holds politicians to account.

On that basis, I would very much welcome the advent of a media panel to advise the Government on how we might build a Scottish print and broadcast media that is diverse, successful and proud to be distinctively Scottish. I hope that such a set-up would concern itself with everything all the way down to local television provision, community radio and—a specific interest of mine—local weekly newspapers, which I firmly believe have a role even in this digital age.

The challenges facing and indeed the approach of such newspapers will vary across the country. My constituency is fortunate to have three weekly papers—the *Arbroath Herald*, the *Carnoustie Guide & Gazette* and the *Kirriemuir Herald*—all of which provide a good-quality offering to readers. There was a time when in parts of this country weekly papers, which have also suffered their share of resource cuts and are in some cases also struggling, were tail-end Charlies in relation to breaking stories. After all, the local daily paper had already covered the items they were carrying three or four days later. However, in some quarters, a change has occurred. As the daily papers have cut staff and lost their local connection, the weekly papers are increasingly setting the agenda, even

though they are still encountering difficulties of their own.

My contention is that people out there retain a trust in their local weekly papers. They tend to be read over several days and, as a parent whose children have at various stages featured in them, I can vouch for the fact that households purchase multiple copies to send to relatives outwith the area. More important, they print stories that the dailies will not run and give local organisations and good causes a publicity platform that they would otherwise be denied. Of course such things matter everywhere, but they matter particularly in rural areas.

As I have said, I firmly believe that there remains a role for weekly papers and that we have to recognise the pressures that such titles are under. Many are in concentrated ownership and face increased centralisation, which carries the threat of a diminution of that distinctive local feel. I hope that the Scottish Government empowers a media panel to pay heed to the needs of and the challenges facing those print titles as well as the more high-profile newspapers and the very important broadcasting sector.

I, too, congratulate Christine Grahame on securing this debate and reiterate my appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to it.

12:50

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I welcome today's debate on the idea of a Scottish media panel and congratulate Christine Grahame on securing a debate on the topic. I agreed with much in her opening remarks. We are at the beginning of an important time in Scotland, and it is important that we have media that are able to represent that. I also agree about the need for effective broadcasting in that area. Her mention of "Scotland Tonight" reminded me that in North East Scotland it is now known as "Rangers News". I hope that the show's producers will take the hint and begin to broaden its appeal.

In this time of political and social change, we must admit that the print media—in fact, the whole of the Scottish media—are changing rapidly. There has been a 10 per cent decline in newspaper sales across the board, and although—as Graeme Dey mentioned—*The Press and Journal* appears to be bucking that trend and we might have something to learn from it, the tendency is for sales to be going downhill. We must accept that a new generation is becoming increasingly reliant on new media for its news and is finding ways to ensure that quality material finds its way into those media to be well read by those who are able to do so.

The conclusions of the report to the Welsh Parliament were based on the information that was gathered by the Welsh committee, and it is on that evidence that the recommendation for an independent forum to advise on policy in relation to the media in Wales was based. I suggest that, without similar evidence being taken in Scotland, the recommendations may tell us more about Wales than about Scotland. Consequently, I think that we need to look rather harder. It should at least be acknowledged that the suggestion that we have in front of us is slightly misleading, as the Welsh Government rejected the idea as far back as July.

Christine Grahame: I do not think that we should just pick up everything—we do not want something off the shelf. However, I think that it is somewhat urgent that we have an independent media panel of experts to advise Government, particularly in the current climate. It would counterbalance the politicians meeting to discuss the response to Leveson, as was suggested in the chamber earlier.

Alex Johnstone: That is an interesting point.

The motion rightly notes that we live in times of reduced budgets and limited resources. Given that it calls for additional spending, it should be carefully scrutinised. Spending to secure a more strategic direction for the development and growth of the industry in Scotland may well have longer-term benefits for both the industry and democracy, but such conclusions are by no means foregone.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the opportunity that the debate has provided to discuss the future of the Scottish media. There is no doubt that added strategy and direction would be welcome in the industry, but it may be that the motion puts the cart before the horse in its proposal to go ahead and create a media panel without first taking some distinctive Scottish evidence to back up the conclusions that can be drawn from the Welsh report.

12:53

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Christine Grahame on securing this important debate. Two or three years ago, I held a summit in Glasgow with the then minister Jim Mather on this very issue. The concerns that were raised then are being raised now, which makes the debate doubly important.

I thank the Carnegie Trust for the briefing papers that it sent along, and I welcome its new project, neighbourhood news, which is a £50,000 competition to improve local news reporting that seeks applications to develop new and innovative ways of producing local news—I plug the fact that I have lodged a member's motion on it. It is a very

good initiative that might get across some of the concerns of members, the newspaper industry and our constituents.

I hope that the Presiding Office will indulge me if I widen the debate. The motion calls for a media panel. There has been talk about the newspaper industry, but I wonder whether the cabinet secretary, if she wanted to create such a panel, would widen it to include other aspects of the media, such as the entertainment industry, and look at the situation that it faces in Scotland as highlighted in the Equity make it in Scotland campaign. The campaign is supported by not just Equity's branches in Scotland but all its branches in the United Kingdom and calls on the entertainment industry and Governments to invest in programmes that are made in Scotland.

A quote from the Equity website about the campaign says:

"Members are frustrated at not getting local opportunities, particularly because they believe there is a wealth of talent outside of London. 'There's a perception among the media elite that you can't be any good unless you go to London, but why shouldn't Scottish performers and crew be able to make a living in their own country?,' said actor Michael Mackenzie.

According to Ofcom, 61.8 per cent of spending by public service broadcasting channels in 2010 went to productions made within the M25. Productions in Scotland received 4.6 per cent of spending, Wales 2.6 per cent and Northern Ireland 0.4 per cent."

The issue is clearly a live one.

I have spoken previously to Equity about the matter, and I went to Equity's make it in Scotland reception that it held in the Parliament on Tuesday night. It basically said that some programmes that are not made in Scotland are labelled as being made in Scotland. Equity is not calling for all Scottish programmes to have only Scottish actors; it is just asking for justice and fairness.

I know that the powers to make some media regulations—such as those relating to Ofcom—are not delegated to the Scottish Parliament but, as others have said, the issue is not just about radio or newspapers. Margo MacDonald—she is no longer in the chamber—made the valid point that we must get the situation in Scotland sorted first. If we are losing talent, how can that talent be replaced?

I make the plea that if we are looking at having such a panel, we involve other parts of the industry, including the entertainment industry. We have Creative Scotland; we have had loads of fantastic films made, particularly in the Glasgow area; we have had Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt—to name just a few of the people involved, although I did not meet them when they were in Glasgow. That shows the strength that we have to make productions in Scotland.

12:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate—her timing is immaculate.

Christine Grahame has long supported the Scottish media and has raised important issues in the Parliament, such as local television and community radio. She is right to highlight the importance of our media. Our media provide the cornerstones of an inclusive and democratic nation. They delight and challenge us, hold power to account and provide jobs and contribute to economic growth.

Of course we have had opportunities in the Parliament, and as a Government, to take on media-related issues. Broadcasting is a reserved matter, but in 2007 the First Minister established the Scottish Broadcasting Commission to investigate the state of broadcasting in Scotland and to define a strategic way forward. The commission's recommendations have since provided a coherent framework for developing the sector. That began in 2008 when the report was published and unanimously supported by the Parliament. Between 2009 and 2012, as recommended by the commission, the Scottish Government reported progress to the Parliament on implementing the recommendations.

In 2010, I responded to the UK Government's local television proposals by establishing the Scottish digital network panel, which provided independent advice on options for establishing funding of a new Scottish digital network given that the commission had recommended that, through opt-out programming, we could deliver local television across all Scotland and not just in those cities already best served by the media. I shared the panel's excellent report with the UK Government, but the UK Government still refused to recognise the importance of the Scottish digital network. However, the panel's findings have continued to inform our thinking.

Turning from broadcasting to the printed medium, I am aware that today will be eventful not just because of this debate in the Scottish Parliament but because—within the hour or perhaps the next half hour—Lord Justice Leveson's report will be tabled in the Westminster Parliament. As press regulation is devolved, that report will also engage the Scottish Parliament, given that significant areas of the Leveson inquiry clearly cover devolved matters. As the First Minister made clear when he gave evidence to the inquiry, we will take that most seriously indeed, and we look forward to considering Lord Justice Leveson's report in detail.

On the wider agenda, we must also ensure that we have a strong media and current affairs sector for the digital age. We need media that have the confidence of our communities and the capacity to fulfil their role in a democratic society. As Christine Grahame mentioned, that wider agenda includes the role of the internet in the digital age and, indeed, the role of social media.

Clearly, even under this devolved Parliament, we have already managed to address a number of issues relating to the media area, but Christine Grahame is right to highlight the need for stability and growth in the media sector. As Alex Johnstone said, the sector's capacity to report on, and respond to, the debates as those develop over the next few years is also important. Across Government, we have worked to support the media sector in areas such as education and training, business support and shared working. Margo MacDonald is absolutely right that the media's capacity to respond is really important, and skills and training are part of that.

It is also important to track the improvements. BBC Scotland has improved its commissioning, with the proportion of programmes made in Scotland having gone up to 8.6 per cent from the previous woeful position of 2.6 per cent. I concur with Sandra White on the importance of Equity's make it in Scotland campaign, which I support, although I was unfortunately unable to attend the reception this week. It is important that we have content and actors here in Scotland and that the entertainment sector is also reflected in Scottish production.

Alex Johnstone: How does the cabinet secretary see the industry responding to that? Is it important perhaps to make a distinction between making programmes that are more representative of Scotland and Scottishness and allowing our creative industries to develop and have their head in producing more generic programmes—as opposed to Scottish programmes—that will sell and succeed internationally?

Fiona Hyslop: The member is absolutely right, but I think that there are three aspects: first, Scotland talking to itself, which is important; secondly, Scotland being able to broadcast and produce productions that can sell not just in England but around the world; and, thirdly, having the technical production capability here. All those aspects are important, but the member is right that we need to be able—we have the capability—to produce excellent content that can be broadcast globally.

Sandra White perhaps got to the nub of what is a real challenge, which is the scope of the proposed media panel. The panel might cover a wide spectrum, including digital entertainment, film and other media including print, broadcast and so

on. Today's debate allows us to consider what that scope might be.

Christine Grahame: The idea, I think, is that the Scottish media panel would not necessarily be static. People could be co-opted on to the panel for specific items, such as the entertainment industry, digital and so on. That is why I would like the cabinet secretary to take away and consider the proposal, particularly in the light of what the First Minister has said. I agree that there should be consensus in the Parliament and that the Opposition leaders should consider Leveson, but it bothers me a little that the politicians' fingerprints might be seen to be all over the response.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I will give you your time back.

Fiona Hyslop: The content of Christine Grahame's motion focuses particularly on the capacity of reporting, which is obviously about editorial control. However, even during the course of this short debate, the contributions from members have covered weekly newspapers, the wider entertainment industry and television production more widely. That is an interesting breadth of scope, to which we obviously cannot do justice in this short debate.

Returning to the print media, I am aware that newspapers are facing challenges in the transition to the online world. More immediately, the imminent Leveson report will provide and define a new direction for the press. We need to assess that report once it is produced, and we will play our full part in taking forward our devolved responsibilities on that.

Clearly, it is important that we continue to hold the BBC to account. I was extremely disappointed at both the content and tone of the response from BBC Scotland to a committee of this Parliament.

Keeping on the debate in hand, I acknowledge that Christine Grahame's motion calls for stability and growth.

I have pointed to how much the sector has been growing in different areas but, as we heard from Graeme Dey, there are significant issues to do with the print media, in particular. Christine Grahame suggests that we should have a Scottish media panel, which could be a rolling media panel that covered different issues at different times.

As far as the immediate issue of the print media is concerned, we await the Leveson report. The First Minister made it quite clear that he takes seriously the capacity, capability and responsibility of this devolved Parliament to take on duties, which is why he has proposed an implementation group.

I want to address the point that Christine Grahame made in her intervention. The First

Minister made it quite clear that he wants to have an all-Scotland response and to ensure that all the leaders of the political parties that are represented have an input into the discussions. That is an extremely important position to take. As a media panel would constitute a panel of media experts, it would give the media plenty of opportunity to express their views. The one group that has not been covered as much as it might have been in the debate is the public, although James Kelly addressed the issue. I would not want politicians or the media to have a dominant role in determining what happens. The public's voice must be heard.

I hope that today's short debate will cause all of us to reflect on the context of any media discussions. It has been a useful opportunity to think about the scope of future discussions on the media and media policy. If we had full powers, we would be able to develop policy that fitted a world of converging media. Looking to the wider horizon, I think that that is an issue that the Parliament will return to again and again.

13:06

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Remploy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S4M-05019, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on Remploy.

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): On 22 March this year, members of this Parliament debated the announcement that was made earlier that month by Maria Miller, the then United Kingdom Government Minister for Disabled People, that the Department for Work and Pensions funding for Remploy would be fully withdrawn by March 2014. During that debate, members spoke with passion about the Remploy workforce and the impact that losing their jobs would have not just on them but on their families and communities.

In the months since then, we have seen the effects of the two-stage process in Scotland, and many members have written directly to me and to the UK Government to express their growing disquiet over the handling of the matter by both Remploy and the DWP. We have seen three factory sites close in Scotland, with 61 disabled people losing their jobs in the process, and this week came the further devastating news that the Springburn site is to close, with a further 45 disabled people set to lose their jobs.

From the outset, in my communications with UK ministers on the matter, I have expressed a wish to work openly and positively to save as many jobs as possible. Sadly, the reality has been different. The commercial process in particular has been run with unnecessary levels of secrecy and it seems to have been predicated on an assumption of the closure of all the stage 1 sites regardless of the commercial process put in place.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I visited the Remploy factory in Stirling again on Tuesday this week. Understandably, given the situation in Springburn, the workforce's hopes were at a worryingly low ebb. That is perhaps not surprising, given that the workforce has fallen from 50 to 30 and that, in effect, there is an on-going recruitment freeze as far as the Stirling operation is concerned. It looks as if the DWP has a policy of slow decline, yet these people are more than capable of winning new contracts as a result of the fantastic quality of their products and their ability to more than meet delivery deadlines.

How best can we help to persuade the UK Government to give these hard-working and dedicated people hope again? Robbing people of

their hope, as the DWP is doing, is just about the worst thing one can do to them.

Fergus Ewing: The best way in which we can give people hope is by calling a halt to the process now to allow time for an orderly transition from Remploy to other means of securing that employment. I say that having had the opportunity to visit the Stirling factory in the constituency that Mr Crawford represents, having spoken to many of the workforce there, and having, *inter alia*, ascertained that the goods that they produce in Stirling are of high quality. I believe that they produce chemical, nuclear and biological warfare suits that are purchased by the Ministry of Defence and used by armed forces personnel. The factory hopes to get another order, and I have asked Esther McVey whether that order can be delivered through the MOD as part of a process to try to further secure, or to secure, the future in Stirling.

In consequence of the experience in the stage 1 process, the Scottish Government, officials and potential bidders alike have not been provided with relevant and essential information in sufficient time for any purchaser to be able to proceed, such as an asset value of the sites. Such information might have supported action to save the factories. All members will know that, in any situation in which a company is in difficulties and people want to try to preserve it, they need information about the value of the assets, the levels of wages and the obligations that they would be taking on. Without that information, they have their hands tied behind their backs and they cannot reasonably be expected to participate in the process.

In the past few weeks I have visited all five of the Remploy front-line sites that are marked down for stage 2 and I have been told repeatedly that staff feel uninformed and do not know what their future holds. Many of them have said that they do not think that they can afford a Christmas this year and that their jobs will be over next March. That is what I have found when speaking to many of the staff across the five sites.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the opportunity for the workforce at Remploy Aberdeen to make a realistic bid for its premises was fundamentally undermined by the failure of Remploy to provide them with a valuation of the factory and the price for which it was prepared to sell or lease those premises?

Fergus Ewing: I certainly think that that opportunity should have been provided. I tend to agree with Mr Macdonald that had that opportunity been provided, it would have been easier to perhaps secure that future, just in the way that the future of Glencraft was secured by the intervention of Production Services Network—PSN—which is

now part of the Wood Group. Some major players in the private sector in this country feel a sense of moral obligation towards workers in supported employment.

The effect of the cloud of uncertainty greatly affects the staff—that is, the people whom we are here to represent and whose future is the foremost purpose of this debate.

Officials from the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and Just Enterprise—which delivers a business support programme of services and which I have asked to support potential bidders—have been denied information about the factory sites and those bidders. Thereby, they have been prevented from providing the type of support that they exist to provide and that has been very unfortunate indeed. It is also unfortunate that a great deal of time has had to be spent on the constant monitoring of the stage 1 process and on our attempts to be more involved with the commercial arrangements.

There is no doubt that had we been able to work more closely with DWP and Remploy on this matter, more could have been done to try to prevent the job losses that we have seen so far. That is the point that Lewis Macdonald made. I pay tribute to the work that Frank Doran did in Aberdeen. He worked with the Co-operative Bank and persuaded Remploy to agree to transfer the assets, although apparently it took 30 days. He and many other members across the parties have done a lot of work behind the scenes, and I pay tribute to that.

A number of steps have been taken successfully, and in the coming weeks we will do more to help those who have already been made redundant and to work with the remaining businesses to try to ensure a secure working future for Remploy workers.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): As the minister knows, there is a very productive Remploy factory in Clydebank, in my constituency. Its work involves the production of innards for car seats that the car industry manufactures. Will the Government engage to ensure that that very profitable work continues? I should declare an interest: the business that I own supplies the motor industry.

Fergus Ewing: Yes—I engage and I will engage. I visited the Clydebank Remploy factory with Gil Paterson and saw what it produces. I think that the factory provides two well-known Japanese makes of motor vehicles with an essential part of their seats. That product is highly in demand—once again, it is not a Mickey Mouse product but one that is highly valued and needed, and with which there should be a successful, commercial,

viable and profitable future. That is what I saw in Clydebank with Mr Paterson.

Over the past eight months, I have had regular meetings with a group of stakeholders and officials on this matter; indeed, we had our sixth meeting at lunch time. In the October meeting, members had the opportunity of meeting Esther McVey, the UK minister, to raise their on-going concerns. The group, which includes trade union officials, the DWP, Scottish Enterprise and local authorities, has helped to provide a clearer understanding of the difficulties faced in trying to support Remploy staff, and its invaluable input has enabled me to highlight to UK ministers on-going issues from the commercial process and the development of the support package.

When the commercial process was announced, I requested Scottish Enterprise and Just Enterprise to complete a report on the Remploy factories. Unlike KPMG, this Scottish contingent of business support and manufacturing experts actually visited all nine factory sites in Scotland before producing its report. Although those people were denied access to relevant financial information by Remploy, it was nevertheless clear to them that significant restructuring would have been required to maintain viability of the stage 1 sites. However, in every site, they reported a committed, determined and highly skilled workforce who were bewildered by what was happening to them and sceptical about the modernisation process to date. The report accompanied an offer to any potential bidder of advice and guidance from either Scottish Enterprise or Just Enterprise, but that offer might have been more readily taken up had Remploy been prepared to share the details of those bidders with us.

As many members know, partnership action for continuing employment is our unique partnership-based system of support for those who are at risk of redundancy. PACE officials engaged with the DWP from the outset but even with their well-established approach they have experienced a number of difficulties. Normally, DWP staff offer their redundancy support to any organisation facing closure from the start of any 90-day consultation. However, in Remploy—one of its own bodies—staff who were facing redundancy were denied all PACE support until the start of the 30-day consultation.

Despite the support of trade unions and my intervention at ministerial level, Remploy refused to enable early access to help address the obvious additional support needs of vulnerable workers. That early access is a vital part of PACE's excellent work; the earlier that it can get in to help people who are under the cloud of redundancy, and the longer that it has to build up a bond of

trust—and to give the one-to-one support that it so ably provides in this country to people who have never in their lives had to find a job for themselves, because they have worked in those factories for decades—in order to help them to adjust mentally to a new situation, gain confidence and find strength, the better.

I am pleased to say that PACE support is now being delivered to those who have been made redundant and I made it very plain to Esther McVey when she visited Parliament on 22 October, and to Remploy at the meeting that I have just left, that support must be made available and without delay to the Springburn staff. No delay will be acceptable—I made that crystal clear about 30 minutes ago both to Remploy and to a senior DWP official.

During the debate in March, members rightly asked what steps the Scottish Government is taking to increase procurement opportunities for supported businesses in general and Remploy in particular through greater use of article 19 of the European procurement directive. I am pleased to say that we have launched a framework with four lots covering a range of goods and services. I gave details of those lots to Mary Fee, the convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee, at what I thought was a useful meeting that we had this morning. The public sector is beginning in earnest to act as we would all wish. I will do all that I can to drive that forward and would appreciate the support of members across the chamber in that respect.

Members will be interested to know that a new company formed by ex-Remploy managers—it is called Redrock Document Processing Services—intends to continue operating as a supported business and hopes to employ some of the disabled people who were previously employed at the Remploy Edinburgh factory. Discussions in that regard have been positive.

With regard to more general article 19 matters, I have written to all my ministerial colleagues to ask them to ensure that their officials and agencies consider the framework and article 19 when procuring goods and services. Members will be aware that the Scottish Government has recently consulted on the procurement bill. I think that other great opportunities exist, particularly in the marine sector and the offshore energy industry.

With that in mind, I have written to a range of energy sector contractors, including the Offshore Contractors Association and Oil & Gas UK, encouraging them to make contact with, and potentially to consider working with, Remploy or a successor company in the future. I understand that at least three companies are to receive presentations from Remploy about its world-

beating life safety belt products, which are made in Cowdenbeath and Leven.

However, more needs to be done. The Scottish Government is developing an offer of further financial assistance for redundant disabled former Remploy workers. The technical, legal and financial details require to be finalised, but I advise members that I intend to come before Parliament before the Christmas recess with full details of that support package. I hope that that will be welcomed by all in the chamber.

I requested the debate some time ago, as I thought that it was very important for all members of all parties to have the opportunity to take part in a positive way in determining how we can make the best of a very difficult situation and do what we can for all the workers who are affected by the situation, who are extremely anxious about the prospects for the future. I look forward to hearing what members have to say and hope that they will support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament calls for an immediate halt to any further actions by Remploy and the Department for Work and Pensions to sell or close the remaining Remploy businesses until a full and independent review of the stage 1 commercial process has been completed; agrees that the Scottish Government should be consulted fully on any further actions in Scotland by Remploy and that much greater collaboration with the Scottish Government must take place to ensure the continuation of jobs for disabled Remploy workers across all parts of the business; believes that redundancy support for Remploy staff in the three sites that have now closed was made available at too late a stage in the closure process, and agrees that there should be much earlier access to Partnership Action for Continuing Employment advice and support for those in sites under threat.

14:46

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I pay tribute to the staff of Remploy factories in Scotland—unfortunately, I can no longer say “around Scotland”—for their hard work and commitment to the company over many years and for their determination to fight to preserve their jobs. They have demonstrated an admirable degree of patience throughout a process that has been completely lacking in transparency and sensitivity.

The entire process has been both flawed and cynical. It was cynical to commission a report on supported workplaces from someone who was on the record as being an opponent of supported workplaces. It was cynical to deprive the workforce and their trade unions of even the most basic information about the bidders and the process. It was also cynical to make workers wait—for eight months in the case of Springburn—to learn their fate. For months, the workers have struggled to

make sense of the process, as we all have. In fact, nothing about the process has been either open or transparent. In any other business situation, it would be regarded as a scandal.

I speak today for Scottish Labour, but colleagues will understand if I concentrate on the situation faced by the workers at the Springburn Remploy factory in my constituency. As I say, we have struggled to make sense of the process, so I will tell members what we know. There were originally at least two potential bidders. One pulled out at an early stage in rather strange circumstances and the workers were then promised that they would be told what the final outcome for their factory would be—first in July and then again in September. In October, it was announced that the two factories involved in making healthcare products, in Springburn and Chesterfield, were being purchased by a company called R Link—or R Healthcare.

On 16 October, the new owner duly appeared at the Chesterfield factory to lay out his plans: a cut in hours, cuts in jobs, de-recognition of the trade unions and no recognition of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. He was billed to appear at the Springburn factory on 17 October but did not appear, and no information was forthcoming to the Springburn workers in spite of letters and emails to the company. On 22 October, when I asked Esther McVey, at this Parliament, what was happening with Springburn, she was unable or unwilling to tell me.

A further month of radio silence followed until, on Monday this week, the Springburn workers were finally told:

“As you may be aware, the bidder, R Link, put in bids for Chesterfield and Springburn. However, they have now decided that, to make their proposed business successful, their bid will only be able to include a proposal to operate the site at Chesterfield.”

Yesterday's *Daily Record* contained a story that suggested that the deal had been done before the process had begun—something that the workers and those of us who support them have long believed to be the case. Even if we are wrong about that, how can a Government agency allow a company to go through—as Remploy has been at pains to point out—a long process of due diligence, only to find that that bidder, after thinking about it for a few more months, has decided that he will take only one part of the bid forward?

In a letter that I received from Remploy yesterday, it sought to provide assurances about the process and suggested that, contrary to the story in yesterday's *Daily Record*, the deal had not been done before the formal process began. I must say that it did not do its case any good

whatsoever by enclosing a statement from the winning bidder, R Link—the company that bid to make wheelchairs in Springburn, but then changed its mind because it could not make a success of it—that tells us:

“R-healthcare will continue to offer Remploy customers the same range of mobility products available and, indeed, has plans to extend this offering in the near future.”

The statement goes on to imply that redundant Remploy workers will be able to apply for a small number of jobs with R Healthcare’s new European distributor.

I mentioned earlier that what has happened would be considered a scandal in any other business situation. I am afraid that I can think of no better word to describe the situation—it is a scandal. In a nutshell, R Healthcare seems to think that Springburn Remploy will close and that it will carry on the work previously done in Springburn, but without the inconvenience of employing workers or maintaining buildings. I am not an accountant, but that sounds suspiciously like asset stripping. What is worse—I say this very seriously—is that the DWP and Remploy management are colluding in the process. Not only that, but Remploy management has refused to consider mutualisation, co-operative models or any of the other suggestions that have been put to it.

Fergus Ewing is right to call for a moratorium on the second phase of the Remploy factories review. We support him in that; indeed, we have been saying for quite some time that that should happen. In my view, the Minister for Disabled People at Westminster should end the process now and carry out an investigation into the bid process conducted by Remploy and overseen by the DWP. If she decides against that course of action, I will ask for the process to be referred to the National Audit Office because the matter is of such magnitude that only that will have any credibility.

Scottish Labour has consistently called on the Scottish Government to play its part in assisting the Remploy workers. I am sincerely grateful to Mr Ewing for the time that he has taken to meet with members and the workers. I am also grateful to him for his announcement today. I hope that a grant such as the one he outlines—we will hear the detail later—will be similar to that adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government, which has been responsible for assisting into employment almost all the disabled workers who have so far found a job. We ask that he consider setting up a permanent supported workplaces task force so that a proper strategy can be put in place for all Scotland’s remaining workplaces.

As a member of the previous Scottish National Party Administration, Jim Mather promised that all

Scottish Government departments would be required to let at least one procurement bid under article 19 principles. I am glad that the minister has undertaken today to deliver on that promise without waiting for the Scottish Government’s new procurement legislation to be put in place. My colleague Jenny Marra gave an example when she ably outlined the possibility that exists for local factory to be considered for the contract for new uniforms for the new single police and fire services.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

Patricia Ferguson has given an example from Dundee, but does she accept that the Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries, which I think is located in her constituency, is another good example of a supported workshop?

Patricia Ferguson: I am always delighted to talk about RSBI, and I am grateful to Mr Mason for giving me the opportunity to do so. That is not only a successful model in my constituency but, ironically—as I have mentioned before in the chamber—it is on the same industrial estate as Remploy. The difference is that RSBI’s management goes out and actively looks for work—it does not sit and wait for work to come to it.

Presiding Officer, I am conscious of the time. As I have said before, Remploy Springburn makes wheelchairs and there is a backlog of people waiting for wheelchairs to be provided by the national health service in Scotland. Will the Scottish Government give serious consideration to the idea of bringing the two together?

At a parliamentary reception last week, I discussed with a young disabled man who suffers from cerebral palsy a new sport that he has taken up that involves him using a walking frame as a running aid. Among the disabled community, that has become a popular sport and is one at which Scots seem to excel. It seems to me that that is exactly the kind of product that a factory such as Remploy Springburn could easily manufacture, given its expertise with wheelchairs.

For me, the killer point is that, whereas a normal nine or 10-year-old would perhaps ask for a bike for Christmas for which mum or dad might have to find £150 or £200 maximum, the parents of disabled youngsters currently have to pay £1,400 for a bike. Producing such bikes is the kind of work that Remploy Springburn could easily and profitably do.

I now turn to the Conservatives, whose amendment I am afraid we cannot and will not support. I understand the position that the Conservatives are in today, although I fundamentally disagree with it. However, even if the Conservatives want to stick by the content of

their amendment, as no doubt they will, they must surely share our concerns about the process. I ask them to speak to their Westminster colleagues and to explain to them our concerns. I ask them to put pressure on Esther McVey to consider the seriousness with which this Parliament views the issue.

The point is that, if nothing changes in the next few weeks, 45 more workers will join the unemployment register. Those 45 workers are looking to us for help, and we cannot fail them.

I move amendment S4M-05019.1, to insert at end:

“; calls on the Scottish Government to consider further measures to assist those made redundant by the closure of Remploy factories, including the introduction of an employer support grant similar to the scheme operating in Wales; believes that every effort should be made to ensure a sustainable future for supported workplaces and calls on the Scottish Government to consider establishing a permanent supported workplaces taskforce, involving the First Minister's Council of Economic Advisers, cooperatives, unions and private sector expertise to establish and deliver a strategy to secure the long-term future of supported workplaces in Scotland, and further calls on the Scottish Government to use its procurement powers to greater effect to secure contracts for supported workplaces and to consider ways of working with Remploy factories such as Springburn to find alternatives to closure.”

14:57

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I commend the work done on Springburn Remploy by Patricia Ferguson. I have listened carefully to her statements and, if I may say so, allegations, which I agree certainly deserve a response from the UK minister. I would be happy to take that forward. I live in Inverness, and we do not have a Remploy factory in my area. I have had no representations on the points that she has raised, so she will forgive me if I do not respond to them in this debate.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):

Will the member take an intervention?

Mary Scanlon: I have only just started.

John Finnie: I am grateful to the member for giving way. Does she accept that there are supported employment places in Inverness where the same criteria would apply?

Mary Scanlon: I thank John Finnie for that point. I was going to mention later the connected issue of Haven Products, which I am sure he is familiar with.

I put on record my welcome for the tone and content of the minister's speech and, indeed, of his letter of 28 November, in which he states:

“I am seeking to build business links between the Remploy Marine Solutions, part of Frontline, and senior figures from the offshore energy sector. There are clear

business opportunities in that sector which I believe could be exploited in the future.”

I welcomed that approach then and I have no doubt that the minister is best placed to secure its success. I was pleased to hear today of some progress on that front. His letter also states that several public bodies are in discussion with Remploy Frontline for workwear contracts, which he also mentioned today. I just hope that it is not too late to pull the situation together and move forward.

It is important to put the debate into context, given that it has been on the political agenda for quite some time. In 2007, the Labour Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Peter Hain, made the decision to close 29 of Remploy's 83 factories. Mr Hain stated:

“The reality is that without modernisation Remploy deficits would obliterate our other programmes to help disabled people into mainstream work. With no change, in five years' time Remploy would require £171 million a year on current trends. That would be £60 million over ... budget”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 November 2007; Vol 468, c 448.]

Five years later, the same issues still need to be addressed but in a very different economic climate.

Mr Hain also said that he had managed to keep 55 sites open only on the basis of their having very stretching procurement targets and a tough forward plan. He stated that it would be up to everyone with an interest in Remploy—Government, management, trade unions, politicians and all other stakeholders—to pull together to ensure that the existing factories meet those targets.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
rose—

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)
rose—

Mary Scanlon: I cannot take two interventions at a time.

Remploy has had five years to achieve the targets that were set by the Labour Government. That is why I started by welcoming the minister's commitment to seek to build business links with the energy sector and more widely.

I am pleased that the £320 million of spending on specialist disability employment programmes remains protected and that an additional £15 million has been allocated to the access to work programme.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: I have given Chic Brodie plenty of opportunities, so no—perhaps later.

The review that was conducted by the head of the UK disability forum, Liz Sayce, strongly endorsed the principle that money should be used to support disabled people into employment, and that that money should follow individuals, not institutions.

As Patricia Ferguson said, the minister's predecessor, Jim Mather, said that, at the very least, every public body should aim to have one contract under the Scottish sustainable procurement action plan to make the maximum use of reserved contracts for supported factories and business. We support that aim, and I hope and trust that it will be included in the new procurement bill to give it the status that it deserves.

Last month, Willie Bain, the Labour MP for Glasgow North East, secured a debate on Remploy in the House of Commons. In that debate, it was mentioned that there are 6.9 million disabled people across the UK, 2,200 of whom worked in Remploy factories, and that in Mr Bain's constituency

"a total of 14,600 people are disabled, and 43 of them work at the Remploy site. However, in the last year, under the Remploy employment services, 534 people had got into work."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 16 October 2012; c 64WH.]

Patricia Ferguson: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: I have 20 seconds left. Can I take an intervention, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As long as it is brief.

Patricia Ferguson: The member will be pleased to hear that Willie Bain has another debate on the issue on Tuesday.

I point out that RSBI is in the same constituency and that no one has ever said that Remploy is the only answer for disabled workers. It is one of a range of options, and it should remain.

Mary Scanlon: I do not know whether I will have time to come on to social enterprises, but I think that they have a role to play. I hope that the member will forgive me—because I live in Inverness, I am not familiar with other organisations in Springburn.

I note that some of Remploy Springburn's contracts will be taken over by Haven Products, which is a social enterprise business that has sites in Glasgow and—as the minister knows—Inverness. I hope that existing experienced Remploy employees in Glasgow will have the opportunity to apply for jobs at Haven Products.

Finally, Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very finally.

Mary Scanlon: I was sorry not to be able to attend the meeting with Esther McVey on 22 October—I was at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly in Glasgow on that day—although I have read the minutes of the meeting.

I commend colleagues for raising the many issues that relate to Remploy employees.

I move amendment S4M-05019.2, to leave out from "calls for" to end and insert:

"notes the UK Government's decision to close a number of Remploy factories that make significant losses year after year, in line with the recommendations in *Getting in, staying in and getting on: Disability employment support fit for the future*, a review carried out by Liz Sayce, the chief executive of Disability Rights UK, which advised that disability employment services should be focused on disabled people themselves rather than institutions so that they can access mainstream jobs in the same way as everyone else; accepts that, while the independent expert report highlighted that several Remploy factories were not economically viable in their existing form, the Department for Work and Pensions has negotiated extensively to secure a future for those enterprise businesses capable of existing outside of government control; welcomes the £8 million package of tailored support that will be available from the UK Government to help Remploy employees with the transition for up to 18 months; welcomes the use of Partnership Action for Continuing Employment to complement existing measures to support those made redundant to get back into the workforce, and commends the work of the Remploy employment service, which has supported over 35,000 disabled and disadvantaged people into work across Great Britain in the last two years and works in partnership with over 2,500 employers."

15:04

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I will focus on the fact that, even at this late stage, it might be possible to save the jobs of disabled workers at Remploy Springburn. I understand that Remploy has decided to close the Springburn factory and that the UK Government has approved that decision. However, I firmly believe that the sale process has been fundamentally flawed from the start.

Shortly, I will make the case for holding an investigation into the details and events that surround the sale of the Springburn factory. Before I do so, I note that the UK Government has embarked on the wholesale destruction of Remploy as a valued and worthwhile employer of disabled workers in Scotland and across the UK in the manner of an ideologically driven exercise that gives no consideration to the devastating human cost of closure.

After the GMB union raised concerns with me, I wrote to Maria Miller, the then UK Minister for Disabled People, on 8 June. I raised a number of concerns about the relationship between Remploy and the company R Link, which is also known as R Healthcare. I say for the avoidance of doubt that

I make no allegations of impropriety against R Link, although I will have some words for it later.

It has been suggested to me that Remploy in Springburn no longer controls its own order book. If that is true, it means that any potential buyer would not control the order book, even if it bought the factory and took on the workers. When I raised such concerns with Maria Miller, she said:

"Whilst I understand the concerns held by members of the GMB, I am sorry that I am unable to comment on Remploy (Springburn) or any other Remploy contracts, which are a matter for the Remploy Board."

In October, I wrote to the new minister, Esther McVey, about additional concerns, which involved allegations about potential buyers being excluded unfairly from the process. Her reply said:

"Any requests for an investigation into this process should be raised with Remploy direct."

I do not know the truth behind any possible loss of the key sales arm of the business at Remploy Springburn or whether that affected the sale process. I also do not know whether potential buyers were unfairly excluded. However, it is unacceptable that, when those serious concerns were raised with me and I asked the UK minister who is directly responsible to investigate, she simply passed the buck and washed her hands of this murky process, which has let the workers of Remploy Springburn down.

Chic Brodie: To compound that, the KPMG report shows that Springburn made a small loss of 6 per cent, but the site was lumbered with central costs of more than £1 million to cover sales—which apparently never happened—and marketing. Given that, is it surprising that the questions that Bob Doris asks suggest a rather unfortunate position for the order book and the whole business process at Springburn?

Bob Doris: Mr Brodie has put on the record another reason why the closure of Remploy Springburn must be halted in its tracks and why an investigation must be launched, with a view to finding a new potential buyer. The GMB union has raised concerns about whether the profit-and-loss balance sheet that has been attributed to Remploy Springburn is accurate. The allocation of central Remploy costs of senior managers elsewhere has led Remploy Springburn to look as if it is losing more money than it actually does. The situation is not as simple as profit and loss on a balance sheet; it is about doing the right thing by Remploy workers.

Patricia Ferguson: I agree with everything that Mr Doris has said. I tell him not to bother trying the freedom of information route. An FOI request from my colleague Willie Bain for details of the sale, of business trips that involved key individuals, of

contacts and of interest from second bidders was refused just this week.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Doris has 40 seconds, please.

Bob Doris: I thank Patricia Ferguson for putting that on the record. That makes a murky business stink even more.

I said that I would have some words about R Healthcare, or R Link, towards the end of my speech. If it works out in the end that it will be responsible for the delivery of wheelchairs via the national health service in Scotland, I hope that we will maximise the number of disabled workers who will work on that. However, it is not acceptable for it to enter a bidding process with a view to taking on the deep responsibility of Remploy workers at the factory at Springburn and walk away from the community with the order book in its mitts. Something has to be done about that.

15:10

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The post-war Labour Government developed the Remploy network in order to provide jobs and incomes for men and women who were returning from war-time service and whose injuries meant that they could not access the mainstream employment market. That initiative had broad support.

As we have heard, a Conservative-led Government is closing down the Remploy network. The Government's argument—perhaps like Mary Scanlon's—is that its motive is not to cut public spending for its own sake, but that the Remploy model of sheltered employment is somehow not appropriate for the 21st century. I reject that view.

Mary Scanlon: I am sorry, but I thought that I made a reasonable contribution on that. It was a Labour secretary of state—Peter Hain—who closed 29 factories in 2007 and gave the remaining factories five years to become sustainable.

Lewis Macdonald: That, of course, is a profoundly unreasonable point. To try to posit the entire closing down of the Remploy network on the fact that a number of factories have closed in the past is precisely to confuse the responsibilities of Government and to try to pass the buck for a profoundly ill-founded decision.

I reject the view that Mary Scanlon puts and the view of her colleagues at Westminster on the basis of the experience of disabled people and supported employment providers in the city of Aberdeen. Aberdeen has the highest mainstream employment levels of any city region in Scotland. Next year, Aberdeen City Council will become the

first local council to give more to the Scottish Government in business rates than it gets back in grants. Aberdeen is now the best city in Britain in which to find a job. If supported employment really were out of date, it would be out of date first in Aberdeen, but that is far from the case. What Aberdeen proves is how hard disabled people will try to maintain a supported environment in which to work, whatever the failures of the organisations that are tasked with providing that environment are, because even in a full-employment economy, disabled people simply do not have equal access to mainstream jobs.

Mark McDonald: Does the member agree that we have seen an evolution towards much more of a social enterprise model at the Aberdeen site, and that the Westminster Government seems oblivious to the very strong social enterprise sector that exists in Scotland?

Lewis Macdonald: That is absolutely correct.

The two key providers of supported employment in Aberdeen have been Remploy and Glencraft, which has otherwise been known as the Royal Aberdeen Workshop for the Blind. Both have faced the threat of closure in the recent past and both have survived until now because of the will of their workforces and the wider community that jobs should not be lost.

When Remploy's future in Aberdeen was under review in 2007, its future was secured through modernisation, in the way that Mark McDonald has said. The constituency MP, Frank Doran, lobbied UK ministers and Anne McGuire agreed that Aberdeen should have a new role as the flagship for social enterprise in the Remploy group. At the same time, I and others lobbied the Scottish ministers to promote procurement by public bodies from supported employment providers under article 19 of the European Union public procurement directive. Jim Mather also responded positively at the time, as Patricia Ferguson said.

Glencraft was threatened with closure in 2009 as a result of the proposed withdrawal of subsidy by the then administration in Aberdeen City Council. Glencraft workers came to Holyrood to lobby the First Minister to save their jobs, and Alex Salmond responded positively to encourage the council and other partners to find a way to keep Glencraft alive. As the minister has already said, that way was found thanks to the leadership that was provided by the Production Services Network oil services company, which is now part of the Wood Group—Duncan Skinner's energy and drive and his personal commitment to the Glencraft cause are a fantastic example of what corporate social responsibility really means. That demonstrates that even the most successful businesses in the most competitive industries

recognise that there is no substitute for supported employment for many disabled workers.

I come to the present closure process. Aberdeen Remploy was unlucky enough to be included in the first phase of closures, and it has been a bitter experience. Aberdeen's success in the past five years in developing a social enterprise model was disregarded. The bid that local social enterprises assembled to take over the premises and maintain employment was rejected. The factory is now closed and boarded up and, as of this week, it is up for sale.

However, that is not the end of the story. The wider community continues to believe that those workers deserve our support. Social enterprises such as Instant Neighbour and Aberdeen Foyer as well as Aberdeen City Council, the University of Aberdeen and Remploy's customers still want a positive outcome. Even Remploy has not entirely closed the door on a possible lease arrangement with local social enterprises if a business case can be made. Frank Doran MP continues to work on making that happen. As Fergus Ewing said, Mr Doran has done a tremendous job in keeping the option open in talks with Remploy's national board and Esther McVey.

In the meantime, the workers have not been idle. Kay Clark, Lorna Buchan and their colleagues have set up a new business, Aberdeen Textiles and Workwear Services, as a co-operative with eight members, full or part-time, who previously worked at Remploy in Aberdeen. When Esther McVey came to Holyrood last month, I asked her to ensure that the sewing and embroidery machines at the Remploy factory were made available to Kay Clark and her team. She agreed to do so and that has happened. The co-operative now supplies high-visibility coveralls to oil service companies across the city that stayed loyal to Remploy through the past few months, and it is even diversifying into making and embroidering school wear.

Aberdeen Textiles shows what can be done with local initiative and support. The co-operative also shows the kind of model of supported employment that works for disabled people. It has already recruited one disabled worker who had given up hope of ever working again, and she will not be the last.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you would draw to a close, please.

Lewis Macdonald: Not every local factory has such loyal customers on the doorstep or a private sector partner who is keen to put something back, such as Wood Group PSN.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please, Mr Macdonald.

Lewis Macdonald: That is why it is so important that the Scottish Government stands ready to help the factories that are involved in phase 1 and those in phase 2 to give disabled workers such as the team that I mentioned the right to work in an environment that gives them the support that they need.

15:17

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I begin by sending my condolences to the families and friends of the disabled workers who were killed this week in a tragic fire at their Christmas workshop in the Black Forest. That tragic industrial accident, which was caused by a heater igniting gas and which is being investigated by the authorities, reminds us that disabled workers are just like everyone else in the workplace and face the same opportunities, challenges and dangers as other workers throughout the world. I am sure that the condolences of the whole Parliament go out to the town of Titisee-Neustadt and to the Catholic charity Caritas, which runs the facility.

Supported workplaces throughout Europe and the world provide opportunity and employment for disabled workers but, more than that, they give dignity to workers who just want to be like everyone else. They want to work, earn and be self-sufficient and self-reliant and support their families. The supported workplace model works across Europe.

That is why I welcomed the announcement that Netherton was to have a Remploy factory. When it was opened in 2003 by then First Minister, Jack McConnell, there was great hope that it would be the start of an endeavour that would expand on the initial 70 supported places. Certainly, the site had potential for expansion. Initially, the factory carried out high-end technical work that involved reconditioning white goods for resale. However, the Remploy factory received its first blow from the Labour UK Government when, within five short years, Anne McGuire, the then Minister for Disabled People, stood in full support behind the Remploy restructuring plans that led to where we are today. That action led to a steady decline in the factory, with worker numbers reducing and the gradual deskilling of the workforce.

Lewis Macdonald: I appreciate the member's desire to support the workforce, but I simply point out that the restructuring plan that was carried out in 2007 was intended precisely to maintain the Remploy network and that what has happened in the past 12 months is the opposite of that, as it is closing down the network.

Clare Adamson: I do not want to politicise the issue. I think that we can all come together in the debate.

When I visited the factory before the closure, there were 29 workers. There was no manufacturing at the plant and workers were simply doing order fulfilment for publishing companies and gift-box packing. Mr Roy, the MP for Motherwell and Wishaw, worked hard on the issue and said, at the time of the reprieve:

"I am delighted Remploy have accepted my proposal to keep the Wishaw factory open by partially turning the Netherton site into a training centre to help people throughout Lanarkshire get back to work."

The GMB was a bit more circumspect, realising that if the plant could not prove itself within five years, it might face closure. Indeed, that is what happened.

I visited the factory shortly after I was elected. There was no evidence that Remploy had carried through the business plan that Mr Roy had proposed. The area that had been identified for use for training was ill equipped, with a few desks and chairs. There was no information technology equipment and the area had never been used for training. The staff canteen had been closed and decommissioned. The enterprise looked like it had been starved of investment and innovation. I was shocked to discover that, despite the reprieve having been based on a training centre business model, there had been no budget to market Remploy Netherton as such or take the proposal forward.

At the start of 2007, Remploy at Netherton had more than 70 supported disabled workers. At the time of the reprieve, a few months later, there were 53. When it closed last month, it had just 20 workers. I consider that to be a failure of Remploy. Remploy failed to control costs, especially the extortionate management and administration overheads that were attributed to supported places, and it failed to market its factories' services and products.

Can anyone explain to me why Remploy Wishaw could not operate profitably, when there is an excellent example of a supported workplace down the road? Beltane Products has been operating for more than 40 years, giving gainful employment to people with disabilities. It is highly commended in its area, which includes upholstery refurbishment, leisure seating, healthcare seating, office interiors, curtains, bedding, beds and bedroom furniture. Currently it supports 23 people in its factory. As I said, I am not politicising the debate. I know that Mr Roy has been working with Jim McCabe from North Lanarkshire Council to try to ensure that as many as possible of the redundant Remploy Wishaw workers are accommodated in the Beltane Products factory.

I am interested in other models. I have a background in IT, so I am interested in the Danish company Specialisterne, which gives high-end IT

opportunities to people with autism, in the field of IT testing. It is unfortunate that the office in Glasgow closed, not because of a failure of the model but because of a global downturn in the industry. The Danish model has been successful in giving welcome opportunities to people to take on highly paid work in supported workplaces.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close now, please.

Clare Adamson: Okay.

I note that the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities has welcomed the national framework contract, which will make it easier for Scottish public bodies to buy from supported workplaces.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they have six minutes for speeches, including interventions.

15:23

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Given the content of the Welfare Reform Bill, we should not have been surprised by the UK Government's announcement in March of its intention to shut four of Scotland's nine Remploy factories. Esther McVey, the disabilities minister, has since confirmed that Government funding for Remploy will be withdrawn altogether by 2014-15.

Since taking office, the coalition Government has made it abundantly clear where the disabled and disadvantaged rank on its list of priorities. Not content with deploying rigid and callous capability assessments to persecute the seriously ill and disabled who are unable to work, it has begun to persecute disabled people who are able to work.

Iain Duncan Smith likes to cultivate an image of people who are out of work or on benefits as being lazy. He recently spoke scathingly of a

"culture of entrenched worklessness and dependency",

and said that the benefits system should be "a safety net—not a lifestyle choice". However, his Government is depriving hard-working individuals of any choice, by forcing them out of work and on to benefits. How does it justify that?

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Was Peter Hain persecuting the disabled when he closed 29 Remploy factories under a Labour Government?

Siobhan McMahon: I am grateful for that intervention because to equate what Peter Hain and the Labour Government were trying to do to modernise the service with what is happening now and the shutting of the service—they are completely different and without parallel—shows the extent of the member's argument: as with

everything else, money is the overriding imperative. Apparently Remploy factories are loss making, but if the Conservatives and their Lib Dem vassals were really so worried about systems that lose money, they would turn their attention to the tax loopholes that allow wealthy individuals to Hoover up prime real estate without paying any stamp duty or land registry tax.

If, after that, they were still short of money, they could always send the bailiffs round to Starbucks. Of course, they will not do that because they have discovered, as have many before them, that it is far easier to pick on the poor and the vulnerable than the wealthy and the powerful—[*Interruption.*] Did Mr Fraser want to intervene?

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the member for giving way again. Will she set out in detail what steps the Labour Government took when it was in power to avoid tax evasion by large companies such as Starbucks?

Siobhan McMahon: Absolutely. Every time that there is a question, the Conservatives have to go back to their defence of "What did you do when you were in power?" [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Siobhan McMahon: Thank you.

Blaming it on someone else is just not good enough for the people who are asking for their jobs now and who are in the gallery this afternoon. It is not good enough, Murdo Fraser.

That is why the coalition continues to attack the public sector and the welfare state, and why it has turned its fire on Remploy—an institution that has served disabled people in this country since 1945, the year of the inception of the welfare state. What parallels could we draw between the compassion of the post-war Labour Government and the callousness of the car-crash coalition? However, I do not wish to embarrass members on the Tory benches—although I think that they are doing that perfectly well themselves.

In stark contrast to Mr Duncan Smith's distortions, the 101 disabled workers at the four Remploy factories that are earmarked for closure do not want to be "dependent or disenfranchised". As one former worker at Remploy's recently closed factory in Netherton, North Lanarkshire, put it:

"None of us want to lie at home on benefits. We want to be out there working. There are already millions of people unemployed. What chance have we got?"

She was right to be pessimistic: the record of the Government's access to work programme is shocking.

As my Labour colleagues at Westminster have already pointed out, for all the promises that

former Remploy workers would be assisted to find new work, only 3 per cent of those who have been made redundant have found jobs.

Here is the brutal reality of that statistic: to date, 31 factories have closed, 1,061 jobs have been lost and only 35 disabled workers have found new work. That constitutes damning evidence that the coalition Government's £8 million package to support workers who have been made redundant is woefully insufficient. For Remploy workers in Scotland, where the unemployment rate is already above the UK average, the landscape is particularly bleak, especially for disabled women, who, according to evidence presented to the Equal Opportunities Committee, are doubly disadvantaged in the labour market.

In light of those facts, I fully support my Labour colleagues at Westminster, along with the Scottish Government, in urging the coalition Government to postpone stage 2 of the closures pending a full and independent review of stage 1. In the meantime, this Parliament has a responsibility to protect Remploy factories and other sheltered workplaces throughout Scotland.

I agree that the coalition Government should communicate its intentions to its Scottish Government counterparts in a timely manner to ensure that, in the event of further redundancies, employment advice is available and accessible at the point of need.

However, that alone is not enough. Given the reports that I have heard about the services offered by Skills Development Scotland and partnership action for continuing employment to workers made redundant by the Philips factory in Hamilton, I do not have great confidence in the ability of either organisation to provide the tailored support needed in this instance. If we are to help disabled Remploy employees back to work, we must do more than merely ensure that SDS and PACE are on hand to give advice about CVs.

What other options are available to us? During the stage 1 debate on the Welfare Reform (Further Provision) (Scotland) Bill in May, I urged the Scottish Government to follow the Welsh Assembly's lead and conduct modelling to assess the impact of the act. Once again, the Welsh Assembly has set an instructive example, introducing an employer support grant to help to secure employment for disabled former Remploy workers. The grant, which will cost in the region of £2.4 million a year, will subsidise wages for former Remploy employees and contribute to additional costs incurred by participating companies.

The grant will also be available to local authorities offering sheltered or otherwise suitable employment to Remploy workers for a minimum of four years. I hope that the Scottish Government

will offer a similar incentive to prospective employers. I look forward to further information from the minister after the Christmas recess.

In addition to that, a great deal more could and should be done to ensure that sheltered employers have fair access to public sector procurement contracts. The Scottish Government's forthcoming public sector procurement bill presents a perfect opportunity to achieve that. According to the consultation brief, the bill as it stands aims to promote

"clear, wide and consistent ... application"

of rules governing public procurement. It also aims to facilitate easier access to public contract opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and the third sector.

I believe that measures to assist Remploy and other sheltered employers to win public sector contracts would fit comfortably within those parameters. I believe—as I have always believed—that it is the duty of politicians to show compassion and support for the vulnerable and disadvantaged, especially in times of adversity. It is in that spirit that I call on members of this Parliament to work together to offer practical and constructive help to all those who are affected by the Remploy closures.

15:30

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): The debate is about people: people who have been let down by a UK Government and people who did not need to be let down by a UK Government. The minister said that he called for a moratorium. It is in the gift of the UK Government to allow that to happen but it is choosing not to. The minister also suggested that there was a veil of secrecy—I am not using his exact words, but there was secrecy nevertheless—that did not allow other commercial bidders to go in and perhaps save Remploy factories.

We are painting a picture of the UK Government once again targeting the most vulnerable and disabled in our communities, but those people have great skills. The people who work in those factories are producing what we need within our communities.

As Lewis Macdonald mentioned, when Remploy was first started its aim was to ensure that post-war veterans had places to go—people who had perhaps been disabled during the war; people who perhaps needed just that little extra to get back into the employment market. The ethos was right at the time but reform was necessary.

I am an advocate of sheltered work, but I am probably a stronger advocate of trying to ensure that, if possible, people with disabilities have the

opportunity to work in the mainstream employment market. I remember very well that when I was 16 my mother thought that I would have an opportunity to work in what was known in those days as Blindcraft in Aberdeen. What ambition for her son—but that ambition was based on love and a desire for security. That ambition was for her son to go somewhere where she knew I would be able to gain a secure employment, perhaps for the rest of my employment days.

Presiding Officer, it will perhaps come as no surprise to you that I rebelled against that. I decided that perhaps there were other opportunities for me. However, I remember trying to get back into the employment market and trying to get some money together to go into my social work career. I worked for a company in Aberdeen—CPT—in mainstream employment. It was a semi-skilled job as a machinist, but I was not there terribly long before health and safety suddenly realised that they had a blind person in the factory and I was dismissed. I was apparently a threat to other employees within the factory.

After that, the opening for me was perhaps to go back to the route of sheltered employment. I chose not to do that, but for many disabled people there are no other options. Many people with disabilities, whether they have mental health issues or physical issues, require that sheltered environment. They require the opportunity for respect and dignity: respect and dignity that have been withdrawn by a UK Government that seems to be completely dispassionate towards the people from whom they are taking away the advantages.

Bob Doris: Dennis Robertson makes a powerful argument for disabilities not limiting people from returning to mainstream employment, but does he accept that sheltered workplaces offer an opportunity for non-disabled workers to be part of the mix, particularly young workers who benefit from seeing disabled workers in a skilled environment?

Dennis Robertson: Yes, I do. However, I say to Bob Doris that the opportunities for people with disabilities are very limited.

Mary Scanlon told us that Liz Sayce said that the money should follow the individual and not the institution. That is commendable, but we should get real. We should not kid ourselves: in the real world, people with disabilities are the ones who are least likely to get back into the employment market. History tells us that; from looking at the figures for people with disabilities who are trying to get employment and are unable to do so, we know the facts.

We know that, through the Welfare Reform Act 2012, the UK Government wants to get people off benefits and into work. However, it is closing down

the opportunities for those with disabilities to stay in work. What the UK Government is doing is shameful. It had the opportunity to go to the Remploy board and say, "Get your act together—look at the alternatives."

Glencraft is an example of a company that has been turned around. It was threatened with closure, but there was a moral input from Bob Keiller and his management team, including Duncan Skinner, who went in and saved it. In a very short time, they turned it into a very successful commercial business. That example is there for the UK Government to see, and for Remploy to adopt.

15:36

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): First, I welcome all that the minister said in his opening speech, and I wish him every success in delivering what he can in the remaining negotiations. Secondly, I thank Dennis Robertson for setting the scene for the focus of my contribution, which seeks to remind us that we should place people at the heart of the debate, and that we are talking about people, their families and their futures.

As a society, including Governments of all hues, we talk for a long time and often wearily about fairness and equality in delivering access to employment. My experience of the issue—which is why I am speaking today—dates back to 2001, when I was in charge of policing in Airdrie and we introduced a closed-circuit television system for the first time. We were short of money, and we needed help from quality people to monitor our system. I discovered that Remploy factories and employment services were available and willing to help. Mary Scanlon will be happy to know that the cost, support and sourcing of staff made the business of delivering far more effective and efficient.

The factory was able to shortlist staff for sifting and interviews, and an interview panel was organised at Airdrie police office. More than a dozen candidates of all different cuts and sizes came forward. Various mobility issues were raised with regard to wheelchair access and upper limb problems, and a plethora of health and safety issues were raised by those who count the beans.

Nonetheless, the major issue that I discovered, as someone who was used to managing staff, was a lack of confidence, a debilitating shyness and an inability to communicate properly. I found that, once we selected our five candidates and they came on duty, their timekeeping was perfect and their self-management was first class. However, they spent almost their entire shift speaking to no one—they did not say a word. They monitored the

cameras throughout their entire shift in a most effective and efficient manner, and they supported the people who were out there doing work on the street. That led to an interaction between the police, the support staff and those who came from Remploy.

Initially, there was a reluctance to engage and a fear of the unknown, with new staff coming into the office, and I think that there was a division between the two groups of staff. However, the staff who had been there long term—the police officers—quickly came to rely on the Remploy staff, who ensured their security on the streets, gave them support on the streets when they felt threatened, and provided evidence that allowed convictions to be achieved.

Dennis Robertson: Does the member agree that what probably happened is that people saw ability and not disability?

Graeme Pearson: There is no doubt that that is the case. Rather than the new recruits bringing problems to the offices, they brought understanding, compassion and, more important, a work ethic that was valued.

What did Remploy do in this whole circumstance? It prepared the people for entry into normal work. It gave them the opportunity to have the courage to have a go and developed a desire in them to contribute. As Dennis Robertson said in his eloquent speech, the Remploy people wanted to work, be part of an effective society and deliver as best they could. They wanted to be employed.

As for the results, although I had my doubts that they would survive in our macho environment, they became an essential part of each shift. When I tried to move monitors from one shift to another, there was an outcry because the police staff rely on people they trust and they knew that the monitors were first class. They became valued members of the shift and became outgoing. They even spoke their minds after a few months, and they were invited to all the social functions that the shifts engaged in.

The practical results in Airdrie were that crime dropped by 21 per cent in the first two years, there was a 48 per cent fall in crimes of dishonesty, and detections were 16 per cent up. For the operators, that was a tremendous impact. They felt valued and had a sense of satisfaction with their work. They were genuine contributors to what we did in the office and each of them brought the strength of their knowledge and the strength of their disability into play in the police station.

Without the Remploy element, I do not know whether those people would have made the transition to normal work. All these years later I still bump into them in various places in the central

belt. Indeed, one of them has gone on to become a senior manager of a local authority unit.

Disabled people deserve the opportunity to participate. There are many opportunities where they could lead the way in terms of employment. There was a disclosure in the *Daily Record* yesterday of a secret deal selling out Remploy workers, which is shameful act that needs to be reviewed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Will you come to a conclusion?

Graeme Pearson: We need to know who is responsible for such matters. We value people who work for us within Remploy, and I trust that the minister will look further and will examine options and find new solutions to deliver opportunities for Remploy workers across Scotland.

15:43

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I support the motion, and I commend the minister for the amount of effort that he has put in on this issue and for the non-partisan way in which he has gone about that.

There is one thing for sure: I will not support the Conservative amendment. However, I give credit to the Conservatives because at least they have bothered to turn up for the debate, unlike the Liberal Democrats, who seem unable to turn up for any of these kinds of debate and are unwilling to defend the indefensible policies of their Government at Westminster. It is a real shame that they have not made the effort to hear what members have to say.

We have a double-pronged attack on disabled people at this moment in time. We have a situation whereby we are about to see massive changes to disability living allowance, with the change to personal independence payments, which will lead to a cut of around £250 million for claimants in Scotland. At the same time, we are seeing the demise of many of the Remploy factories that we have in this country. It is a double-pronged attack on disabled people in Scotland.

The closures are at odds with the Conservatives' stated aim for welfare reform. If they truly want to get people back to work, they have to give opportunities to every single person, no matter what their capabilities are.

I agree that, where possible, we should ensure that disabled folk can go into mainstream employment, but we know that, as Dennis Robertson pointed out, there are times when that will not be possible and when impediments are put in the way of people entering the mainstream jobs market. We must also remember that, at present,

unemployment rates are quite high and it is difficult for able-bodied people to get into work, never mind folk with severe disabilities.

One thing that I find really galling—it is in the Tory amendment—is the claim that

“several Remploy factories were not economically viable”.

My experience of the Aberdeen situation—I am sure that my colleagues from the north-east will agree with this—is that a huge amount of costs were put on the factory that had nothing to do with what was happening in it. The Aberdeen factory has actually reduced costs dramatically in the past couple of years since the previous reform.

John Mason: I can tell the member that that is not just the case in Aberdeen—it is the same in Glasgow. As I understand it, RSBI is profitable, and one thing that it has done that Remploy has not done is to develop its products. It has changed over the years, and it has worked with the Glasgow Housing Association and other organisations.

Kevin Stewart: I will come back to the points that Mr Mason has made later in my speech. I want to carry on discussing the burden of the costs that were put on Remploy factories.

Mr Macdonald said that, during the negotiations about the Aberdeen factory, Remploy would not put a value on it. I have been told that the factory is worth about £400,000. For a factory of that value, we would expect an annual rent of about £40,000, but no—Remploy was charging Aberdeen Remploy £80,000 a year for the factory.

Dennis Robertson: Scandalous.

Kevin Stewart: It is indeed an absolute scandal. The UK minister came here and said that that was the market value, but it is not the value in any of the markets that I know. That was an added burden on that Remploy factory.

Lewis Macdonald: I simply add to Mr Stewart's outrage that the value of the property is probably significantly less than £400,000; £250,000 would be closer to the mark.

Kevin Stewart: I am not an expert on these things and I take at face value what I am told by others. No survey has been done. The member is probably right that the value is lower, but I was giving Remploy the benefit of the doubt.

The top tier of Remploy seems to take an awful lot of money to run a business. I think that we need an investigation into the costs of the top tier.

I return to Mr Mason's point, because it is important. We have seen skeleton sales teams at Remploy, and individual Remploy factories have been told that they cannot market their products. How can the factories survive when they cannot

market and sell their products? That is what has led to the demise of the factories, and it is shameful that Remploy and the Westminster Government have allowed that to happen.

Something needs to be done to stop the double-pronged attack on disabled people. We need to look closely at what is happening in welfare reform—I know that our Welfare Reform Committee is doing that—but we also need to do our best for those folks in sheltered employment and ensure that it survives in this country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are now getting a bit tight for time. I call Annabelle Ewing, to be followed by Sarah Boyack.

15:49

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am pleased to have been called to speak in this afternoon's debate; members may recall that I was also called to speak in the previous debate, in March.

I must say at the outset how angry and disappointed I am by how the UK Government has gone about things in the intervening period.

As has been very well highlighted in the debate, we have—to be frank—seen the rug being pulled out from under Remploy workers in the factories at Netherton, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and, most recently this week, Springburn. The question must be asked why those factories were not given the chance to succeed and why—to add insult to injury—they were not given the chance to find an alternative future for their workers.

We have clearly seen the operation of a presumption, as the minister said, in favour of closure. Indeed, we have seen the UK Government take what can only be regarded as precipitous decisions to close the sites—decisions that were made notwithstanding the fact that potential bids were in place and could have been brought to the table, had a more reasonable timeframe been allowed. As has been said, we have seen an unnecessarily secretive approach from the UK Government in the release of information—information that could only have helped to secure viable alternatives to closure.

The question was asked: why has there been no asset valuation? In what serious commercial circumstances would there be no valuation of assets? We have also seen lack of clarity on the processes that were involved and we have even heard this afternoon about the UK Government's denying the Scottish Government access to vital information that could have helped to make a difference. At the very least, surely there should be an inquiry into the mishandling of the closures that the UK Government has forced through to

date. How can we have any confidence in the process when so many questions remain unanswered?

At the same time, how can the UK Government possibly justify proceeding with stage 2 of the process without addressing the key problems that have arisen in stage 1? I support the call for a moratorium on stage 2, because I believe that the UK Government has lost the confidence of the public in what I would call a discredited process.

The issue is not simply that workers have, sadly, lost their jobs through no fault of their own, but that there is another set of workers—the workers at the other five sites—who are currently on tenterhooks regarding what will happen to them.

Mary Scanlon: From Annabelle Ewing's point of view, this appears to be all the fault and responsibility of the UK Government. I accept its role, but the SNP Government has been in power for five years. Five years ago there were warnings that changes had to be made, otherwise other Remploy factories would be under threat. What has been done?

Annabelle Ewing: Mary Scanlon's intervention and the gall that she shows in posing such a question take my breath away. She represents a UK Government that has rightly been said to be proceeding with a two-pronged attack on disabled people in our country through the closure of supported employment by Remploy and the disgraceful attack on disability benefits—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Ms Scanlon.

Annabelle Ewing: In a general sense, that should answer the points that Mary Scanlon raised. Notwithstanding her intervention—or perhaps because of it—what confidence can the workforce that is still in place have in the process? How can any meaningful alternative be worked out for the sites when they are left in the dark by the DWP, with no substantive or timeous information coming from the UK minister? What a shameful way to treat the workers and their families—families who know all too well that for some people, supported employment represents the only chance of accessing a job.

As I mentioned in my response to the intervention from the Conservative member, the UK Government has form—sadly—on its treatment of disabled people. As we have heard, it quite blithely announced sometime last year a 20 per cent across-the-board cut in disability benefits—benefits for some of the most vulnerable members of our society. How shameful that is, as Dennis Robertson rightly said in his extremely powerful intervention this afternoon.

The Remploy closure programme must be brought to a halt, because there is no confidence in it. Scotland needs the full powers of a normal country and all the necessary economic levers to ensure that such situations do not happen.

In the meantime, I am very pleased to hear of the Scottish Government's various actions to help the workforce and to promote supported employment in Scotland; I was particularly pleased to hear about the contacts that the minister has made with the marine sector and that some of the sector's key players are interested in pursuing potential business proposals at some of the remaining sites, including in Cowdenbeath and Leven in Fife. I hope that the minister will follow up that potential opening and I look forward to his reporting back to Parliament on that and on the general support package that the Scottish Government intends to put in place when we next hear from him in December or thereabouts.

15:55

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): This is not our first debate on supported employment and, I am sure, it will not be the last. However, when I look back over our previous debates and discussions, I think how hard they have been and am struck by the raft of good ideas and promises that have simply not been followed up. In the past few months, disabled workers in Edinburgh have faced a double blow with the loss of Blindcraft and then Remploy Edinburgh.

I take issue with the previous speaker, because I think that we have sufficient powers at our disposal to be getting on and doing something more positive. After all, that is what we are here for. We are here to decide what is important to Parliament, to consider how we use the available levers of power and to think about the message that we should be sending about how our resources should be spent. That is what we should be doing today. I agree with colleagues across the chamber that we should be united in our condemnation of the UK Government's philosophical approach and its absolutely appalling treatment of hard-working and loyal staff.

We should not buy into the fiction that supported workplaces have not been successful—they have. However, regardless of their success or their potential, Remploy workplaces have been closed with an appalling lack of transparency in a process that has not allowed anyone to come in and take them over easily. The Royal National Institute of Blind People is absolutely right to say:

"We understand the need for greater efficiency, but this should not come at the expense of the income and self-esteem of blind, partially sighted and other disabled people."

We should be looking at the excellent regional model that has been adopted in Glasgow and which links training and support for able-bodied and disabled workers. There is also merit in the approach that has been taken in Aberdeen. Both show what can be done when political resources and political leadership link across a region and the private sector is involved.

Today we must ask what we can do. I very much welcome the minister's commitment to bring to Parliament a scheme for helping former Remploi workers get back into work and his announcement that Redrock will pick up as many staff as it can in Edinburgh Remploi's area. However, we also need to think about the many people who are seeking employment not only in Edinburgh, but in every constituency, who have some form of physical or mental disability. Our debates tend to be crisis debates that are held in response to a problem such as the closure of a factory or supported employment workshop. Instead, we need a proper strategy that not only recognises the importance of supported employment in a sheltered workplace, but seeks to give people with disabilities proper rights and proper access to the labour market.

We cannot leave that to the market alone; Dennis Robertson was absolutely right to highlight how tough the current labour market is. Let us be honest: it is tough for everyone—young people, graduates and people who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own—but it must be tougher for the people we are talking about if all that an employer can see in them is their disability. We need to look at that issue, and I recommend to the minister the superb work that has been carried out by the Scottish Union of Supported Employment on the attitudes of employers and people with disabilities.

Only half the disabled people in Scotland have access to work, although many more want access to employment. We know from research that employers value the work of their disabled employees. They rate highly the contribution that disabled employees make to the workplace, which is described as being "inspirational" when employers look at the barriers that people have overcome in order to play a full part in the workforce and at the strong desire and hard work ethic that people with disabilities bring to employment. We need to shout that from the rooftops and give employers the best practice and support, whether it be financial or advisory, or the political encouragement for them to take the step of employing people with disabilities.

From us, that needs sustained interest and political priority. That is why I strongly support the recommendation in our amendment for

"a permanent supported workplaces taskforce".

That is an excellent suggestion, which I hope the minister will support and act on. We have the occasional debate on the subject, but disabled people experience the problems daily. We must do better across the parties. The other suggestions in Patricia Ferguson's amendment are superb. The minister has alluded to the fact that he will introduce a scheme similar to that which has been introduced by the Welsh Assembly Government, and I welcome that.

The other suggestion in Patricia Ferguson's amendment that should not be missed is the point about using procurement powers. I spoke to somebody who is reasonably senior in a public sector organisation about the impact of the closure of Remploi Edinburgh and I mentioned the Government's commitment that every public sector organisation would have at least one supported employment contract. The person looked at me in a very embarrassed manner as I had to explain to her what the policy is; she could not tell me what was happening in her organisation. We need to know that when we speak to anybody in the public sector, they will be able to tell us—with pride—what contribution is being made to their organisation by supported employment, and not just the number of people whom it supports in employment.

We need a sustained approach that we can all sign up to politically, and not just for the present Government's term in office but in the future. The Remploi workers who have lost their jobs have worked for Remploi for decades. They have given their long-term commitment and support, and we should repay them. We should give them support and encouragement by giving a long-term commitment to support for a framework for employment, to public procurement encouragement to the private sector and, above all, to leadership from Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Again, I must tell members that we are very tight for time.

16:02

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): On 7 March, the UK Government announced the withdrawal of Remploi funding within two years. The board of Remploi then announced the closure of all its factories in a two-stage process, with 36 factories to close by the end of 2012 and a further 18 to close by 2015. Following a 90-day consultation, only nine sites—three of them in Scotland—had received formal business plans.

When I spoke in the debate on Remploi back in March, I referred to a quote from Phil Brannan, the convener of shop stewards at Remploi, who said:

"In 2008, 29 factories in the UK closed, and 3,000 severely disabled people lost their jobs. Around 18 months later we surveyed those workers and 84% had not secured employment".

The governing party at Westminster may have changed, but has the present Government there learned any lessons from the previous closures? It appears that it has not, as Esther McVey, the minister with responsibility for disabled people, said in a House of Commons debate on 16 October, in relation to the 27 factory closures:

"So far to date, 35 staff immediately found work".—
[Official Report, House of Commons, 16 October 2012; Vol 551, c 64WH.]

That is 35 staff out of 1,421 people at Remploi factories across the UK who will be unemployed by January. It is not quite 3 per cent, and that is hardly surprising at a time when the UK is struggling to get out of a double-dip recession that is the longest since the 1950s.

I do not have enough information to know whether those 35 jobs are part of the rescue package at the Bolton factory, which was one of the 27 factories that were earmarked for closure. On 23 October, *The Bolton News* reported that 30 jobs will be created when Ability Tec takes over the Remploi factory, and that 75 per cent of the employees will be disabled. It also reported that the Bolton site was believed to be the only factory out of the 27 across the UK to have been saved since the closures started. However, just two weeks later, Ability Tec had to backtrack and delay the opening of factories until after Christmas due to the delay in receiving orders from a customer. My hope for the workers in Bolton is that that factory will eventually open.

What of the Scottish factories? Remploi Wishaw closed with the loss of 24 jobs, but the other three sites had received business plans from organisations that wished to keep them open. However, the Edinburgh site closed after Remploi claimed that there was no best and final offer—although the news about the Edinburgh site will be welcomed by the employees who have lost their jobs. The Aberdeen site closed after a social enterprise bid was rejected, and the Springburn site closure was announced recently when Remploi again claimed that there had been no viable bidders, despite interest from Greentyre.

What I am having difficulty understanding is why anyone would spend time and money developing a detailed business plan—which gave an analysis of the proposed business model, a financing plan, and a scheme for employment of disabled people—and would, in addition, sign a non-disclosure agreement, complete an expression of interest form, appoint advisers for formal due diligence and provide proof of funding, if they did

not believe that they had a viable business proposition.

What were the criteria that prospective bidders had to demonstrate? First, they had to provide for the on-going employment of disabled people—something that the Remploi management is failing to do. Secondly, they had to meet the criterion to explain how it would work, who would own and manage it, how it would be financed, how costs would be covered and—above all—how it would be a commercially viable business idea. That is something that the Remploi management was unable to do.

Thirdly, they had to demonstrate that they had the skill to manage and achieve a successful outcome. Again, that is something that the Remploi management was incapable of doing. The bids for the three factories in Scotland were rejected after a lot of time and effort had been expended, and at considerable cost to the bidding organisations.

Media commentators have stated in the press that Remploi's problems were due to lack of good commercial management, the wrong business strategy and poor communication skills. As a result, some of the most vulnerable people in society will suffer, because many of the factories were in areas of high unemployment. Many commentators have also highlighted their belief that the bid process was flawed, that it lacked transparency and that it was surrounded by secrecy.

We need an independent inquiry into the mishandling of the Remploi factory closures. There must be a halt to stage 2 of the closures that will affect 18 factories across the UK, five of which are in Scotland—at Clydebank, Cowdenbeath, Dundee, Leven and Stirling.

On 22 October a meeting was held with Esther McVey, the Minister for Disabled People, at the Parliament. Nineteen members from across the parties came together to voice our concerns about what is happening to the Remploi sites in Scotland. The minister, Fergus Ewing, expressed the view that

"in light of the many problems that have arisen during stage 1 of this process, stage 2 should be delayed until these are addressed."

I support that call to halt the process, but we also need to hold an independent inquiry to investigate all aspects of the stage 1 closures—especially the bid process. With employment of disabled people running at half the rate of that of able-bodied people, the UK Government should not be condemning people to a lifetime of unemployment.

16:08

Helen Eadie (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I represent constituents who work at the Cowdenbeath factory, and I have visited it and the factory at Leven and other Remploi factories across Scotland. I have also visited other supported businesses, including the splendid City Building (Glasgow) LLP, which is a real credit to Glasgow City Council's support and a model of how any Government can be supportive. I congratulate all who are associated with that Glasgow enterprise.

I know much about the history of the Remploi situation if members are interested—although obviously Lewis Macdonald has set out the background to the legislation that was introduced in 1994 to set up Remploi following the return of soldiers from military conflict across Europe. We must also remember Blindcraft, which was set up more than 300 years ago. Its recent closure is also a tragedy that we should never forget, and it is a pity that more was not done about that at the time.

Since 2000, the Scottish Parliament has hosted receptions for the group that was called friends of Remploi and which is now called friends of supported businesses, that exists thanks to the work of John Moist from the GMB, Lyn Turner from Unite and other community officials. We are indebted to them for drawing our attention to the issues, in which historically—for many years, even before 2000—there have been difficulties.

I also want to congratulate Dennis Robertson. Bob Doris described him as a powerful advocate and I agree with that description. With his sight impairment, Dennis Robertson is a superb example of humanity at its best. I think that he is a really good person.

On the Tory amendment, I point out to Mary Scanlon and Murdo Fraser that we have had the Sayce report and the Government's response to that report. I do not know whether they have read that response, but if they have not, I would be glad to present it to them this afternoon. Recommendation 3b of the Sayce report spells out very clearly that

"The Department should ensure existing employees in Remploi Enterprise Businesses are offered the opportunity and expert entrepreneurial and business support over a decent time period to develop businesses into independent enterprises, where viable—whether mutuals, social enterprises, companies limited by guarantee or other models. The Department should actively pursue partnership working between Remploi, local authorities, businesses, disabled people's organisations and others to achieve this. Trade unions should be fully involved."

None of that has happened.

Anyone who has hands-on experience, as I have had over the years—I declare an interest as a member of the Co-operative Party—will know exactly how time consuming is the huge effort that

is involved in setting up a co-operative. The Westminster Government has done nothing at all to achieve what is a clear recommendation in its own report. Why are Mary Scanlon and Murdo Fraser not pursuing that and, therefore, supporting Scottish Labour's motion this afternoon? That is what we call for.

It is not too late for those things to happen in the Scottish context. However, I know from my discussions with business gateway people throughout Scotland that they have been unable to get the necessary business development information to be able to help in putting together business plans for Remploi factories that wish to set up such enterprises. I know that the minister had the same problem, which he mentioned this afternoon.

Another thing to keep in mind—I urge the minister to take this on board—is the procurement threat. I know from speaking to Catherine Stihler only this week that there are still issues to be addressed at European Union level. We are not out of the woods yet as regards the threat to the social clauses that exist to protect people, such as article 19 of the procurement directive and other provisions that have been legislated for over the years. We need to keep an eye on that and we need to work hard, along with our MEPs, to ensure that we do not lose that point.

Dennis Robertson: I thank Helen Eadie for taking an intervention and I thank her for her compliments. Does she agree that, if the UK Government continues on its current route, there will actually be no need for article 19?

Helen Eadie: The issue is not just for the Westminster Government; a whole lot more could be done by the Scottish Government; really, our focus this afternoon needs to shift to the Scottish Government. Although the Scottish Government has done some work, there is, as the saying goes—and without being political about it—more to be done.

I am not being critical of the Scottish Government in saying this, but I was disappointed when the minister did not open up his task force to other members who wanted to work along the same lines when the task force was initiated. I really am very disappointed about that. If we had been involved in those discussions, we would have asked why the Scottish Government did not appoint an ambassador to work with businesses to ensure that they know about the support that is available for disabled people in the workplace in Scotland and further afield. I can think of a splendid ambassador—John Moist, who has just retired. No one knows more about Remploi and the case for defending it than he does.

Fergus Ewing: I acknowledge the work that Helen Eadie does. To have accepted one MSP on the task force would have opened the door to accepting many MSPs on it. That alone was the reason why we did not do so.

We will support the Labour amendment. I hope to work with all parties and to meet the Labour Party to discuss in detail some of the proposals that Helen Eadie has put forward. Let us all work together to use the powers that we have to best effect in order to achieve what we can for the Remploy workers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to a close, Mrs Eadie.

Helen Eadie: I am very grateful for that intervention. I did not think that the minister would have every MSP on the task force, but I hoped that he would have one MSP on it. I am not saying that I would have been the one who would have been chosen by my party, but I would have put my name forward. I am suggesting that, at this late stage, even the Tories should be on it. It is imperative, for the sake of disabled people across Scotland, that we think about what we can do to help not just Remploy, but the other supported businesses.

16:16

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the debate not happily but angrily. It was Einstein who said:

"The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits."

If any event in our recent political lives crystallises current UK Government policy and human stupidity, it is the debacle that goes by the name of "Remploy closures". I was one of those who sat through the meeting with the UK minister, Esther McVey, on 22 October, at which we called for a full independent review to be carried out of the stage 1 Remploy closures before the stage 2 closure plan was embarked on. That call was ignored; indeed, it was not even acknowledged. Therein lies not just the stupidity but the crassness of the UK Government. A duty of care has been abandoned, and there has been monumental business and governmental incompetence.

I will come on to the latter in a while. All that I will say for now is that anyone who makes an announcement in which she says that she does not intend to delay stage 2 as she feels that to do so may weaken the business does not understand business. I know from my business experience that such a statement weakens the business's viability and would make any potential customer or buyer wonder, "Why the rush?"

This farce—this circus—has been a smokescreen to cover up the UK Government's intention, come what may, to shut down our Remploy factories, which it says were losing £68 million a year, although that figure is disputable, and to throw disabled workers into unemployment, which will result in them costing as much, if not more, through unemployment and disability benefits and the need for treatment of hastened illnesses and anxiety.

This farce—this circus—became a totem for the UK Government when it put Liz Sayce, the chief executive officer of the disability rights group, Radar, in charge of the Remploy review. As someone said at the time, "It was like putting a vegetarian in charge of a review of a meat factory." It was inevitable that a review by someone who is a mental health expert rather than a business expert would come up with the recommendation that UK Government funding should be directed at supporting more disabled people into mainstream employment. If the Government, through its access to work scheme, and Radar are so good at that, why is it the case that 85 per cent of the Remploy employees who were made redundant four to five years ago are still unemployed?

The present situation magnifies the UK Government's manifest incompetence when it comes to understanding business and, in particular, small business entities such as Remploy. Everything that has happened has happened because the UK Government has starved Remploy companies of strong local sales and marketing resource, and has burdened them with huge central non-productive and sales overheads.

At stage 1 of the process, 36 out of 54 Remploy factories—four of which were in Scotland—were designated for closure unnecessarily, because of an inability to understand the structures of a business sale that led to the closing off of the bids involved in the process. That in itself requires serious investigation. Under stage 2, another 18 factories—five of which are in Scotland—will go through another spurious exercise, unless the lessons of stage 1 are thoroughly learned and accepted and lead to change.

However, all is not lost. I have had regular and constant contact with bidders and particularly with Redrock, which the minister mentioned, and I can advise members that one of the 36 factories escaped. The factory in Wigan escaped, months after closure. A phoenix has risen from the ashes there, and a former Remploy factory now employs 16 of the 18 disabled former Remploy employees. Who knows? The road to Wigan pier might carry on all the way up to Scotland. I am confident that the Scottish Government will work with associated

bodies in Scotland to optimise the opportunities that will arise.

I return to Einstein, who said:

“Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I’m not sure about the universe.”

Let us continue to challenge the nonsense that was the Remploy stage 1 exercise. We should delay, if not dismantle, the whole stage 2 exercise. Businesspeople in Scotland stand ready to help. We owe our disabled fellow citizens of Scotland no less.

16:21

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Along with my colleagues Kevin Stewart and Maureen Watt, I wrote to Maria Miller, Esther McVey’s predecessor as the Minister for Disabled People, to ask her to visit the Aberdeen Remploy factory. I wrote to her on 23 April, 6 July and 17 July but, on each occasion, she refused to visit. That puts into context the lack of interest with which the UK Government has viewed the situation of Remploy not just in Aberdeen but in Scotland as a whole.

The UK Government was ignorant of the social enterprise model that was being developed in Aberdeen—there was a clear lack of understanding of it. As my colleague Kevin Stewart pointed out, the UK Government also seemed entirely uninterested in the crippling rental burden that was being placed on Aberdeen Remploy, which absolutely affected the ability of that social enterprise hub to grow and flourish.

What is almost a phoenix from the flames has risen in Aberdeen, because seven of the 14 former Remploy workers have set up Aberdeen Textiles and Workwear Services as a co-operative. The other seven workers chose to take redundancy packages following Aberdeen Remploy’s closure. It has been reported that old and new customers have approached the new firm about possible business. However, although Remploy and the UK Government said that assets would be transferred, the workers in Aberdeen have not been able to obtain the hard drives from the former Remploy factory, which has hampered their ability to seek work actively and co-operate with former customers.

In a letter to me of 17 November, Esther McVey clarified that the factories would not be sold off en bloc—it had been feared that they would be available only for large private enterprises to purchase as a block. She also said:

“Along with Remploy, we are keen for the factory’s assets including fixtures and machinery to be disposed of in the best way, particularly where they may be used to support disabled people locally.”

Allowing the former Remploy workers in Aberdeen access to the computer drives from the old Remploy site would assist disabled people locally and would assist the new social enterprise in going forward. I encourage the UK Government to work with Remploy to make that happen and ensure that the new business continues to grow and flourish.

I welcome the Scottish Government’s response and the statement from the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism that he has visited all the sites that are part of stage 2. I point again to the response that I received from Maria Miller—a contrast perhaps exists between the Scottish Government minister’s willingness to visit Remploy sites and see the work that goes on there and the UK Government’s desire to sit in its Whitehall ivory towers and issue edicts, without going out and seeing the work that is taking place at the front line.

I am grateful that the minister has agreed to look at bringing forward a scheme similar to that in Wales. That will be of benefit in supporting workers who have been victims of the closures at stage 1.

Much has been made of the role that the public sector can play. The situation at Glencraft was mentioned. Its salvation, if you will, came as a result of a combination of the Scottish Government, the council and PSN coming into the situation. PSN helped in providing much-needed sales and marketing expertise. We have heard much about Remploy’s inability to go out and market its products. Remploy in Aberdeen would have been more than capable of competing for tenders if it was able to go out and actively market its products. PSN brought that expertise to the table for Glencraft, and the council reduced and deferred rents in order to allow the business time to grow, find its feet and develop as a social enterprise.

There is still a role that the council can play in Aberdeen. We have heard that the site in Aberdeen that Remploy formerly occupied is up for sale. When the site was closed, Kevin Stewart and I called on the council to look at the possibility of purchasing it through the council’s common good fund. The Aberdeen common good fund currently sits at £73.8 million, with £7 million in cash. It would be capable of absorbing the purchase of a £250,000 or even a £400,000 factory site. There would then be the option of renting the site back to a social enterprise hub at a market rate. The current co-operative is based at the Twin Spires business park site. The option of purchasing the former Remploy site through the common good account and leasing it back at a market rent in order to allow a social enterprise hub to develop—the idea was that the factory site

is ideally placed to host a number of social enterprises—could and should still be explored. I call on Aberdeen City Council, not on a partisan basis, but on a constructive basis, to look at the opportunity that that presents. The site would be a common good asset and there would be a common good rental income. It would be a win-win situation for the council and the social enterprise community in the north-east. I hope that the council will look at that idea.

16:27

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):

The Remploy debate is about attitudes and language. Patricia Ferguson spoke about cynicism. Cynicism has quite clearly peppered the entire process and has been very destructive.

We heard from Mark McDonald about the UK Government being “uninterested”. That is extremely disappointing.

On a more positive note—I am grateful to the organisations that provided briefings for the debate—the Community trade union talks about “the right political will” being the way forward. I am delighted that the minister accepts the inclusive Labour amendment, which provides an opportunity to involve a wide range of folk, not least the unions. That is the way forward.

Ideology also plays its part: it is the UK Government’s aversion to quangos that sees Remploy under attack.

We heard about the creation of Remploy at the end of the second world war. We also heard some very positive words: sheltered employment and rehabilitation are very positive things. There are the two strands of the factory network and the various figures for people who have been put under threat, which I will not repeat. Then we heard about employment services. The figures that I have show that, in the past year, employment services have assisted 20,000 people into mainstream employment. Those services will have to redouble their efforts if the closure programme is continued.

I will pick up on Graeme Pearson’s points about CCTV and the key role that its operators play in policing operations. That is a very good example of a role. Front-line crime is fought not only by police officers; CCTV operators also have an important role. That is the case in Fort William, Inverness and Tain in my area.

It is important to be aware of the attitude and language in the UK Government’s approach to health and safety at work. Clare Adamson talked about a tragedy, and we all share her sympathetic response. A University of Stirling report has talked about the erosion of the Health and Safety

Executive’s role that has made it almost exclusively reactive, rather than proactive and reduced the number of investigations and, consequently, the number of prosecutions. That comes from a UK Government whose Prime Minister describes equality impact assessments as “nonsense”. That is important language and gives a clear indication of where the UK Government is coming from.

One argument that could be made and perhaps has been—it is certainly implied in the Conservative amendment—is that the issue is not about premises; it is about people. That would be fine were it not for the attack on the welfare system, to which several speakers have referred, involving disability assessments and the approach of Atos Healthcare. As we have heard, the welfare reform is predicated on savings, not on assessed need.

The word “contrast” has been used a few times. I, too, would like to contrast the approaches of the UK and Scottish Governments on the issue. This morning, the Equal Opportunities Committee heard from the minister, Fergus Ewing, about the positive approach that has been adopted. Again, the language is important. Like other members, I was pleased to hear that the minister has visited a number of factories. It is apparent that those were not visits to the boardroom, but that they involved positive engagement with people on the shop floor. We heard about particular worries that we would all understand to do with Christmas and so on. That is important, because the issue is about people. We can talk about statistics all day long, but everything is about people. I am also pleased about the engagement with potential customers, particularly in the oil and offshore sector.

The Scottish Government’s concerns about the UK Government’s handling of the issue are understandable. There has been unnecessary secrecy. Patricia Ferguson talked about freedom of information requests. If we are to make progress, it is absolutely crucial that everyone is as open and transparent as possible. Information must be relevant and there must be sufficient information available to people to allow them to meet their obligations.

I agree with five words in the Conservative amendment, which are

“Partnership Action for Continuing Employment”.

As we know, PACE was not allowed access to the employees. However, as we heard from the minister, early intervention and one-to-one counselling are vital if we are to address individual needs in local circumstances. A range of options can and should be considered. The models include employee buy-outs, social enterprises and co-operatives, but there are others.

Staff feel uninformed. Someone told the minister that they do not understand how things happened. A £2,500 stipend from the Department for Work and Pensions will come as cold comfort, particularly at this time of year.

The minister and others talked about good businesses and quality products, but said that the prospects are undermined by the approach that the UK Government has adopted. I am delighted that the priority is the continuation of businesses and that employees are central to that. Working with the trade unions, we can make progress. Like other members, I look forward to the minister's statement later in the year.

16:33

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We should remember that the debate is about people and that the people who are affected are the committed staff of Remploy, who face a difficult and uncertain future. Whatever the outcome of the debate, it is important that we do all that we can to maximise the help for those who face that difficult time. It is no consolation to the Remploy workers, but they are not alone in the Scottish workforce in facing a difficult and uncertain future. We have recently seen the closure of Hall's of Broxburn, with the loss of 1,500 jobs, while those working for the remainder of the Vion Food Group face an uncertain time. We need to be conscious of that when we approach debates on such issues.

The background to the debate is the Sayce review, which was headed by Liz Sayce, the chief executive of Disability Rights UK and the former director of the Disability Rights Commission. She concluded, after an extensive review, that employment services should be focused on disabled people themselves rather than on institutions, to enable disabled people to access mainstream jobs in the same way as everyone else does. I think that that general approach commands widespread support, and I think that Dennis Robertson acknowledged that very point in his powerful speech.

Lewis Macdonald: The question of access to mainstream employment has broad support. However, does Mr Fraser agree with Liz Sayce that there is no place for supported employment? The view has been rejected by other parties during the debate.

Murdo Fraser: I will come on to that point. The Sayce review concluded:

"In relation to Remploy factories there was a total consensus among disabled people's organisations"—

Helen Eadie: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: Will the member let me finish quoting from the review? It concluded:

"there was a total consensus among disabled people's organisations and charities that the factories were not the model for the 21st Century, and that Government funding should be invested in effective support for individuals, rather than subsidising factory businesses."

Bob Doris said that the closures are ideologically driven. If that is the case, the ideology seems to have a lot of support among disabled groups.

Helen Eadie: There was not a complete consensus. The Royal British Legion, Poppy Scotland and a variety of other major disability organisations did not agree with the Sayce report. I ask the member to address the response of his own party's Government to recommendation 3.

Murdo Fraser: I will come on to that. I can say only that I was quoting from the Sayce report and the work that Liz Sayce did.

Chic Brodie: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: No. I have taken two interventions and if I take another I will have no time to say anything at all. I ask Mr Brodie to take his seat, please.

A few harsh words were said about the UK Government's record. Let us get some facts on the record. The UK Government has protected the £320 million per year budget for specialist disability employment. It is a fact that, for the cost of one job in a factory such as a Remploy factory, four jobs can be provided in mainstream employment, with adequate support. It is also a fact that the Remploy employment service has been an undoubted success, with 35,000 disabled and disadvantaged people supported into work during the past two years.

Dennis Robertson: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: No, I am sorry. I need to make progress. I will give way to Mr Robertson later, if I have time.

As Mary Scanlon said, there is nothing new about the process. It was Labour minister Peter Hain who closed 29 out of 83 Remploy factories back in 2007, and more jobs were lost then than are threatened now. At that time, Peter Hain put the rest of the Remploy network on notice. Let me quote from *Hansard*. Peter Hain said:

"We have managed to keep open 55 sites only on the basis of very stretching procurement targets and a tough forward plan. It will be up to everyone with an interest in Remploy—Government, management, trade unions, local MPs and other political representatives—to pull together to ensure that those factories meet their ambitious targets, otherwise they, too, could be put at risk."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 Nov 2007; Vol 468, c 449.]

There seems to be collective amnesia on the part of Labour members. They do one thing when they are in government and they say something quite different when they are in opposition. They should pay attention to their record.

Fergus Ewing started the debate by setting out a positive and measured approach and focusing on what needs to be done. It is unfortunate that some SNP back benchers could not resist the temptation to make party-political points or, worse, constitutional points. Many Labour members forgot their record in government, but at least Patricia Ferguson offered practical suggestions, and we heard good speeches from Graeme Pearson, Sarah Boyack and Helen Eadie, who made good points about co-ops.

I welcome much of what is being done. I welcome the PACE team support that is being given to employees. I welcome the minister's undertaking on changes to the procurement process, to make maximum use of reserved contracts for supported factories and businesses. As Mary Scanlon said, the minister's predecessor in the previous session of Parliament, Jim Mather, promised that and it is good to see the measure being delivered. I also welcome the Scottish Government's announcement of additional financial assistance for redundant workers.

Those things are all welcome, but we should not lose sight of the bigger picture. The Remploy model is losing money that could be better employed in supporting more disabled people in different ways. That is the important point to be made in the debate.

As we go forward, we need to concentrate on how we learn lessons from this situation. As my colleague Mary Scanlon has said, we are happy to pass on to our colleagues at Westminster points made on the process.

I return to the key issue, though, which is to support the people involved. The minister, Fergus Ewing, said that he wanted a positive debate about what we can do now. That should be our focus—helping the workers in this unfortunate situation and doing what we can to help them back into employment.

16:40

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): It has been clear from this afternoon's debate that the future of the Remploy factories is close to the hearts of members across the chamber, as is concern for the future of those workers, who have gained so much and given so much during their employment at Remploy. A powerful message has been sent out to the UK Government today—to which we can only hope it listens—that it should halt this damaging process.

As we have just heard, there has not been unanimity today. As in the debate earlier in the year, Conservative members have sought to describe the work of Remploy as “unsustainable” or outdated. That does not reflect the view of the great majority in the chamber, as expressed this afternoon, nor does it reflect our experience of Remploy.

Members across the chamber have talked about the great contribution made by Remploy factories in their area—factories that in too many instances have now closed. Patricia Ferguson and other members have talked about the factory in Springburn. Many of us will have been concerned about the developments there that were reported in the *Daily Record* this week. Helen Eadie, who, with Unite and GMB, has worked extremely hard to fight for a future for Remploy and supported workplaces, talked about her work on the issue and the Remploy factory in Cowdenbeath in her constituency.

We heard Lewis Macdonald and members from across my region, the north-east, talk about the great contribution made to our community by the Aberdeen Remploy factory. Along with Lewis Macdonald, I was with the Remploy workers on the day the factory closed. Over the past few years, the workforce had reduced, but the threat of closure had been staved off, through the efforts of the workforce, their trade unions and the city's MPs, Frank Doran and Anne Begg. When the doors finally closed, it was an emotional and traumatic moment for the staff who remained, some of whom had been with Remploy for more than 20 years.

The minister was right to highlight the complete mishandling of that process by the UK Government and Remploy. In too many instances, the hopes of saving factories and jobs have, at least in the short term, been dashed by the complete mismanagement of the process.

What was particularly cruel about the UK Government's decision to proceed with the closures was that it came just as a number of factories were making real progress in becoming viable social enterprises. No one can doubt that Remploy has suffered from management that has failed the organisation. That point has been well made by GMB and Unite, as the unions representing the workforce, and it has been made again today. That is why the previous Labour Government invested more than £0.5 billion to bring change to Remploy to make its businesses sustainable. I say to Mr Fraser that that is the difference—£0.5 billion of investment compared with complete withdrawal of funding by the current UK Government. We will stand proud on our record of supporting supported workers.

Mary Scanlon: I correct the member on two points. Neither Murdo Fraser nor I have said that the Remploy factories were “unsustainable” ; it was Peter Hain who said that, as can be seen in *Hansard* on 29 November 2007. I have quoted him and Murdo Fraser has quoted him. Peter Hain put down a marker to say that unless people worked together, the factories that the Labour Government had not closed were at risk.

Richard Baker: That is why £0.5 billion investment—

Mary Scanlon: But that is why we retained that money.

Richard Baker: We have come to talk about the progress that has been made. Members across the chamber have referred to that progress, and to the opportunities to make the factories sustainable, which was there and which the Conservative Government dashed—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): One at a time, please.

Richard Baker: Sorry, Presiding Officer. What is said in the Conservatives’ amendment is quite clear. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Richard Baker: The Conservatives do not believe that the models were in any way sustainable. I stand by every word that I have said.

It was to make the factories sustainable that a social enterprise model was introduced in Aberdeen and a manager, Ben Mardell, was hired. There was success, particularly with Aberdeen Textiles and Workwear Services, which is a business that is seeking to continue its work and which had become profitable.

Kevin Stewart: It was not just a case of the Remploy factory becoming much more of a social enterprise—it was the fact that the factory was being turned into a social enterprise hub, so many others were benefiting as well as those folk who were employed by Remploy.

Richard Baker: That is absolutely correct and that is the point that I was seeking to make as well.

Frank Doran also continues to be actively engaged in seeking a long-term future for the factory and I welcome the minister’s comments about Frank Doran’s important contribution to that important work.

Today the factory is closed, but that does not mean that the hope that its doors will open again to provide supported employment has been given up. We now have to look at what we can do through the Scottish Government and as a community in Scotland to support these factories. I

commend Mr Ewing for his assiduous work in this crucial area. There can be no doubt that he wishes to take forward action by the Scottish Government. I am extremely pleased that he will accept Labour’s amendment. The cross-party approach that he seeks to take on this vital issue is to be commended, and we look forward to working with him on developing our proposals.

The minister will know that those proposals are not simply proposals from the Labour benches. They were brought forward in a briefing that was sent to members by Unite—Lyn Turner of Unite is here today. I am sure that Unite will also be pleased that we can work together on the proposals, including for a scheme similar to the employer support grant that has been introduced in Wales; it will look forward to hearing after Christmas about the scheme that will be brought forward here. I am sure that Unite will also look forward to the development of a permanent supported workplaces task force, which Sarah Boyack also referred to—involving the Council of Economic Advisers, co-operatives, unions and businesses—to deliver a strategy to secure the long-term future of supported workplaces in Scotland.

The final issue that I wish to raise is procurement policy, which a number of members have raised. I raised the issue in a members’ business debate on supported workplaces that I secured nearly three years ago when a number of supported workplaces were closing. I know that ministers have talked positively about using article 19, but I made the point then that—other than the work that Glasgow City Council does with Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries—that simply was not translating into contracts for factories. That has remained the case over the past few years.

I welcome the framework that the minister announced at the Equal Opportunities Committee meeting today. Progress on that is vital if these factories are to have a long-term future. The minister has said that that will be a feature of the procurement bill when it is published, and I hope that we see intention translated into action on that crucial point.

All that the Remploy workers have asked for is the opportunity to work—to be in employment. Surely we should all support that. The fact is that without Remploy many of those workers would not be able to work. Dennis Robertson made that point powerfully. Today, those opportunities are being taken away for many, but with the right action we can provide a future for supported employment in Scotland. We can protect that opportunity to work that the Remploy staff have fought for—their right to work, which they should not be denied.

16:48

Fergus Ewing: This has been a serious and passionate debate. There were a few moments of levity, some of them unexpected. I never particularly expected that Einstein would make an entry into the debate—that was thanks to Mr Brodie, who made a useful speech.

Most of the speeches that we heard were passionate but also informed: across the chamber, across all the parties including, I have to say, the Tory representatives, there is a concern about the topic. I do not want to make and will not be making any party political comments about the issue. Our whole focus is about where we can go from here and what we can do for the individuals who are affected. Sadly, as we have heard, a great many of them have already paid the price, made the sacrifice and lost their jobs.

I want to address some of the particular points that were made across the chamber by a great many members. First of all, we must use the powers that we have. We are doing that and, in particular, are using the powers that we have with respect to procurement.

I was able to share with Mary Fee and members of the Equal Opportunities Committee the fact that we have put in place the reserved framework contract for supported business. It was established on 12 September 2012, thanks in part to the efforts of my colleague Alex Neil in his former role as Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment.

I probably should not ask this question because it is certainly not in any script that is before me—not that I would be reading from such a script anyway—but I will: have we, all of us, done enough over the years? No, we have not, and that probably includes me. Perhaps that is a good starting point from which to move forward and say that we should all now do what we can to put that right.

The framework is a serious piece of work, and drawing it up was not a simple task. Reference has been made to the potential EU difficulties. I am not aware of those issues, but I will look into them so that I can respond to the point and reassure members in the chamber. I sincerely hope that there are no issues in that regard.

The framework was put in place relatively recently, about two months ago. There are four lots, and 10 suppliers have already been successful in gaining a place. They include Beltane Products in Wishaw, which was mentioned by Clare Adamson, who made a passionate and informed speech about the gradual decline in the workforce at Netherton. I pay tribute to those authorities such as North

Lanarkshire that have champions for procurement opportunities for supported employment.

That relates to Sarah Boyack's point about another public sector institution that was not aware of its moral—and perhaps legal—obligations in that respect. One key point that we all must take on board is the need to increase awareness among all public sector bodies that have significant procurement responsibilities so they know that they can be part of the solution.

I think that those bodies are becoming aware of the sector. As well as Beltane Products, we have Dovetail Enterprises in Dundee, and Glencraft in Aberdeen, about which we have heard from all the Aberdeen members, who made excellent contributions to the debate. We also have Matrix Fife, Palatine Beds in Newcastle, and Remploy in Swansea. It is not simply a Scottish issue—we do not want the assistance to stop at the border. There is also Remploy Edinburgh; RSBI in Glasgow, about which we have heard; Remploy Frontline textiles in Stirling; and the Sign Factory in Falkirk.

In the first six weeks in which the framework has been operating, the following public bodies have placed contracts: the Scottish Government with the Sign Factory in Falkirk for signage worth £40,000; City of Edinburgh Council with Dovetail Enterprises for furniture worth £15,000; Argyll and Bute Council with Matrix Fife for furniture worth £8,000; and the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service with Dovetail Enterprises for furniture worth £7,000.

Those are all relatively small amounts, but many a mickle maks a muckle, as has been said. If all the public sector organisations can contribute through procurement and if they have people who are champions for supported employment—or who are at least educated about it—much more progress will be made beyond those initial positive steps. Those steps are modest, but they are a good start given that the framework was launched only a few weeks ago.

I have a particular responsibility that I will do my best to fulfil, which is to ensure that all public sector bodies are made fully aware of their responsibilities. My colleague Alex Neil was not present to receive the praise that I bestowed on him a moment ago, but he is here now—he is always the modest chap. [*Laughter.*] I could not resist saying that.

We all have a serious responsibility across all the portfolios to do what we can to ensure that every part of the common weal in Scotland plays its part in procurement that will benefit the supported sector and enable it to carry on working in the way it does so well.

I was pleased that Graeme Pearson and John Finnie mentioned the role of Remploy in CCTV, which highlights a useful contribution from a group of people who were otherwise in danger of being ignored. There are Remploy employment services sites in Scotland—I visited one in Glasgow, and I know that they provide excellent services. I mention those because, although they are not the immediate focus of the debate, their work is much appreciated.

The next steps are very important and, as far as I am concerned, the next step is that we urge the UK Government to think carefully about how it proceeds. We have called for a halt, echoing the moves that the trade union representatives have made, not for party political reasons but for practical reasons. If there is an immediate commencement of a fresh tendering phase, it will be difficult to marshal the support of, for example, the private sector in the oil and gas sector and the offshore wind sector, as I seek to do, if they are not sure whether there will be an organisation to fulfil orders. How can I encourage the private sector to make orders for life jackets when they ask me who will be around to deliver and fulfil the contracts?

Plainly, if phase 2 of the tender process is initiated and the tender date is set but the message for private companies is that there is no future for, for example, the Cowdenbeath and Leven factories—which Helen Eadie knows and which she spoke so passionately about—what is the point of their putting in an order? The business will not be there to fulfil it. As I argued at the stakeholder group this afternoon to the Remploy representatives who were good enough to come along and take part, surely it would be better, rather than go ahead with phase 2 of a tender process, to think of other options, such as a voluntary sale.

I understand that, in relation to the Cowdenbeath and Leven factories, because the intellectual property is owned by a third party—a commercial company that has some of the patents—it may not be possible to go out to tender. I heard that today for the first time, but it would have been nice to have heard it before. Be that as it may, if we have a rethink for practical reasons not political reasons, that will be good news all round and it will be the best means of going forward.

I am delighted to accept the Labour amendment this afternoon. I want to meet Patricia Ferguson about the issue. I supported her speech, as I did the speeches of many of her colleagues, who made excellent contributions. We are already considering further measures. Incidentally, we will announce those further measures not after Christmas, as Labour mentioned, but before

Christmas. I ask members to hold me to that and to make some points of order or whatever if I fail to deliver.

We want to deliver the news before Christmas because the Remploy workers are there, which is perhaps the key point. As Dennis Robertson reminded us, the debate is ultimately about people and not about tender procedures and article 19, which are just devices. What I think we all want, including Mary Scanlon—to be fair to her and to lift the matter out of the party political—is to find a way that means that in Scotland we have the ability to achieve the survival of the dignity and respect that is secured by all the people around the country who work in the Remploy factories. They have had that dignity and respect for decades in the past, and we want them to have it for decades to come.

I am cautiously optimistic that we can achieve that, and I am cautiously optimistic for one reason alone. Over the past few months, I have had the opportunity of meeting and speaking to some of the workers in the factories in Fife that I visited—I look forward to visiting more of the factories that I have not yet had the chance to visit—and I found, without exception, some of the hardest-working and most committed and determined individuals that I have met in any workforce in any office or factory throughout the land. They produce first-rate products that are valued and commercially profitable if they get the right support, which they have not been getting.

We will make determined efforts to provide them with the ability to continue to use our powers in public sector procurement and our influence with the private sector to persuade companies to emulate the magnificent act of PSN, which is now part of the Wood Group, in displaying a moral sense in its intervention in Glencraft, which Richard Baker, Lewis Macdonald, Mark McDonald and many others rightly praised.

I think that we can do for other companies what the Wood Group has done for Glencraft. I am cautiously optimistic that we can see the survival of the businesses in places such as Cowdenbeath, Leven, Clydebank, Stirling and Dundee. Following this debate, I will devote all my efforts to that objective, with, I hope, the support of all parties in the chamber.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-05067, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a revision to the business programme for 4, 5 and 6 December.

17:00

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): I highlight the alterations to Tuesday's business. We will now have a ministerial statement on the annual European Union fisheries negotiations followed by a debate without motion on the Leveson report—the way forward for Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 4 December, Wednesday 5 December and Thursday 6 December—

delete

Tuesday 4 December 2012

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Annual EU Fisheries Negotiations

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 5 December 2012

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 December 2012

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: The Modernisation of Scotland's Career Services

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

Tuesday 4 December 2012

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Annual EU Fisheries Negotiations

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Leveson Report – The Way Forward for Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.15 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 5 December 2012

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions

Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

followed by Scottish Labour Party Debate: Policing in Scotland

followed by Scottish Labour Party Debate: Scotland's Health Service

followed by Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee Debate: 1st Report 2012: The Scotland Act 1998 (Modification of Schedule 5) Order 2013 [draft]

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 December 2012

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Rail

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Modernisation of Scotland's Career Services

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-05019.1, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05019, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on Remploy, 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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 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)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)

MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 93, Against 0, Abstentions 14.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S4M-05019.2, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05019, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on Remploy, 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 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)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)

MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 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 14, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S4M-05019, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on Remploy, as amended, 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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 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)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

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

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 93, Against 14, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament calls for an immediate halt to any further actions by Remploy and the Department for Work and Pensions to sell or close the remaining Remploy businesses until a full and independent review of the stage 1 commercial process has been completed; agrees that the Scottish Government should be consulted fully on any further actions in Scotland by Remploy and that much greater collaboration with the Scottish Government must take place to ensure the continuation of jobs for disabled Remploy workers across all parts of the business; believes that redundancy support for Remploy staff in the three sites that have now closed was made available at too late a stage in the closure process; agrees that there should be much earlier access to Partnership Action for Continuing Employment advice and support for those in sites under threat; calls on the Scottish Government to consider further measures to assist those made redundant by the closure of Remploy factories, including the introduction of an employer support grant similar to the scheme operating in Wales; believes that every effort should be made to ensure a sustainable future for supported workplaces and calls on the Scottish Government to consider establishing a permanent supported workplaces taskforce, involving the First Minister's Council of Economic Advisers, cooperatives, unions and private sector expertise to establish and deliver a strategy to secure the long-term future of supported workplaces in Scotland, and further calls on the Scottish Government to use its procurement powers to greater effect to secure contracts for supported workplaces and to consider ways of working with Remploy factories such as Springburn to find alternatives to closure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:05.

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