



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 19 December 2013

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 19 December 2013

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

General Question Time

Conviction Rate

1. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to reports that, in the last year, the conviction rate in criminal cases has fallen by 7 per cent. (S4O-02737)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): There has not been a 7 per cent fall in the conviction rate in criminal cases. The conviction rate, which is the proportion of court proceedings that resulted in the main charge being proven, was 87 per cent in 2012-13. That is the same as in 2011-12. There was a 7 per cent fall in the total number of persons with a charge proven between 2011-12 and 2012-13. That reflects the fall in the volume of court business, as recorded crime is at a 39-year low.

Annabel Goldie: It is instructive that with corroboration the conviction rate for sexual offences rose. With the best of intentions, the Scottish Government wants to abolish corroboration, but the only certainties consequent upon that will be more prosecutions and more miscarriages of justice. There is certainly no certainty of more convictions. Given the controversy that that proposal has generated, will the cabinet secretary please consider, for the sake of all interested parties, removing the proposal from the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill and referring it for an external group to consider and advise on?

Kenny MacAskill: The conviction rate for rape and sexual offences has risen because of increased reporting, which is down to a variety of factors: an increase in awareness among and actions taken by police and prosecutors, with dedicated squads; an increase in people's willingness to report such crimes, because of the support, sympathy and treatment given to them not only by law enforcement agencies but by other agencies such as Victim Support Scotland, Rape Crisis Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid; and factors such as the media and the raising of awareness of historical abuse. For those reasons, people to their great credit have shown great courage and stepped forward. The increase in the number of people reporting has resulted in an increase in convictions. However, we still face

significant challenges in ensuring that things are improved.

The matter of corroboration is with the Justice Committee, to which I will give evidence next year. Yesterday I spoke with the Faculty of Advocates and today I spoke with the Law Society of Scotland. I stand by the Lord Justice Clerk's position: this is an archaic rule. It does not serve the victims of rape and sexual offences or domestic abuse. We have to provide access to justice for those who have incapacities, whether they are aged or young. The proposed change to corroboration is not about increasing the conviction rate; that is for the judiciary and juries. It is about allowing access to justice, because at the moment far too many people are denied even that.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that, although the decrease in the number of convictions for violent crimes, excluding homicide, is no cause for complacency, it is a welcome step towards a safer society?

Kenny MacAskill: We should not be complacent, but the fall in violent crimes, excluding homicide, is welcome and reflects the 21 per cent fall in the number of violent crimes recorded by the police between 2011-12 and 2012-13. We also must remember that the homicide rate fell by 32 per cent and is at its lowest level since records began in 1976. However, any crime of violence—any murder—is one too many. We must continue to be ever vigilant, in terms of supporting law enforcement, making legislative changes where necessary, supporting the position of victims and witnesses and changing cultural matters—in particular, the abuse of alcohol at this time of year.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 2 is in the name of Anne McTaggart, who I note is not in the chamber to ask it. I expect an explanation by the end of the day.

"Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland" (Promotion Costs)

3. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the costs of promoting the white paper on independence. (S4O-02739)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): As I indicated in my statement on 26 November, the total cost of the public information campaign to support the launch of "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland" will be around £450,000.

Drew Smith: That is about the cost of a trip to the golf.

We understand that the Scottish Government took £800,000 from the Scottish Water budget to assist with the costs of promoting the white paper and spent about £12,500 on the launch event at the Glasgow science centre. We know that ministers will be embarking on a roadshow next year to sell the white paper. Will the Deputy First Minister confirm whether the costs of the roadshow will be met with the money taken from Scottish Water, whether they are included in the £450,000 or whether they will be met from any other budget held by the Scottish Government?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I said in my statement, the cost of the public information campaign is around £450,000. I also said in my statement—and I repeat—that I will keep the Parliament updated on the final, total cost associated with the white paper.

One of the key constraints in providing information to the Parliament at this stage is that we are still getting very high demand for copies of the white paper. Given the demands that the Opposition has made over the months for more information about what a yes vote in the referendum means, I would have thought that Opposition members would welcome the fact that so many people are keen to access and read the white paper. If Drew Smith does not already have his own copy of the white paper, I would be delighted to provide him with it. He is welcome to come to any of the roadshow events to educate himself about the benefits of independence.

I will, as is the obligation that is placed on me, ensure that the Parliament is kept appropriately updated about the costs of the white paper.

Energy Market Reform

4. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on how the United Kingdom Government's proposed energy market reforms will impact on the Scottish economy. (S4O-02740)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The UK Government has not yet acknowledged the need for different levels of support across the three main island groups—Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles—a need that was identified by the research that was initiated by both Governments. The single proposed strike price of £115 per megawatt hour falls short of the level required for some projects, especially in the Western Isles.

Nigel Don: What impact will energy market reform have on the security of supply?

Fergus Ewing: I share the serious concerns that the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets and National Grid have already expressed about security of supply and the risk of blackouts over

the coming years, especially in England. Electricity margins—that is, the excess of aggregate supply over peak demand—could drop to as little as 2 per cent as early as 2015-16. That is a very slim margin indeed. The Scottish Government is clear that it wants to use the surplus electricity generated from renewable sources, which is now at record levels in Scotland—40 per cent in 2012—not only to supply homes in Scotland but to keep the lights on for our good friends in England.

Emergency Services (Social Media)

5. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it encourages the emergency services to use social media as a means of communicating with the public. (S4O-02741)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government encourages public bodies to use social media—blogs, Twitter, Facebook and other channels. By that approach, we have demonstrated that social media are a powerful tool to communicate and engage with the public. The Scottish Government has developed policies for responsible use of social media and has made those available on its public-facing website for all, including public sector bodies, to use.

Willie Coffey: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the huge potential to keep the public informed and up to date with news and events, particularly on major incidents, often much more quickly than the traditional media can achieve. The recent events at the Clutha bar showed how Police Scotland, for example, can get information out to people relatively quickly and accurately. During the floods in Australia in 2010, the Queensland Police Service Facebook page jumped from 17,000 to 100,000 hits in just 24 hours, which shows the power that social media can achieve. Will he do everything that he can to promote further the use of social media in our public bodies in Scotland as a means of communicating directly and accurately with the people?

John Swinney: Mr Coffey makes a number of important points about the availability of information to members of the public, particularly during critical incidents. His reference to the helicopter crash at the Clutha bar was an illustrative example of how Police Scotland uses social media to inform members of the public and encourage their support and co-operation, which has been a subject of significant note in the chamber. I assure Mr Coffey that the Government is intent on using all such channels of communication to assist with the proactive sharing of information to ensure that members of the

public can, for example, plan journeys. The traffic Scotland Twitter feed is a very helpful source of information on incidents on the transport network. Significant followings are emerging for the emergency services, which can assist in informing members of the public about relevant and important issues.

Social Care

6. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that Scotland's social care system is world leading. (S4O-02742)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government is very proud of the high-quality social care that we have in Scotland and of the dedicated and skilled staff who work hard to support our most vulnerable children, adults and families who are dealing with challenging situations in their lives. The staff who deliver a huge variety of support and services are employed by a range of different organisations in the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors across Scotland. All those providers undertake a range of activities to ensure that services are of high quality and that they deliver good outcomes for users of services, such as improving life chances and enabling people to live longer, healthier and independent lives.

Neil Findlay: The white paper states that an independent Scotland will continue to provide high-quality, "world-leading" social care. In relation to adult social care, does the cabinet secretary really believe that statement? Does he believe that a system that exists on the basis of low pay, poor working conditions, limited training and care visits that in some cases—according to Age Scotland—are now as short as seven minutes is world leading? If he does, he is simply not living in the real world.

Alex Neil: I see that Mr Findlay is full of his usual Christmas cheer. I can tell him that I have commissioned Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate to develop a new model of strategic inspections for adult services across Scotland that takes into consideration, among other things, some of the issues that he mentioned. In particular, I have asked them to look at the commissioning of visits of 15 minutes or less to get to the bottom of why such issues are arising in certain areas—not least those that are controlled by the Labour Party.

Young Disabled Adults (Respite Services)

7. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what measures there are for young disabled adults to access bespoke respite services. (S4O-02743)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): We are funding the better breaks programme to provide responsive and creative short breaks for disabled children and young people up to the age of 20 who have multiple support needs. If projects include some young adults over the age of 20, they can be considered for funding. We are also funding the take a break programme, which provides grants directly to families with disabled children and young people up to the age of 20. We are considering whether, next year, better breaks and take a break should be available to young disabled adults as well as to children and young people and their carers. A decision will be made in time for next year's programmes.

I am aware of the issue of the provision of suitable bespoke respite services for young adults, particularly in view of the age limit for Children's Hospice Association Scotland services. My officials will consider options and will report to me with recommendations early in the new year.

Jim Eadie: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but has he considered Robert Watson's public petition, which highlights the gap in the provision of respite care for young disabled adults? Will he encourage health boards and local authorities to do what is necessary to provide the bespoke respite services that are required, whether that means pooling budgets or adopting a funding model similar to the one that is used to fund children's hospices in Scotland?

Alex Neil: My officials will work in the new year with a view to taking the issue forward. We will consider the views that are expressed in Robert Watson's petition and the model that CHAS has suggested.

As commissioners of care, local authorities and national health service boards have a statutory responsibility to determine the requirements of local services and to provide or commission services. Each local authority and health board will decide on its own priorities and how best to address the need for respite.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): As it is Christmas, will the minister commission research to establish the number of young adults who need bespoke respite services so that the policy responses that he mentioned are evidence based?

Alex Neil: I am always willing to listen to the good fairy godmother, Jackie Baillie. She makes a very good suggestion—one that we have already implemented. We are already trying to quantify the demand for such services among this group but, in the spirit of Christmas, I am prepared to give Jackie Baillie the credit for her press release, which no doubt will be hitting the streets as we speak.

The Presiding Officer: As if.

Proposed Higgs Centre for Innovation

8. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide support for the proposed centre for innovation that is to be based in Edinburgh and named after the Nobel laureate, Professor Peter Higgs. (S4O-02744)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): We welcome the recognition that Professor Higgs is now receiving as a result of his deserved Nobel award and the inspiration that that is providing to the next generation of physicists.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting the Higgs legacy and I am delighted to announce that, via the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, we are further supporting that legacy through a £2 million contribution to the proposed Higgs centre for ideas and an additional £2 million to support postgraduate study in physics or mathematics.

Iain Gray: Those are welcome announcements in recognition of Professor Higgs's marvellous achievement, but they are leveraged, of course, by the funding of £11 million through the Science and Technology Facilities Council, which allows for the centre for innovation to be set up. Will the cabinet secretary not agree with me that it is that combination of devolved and reserved funding and effort that makes us strongest—something that it would be foolish to jeopardise by removing Scotland from the United Kingdom? [*Applause.*]

Michael Russell: It is quite significant that there was no applause from members on the Labour benches for the announcement of £4 million for the Higgs centre but there was applause for Iain Gray's unfortunately partisan welcome of that £4 million. That says it all about the position of the Labour Party. It will not welcome investment in excellence in Scottish education; it will only welcome its own spokesperson, who wants to run it down.

For the avoidance of doubt, I will say that research has no boundaries. That is what it says in the white paper. Research has no boundaries between Scotland and England and it has no international boundaries. Research excellence in Scotland has no boundaries—the work that Peter Higgs did had no boundaries. That is the way we should go forward with research, rather than taking the narrow, partisan view that we have just heard from Iain Gray.

Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 (Support for Carers)

9. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 supports carers. (S4O-02745)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act, which will come into force on 1 April 2014, provides a power for local authorities to support carers. At the discretion of local authorities, carers can be offered a choice of one of the four options for self-directed support as set out in the statute. Regulations about the waiving of charges for support to carers under the act and the accompanying guidance will come into force next April.

Mary Fee: We know that the festive period can be stressful for most people and additionally stressful for carers. What steps has the cabinet secretary taken to provide additional respite and to improve access to respite for paid and unpaid carers at this time of year?

Alex Neil: The member will be aware of the whole range of actions that we have taken to support carers in Scotland, including in the self-directed support act, where we have made clear what the policy is in relation to charging carers for services that they receive in their role as carers—in other words, such charges do not need to be made. As the member will also be aware, we have already announced our intention to introduce to Parliament—over the next 18 months or so—a carers bill, which will further enhance the rights of carers in Scotland.

Commonwealth Games (Benefits for West Scotland)

10. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what benefits the Commonwealth games will bring to West Scotland. (S4O-02746)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): The BIG 2014 communities programme has awarded almost £650,000 to about 430 community programmes; 55 businesses have won games-related contracts; and four projects have been awarded £223,000 through the active places fund, complementing the 26 community sport hubs that are already in place. That is a small sample of the work that is going on. I encourage Mr Paterson and other members to visit the legacy 2014 website, where they can get more details on what is happening in their areas.

Gil Paterson: There has been some chatter in the press—in one paper, in fact—about legacy. Can the minister provide details on how the

Government plans to measure the legacy of the Commonwealth games?

Shona Robison: Our assessing legacy 2014 website tracks the games legacy outcome indicators and reports every six months on progress against the 48 legacy programmes. The progress as at the end of September will be published on the assessing legacy 2014 website later today.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): In this last First Minister's question time of the year, I wish everyone—and I mean everyone—a happy Christmas and a very peaceful new year.

To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-01781)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I reciprocate Johann Lamont's Christmas greetings to everyone in the chamber.

The Government will take forward the programme for Scotland.

Johann Lamont: Earlier this year, we were shocked to find out that proportionately more patients were dying in Lanarkshire than anywhere else in Scotland. This week, we found out why. According to staff, NHS Lanarkshire is in

"a state of perpetual crisis".

That raises serious questions about the running of our health service. Alex Neil is blaming everyone—bar himself. When will the Scottish Government take responsibility for the problems in our national health service?

The First Minister: In the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's statement on Tuesday, which I attended the chamber to listen to, he showed exactly the action that the Government is taking. Among the most important points that Alex Neil made on Tuesday was, of course, that without the introduction of the patient safety programme in the national health service, there would have been no means of identifying the problems that have been identified in Lanarkshire. He also made the point that although there is, of course, a serious situation, which has been responded to in a serious way, it should be remembered that there has been improvement in the patient mortality rates, even in Monklands hospital. The alarm bells rang because that improvement was not as great as it was across Scotland. The health secretary also went through the significant increases in staff, nurses and consultants in NHS Lanarkshire over the past few years.

All that information was imparted in the chamber last Tuesday. I thought that it was done in a serious and excellent way as a response to a serious situation. That is how we should treat the situation and that is how the Government will treat it, in the interests of the health service in Scotland.

Johann Lamont: It is precisely because the problem is serious that the matter has been

raised. The difficulty for the Scottish Government is that it appears to be responding to bad headlines rather than addressing problems of which we have been aware for years. On rare diseases, cancer drugs or trolley waits, it seems that a headline in the *Daily Record* is what is needed for the cabinet secretary to respond, rather than there being an understanding that these are huge problems that have to be addressed over time.

The high number of deaths may have been unique to Lanarkshire, but the problems that caused them are endemic in Scotland: overworked nurses, overstretched doctors, not enough beds, and gaps in out-of-hours and weekend provision are all problems that have been growing for a number of years. Can the First Minister tell us why his health secretary is only now addressing the problem in his own constituency, although alarm bells have been ringing across Scotland for some time?

The First Minister: Again, that point was dealt with in the statement on Tuesday.

I return to the indicators that were responded to. The hospital standardised mortality ratio indicators that have been introduced in the health service as part of the patient safety programme showed a fall—that is, an improvement—of 4.3 per cent at Monklands since 2007, a fall of 7 per cent at Hairmyres, and a fall of almost 18 per cent in Wishaw. The alarm bells were rung because the improvements at Monklands—in particular—and Hairmyres were less than the Scottish average of 12.4 per cent. That was in response not to headlines, but to the patient safety programme that has been introduced in hospitals around Scotland.

Without those indicators and that information, the health secretary would not have been able to set up the review that reported on the matter. He then reported the information to Parliament on Tuesday; the facts are well understood. Perhaps Johann Lamont will acknowledge the seriousness with which the investigation was undertaken, and the action that has been rolled out to address the situation. That is surely the way to respond to the situation in Lanarkshire, and the way to treat the health service.

Johann Lamont: That situation is not happening just in Lanarkshire, it is not just happening now and it is not happening simply because a measure was introduced to identify the problem. Had the First Minister listened to staff over the years, he would have known that there is a problem.

We are now in a position in which only a third of nurses and midwives say that they can meet the conflicting demands during their time at work, and

just a quarter think that there are enough staff to allow them to do their job properly. That is not something that we should be complacent about, nor has it happened just over the past couple of weeks.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland uncovered weekend staffing levels as being a key problem in NHS Lanarkshire. Through freedom of information requests, we have a snapshot of staffing levels elsewhere. NHS Lothian has reported that its medical staff drops from more than 1,000 a day to just 25 at weekends, NHS Forth Valley has at the weekend half the nursing staff that it has on a week day, and in NHS Fife consultant numbers fall from 210 to 7 at the weekend. All over Scotland, hospitals are operating with minimal resources against increasing pressures, just as NHS Lanarkshire is.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We need a question, Ms Lamont.

Johann Lamont: What will it take for the First Minister to acknowledge that we have a serious problem in delivering the health service that we want for Scotland?

The First Minister: That is why we guaranteed the real-terms increase in the health resource budget and delivered it. Let us remember that staffing levels in the national health service are up 5.6 per cent—an increase of more than 7,000 staff since Labour was in power. Qualified nurses and midwives are up by more than 1,000, paramedics are up 11 per cent, medical consultants—who play a key part in processing people through hospitals—are up by 28 per cent, general practitioners are up by 5 per cent and dentists are up by 33 per cent. Those are all comparisons with the staffing levels when the Labour Party was in power. Those increases were possible because we guaranteed the real-terms increase in revenue funding.

In both the 2007 election and in the run-up to the 2011 election, the Labour Party refused to guarantee that real-terms resource funding, but we know what it would have done because we can look to Wales, where health funding is falling in real terms. At what stage will Johann Lamont recognise that although there are challenges in the health service that are being responded to in a serious way, this Government has backed the health service with real resources and money, which the Labour Party did not promise to do in those two previous elections?

Johann Lamont: The First Minister has returned to his comfort zone; he wants this to be a fight between politicians about numbers and manifestos. Let us not worry that staff are saying that they cannot do the job or that NHS Lanarkshire “is in ... perpetual crisis” because he

can show that his numbers are better than ours. That is nonsense.

The First Minister does not need to listen to me. Let him listen to Theresa Fyffe, the Royal College of Nursing Scotland's director—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Continue, Ms Lamont.

Johann Lamont: I suspect that Theresa Fyffe knows a great deal more about the matter than any of us in the chamber. Less than an hour ago she said:

"The Scottish Government cannot simply continue to say that the number of nurses working in the NHS is higher now than it was a couple of years ago—this misses the point entirely. We need enough appropriately skilled nurses—and other staff—working in the right places to both meet growing demand and deliver good quality care."

That is the challenge to which the First Minister needs to rise.

The Presiding Officer: A question, Ms Lamont?

Johann Lamont: I have a question. Audit Scotland says that the pressures will increase, the British Medical Association says that the situation is unsustainable and the Royal College of Nursing is calling for a full review. Those calls are backed by *The Herald* newspaper, which is leading calls for an honest debate. Is the First Minister prepared to get beyond crisis management and agree to a full-scale review of NHS staffing and resources, and to confront with honesty the scale of the challenge that has been identified by health service staff and patients?

The First Minister: The health service does not need a review—it needs the resources to meet the rising demand for health services. That is why this Government has guaranteed the real-terms increase in health funding, which Labour would not do.

On what people say, let us remember that 85 per cent of Scottish in-patients say that their care was good or excellent, 87 per cent of people are satisfied with the care in the national health service, and 89 per cent of patients believe that the care that their GP surgery provided was good or excellent. The point about patient satisfaction is important, because those are the people who are treated by the health service.

On the specifics about NHS Lanarkshire, it would have been instructive for her if Johann Lamont had bothered to attend the statement on Tuesday to hear the health secretary address those matters in a serious fashion. The point is that alarm bells were rung because Lanarkshire's improvements in patient safety were smaller than those that were taking place across Scotland.

The patient safety programme has been lauded by the very person who was brought in to address the serious difficulties in the health service south of the border. Let us remember that Don Berwick said:

"The Scottish Patient Safety Programme is without doubt one of the most ambitious patient safety initiatives in the world—national in scale, bold in aims, and disciplined in science ... aligned toward a common vision, making Scotland the safest nation on earth from the viewpoint of health care."

Yes, we have specific problems in Lanarkshire. They are being addressed. Yes, of course the health service is under pressure. However, politicians respond to the health service by backing the nurses, backing the doctors and backing the real resources that need to go into the health service.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): I add my best wishes to all for a very happy and peaceful Christmas and new year period.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-01777)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans in the near future, but I understand that a DVD of the secretary of state's appearance in committee last week is being circulated, either as part of a civil service training programme or as propaganda for the yes campaign.

Ruth Davidson: It is good to see that the objection to narrow political points that the First Minister's Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning made a few moments ago did not last into the First Minister's remarks.

This week it was announced that anyone who is convicted of housebreaking over the festive period will face a maximum sentence of five years in prison, instead of the one year that is currently the maximum. Does the First Minister agree that the policy should be extended beyond 6 January, so that people who are convicted of housebreaking in future will always face a higher sentence?

The First Minister: The sentence is for the determination and judgment of the court, but I would have thought that most people would welcome the initiative from Police Scotland and the Crown Office to address a problem that has been identified.

Let us remember that this is happening in the context of the drop in recorded crime in Scotland to its lowest for more than 30 years. That is a substantial achievement of this Government coming into office. Let us also remember something really important, which is that the public's fear of crime, which is pernicious

throughout society, is much, much lower in Scotland than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom.

At some point, will Ruth Davidson acknowledge that the efforts of our police service and our Crown Office are bearing results in society's battle against the criminal?

Ruth Davidson: I welcome Police Scotland's initiative and I am glad that the First Minister recognises its value. However, it somewhat misses the point: a crime in June is every bit as wrong as a crime in December, and the penalty for breaking into someone's home should be just as serious every day of the year.

Few people will disagree with the initiative, but most people also think that what is needed is a firm commitment to a permanent change. Last year, nearly 1,400 people were convicted of housebreaking, but only half got any form of custodial sentence at all. Those who violate the homes of others should know that they face the full force of the law, no matter in which month they commit their crime.

Will the First Minister take action, so that housebreakers can face higher sentences all year round?

The First Minister: Sentencing is a matter for the courts and for the Crown Office, and action by the police is an operational matter for Police Scotland, guided of course by this Government. Police Scotland is able to conduct the campaign because it has the staff and people power available to pursue it. That is because 1,000 extra police officers are working in the communities of Scotland.

I know that Ruth Davidson wants to be gathered into the Christmas cheer, so I will not make the full point about the dramatic decline in police numbers south of the border and the total lack of confidence that the Police Federation has in the Home Secretary, but there is not a single police officer in Scotland that would not rather be fighting crime here in Scotland, and many of their English colleagues would like to come and join them.

Cabinet (Meetings)

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

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-01778)

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

Willie Rennie: Yesterday's unemployment figures show that 1.3 million more people are in work, including 110,000 in Scotland. The First Minister said that the coalition's economic strategy

would not work. There is more to be done, of course, but does not the First Minister now accept that he got it wrong?

The First Minister: I congratulate Willie Rennie on raising the subject of unemployment. Johann Lamont has not done it once this entire year, presumably because the Labour Party does not like to see the successes that we are having in Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: If the fact that employment is higher in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom, that unemployment is now lower, that youth unemployment is lower and that there has been a dramatic increase in female employment in Scotland has nothing to do with the policies of Mr Swinney and the Scottish Government, why have Mr Rennie's colleagues not replicated that success to its full extent south of the border?

We should also remember that although the figures have improved throughout the year and some impressive gains have been made in employment, we are coming out of the greatest recession since the 1930s, which was induced by the Westminster parties, and our recovery has been delayed by Mr Rennie and his Tory colleagues in London.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister said that the coalition plan would not work; now he claims the credit for that plan. There is a lot more to do, but it is the coalition plan that is building the stronger economy. Taxes on jobs are down. Fuel duty has been frozen. Investment in science and broadband is up. Growth is up. The millions who are working in Scotland have had their income tax cut by £700 each. The First Minister does not support all those measures but will he, for once, recognise the achievement?

The First Minister: It is Christmas so I will be as gentle as possible, for I would never say that London is draining the life out of the rest of the country as Vince Cable said this morning on the radio.

I will give the full quote for the Tory members' benefit. Business secretary Mr Cable, who is a coalition minister and a member of the Liberal Democrats, said that London

"is becoming a giant suction machine draining the life out of the rest of the country".

I think that he was alluding to the fact that development is uneven across the UK.

The fact that Scotland is doing relatively well in terms of employment and unemployment, particularly with the growth of female employment, might have something to do with the discretion in policies that has enabled Mr Swinney, for

example, to mitigate some of the effects of the dramatic cuts in capital spending that were enforced by the Westminster Government.

As it is Christmas, I will give the Liberal Democrats a present. Among the dramatic successes indicated in yesterday's employment figures was the fact that there are now 61,000 more women in work in Scotland than there were last year. That is a great thing. That is 3 per cent more women working in Scotland. If 3 per cent can be achieved in one year, does Mr Rennie not think that 6 per cent could be achieved in five years, given the transformational childcare proposals for an independent Scotland?

Lockerbie Commemoration

4. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government will commemorate the passing of 25 years since the Lockerbie disaster. (S4F-01794)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The local community in Lockerbie will be commemorating the tragic events of a quarter of a century ago. On Saturday, I will be attending a wreath-laying ceremony in memory of all those who were lost in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103. There will be ministerial attendance at the evening service at the church, the commemorative service at Westminster abbey in London and the memorial service at the Arlington national cemetery in Washington.

One of the themes of the memorial event in Washington is to look forward. That will involve students from Lockerbie and Syracuse University, which of course lost 35 students in the tragedy. The exchange scheme has allowed the communities in Scotland and America to come closer together and look to the future with hope and expectation. I can confirm that the Scottish Government will make a contribution of £60,000 towards the fund that allows Lockerbie students to study at the university in the United States.

I am sure that members from across the chamber will join me in confirming that our thoughts, and the thoughts of people across Scotland, are with those who were affected by the terrible events of 21 December 1988 that befell the town of Lockerbie and all those on board Pan Am flight 103. That comes poignantly as we approach the 25th anniversary of the tragedy.

Christine Grahame: I thank the First Minister for his reply and endorse his comments with regard to our thoughts for the victims' families and indeed the victims themselves.

I should declare that I am a signatory to the justice for Megrahi campaign and, like many

others, am concerned that the wrong man—and possibly the wrong nation—was in the dock.

Will the First Minister now write to the Prime Minister requesting a joint inquiry, under section 32 of the Inquiries Act 2005 and the concordat between both Governments, into all aspects of that atrocity? If the Prime Minister does not agree, will the First Minister's Government take the lead and instigate an inquiry here into the devolved issues, such as the policing and Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service actions, which might at last kick-start a full United Kingdom inquiry, which, I respectfully suggest, is what the victims' families really require?

The First Minister: I think the focus of events on Saturday should and will be on remembering those who were lost 25 years ago and on supporting the aim of the community in Lockerbie, including young people, to look forward.

The bombing of Pan Am flight 103 was a terrible crime. As the Lord Advocate made clear this week, there are live investigations into that crime, to see whether others can be brought to account.

The Scottish Government has not written to the UK Government asking for a joint inquiry. Mr al-Megrahi was convicted in a court of law and that conviction was upheld by the appeal court. We have made it clear that our view is that the only place in which Mr al-Megrahi's conviction could be upheld or overturned is a court of law.

There are established procedures in place, as part of the checks and balances in our justice system, that allow the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission to consider referring a case back to court. It is important to note that the processes can be used even though Mr al-Megrahi is deceased.

Scottish Welfare Fund

5. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister when the Scottish Government will publish the next set of statistics for the Scottish welfare fund. (S4F-01785)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The chief statistician will be publishing statistics on the Scottish welfare fund at 9.30 am on Tuesday 11 February. Those statistics will cover the period from 1 April to 30 September 2013.

Jackie Baillie: In this season of goodwill, let me thank the First Minister for his response and wish him a merry Christmas. I am sure that he will be aware, however, that for some families it will not be a very merry Christmas, due to their experience of poverty.

Is it not the case that the First Minister promised publication of the statistics on the Scottish welfare fund in November? The date then slipped to

December and now it is to be the middle of February next year. Is it not the case that his Government has failed to spend the money that is intended for the poorest, most destitute people in our communities? Is it not the case that publication is being delayed solely to hide the fact that in some areas as little as 11 per cent of the available money has been distributed?

The First Minister: If that is Jackie Baillie at Christmas, I would hate to think how she is for the rest of the year.

As Jackie Baillie knows, the head of the communities analytical services division wrote to the Welfare Reform Committee on 29 November to inform it of concern over the quality of data received from councils and said that the figures would now be published on 11 February.

Jackie Baillie: There were 16 changes to the guidance.

The First Minister: Jackie Baillie should have put that in her question, but I will address it, because it is Christmas.

It was pointed out that the chief statistician has the sole responsibility for deciding on the content and timing of statistical releases.

Jackie Baillie mentioned 16 changes to guidance. There has been only one change to guidance, in October, which was planned to take account of universal credit and to widen out eligibility to allow greater flexibility.

We might have thought that Jackie Baillie's concern over the matter would allow her to welcome the fact that this Government acted to increase flexibility so that the welfare fund and the top-up funding that we established could help more people facing the crisis of Westminster welfare—well, they call it reform, but it is actually the dismantling of the welfare state.

It is Jackie Baillie who, faced with a crisis of welfare induced by Westminster, said—even under those circumstances—not that Scotland could not have its own welfare system, but that it should not have its own welfare system. That is why, even at Christmas, Jackie Baillie is the one with explaining to do.

Wind Turbine Development (Tiree)

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the impact will be on the Scottish Government's energy policy of Scottish Power's decision not to go ahead with its proposed wind turbine development off Tiree. (S4F-01780)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): There will be no impact, in the sense that that was always regarded as a longer-range project.

Although I will not accuse Liz Smith of having a planted question, this gives me the opportunity to point out that this very morning, the latest statistics on Scottish renewables and renewables generation figures have been published. They show that Scottish renewable electricity enjoyed another record year. Renewable resources delivered 40.3 per cent of gross electricity consumption in 2012, up from 36 per cent in 2011 and putting us well on the way to the interim target of 50 per cent by 2015.

Although the question was not prearranged, I know that Liz Smith will join me and the whole chamber in welcoming that demonstration of the success of the renewables strategy in Scotland.

Liz Smith: In the spirit of Christmas, I note that I am not given to asking planted questions.

Shale oil and gas are revolutionising the United States energy markets by substantially reducing costs, customer bills and carbon emissions. That is why, earlier this week, the United Kingdom Government produced a regulatory road map for shale oil and gas. Will the Scottish Government now produce a road map for Scotland?

The First Minister: We are a country that produces seven times the hydrocarbons that we consume. We should therefore proceed cautiously on the undoubted opportunities that there are for shale gas in Scotland, not just onshore but offshore. That would be my position and the Government's position on the matter.

What interests me is that the Conservative Party has been objecting to energy projects the length and breadth of the country. I do not think that it carries its support in that matter, because its support shows consistent support for wind energy. I do not think that it even carries its members on the matter, as at least three of them have wind projects on their own landholdings.

A balanced policy for renewables is the right way forward. I hope that the Westminster Government can start to reconcile the differences between the two elements of the coalition because that difference and uncertainty are the sole things that are damaging opportunities for further energy initiatives in Scotland.

Home Office Go Home Campaign

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-08323, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on discontinuation of the Home Office's go home campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the Home Office decision to discontinue what it considers its insensitive, callous and ill-thought-out Go Home poster campaign at its reporting centre at Brand Street in Glasgow; considers that, as the Scottish Refugee Council has stated, it caused distress to men, women and children in Scotland, some of whom are past victims of atrocity, torture and ill-treatment; notes what it believes is the shared will in Scotland and across the UK against such a hostile policy toward people who have claimed asylum in the UK; considers that the Go Home campaign messages echoed the language of the National Front in the 1970s, which was targeted particularly at non-white communities and recently arrived visible minority immigrants, and believes that what it sees as such an intemperate and appalling approach to refugees should be rejected.

12:29

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am an immigrant—I was born in Hong Kong to a Portuguese father and a Scottish mother. Although I came to this country in my teenage years—quite a long time ago, some might say—this is my home and where I choose to live and bring up my family. When the Home Office says, "Go home", what is it saying to me? More important, what is saying to people who are seeking asylum? Many are fleeing from violence or to save their lives, and the reality is that many of them will not see family and friends again. Those are the tough choices that people face when they seek asylum.

Some of us are just about old enough to remember the 1970s and the hate-filled and toxic rhetoric of the National Front, telling the newly arrived visible minority immigrants to go home. I do not accept that the Home Office campaign is in any way a coincidence, which makes it all the more appalling. It is beyond belief that the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition would borrow from such right-wing racist ideology.

For those who missed it, the campaign consisted of mobile billboards in London and a pilot poster campaign in the Glasgow and Hounslow reporting centres. The billboards asked:

"In the UK illegally? GO HOME OR FACE ARREST".

There's subtlety for you. How about the posters in Glasgow? One said:

"Is life here hard? Going home is simple".

Another said:

"This plane can take you home. We can book the tickets".

Yet another said:

"Going home is as easy as 1, 2, 3".

One Scottish Refugee Council client, a woman awaiting asylum, had this to say:

"The signs were everywhere in the Glasgow Reporting Centre—on the back of chairs, on the walls and on the steps. I had my three year old with me and he kept asking me what all the signs said, where the footprints on the floor led. There were huge pictures of homeless people. I didn't know what to say to him."

What can one say about such a crude, insensitive and utterly appalling campaign? Theresa May should be ashamed of herself. It was, I think, a personal error of judgment; she signed off the vans, the slogans and the funding and defended them for months until her recent U-turn.

It is fair to say that the billboards triggered not only a storm of protest across the United Kingdom but successful challenges to the Government. First, the courts determined that the Home Office had acted unlawfully by failing to have due regard to its public sector equality duty. Secondly, the Advertising Standards Authority determined that the figures quoted for arrests could not be substantiated and should be withdrawn. The ASA also concluded that the Home Office must not run the campaign again in its current form.

The campaign had the potential to damage community relations and incite hatred against minority communities. Of course, it is part of a wider and more worrying approach by the UK Government, which I believe nurtures a deep and persistent hostility towards migration, especially those who are seeking asylum. Although the Immigration Bill, which is currently before the UK Parliament, contains provisions that would command support across the chamber, it also contains others that are deeply concerning. For example, the clauses on residential tenancies place a duty on private sector landlords and housing associations to check and monitor the immigration status of prospective and existing tenants, with little practical support from the Home Office and the prospect of a £3,000 fine for failing to do so. It will undoubtedly lead to discrimination in such housing, and it is totally impractical to burden landlords with no experience of dealing with immigration matters in such a way.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): On Jackie Baillie's point about the use of inflammatory language, with which I entirely concur, does she think that the phrase

"British jobs for British workers"

falls into a similar category of politicians using rhetoric that really is rather irresponsible in a broader context?

Jackie Baillie: I do not agree with the member, but I believe that we need to get beyond the populist rhetoric and come up with evidence-based solutions. Let me be clear: I think that we all accept that there are people who come into the country who do not have protection needs and should therefore return to their country of origin. However, that is best done as part of the routine assessment carried out between a Home Office decision maker and the person who is seeking asylum, not through generic advertising of the kind that we witnessed in the go home campaign.

I want to explode some myths on immigration. Myth 1 is that many immigrants come to the UK as benefit tourists. The truth is that only 38,000 claimants out of some 1.5 million people claiming jobseekers allowance came from other countries. Myth 2 is that immigrants are a burden on the UK economy. The truth is that immigrants contribute more than they take out of the economy—an amount that has been estimated at some £25 billion in the past decade alone.

Myth 3 is that most immigrants to the UK are somehow unskilled. The truth is that 32 per cent of European Union immigrants and 43 per cent of non-EU immigrants held a university degree in comparison with 21 per cent of the UK population. Myth 4 is that most immigrants come to the UK and do not work. The truth is that, in 2012, labour market participation for foreign-born people was 73.7 per cent and their unemployment rate was 9.3 per cent—statistics that almost perfectly match those for the rest of the UK population.

It is appropriate to have controls and to tackle illegal immigration, but we need a mature debate and policy that is based on evidence and understanding rather than ill-informed rhetoric.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The debate is heavily subscribed and a number of members wish to speak, so I ask members for speeches of four minutes or less.

12:36

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the debate that Jackie Baillie has brought to the chamber on the discontinuation of the Home Office go home campaign. This is our last day of debates in the chamber before Christmas, and I have a message of good will for Jackie Baillie: “Feliz Natal!”—a merry Christmas from a new Scot born in France to an MSP to highlight our shared Portuguese identity.

Those last remarks require a wee explanation. My mother, like Jackie Baillie’s father, is

Portuguese. I am sure that Jackie Baillie and I share some of the same childhood memories of fados, strong Christian faith and dried figs. I like to think that the main reason that I decided to pack my suitcase and leave to settle abroad was the fact that my Portuguese grandfather did the same thing before me. The Portuguese tradition of considering the world as a good place to live is very much the same tradition that I found here in Scotland. Jackie Baillie and I must have many relatives in South America, just as most Scots have many relatives in North America. I see Scotland as the Portugal of the British isles, although fortunately for the people in Portugal decisions are not taken in Madrid.

That is what the debate is about. The poster campaigns in Glasgow originated not from this Parliament but from the Home Office in London. Like the Scottish Refugee Council, I was appalled by the Home Office go home campaign, but it did not come as a surprise to me. The rhetoric around refugees and migration south of the border has been hotting up for some decades, and the campaign is just the logical progression of the debate that is taking place at Westminster.

The first mistake—I do not know why I give the Home Office the benefit of the doubt by calling it a mistake—is to mix two separate issues into one. Jackie Baillie made that mistake in her speech. We need to separate migration and the right to asylum. The second mistake is to make the issue a political argument—we have just heard an intervention in that vein—in order to win votes. The last mistake is not to realise that, once a negative campaign of fear against a group of people has been started, it is very difficult to stop.

I heard a lot of ideas from people who were offended by the go home campaign. We might have had to start our own campaign—“Welcome to Scotland: we want you to stay, we need you to stay”—if the Home Office campaign had not stopped.

We in the chamber all agree on the valuable contribution that refugees can make here in Scotland. Recently I ventured out of my own region to visit a very active group of refugees and asylum seekers in Maryhill in Glasgow. I made them laugh when I told them that I became an MSP without having to prove my identity—my French passport was not needed. That is an example of how inclusive a society we are, and we should celebrate that more often. That was one of the conclusions that was reached at the our day: migrants in Scotland event that was held in the Parliament last Tuesday, at which the Minister for External Affairs and International Development spoke.

We, as politicians, have the biggest responsibility in keeping political debate free from

negative campaigns of fear towards refugees and migrant communities. We must debate the issues but with a different tone. I, for one, do not blame the media down south, because the media reflects only what the political establishment in London is saying day after day. We cannot help what the Westminster message is, but we can ensure that every political party in Scotland takes another direction when talking about refugees and migration.

My message to the media in Scotland is that we want it to report the positive message coming out of this chamber, which is based on facts. Page 118 of the Scottish Refugee Council's report "In Search of Normality: Refugee Integration in Scotland" shows how refugees see Scotland: they say that they feel welcome and that the problem is the Home Office. In the report "New Scots—Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities" from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Refugee Council and the Scottish Government, we can read of the vision of how we can do things better in Scotland than they are done at Westminster just now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you need to close.

Christian Allard: We can read about the same thing in "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland".

I am afraid that Jackie Baillie will not be happy with me. I am not going to give her a Christmas card, but she will get an email that will explain that, instead, I chose to drive to Peterhead and give a cheque to the local fishermen's mission. I learned there that there will be a very special Christmas lunch for all the foreign crews working in the fishing industry. That is an industry that is dear to me and which would not have survived over the years without the migrants who chose to come and work in Scotland. What a wonderful Christmas message from the blue toon—Peterhead—in giving a message of thanks for all the people who have chosen to come and live here in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but because I was rather lenient with Monsieur Allard I am afraid that I can give other members only up to four minutes for speeches.

12:41

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing the debate and giving Parliament an opportunity to express our collective anger at an insensitive, callous and ill-thought-out campaign.

Like other members, I have substantial casework consisting of people's complaints about the go home campaign. When I wrote to Theresa

May to ask her to withdraw the campaign, I got a very cavalier response from the UK Minister for Immigration, Mark Harper, who argued that he felt that it was the majority opinion of the British public that the message should be promoted. I think that the Scottish Parliament will today speak out in stark contrast to that perceived belief.

I chair a national organisation called Movement for Change, which is all about community organising and empowering people to effect change in their own communities. There are numerous strands to the campaign, which include some of the work that I have done around payday lending and work around housing standards. There is also a specific stream of work around the refugee community in London, where we have been working very closely with the Refugee Council to help support destitute women in London.

One of those women is Trizah Ndwaru, who was a student at Napier in the late 1980s, where she completed a masters degree in water management. She is an incredible woman who has published several books and is highly intelligent and dignified. She went back to Rwanda and had a very successful career, but then things started to change in Rwanda. She faced horrific systematic abuse and had to flee the country and come back to the United Kingdom. She has lived in London for 12 years now without recourse to public funds. I met Trizah in the House of Commons when Stella Creasy and I were running a training workshop with women on how to empower them to take part in the political process.

The posters in the Home Office building in Glasgow's Brand Street said

"Is life here hard? Going home is simple".

Yes, life here is hard for Trizah Ndwaru, but she cannot go home—there is no way she can go home. She needs a Government that is on her side. She wants to be able to contribute to British culture and society, and to connect and integrate. If she cannot have that, she wants at least a Government that understands her life and how she finds herself in the United Kingdom and on what terms.

That is what the London refugee women's forum exists to do; it is about building the women's confidence and giving them the power, skills and ability to articulate what their life is really like and to speak truth to power. It is about tackling the injustice of women who face destitution every day. At the moment, the women are working to make their own submission to the Home Affairs Committee's inquiry into asylum.

That type of work is critically important. I welcome the opportunity that Jackie Baillie has given Parliament to let me tell that story today.

12:44

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I welcome the discontinuation of the poster campaign that the motion mentions. I think that the decision to do that was right and appropriate. However, the nature of the debate that has been brought before us today is one that I find difficult to accept.

Let me lay a few myths. As a Conservative, I am not opposed to immigration. I see Scotland today as a country that, in some of its regions, has a chronic labour shortage, and the movement of labour around Europe, particularly within the European Union, is a boon to many businesses in parts of Scotland that simply would not exist if they could not employ eastern European labour. Similarly, I believe that this country has a proud record of providing asylum for those who require it.

The Labour Party has questions to answer about its treatment of refugees when it was in government. It had a tendency to accept asylum seekers into the country, give them homes, give their children school places and then take years to decide that they were not entitled to asylum in this country. That resulted in people who had been here for many years being deported at short notice, which was, in itself, cruel and unusual treatment. The previous Labour Government did not have an unblemished record.

What we see today from Jackie Baillie is, as other members have said, an attempt to confuse and conflate a number of issues. We should be prepared to address the issue of illegal immigration in a sensible and fair way. It is reasonable that any country should have rules governing who can and cannot enter as an economic migrant, and those who seek to bypass the system with bogus asylum claims or by simply bypassing the entry points to the country altogether should feel the full force of the law. It is important that those who are not entitled to be here and cannot justify their presence are given the opportunity to return to the country from which they came.

I am concerned about the motion's reference to the behaviour of the National Front back in the 1970s. I am just about old enough to remember how the National Front behaved in the early 1970s and I would not wish to compare anyone with it, although I understand that certain words on the posters may give the opportunity for such comparisons to be made. However, if we look at the Labour Party's actions in opposition south of the border, we see it reacting to the proposals to change the rules in advance of 1 January with nothing other than procrastination. What is driving that other than fear of the advance of the UK Independence Party south of the border?

I believe that we need a much clearer view of what constitutes a legal immigrant and an illegal immigrant. We need to accept those who are part of our economic process and welcome those who are entitled to seek asylum in this country. However, synthetic outrage and failure to see the big picture does nothing to deliver for those people.

12:48

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):

I add my thanks to those of my colleagues to Jackie Baillie for bringing this important debate to the chamber, especially at this time of year. Yesterday was international migrants day, and we celebrated the day in the Parliament on Tuesday night when, with the Scottish Refugee Council, Migrants Rights Scotland, Migrant Voice and a number of eminent academics, we debated with Humza Yousaf, the Minister for External Affairs and International Development, the very positive impact that new Scots have had on this land. The warm stories of the welcomes that they received were tinged with the harrowing stories of the treatment that was meted out by the Home Office and the UK Border Agency.

Let us get one thing straight: as members have stated, migrants in Scotland contribute far more to our society than they take out—that is a plain fact. Yesterday, when we were celebrating the positives of migration, David Cameron and his anti-EU pals in UKIP were heading to Brussels to tell the EU what to do. How confrontational and nasty can they get? Some people describe UKIP as the tail wagging the coalition dog, but I would describe it as an irksome flea on the tail wagging the dog. We saw how nasty they can get with their go home campaign vans and posters on billboards. What a disgusting exercise. Using the language of the far right in such a campaign is absolutely abhorrent.

Today, the Migrant Voice website carried a blog post by Pinar Aksu. Its headline uses one of the tag lines of the Home Office's campaign: "Is life here hard? Going home is simple." The post continues:

"Once again, here I am—outside the Home Office at Brand Street in Glasgow. This is where I used to come with my family every Monday after school to let UKBA know that we are here and not running away. This is where I witnessed how some people on this planet have no feelings. Their hearts have been replaced with cold stones. They don't believe you. They don't listen to you. THEY treat you as a number. By 'they' I am referring to those who work for UKBA. If they were part of this world then they could understand the reasons why people seek asylum: Not for fun, but for their safety.

It has been 7 years that I have been involved with campaigning for asylum and human rights. Every time I come to Brand Street, I feel different. It brings back memories when I was an asylum seeker and how my family was treated. Nothing but a piece of paper. Sometimes it

hurts being here, knowing that this disgusting treatment is continuing. Many families being sent back, many dreams being locked away: trust me UKBA you are not helpful at all. Once again this is why I am here again, standing shoulder to shoulder supporting those that must witness posters saying 'Go Home' in Glasgow and London. I find this disgusting and humiliating and I am not alone in thinking this.

The Scottish Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon (and others) mentioned how she was unhappy with what was going on, meanwhile the Minister for Immigration, Mark Harper replied back to Ms Sturgeon saying 'it was for failed asylum seekers to return home easily and with dignity'. I want to clarify something here, why would someone who runs away from a war zone or from any other difficulties want to go back? Why would someone want to leave their homeland and face difficulties in another country? I suppose no one will understand this unless they carry a brain and a heart with them.

I only ask for one thing: bin those posters! It is disgusting to see such a thing happening in a country with 'human rights'. Let me tell you one final thing, no one in this world would want to leave their sweet home out of nowhere and move to another country to be treated like an animal. For those who came up with this clever idea saying, 'Is life here hard? Going home is simple', why don't you go and see if 'life is hard there'?"

To return to Christmas, would the UKBA have turned away Mary and Joseph if they had sought asylum in this country? I wonder.

I know that Jackie Baillie will not agree with me on this point, but the only way to move away from the anti-EU, anti-migrant, right-wing danger that is Westminster is to vote yes next year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In view of the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice to extend the time for debate by half an hour.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by 30 minutes.—[Jackie Baillie.]

Motion agreed to.

12:52

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I am conscious that Bob Doris and Neil Findlay also lodged motions on this subject, but I congratulate Jackie Baillie not only on lodging the motion but on securing this afternoon's debate. I also thank the Scottish Refugee Council for its comprehensive, detailed and measured briefing.

The SRC condemns the Home Office's campaign for its

"crude approach, insensitive tone, and the real distress and trauma it caused."

That sums it up pretty much perfectly, and it also helps to explain the response to the campaign. That response came not only from Scotland; as

Jackie Baillie's motion acknowledges, the backlash was UK-wide and, as the SRC says in its briefing, it

"triggered a storm of protest across the UK, particularly in London."

There are many aspects of the campaign to criticise, but the sheer predictability of the fallout makes it all the more galling. It is clear that Home Office ministers demonstrably did not seek views across Government, and certainly not across the coalition. However, to compound that—in breach of the public sector equality duty—they did not even bother to seek the views of those working in the sector. It is quite clear at this stage that the reputation and work of the Home Office have been undermined and that, more worrying still, those working on its behalf, including the likes of Refugee Action, which was contracted to run the assisted voluntary return scheme, have suffered damage as well.

We should not lose sight of the fact that, as the SRC and Jackie Baillie acknowledge, there are people who do not have protection needs and should return to their country of origin. However, that is best achieved through confidential dialogue between refused asylum seekers, their advisers and Home Office staff. Wider communications can also play a useful role in that, but not when they are as hostile and generic as those that were used in the go home campaign.

The evidence shows not only that the posters, billboards and leaflets were inflammatory and offensive but that they cannot even be claimed to have been effective. Refugee Action has stated that the campaign has

"diminished levels of trust in our service"

and reduced the take-up of the assisted voluntary return scheme.

Of course, the language that was used in the campaign has, understandably, attracted most of the criticism. As Jackie Baillie highlighted, the "go home" rhetoric had uncomfortable echoes of the rhetoric that has been used by fascist movements through the years, notably in the 1970s.

The campaign has also allowed conflation of the issues of asylum and immigration to take place. As Christian Allard was right to say, we need to have this debate. The issues are serious, cannot be ducked and must not be oversimplified. They require all politicians to take care in the language that we use.

Illegal immigration is a problem that must be tackled. For example, the removal of exit checks was a mistake that successive Administrations made in the 1990s, and the situation now needs to be reassessed and addressed. That will be key to restoring public confidence in this area. From

rogue employers to bogus colleges, action quite rightly has been taken by the UK Government to address shortcomings, but the debate, at all times, needs to be characterised by fairness and balance.

It is worth mentioning the welcome end of child detention as part of the coalition agreement. The practice at Dungavel and elsewhere was utterly reprehensible and a scar on our conscience.

There are issues that we must continue to debate and difficult decisions that we need to take, but the serious risk arising from the go home campaign is that we make the task more difficult and in the process cause unnecessary risk and anxiety to many vulnerable people who already feel under threat and others who have made and continue to make such a significant economic, social and cultural contribution to Scotland and the UK as a whole.

Jackie Baillie: I welcome Liam McArthur's comments. Does he agree that the housing provisions in the Immigration Bill are inappropriate, and will he encourage his Lib Dem MPs to vote against them?

Liam McArthur: Such a broad dismissal of the housing provisions in the Immigration Bill would be wrong. If specific aspects of the bill need to be reviewed I would support that, but I do not think that we should tread on eggshells. There are issues that need to be addressed, and some of them are being taken forward in the Immigration Bill.

I hope that lessons will be learned and that we will be spared any repeat of such a lamentable campaign in the future. In the meantime, I thank Jackie Baillie for allowing us all to get some of these frustrations out of our system, ahead of Christmas.

12:57

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I express my thanks to Jackie Baillie for bringing to the chamber her motion for debate. I express my dismay that one member has chosen to describe the reaction against this despicable campaign as "synthetic". It is very clear that the reaction comprised very genuine and sincerely felt anger, disgust and dismay at the nature of the campaign.

There is, of course, a distinction between the mechanisms of asylum and immigration, but there is an overlap in the way that those issues are politically debated. Why is that? It is because among the most powerful forces in both debates are racism and xenophobia, and the way in which those forces are manipulated and whipped up by certain elements of our political culture and media in the UK. We need to recognise that. I will

concentrate my remarks on the asylum system, because of the particular viciousness of the use in Brand Street of images of homelessness to intimidate asylum applicants and their families.

We need to address what the asylum system is for, because that is what is challenged by this campaign and the years of policy that preceded it under the current and previous UK Governments. An asylum system should be founded on compassion. Its purpose should be to give asylum to those who need it, not to refuse it to everyone for whom an excuse can be found to give a refusal. The latter, I am afraid, is what we have in this country. We have an asylum system that has morphed into what is little better than a human stock-taking exercise, in which individuals who work in the system are under constant pressure to say no at every opportunity and in which applicants are forced to get over absurd hurdles. There are barriers to justice that a Scottish person—a UK citizen—who sought justice in our courts would never have to experience, such as issues around stress, translation and representation. There are things to which they should have access but to which they do not, which creates a lack of justice in the system.

There should be justice as well as compassion for the same reason that we say in our criminal courts that it is better that a guilty person occasionally goes free than that innocent people be convicted. On the same principle, it is better that some people who might not have a well-founded claim end up being given leave to remain than that people who face genuine fear of persecution be sent back to face it.

If we rebalanced that, we would have an asylum system that was based on compassion and justice rather than one that is based on shallow, self-defeating principles, which those who whip up racism and xenophobia in the debate have managed to achieve. I repeat that they have managed to achieve that. Let us acknowledge what has been done to the asylum system over the years.

The images of homelessness that are being used to intimidate applicants are vicious not only because they cause fear or are distressing but because they recall the fact that destitution—the reality of destitution, not just the image of it—has been a deliberate act of asylum policy in the UK for years. Those images are so capable of causing fear because the reality exists on our streets. It has existed for years and will exist this Christmas as it has done for Christmases past.

Whether in the context of the UK or, perhaps more easily, a Scottish asylum system, that must be reversed. Years of racism and xenophobia in the asylum system must come to an end.

13:01

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Like others, I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing the motion to the chamber. When I came into the chamber for the debate, I did not expect the Portuguese theme that I have heard and, unfortunately—

Jackie Baillie: Are you going to continue it?

James Dornan: I am going to continue it, yes. As many members know, I was over seeing my brother get married on Wednesday. Michael is an immigrant to Portugal. He has been there for nearly 40 years and has made a life for himself. However, more interestingly and because it is right that we recognise clearly that there is a distinction between immigration and asylum, Michael's partner, Raul, stayed in London because he was a refugee from Salazar. He could not go back until the dictatorship had fallen, and that is when they moved over to Lisbon.

People we know are affected by asylum and immigration all the time, which made me think about the issue on a personal level. The difference between asylum and immigration must be at the forefront of the debate, because the two have been conflated by politicians for their own ends and we must acknowledge that there is an important difference.

I first heard of the campaign when a constituent contacted my office to tell me about the posters. Like most people to whom I have spoken and like everybody who has spoken in the debate so far, I was appalled that such messages were being used at all and particularly in Scotland.

I wrote a motion and wrote twice to the Home Secretary asking her for justification for the posters, but I am still waiting on a response. I feel a bit peeved: Kezia has had one and Nicola has had one, but I have not had a response from anybody.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Full names, please, Mr Dornan.

James Dornan: My apologies, Presiding Officer.

I also wrote to the then Minister of State for Crime Prevention, Lib Dem Jeremy Browne, after some encouraging newspaper comments from him. Unfortunately, since then, he has been removed from office. I am sure that that is just a coincidence.

Of course, like everyone else, I welcome the Home Office decision to discontinue the go home poster campaign and the commitment by the Scottish Parliament to condemn the pilot programme. However, not only was the campaign appalling and insensitive, but its intent was clear: it

was to say, "We don't want you here." The posters added more fear and distress for those who were already living life on the edge while seeking asylum in the UK.

Robina Qureshi from Positive Action in Housing said it well when she said of the rhetoric:

"As we all should know, 'Go Home' is a well-known racist taunt that has been used for decades in this country by fascists and racists against those of us from immigrant communities. That a government agency should decide to take up the same racist and xenophobic refrain while 'processing' would-be refugees to this country, is shameful and deeply offensive."

More than being "shameful and deeply offensive", it is harmful to the country's reputation and, more important, to asylum seekers' wellbeing. I doubt that it ever once crossed the mind of the Home Secretary and her officials what feelings the use of language such as, "Is life here tough for you? We can help you go home," would stir up for people for whom that is not an option at all—men, women and children who have fled for their lives, been separated from their families or seen their families killed. It is that lack of compassion from Westminster that appals me the most about the campaign.

As well as being condemned by almost the whole chamber and the third sector, the campaign was condemned by *The Herald*. I think that its editorial of 30 August perfectly captured public feeling on the matter. It said:

"What is particularly offensive about this is that these adverts, which are also being piloted in London's Hounslow, appear to be directed at asylum seekers who have fled their countries of origin because they were no longer safe there. These are people whose claims are being processed by the UK Government. What point can there be in urging them to return to countries where they could be tortured, imprisoned or killed?"

That ties in with the Home Office statistics that show that Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, China, Syria, Bangladesh and Afghanistan—countries where significant human rights abuses have been and continue to be documented—are among the top 10 countries from which asylum seekers come. Are we really saying that asylum seekers from those countries should be pressured into going back there?

As we know, the majority of asylum seekers in Scotland live in Glasgow, where they form less than 0.5 per cent of the population. If all the asylum seekers in the city were put in Hampden stadium—which is in my constituency, in case I have not mentioned that previously—it would not even be 40 per cent full.

It is clear that the pilot was designed not for Scotland, but for the south of England, where UKIP—as has been mentioned—is a threat to the political status quo.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Dornan, will you start to wind up, please?

James Dornan: Yes, I will do.

I am pleased that the white paper promotes the idea of a truly progressive immigration and asylum system that would consider each application on its merits and which would not ask people to go home, because we want everyone who lives in Scotland—for whatever period of time and wherever they have come from—to see it as their home.

I support the motion.

13:06

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good afternoon, Presiding Officer.

I thank Jackie Baillie for securing the debate. It is tremendous that she has taken the opportunity to lead a members' business debate on the issue.

Just because Christmas is a time of good will and happiness for everyone, we should not allow that to confuse us about the extent to which the Home Office's latest campaign has upset many among us in the community. In all my life, I never imagined that a British Government would allow one of its departments to be so cruel, crude, unkind and out of touch as to run such a campaign. I was ashamed, disappointed and shocked. I could not believe that, in this day and age, people would stoop to such levels, but they did. I hope that many other departments—not only in the UK, but elsewhere in Europe—will learn that such behaviour is unacceptable and that it will not be tolerated. It does not represent our people or our nation, and it certainly does not represent humanity.

It has been said that there is not enough evidence that the type of message that the campaign sends hurts people's feelings. I do not need evidence to tell me that. Why? I have experienced that hurt for myself—I have real-life experience of it. I do not need to prove to any out-of-touch department or secretary of state that the campaign has hurt people's feelings.

Many organisations—including the Scottish Refugee Council—and politicians around the world have advised the Government of the fact that its actions were ill designed and desperate. It is unbelievable that the safeguards that are in place in relation to equality issues and the legislation that is there to protect the vulnerable have failed to work in this instance. People talk about freedom of speech, but at the same time we have laws in this country to protect us against racial harassment, intimidation and bullying, and I am surprised that no one has gone down that route to take the UK Government to task over its campaign.

Consideration needs to be given to the taking of such action, not just against the Home Secretary, but the people who put together the campaign.

Members have shared some of their experiences. When I was young, people would say to me, "Why don't you go home?" I would say, "Well, I'm going home later on." For me, home was Glasgow; it still is. However, people see you differently. That is the issue; that is the issue about harassment, prejudice and discrimination. We have to learn, live and teach and change the hearts and minds of people. Such a campaign does little to support or help with that. That is why it is important to challenge the campaign.

Even now, people will say, "Where are you from?" I say, "I'm from Glasgow." They say, "Yeah, but I mean, where are you actually from?" I say, "Well, I'm from the west end—Maryhill." They say, "No, no, I mean—". I say, "Well, I was born in Govan." They say, "No, I mean—". I say, "What do you mean, you mean? I am telling you where I'm from—I'm from Glasgow." However, that does not satisfy some people.

This type of propaganda encourages that type of attitude. That is why it is important for everybody to be absolutely clear about what they want to do. I hope and I wish and I pray that the fact that we are debating the issue will send the right signals to the UK Government and to all Governments around the world that we have to resist the temptation to go down that route. I commend the motion.

13:11

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing the debate and I recognise that a number of MSPs have put forward motions on the issue and run campaigns. James Dornan, who spoke earlier, has been particularly robust in the campaign in Glasgow. I commend them all for that.

I very much welcome the opportunity to speak in and close the debate. There were some fantastic speeches from across the chamber from members who touched on their personal experiences, which I will also do.

There was almost universal condemnation of the campaign. It is a campaign so iniquitous, cruel and shameful that it is hard to believe that it came from a Government department. It is a campaign that genuinely—as Patrick Harvie said—threatened to derail much of the progress that we have made to reduce the levels of racist bigotry that we have seen in the past. It probably has derailed some of that progress.

Scotland has a long history of welcoming people from all over the world, whether they are visitors, students, migrant workers or asylum seekers. We want to be a progressive and socially responsible nation that provides a place of safety and fair, humane and sensible policies on asylum.

In response to Alex Johnstone's comments, I do not believe—and certainly I do not think that any member in the chamber believes—that anybody in the Conservative party, for example, is a racist. That is not the point that we are trying to make at all. The point that we are trying to make is that that phrase—that language—has been taken from the National Front; it has been taken from the British National Party. It is a phrase that has been used by racists up and down the country over the ages and over the years and there is no way that anybody in Government, be they a minister, a cabinet secretary or even a civil servant, would not have known the impact of using that language and why it was so hurtful and so offensive.

Mr Malik was spot on in describing how it made him feel. Much like him, having grown up in Glasgow—having been born and bred in Glasgow—I have been called every name and every racist slur under the sun. I have been called the four-letter word for a Pakistani; I have been called a black b; I have been called anything that people can imagine from when I was in primary school to, most recently, a couple of weeks ago on social media. However, the one that gets to me the most—the one that hurts the most and the one that really grinds against the grain the most—is when I am told to go home. As Mr Malik was saying so correctly, when I have worked hard for this country, when this is my country, when I was born and bred here and am just as Glaswegian and just as Scottish as anybody else, and somebody tells me to go home, I think, “What the—”. Dinna worry, I stopped myself. I think, “What right do they have to tell me to go home?” It does hurt.

I respect that perhaps Alex Johnstone agrees that the language that was used in the campaign was not fair and not sensible and, more than that, it was offensive.

We cannot take that campaign in isolation. Members have touched upon this point. There is a sense that when it comes to issues of asylum and refugees as well as immigration—we do not want to conflate them but there are similar themes around both issues—there is a trajectory and the UK is regressing. We have heard EU commissioners saying that the UK is now being viewed as a nasty country.

That is the trajectory that the UK is on. My appeal to colleagues in the Labour Party is honest and sincere. There is no difference—not an iota—between Jackie Baillie and me in our belief about

how asylum seekers and those who are seeking refuge in this country should be treated. We believe that they should be treated humanely and compassionately. However, I am genuinely worried that the UK political parties, including Jackie Baillie's party, are on the wrong trajectory. I know that she says that that is not true, but I genuinely think that they are going in the wrong direction. I also believe that they are pandering to the UKIP agenda.

Diane Abbott, who is a very senior member of the Labour Party, said:

“Ed Miliband has made two speeches on immigration in recent months ... all parties need to be careful of ‘dog whistle’ politics on immigration where the text is fine but the underlying message is one that is not so fine.

The rise of Ukip has made people panicky about immigration but the truth is that the fear of immigration is just that—it is fear. The more immigrants who live in your area the less likely you are to worry about it.”

I will come to a point that Kezia Dugdale made.

Liam McArthur: I do not disagree with anything that the minister is saying, but I caution against perhaps portraying the sentiments of people south of the border as being somehow very different from sentiments north of the border. As the SRC made clear in its briefing, the outrage that was felt in London was particularly acute. I think that that reflects the fact that there are concerns right across the UK about the need to get the debate about asylum and immigration right.

Humza Yousaf: I do not disagree at all with Liam McArthur's points. I purposely referred to political parties; I did not refer to the British people, people in Scotland or people in England. I said that political parties have to be careful about the trajectory that they are on.

Liam McArthur's point takes me to a point that Kezia Dugdale made. Kezia Dugdale's speech and the story that she told were extraordinarily powerful. She talked about public opinion perhaps not chiming with the go home campaign. By and large, I agree with that, but the honest reality is that many members of the public have an irrational fear of immigration, who asylum seekers are, and why they are in the country. I think that the defining difference is in how politicians choose to respond to that. I do not believe that the language that is coming from politicians, particularly the Conservative-led coalition Government and the Conservative Party, is helpful.

We have seen an almost united front in the chamber—a pretty unanimous display of why we believe that immigrants and those who seek asylum should be welcomed to Scotland. That is the right political message, and I hope that it filters down to people. I appeal to those who have influence in their parties in the UK to try translate

that tone and feeling to those parties, as they are not going in that direction. We have displayed something in the Scottish Parliament that I do not think would quite be heard in the UK Parliament, certainly not from senior members of the UK Government.

We have published "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland", a white paper in which we have very clearly given our priorities for asylum and immigration. On asylum, we believe in closing down Dungavel, which is a toxic institution. We believe in no longer allowing refugees to become destitute, but providing them with continued support, and in no longer carrying out dawn raids and dragging families and children out of their homes at 3, 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. That is not just a legal duty; it is our moral duty. It will help us to build a more successful nation that is based on diverse, inclusive and skilled communities that work not only for economic growth but for better social and cultural diversity.

I will end with the poignant and aspirational image that Christian Allard MSP painted. He said that, instead of having vans driving around that tell people to go home, he envisages a Scotland in which people drive around in vans that say, "Welcome to your new home."

13:19

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Draft Budget 2014-15

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The first item of business this afternoon is a debate on motion S4M-08576, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on the Finance Committee's report on the draft budget 2014-15.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): It is with pleasure that I open this debate on the Finance Committee's consideration of, and report on, the Scottish Government's draft budget for 2014-15. I thank all those who assisted in our consideration of the draft budget, including those who submitted written evidence and witnesses who gave oral evidence. I also thank the Finance Committee clerks; our budget adviser, Angela Scott; and the Scottish Parliament information centre for its very helpful briefings.

The budget process works to a tight and demanding schedule, and this year was no exception. We agreed before the summer recess that our main focus would be on the national performance framework and the Scotland performs website. However, not wishing to lose sight of topics on which we had concentrated in previous years, we also continued our on-going scrutiny of the Government's progress in moving towards a preventative spend agenda, particularly with regard to the ways in which public bodies might work more closely with one another. In addition to those significant and substantive themes, the committee continued its on-going consideration of where the Government's spending decisions are aligned with its stated purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth.

To support our scrutiny of the draft budget, we issued a call for evidence prior to summer recess, in response to which we received 34 written submissions. We also took oral evidence through the autumn from witnesses including economists, academics and representatives of the public, private and third sectors.

In early November we held an external meeting in Arbroath, which gave us the invaluable opportunity to hold workshops with local businesses, voluntary organisations and public bodies, from whom we heard at first hand about issues that mattered most to them. We then took evidence from the cabinet secretary and put questions to him based on the evidence that we had heard.

In addition to our own scrutiny, each of the subject committees, along with the Equal

Opportunities Committee and the European and External Relations Committee, conducted its own inquiry into the draft budget. Those inquiries focused on the impact of the budget on the areas in the committee remit. Each committee then submitted a report to us highlighting its findings and priorities.

I turn to the national performance framework, which is intended to support an outcomes-based approach to performance. It is underpinned by five objectives and consists of 16 national outcomes that describe what the Scottish Government wants to achieve over a 10-year period. There are 50 national indicators that track progress towards the achievement of those outcomes, which ultimately contribute towards the delivery of the Government's stated purpose. All those measures are tracked and reported on the Scotland performs website, which is intended to show at a glance whether performance is improving, worsening or remaining steady.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth has described Scotland performs as

"the primary source of information ... against the outcomes set out in the National Performance Framework."

He also stated at committee that it

"is not a report card on the Government; it is an assessment of Scotland's performance. Of course the Government contributes to that, but so do many other players."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 4 November 2013; c 3235.]

We heard from a number of witnesses that the NPF is internationally recognised as an exemplar of an outcomes-based approach to the measurement of Government performance. Nevertheless, there was broad consensus that, although the framework itself is commendable, it is not widely known outside policy-making circles.

In recognition of that point, we invited the Government in our report to detail the exact purpose of the NPF, its intended audience and how it works in practice. We also recommended that the information should be published on the Scotland performs website. Similarly, we sought clarification from the Government in relation to how it intends to further embed Scotland performs in policy-making circles across the Scottish public sector.

Another point that arose during our inquiry is the lack of a clear link between spending and outcomes. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, for example, suggested that there is a need

"for much clearer links between the priority setting and resource allocation decisions that are made by Government and its partners in contributing to the targets and outcomes."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 2 October 2013; c 3080.]

Our budget adviser noted that there is

"no link between the Government's spending plans, as set out in spending reviews and draft budgets, and the intended impact spending will have on future performance."

She also pointed out that some jurisdictions, including the state of Virginia, have moved towards a system of linking expenditure to performance.

Expanding on that theme, we asked the Government whether it has any plans to move to a more substantive approach to linking performance and resource.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we heard a number of different views regarding the national indicators, with organisations such as Oxfam and the Scottish Trades Union Congress calling for the inclusion of an indicator measuring median household disposable income, which they stated would be a

"much better indicator of national collective prosperity than GDP."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 9 October 2013; c 3120.]

The committee was persuaded by that suggestion and has recommended that the Government incorporate such an indicator into the NPF. In keeping with the importance placed on the NPF both by the committee and the witnesses from whom we took evidence, we welcome the Government's commitment to consulting on the option of putting it on a statutory footing.

Turning to another subject of our budget scrutiny focus, I will address the topic of preventative spending. It has been a key area of interest for the committee and its predecessor in the previous session. We also considered the importance of the preventative spend agenda in the context of demographic change and an ageing population, which is an increasingly important issue on which we conducted an inquiry in 2012.

We committed to monitoring the progress made with regard to the Government's various change funds, including those related to the care of older people, the early years of childhood, and programmes aimed at reducing rates of reoffending. For that reason, we requested that the Government provide an overall assessment of the progress being made towards implementing a preventative spend approach. In doing so, we recognise the need for robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and we would welcome an update on the progress made towards putting them in place.

The Government committed to investing up to £500 million in change funds in its budget for 2012-13, and the committee welcomed that investment. It is clear that local authorities have responsibility for much of the service delivery that has the greatest impact on people's daily lives.

Local authorities must also contribute towards those funds, but the committee is concerned that not all local authorities appear to be doing so. For that reason, we ask the Government to provide us with details of how much new money has been contributed to change funds by local authorities.

We heard from third sector bodies that evidence of the required shift in spending priorities is lacking, with the focus continuing to be on treating the symptoms of problems rather than on preventing them from arising in the first place. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde summed up the difficulties faced by councils and health boards in seeking to

“invest in new programmes of prevention and intervention while managing their budgets in a way that deals effectively with the problems that confront them at present.”

It argued that that

“balancing act is probably the biggest challenge that health boards and local authorities in the west of Scotland are facing.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 9 October 2013; c 3143.]

Our report highlighted the committee’s concerns relating to the apparent lack of evidence of the necessary disinvestment taking place to support the shift towards a preventative spend agenda. Without the disinvestment in existing services, it is difficult to see where the additional resources required for investment in preventative services will come from.

We recognise that difficult decisions require to be taken and appreciate that that is not easy. Glasgow City Council said to the committee that disinvestment is

“extremely difficult to do at any time ... but it is particularly difficult to do at the moment”.—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 9 October 2013; c 3153.]

We ask whether the Government is content with the progress that public bodies are making in that regard and that it provide examples of resources being unlocked for preventative measures through disinvestment in existing services.

There is some evidence that the necessary shift in spending is taking place in certain areas. One that stood out as a role model was the Highlands, where a partnership agreement between Highland Council and NHS Highland was signed in 2012. The agreement is intended

“to achieve better outcomes for people through directing resources more effectively, and through new and integrated service delivery models.”

The committee welcomes that approach.

We recognise that it is not possible simply to switch off existing services in order to reallocate funding, and we heard of the importance of bridging funds that allow the temporary double running of services until demand for existing

services is reduced. We also recognise that there is a range of challenges and barriers that can prevent the necessary cultural and structural changes from taking place, and we would welcome the Government’s views on how best to address them.

As I mentioned in my introductory remarks, another key focus of our scrutiny of the draft budget was the continuation of last year’s consideration of the Government’s progress towards realising its purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth. A key element of the Government’s strategy for realising that goal is capital investment through which it intends to accelerate the country’s economic recovery. Much of that investment is intended to be allocated via the non-profit-distributing model.

The draft budget states:

“Progress continues to be made on delivering the full Non-Profit Distributing ... pipeline of investments”,

with an estimated £809 million-worth of projects due to start construction in 2014-15. However, the cabinet secretary noted in his ministerial statement on the draft budget:

“In the short term, NPD investment is lower than was originally forecast.”—[*Official Report*, 9 October 2013; c 23471.]

He attributed that to two reasons: first, some NPD projects are being concluded at lower than expected costs; and, secondly, some are taking longer than expected to be prepared and planned.

We took evidence from the Scottish Futures Trust, which stated that,

“overall, longer preparation time, rather than confirmed cost savings, is the greater part of what has changed the profile.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 30 October 2013; c 3179.]

It also stated that “very significant” progress has been made, yet it explained that some projects

“have taken longer than anticipated to bring through early project development and hence the overall build up in construction activity will be slower than that anticipated in the earlier projections which were based on high level information.”

The SFT is ambitious in setting targets for the delivery of NPD-funded projects, and the committee agrees that it should be. As the cabinet secretary stated,

“it is better to set an ambitious target and not reach it than it is to set an underambitious target purely and simply for the device of passing it.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 4 November 2013; c 3241.]

Despite that aim, it would appear that a pattern of consistent overestimation of the delivery of NPD projects has emerged in recent years, so we recommend that the process for formulating those estimates be reviewed.

The committee also considered the Government's plans to switch more than £700 million from resource to capital between 2012-13 and 2014-15. However, the estimated resource to capital switch in the draft budget is £165 million, which is significantly lower than the estimated £270 million that is set out in the 2011 spending review. When we questioned the cabinet secretary on the reasons for that, he explained that he considered it the best way to respond to budgetary changes resulting from Barnett consequentials. He emphasised the fact that it has not affected the planned delivery of any specific projects.

Although the committee recognises the need for the cabinet secretary to make budgetary changes in response to changing circumstances during the year, we highlight the need for greater clarity in presenting past proposals for resource to capital switches. We therefore recommend that all future budget revisions provide the latest available figures in relation to the transfer of funding from resource to capital.

Another important theme to which the committee returned during its budget scrutiny is improving employability, particularly with regard to young people not in employment, education or training. That was one of the main topics of discussion during our workshop sessions in Arbroath, where we heard of the problems that are faced by some local employers in accessing the modern apprenticeship scheme. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and the Equal Opportunities Committee also expressed concerns relating to access to modern apprenticeships, and we have invited the Government to respond to those concerns.

The committee also considered a wide range of other issues during its scrutiny of the draft budget, ranging from the impact of welfare reform and fuel poverty to the Government's progress towards achieving its climate change targets. I am sure that some of those themes will be touched on later in the debate. Although I could discuss those topics in detail, I have covered a number of issues in the time available and I am conscious that time for the debate is limited.

I said at the beginning of my speech that the committee's budget scrutiny focused on the national performance framework but that we also sought to monitor progress in relation to preventative spending and increasing sustainable economic growth.

The committee greatly welcomes the NPF and applauds the Government for developing an internationally recognised exemplar of an outcomes-based approach to performance measurement. However, it is clear that the NPF is not widely known, which would appear to be at

least partly due to a lack of clarity with regard to its purpose and intended audience.

On preventative spending, the committee has concluded that there is some evidence of progress despite a challenging fiscal environment. Nevertheless, there is less evidence of the necessary disinvestment and the system and cultural changes that are essential for the shift towards a preventative approach to be fully realised. The committee would like to see a much better and clearer alignment between the NPF, draft budgets and the emphasis on a preventative approach. On those key findings, and all other aspects of our report, we look forward to the Scottish Government's response.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Finance Committee's 10th Report, 2013 (Session 4): Draft Budget 2014-15 (SP Paper 431) and its recommendations to the Scottish Government.

14:43

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I thank the Finance Committee for its report on the Government's budget. Although I will give some initial reactions to the content of that report in my comments to Parliament today, the Government's full response to the Finance Committee's report will be provided in writing in advance of the stage 1 debate on the budget bill in late January.

I welcome the degree of interest that the Finance Committee has taken in Scotland performs and the national performance framework. It was a bold endeavour by the Government to set out, in 2007, to create a framework in which we would signal to all relevant public authorities, as well as to the private sector and the third sector, the focus of our public policy intentions and how we intend to structure the different interventions that we make to realise our ambitions.

The purpose of Scotland performs is twofold. First, it is to provide an integrated framework for policy delivery that is relevant to all public bodies and public authorities in Scotland and which gives the clearest possible indication to private and third sector organisations of the focus of policy making in Scotland. Secondly, it is to provide a mechanism to assess the performance of Scotland as a whole in working towards achieving the objectives and aims that are set out within Scotland performs.

In that sense, the comments that Mr Gibson relayed, which form part of the Finance Committee's report and which I put on the record at our discussion in Arbroath, are absolutely correct. Scotland performs is not designed to be a report card for the Government. There are many

appropriate ways in which the Government's record, plans and policies can be subject to scrutiny on a daily basis—through the reports that Government makes to Parliament, the appearances of ministers at meetings of parliamentary committees, the debates that we have in this chamber and the wide variety of statistical evidence that the Government publishes every day about our performance in relation to our policy intentions.

Scotland performs is designed to elevate that debate to a more strategic level and to assess the degree of progress that Scotland is making in realising the ambitions in the national performance framework. That is driven by the Government's purpose of increasing opportunities for all to prosper in Scotland through increasing sustainable economic growth and, as Mr Gibson correctly identifies, through the various national purpose targets that we have set out, the national outcomes and the indicators of performance.

I think that that represents an excellent framework that—as I think the Finance Committee would recognise, based on the organisations it heard from—is increasingly recognised by organisations in Scotland as providing the policy discipline within which organisations are able to take their decisions.

If taking account of my assessment of Scotland performs is not appropriate, Parliament should take account of the view of the Carnegie UK Trust. In its report, "Shifting the Dial in Scotland", which discusses examples of strong public policy frameworks across the world, it said:

"We did not expect to find international innovation on our doorstep. But our work has repeatedly found that the Scottish National Performance Framework is an international leader in wellbeing measurement, a sentiment repeated by Professor Stiglitz in his address to the OECD World Forum in India, in 2012."

That strong endorsement of the value and strength of Scotland performs should give Parliament a great deal of confidence.

That was reinforced by the comments that Jeremy Peat, of the David Hume Institute, made to the Finance Committee:

"I think that Scotland should be proud of the NPF. It is a remarkable achievement to have got something so detailed, so regularly presented and so transparent in terms of the data, targets and information that are set out. It is a hugely positive base from which to proceed."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 2 October 2013; c 3087.]

The Government believes that we took the right step to establish the national performance framework, and I think that the statements of independent commentators evidence the fact that it is having a significant effect on the structuring of public policy.

One point that Mr Gibson raised on behalf of the committee, and which was reflected in some of the views of the committee's adviser, is that there is a difficulty in establishing the link between policy and outcomes. I completely disagree on that point; I do not accept it by any stretch of the imagination. The ability for us to construct a model that can trace the impact of any individual pound of public expenditure to a policy outcome will involve us in an assessment of such complexity that it would stop us from doing virtually anything as a policy-making community.

What is important is to test the ambitions and the policy programme of Government against the outcomes that are achieved and are recorded in Scotland performs. For example, to look at the outcomes that have been achieved on the economy in a 12-month period strikes me as a vivid test of whether the Government has succeeded in establishing a link between its interventions and the achievement of desirable policy outcomes.

Let us consider the data. In 12 months, the gross domestic product of Scotland increased by 1.8 per cent, compared with 1.3 per cent in the United Kingdom; employment in Scotland rose by 83,000, compared with a rise in employment across the UK of 485,000; unemployment in Scotland fell by 8,000 over the year, compared with the fall in unemployment in the rest of the UK of 121,000; and economic inactivity in Scotland fell by 69,000, compared with a fall of 156,000 across the whole of the UK.

Those measures of economic performance—GDP, employment, unemployment and economic inactivity—indicate that the Government's aspiration to take a set of decisions that are designed to intervene in the economy and deliver a better performance are evidenced by the material that Scotland performs and the statistical base that the Government supports are able to establish.

I hope that that reassures the Finance Committee that the Government has clearly established, in the particular measure of the assessment of our economic activity, the link between policy intervention—I could not have been clearer in my 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 budgets about the Government's focus on improving economic performance—

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: Of course.

Malcolm Chisholm: Given the logic of what the cabinet secretary says, if the economic indicators go the other way, as they have from time to time over the past few years, that demonstrates the

failure of the particular policy prescriptions of his Government.

John Swinney: I accept that point. Surely that is what performance assessment is about; otherwise, there is no point in putting in a policy framework that tests the policy direction of a Government. When it does not work out, we find that our policy interventions are not correct.

It matters to me what is in Scotland performs, and I look at it on a regular basis to determine whether the Government's interventions are satisfactorily delivering the policy outcomes and objectives that we want to achieve. That seems an elementary aspect of the assessment of performance.

The focus of the Government's budget that is before Parliament remains on improving economic performance. The skills investment that we set out, the £8 billion-worth of capital investment over a two-year period, and the investment in our college and university sector exceeding £1.52 billion in 2014-15 are all part of the Government's programme of activity to strengthen our economic performance.

I will close by making some remarks about the wider sustainability of public finances. The Finance Committee is absolutely right that preventative interventions are crucial to delivering sustainability of public finances and to the transformation of the way in which we deliver services. However, I do not take the same view as the Finance Committee that disinvestment in particular public services is the key measure or indicator. Surely if we follow the logic of the centrality and importance of Scotland performs, the achievement of better outcomes for our citizens will be the test of whether we are meeting the needs and expectations of the public.

Scotland performs is assembled on the range of different indicators of public service performance, impact and improving outcomes for members of the public that are a direct consequence of the investments and interventions that we make as a Government. Through the shift of emphasis into preventative measures—whether through reshaping care for older people, through the early years change fund or through the reducing reoffending change fund—the Government remains focused on delivering the decisive shift to prevention that I set out in the spending review, which remains at the heart of our public service reform agenda.

14:54

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The Finance Committee is to be congratulated on the approach that it has taken to the budget this year. Mr Gibson took us through that extremely eloquently at the

start. Not only did the committee, as it has sometimes only done, scrutinise what is up and what is down in the budget, but it took a longer-term, more strategic look at how the budget underpins the Government's objectives.

After all, it is now six years ago that the Scottish Government unveiled its purpose—

“a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth”—

along with five objectives, 16 national outcomes and no fewer than 50 national indicators, all woven together into a purpose framework and tracked in a national performance framework.

In the course of his evidence, the cabinet secretary told the committee,

“I am not sure that it is vital that it is understood by members of the public”,—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 4 November 2013; c 3242.]

which may be just as well, but made much—fairly—of the compliments that many witnesses paid to the national performance framework as an approach. However, he cannot then simply ignore the fact that, one after another, those expert witnesses told the committee members of their concern that they could find no connection between the Government's purpose and its spending decisions.

Mr Gibson quoted his committee's adviser, who said:

“There is ... no link between the Government's spending plans ... and the intended impact”.

However, not only the Finance Committee found that. The Health and Sport Committee also reported on the

“lack of clear links ... between the information in the Draft Budget and the indicators”,

and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee concluded:

“There is no attempt to link spend to specific Targets or Indicators.”

The fact that no committee could find any link between the budget and what it is supposed to be for cannot simply be dismissed. Whether it was making Scotland wealthier, fairer, healthier or greener, our committees could see no plan, strategy or targeting of resources.

Mr Swinney says that we should not worry about that because we should test against outcomes, so let us do that.

Unemployment figures may be improving, but there are still 75,000 more Scots on the dole than when the Scottish National Party came to power. More and more Scots who are in work earn less than the living wage, more are in part-time work

and more are on zero-hours contracts. Those are not outcomes with which we can be satisfied.

Let us look at the health service. The budget claims to protect the health service—the First Minister made much of that earlier today—but a recent survey showed us that less than one third of NHS staff think that we have enough doctors and nurses, and marginally over half think that the NHS puts patients first. That is in a week when what must be one of the most damning reports into any hospital that the Parliament has ever seen was published. Those are not outcomes with which we can be satisfied.

When the cabinet secretary published his budget, he made much of an increase in the housing line, but the truth is that he is simply restoring cuts that, at one point, cut the housing budget in half. Every year, he tells us that he intends to build his way out of recession but, last year, fewer houses were built than at any time since 1946, 20 per cent fewer social rented houses were completed than in the year before and waiting lists spiralled.

As for the future lifeblood of the country, Mr Gibson is right that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee was concerned to find that the number of 16 to 19-year-olds not in employment, education or training is not reducing. In fact, it increased last year.

As for creating a fairer Scotland, the SNP inherited £1.5 billion of anti-poverty programmes and £1 billion of those programmes has disappeared. Is it any wonder that we still have 200,000 children living in poverty?

The connection between those decisions and the outcomes does not seem too complex to me.

The Government's spin doctors rather let the cat out of the bag when the budget was published, because they briefed that it was a budget for independence. Of course, that is the Government's actual and only objective. It is a budget to get through the referendum, so steady as she goes. Difficult decisions are dodged, responsibility is refused and no horses are frightened. That is not good enough.

If the cabinet secretary wants us to believe that the budget is about more than that, he should start by making two changes. First, he should use the consequentials from the autumn statement to extend 600 hours of nursery provision to 50 per cent of two-year-olds right now. Secondly, he should identify the money and the means to mitigate the whole impact of the bedroom tax; £20 million is less than half of what is needed.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Iain Gray: I am sorry, but I am in my final minute.

I believe that such a spending decision would have the clear outcome of immediately reducing the suffering that is faced by tens of thousands of Scottish households. If the Scottish Government fails to act, that implies that it would rather keep issues such as childcare and the bedroom tax as referendum issues in order to leave Westminster on the hook, and that is not good enough.

The Presiding Officer: You need to bring your remarks to a close.

Iain Gray: The Government should accept the obligation to use the powers that it has now, take the decisions that are necessary and inject some purpose into the budget, which it seems to singularly lack.

15:00

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): I will begin by looking at Scotland performs and the national performance framework, on which the committee took a fair bit of evidence. In my view, the vast majority of that evidence was extremely positive, and although I think that the cabinet secretary fairly conveyed the flavour of the evidence that we received in the comments that he read out, I gently ask him to reconsider his remarks about what we should do about linkages between the NPF and the spending decisions that are made in the budget.

I entirely accept the cabinet secretary's statement that it would not be worth while looking at the result of every public pound that is spent by the Scottish Government and, indeed, local government. That is a fair position to take. It would be possible to spend too much time on that and not get to the bottom of things, taking resources away from other parts of budget.

However, it is important for the Government to listen to what the committees and the experts had to say. The committees were strongly of the view that, as things stand, the linkages between expenditure and the NPF are not enough. Some people would say that there is no linkage whatever; others would say that there are linkages but they are not yet sufficient.

I think that the conclusion of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, which the Finance Committee invited the Government to consider, probably puts it best. It asked the Government

"to improve the linkage between expenditure and the NPF."

That is a fair conclusion. It does not say that every piece of expenditure has to have a perfect and direct link with the NPF, but I think that it would be

worth the Government's while to review the issue and to look at where the linkages can be improved so that a clearer picture is provided. It appears to me that such linkages are established to a greater degree in the state of Virginia, which is where the framework that Scotland performs is based on originated. If it can be done to a greater degree in the state of Virginia, I am convinced that more can be done in Scotland to make those linkages clearer.

John Swinney: I firmly hold the view that the linkages are clear, because the Government's policy decisions are informed by the outcomes that we want to achieve. However, if committees want to suggest to the Government how those linkages could be improved, I will willingly consider their propositions. I cannot accept that there are no linkages—I think that that is a baseless remark—but I will be happy to consider suggestions from committees about how the linkages could be strengthened.

Gavin Brown: I look forward to seeing the Government's written response to the Finance Committee's report. The cabinet secretary makes a fair suggestion. He has thrown down the gauntlet to committees and others. Although I would not say that there are no linkages whatever, I think that they could certainly be improved.

Another recommendation on the NPF that it is worth looking at is recommendation 37, which states:

"The Committee would welcome clarification in relation to how Scotland Performs will be embedded within the policy-making community across the public sector including the Scottish Government."

I have no doubt that there are sections of the Scottish Government and of the wider policy-making community that look at the NPF in detail, but the flavour of the evidence that the committee received was that Scotland performs is not embedded in that community and that we need to think about ways of ensuring that that happens to a greater extent in future.

In his remarks, the convener also touched on the NPD programme that the committee took evidence on. We discussed it with the cabinet secretary and, indeed, with the Scottish Futures Trust. The figures, of course, are laid out in the appendix to the budget document and show that, in this financial year, the spend will go from £338 million down to £185 million, which was predicted. Next year there will be a reduction from £973 million to £809 million.

The Scottish Government said to us initially in the budget statement that the changes were partially to do with savings and partially to do with delay. Subsequent to that, the Government has suggested that the balance will be more to do with

delay than with savings. What we do not know at this stage is what percentage of the change is down to delay and what percentage is down to savings.

Any reduction in spend due to savings is to be welcomed, in our view; any reduction due to delay is clearly not to be welcomed. I ask the Government either to get back to us today or to get back to the committee on what percentage is down to delay as opposed to savings. Indeed, while we are at it—now that we are eight months through the financial year 2013-14—the Government could say where we are in relation to the £185 million that was predicted to be the case in September. We are two thirds of the way through the financial year. Is two thirds of the construction spend happening? Are we likely to hit that or, indeed, to be over it or under it? Also, how will the Government address that going forward, as suggested by the convener?

I want to touch on one other issue. We looked at business rates over the course of the inquiry and there is just one question that I want to put to the Government at this stage. The Scottish Government has central projections for business rates. It believes that it will be £2.688 billion for 2014-15. It predicted £2.435 billion for 2013-14. What impact do the recent announcements have on those projections, because they are going up by 2 per cent instead of 3.2 per cent? Clearly, that will reduce them slightly but growth is projected to be higher than it was previously—it is projected to be 1.4 per cent this year and 2.4 per cent next year. What impact will that have on the projections for business rates? We would certainly welcome any update on that from the Government.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Time is really tight—we have absolutely no time in hand—so I cannot compensate members if they take an intervention. Members should not feel obliged to take their full six minutes. I call Jamie Hepburn.

15:07

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I thank witnesses for their evidence, the clerks for their support and other committees for the evidence that they provided the Finance Committee with—as others in the Finance Committee will undoubtedly do and as the convener has already done.

I will speak from the perspective of not only a member of the Finance Committee but deputy convener of the Welfare Reform Committee during its budget scrutiny.

As the convener set out, the Finance Committee focused on two main areas: the national performance framework and how it interacts with

the budget process; and the preventative spend agenda.

On the NPF, I confess that I have not been particularly engaged in thinking about the Scotland Performs website that is associated with it and have not particularly utilised it, so I will need to consider how I do so in the future. However, it is clear that those who are engaged in that area and who think about it like what they see. The cabinet secretary quoted from the Carnegie UK Trust report and set out its perspective. The trust also told the Finance Committee that the NPF is

“a tool of international significance.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 9 October 2013; c 3124.]

Donald MacRae said in written evidence that the national performance framework

“deserves strong support and positive endorsement”.

Jeremy Peat said that it is “a remarkable achievement”. The Centre for Public Policy for Regions said in written evidence that

“setting ambitious targets across all the areas identified”

in the national performance framework

“is to be commended.”

Therefore, it is clear that the NPF is well-liked by the policy-making community.

Some concern was expressed that the NPF is not particularly well known. When the cabinet secretary was giving evidence to the Finance Committee in Arbroath, he stated that he felt that the NPF is probably “pretty well known” at public leadership level and “probably well known” by the policy-making community. There was a degree of irony in having people before the committee telling us that the NPF is not well known when they are there telling us everything that they know about it because they do in fact know about it.

A more appropriate question than whether the national performance framework is well known is probably whether it is being used as well as it could be. To reflect on my own experience, a number of witnesses and other committees spoke about how the national performance framework could be better linked to spending priorities. I take on board the cabinet secretary’s points about how it would probably be impossible to link every outcome to every pound that has been spent—Gavin Brown made that point, as well—but I wonder how the national performance framework might interact better with the budget process. Perhaps that is as much a matter for Parliament as it is for the Government in setting its budget, and perhaps there is as much an issue for the Parliament in how we use the national performance framework in our budget scrutiny across the committees.

We will have an opportunity to consider that in light of the consultation on the community empowerment and renewal bill, as the cabinet secretary has confirmed that the Government will consult on putting the national performance framework on a statutory footing in that consultation. Perhaps when members consider that bill, we can think about how we might utilise the national performance framework better in future.

The other area is the preventative spend agenda. Obviously, the committee’s assessment builds on previous work in previous years. It is clear that preventative spend has to be a priority for all of us. In an environment in which budgets have been tightened, we must ensure that every pound in the public purse is spent wisely, but we must also, of course, consider that the preventative spend agenda can lead to better outcomes for individuals. Various examples have been cited, such as the older person who wants to stay in their home and not have to go to hospital. Clearly, if we can deliver that, it will be a better outcome for them; and it would be a better outcome for the public purse. Intervening early with a young person who may be in danger of falling into the criminal justice system and keeping them out of jail is also better for them and for the public purse. Therefore, I welcome the change funds that have been delivered to help to achieve that end and look forward to continuing to assess the preventative spend agenda.

I note that the Finance Committee said:

“The Committee welcomes the additional money to alleviate the impact of the welfare reforms”.

There was a similar experience at the Welfare Reform Committee, which focused its budget scrutiny work on the Scottish welfare fund and the council tax reduction scheme. As a committee, we commended

“the actions of the Scottish Government in supporting”

the Scottish welfare fund

“and protecting the vulnerable”,

and supported the proposed level of funding. On council tax reduction, the committee welcomed

“the steps taken by the Scottish Government and local authorities to work together on the provision of this scheme, which has avoided some of the difficulties being experienced in England and Wales.”

I note that other committees, such as the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee and the Equal Opportunities Committee, have engaged in thinking about the welfare reform agenda. Like the Welfare Reform Committee, they are doing so on a collegiate basis.

I was disappointed that there was a division in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee.

Some members, including the two Labour members, voted against the money that is being delivered for discretionary housing payments. That rather puts in context Iain Gray's demands now for additional money, as Labour members cannot even welcome the funds that have been delivered.

15:13

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): The Finance Committee has done the Parliament and perhaps Scotland more generally a service by helping to bring Scotland performs out of the shadows. We certainly heard many compliments about it in the Finance Committee, but it is a fact that it is not widely known, and to many people its purpose and intended audience are not clear.

Although compliments were paid about Scotland performs, many qualifications were also made about it. The key qualification, of course, related to there being no clear link between spending and outcomes. The cabinet secretary was very concerned to rebut that, of course, but it is a fact that expert witnesses in significant numbers and several committees made that point, so it cannot be so easily brushed aside. I was not overimpressed by the cabinet secretary's line of argument on that. I intervened during his speech because it seemed odd to me that he would judge the success of all the measures that he put in his economic policy by the outcomes. First, because the outcomes are open to debate, as Iain Gray said, and, secondly, we all know—the Scottish Government emphasises this repeatedly in other contexts—that the Scottish Government by no means has control of all the external economic factors. I was not overimpressed by that argument.

It would be a good discipline to connect individual spending decisions to Scotland performs and, perhaps most obviously, to the indicators. If we do not do that, the danger is that spending decisions will be made for political reasons. The charge has been made—in fact it was the Government's spin doctors who set the hare running—about Scotland for independence. Be that as it may, the suspicion will be that the decisions are made for political reasons rather than because of the objectives of Scotland performs.

If we focus on the indicators and relate spend to them that would be a step forward. There was a lot of discussion about the indicators; many people thought that there were too many and we should certainly discuss that as part of the budget process. I was impressed by the idea of having median household income as a new economic indicator. I hope that the Government will look at some of those issues.

We commend the Government's intentions on preventative spend and pay tribute to the Finance Committee in this and the previous session for doing a lot of the initial work on the topic. Everyone is signed up to those intentions in principle but the committee has made several points about that. First, more evaluation and monitoring are needed. Secondly—to cite a quote in the committee's report—the Health and Social Care Alliance was concerned that the change funds may

“prop up existing service provision so that it is maintained rather than driving the change agenda.”

I do not think that the committee necessarily endorsed that view, but it highlights the need for monitoring and evaluation because that is the view expressed by some expert players in the field.

The Finance Committee's main point was that we are not seeing the disinvestment that is required in order to make preventative spend of a sufficient scale to be effective. The committee was not being overcritical in that regard, because many witnesses highlighted the difficulties of disinvestment at this time, particularly with regard to demography, which I think was Glasgow City Council's main point, as quoted by the convener earlier. That is a very challenging situation, given the financial circumstances that we face. However, if we cannot get more focus on disinvestment, it will be very difficult to get the scale of preventative spend investment that we want.

However, we have a golden opportunity in the budget—I am two thirds of the way through my speech and I am moving on from the Finance Committee's report—because we need to start considering what spending shifts we want. As someone who has supported further investment in childcare for several decades—certainly during all my time in politics—I am very attracted to what Labour is putting forward with regard to using the consequential from the Westminster budget to start the process of expanding childcare.

The big gap in the Scottish Government's childcare arrangements is in provision for two-year-olds, yet all of us, because of our commitment to preventative spend, believe in early intervention. Crucially, one of the main insights that we had on preventative spend when I was on the Finance Committee is that nought to three are the crucial years. I do not think that anyone can argue in principle against more investment for two-year-olds. I find the Government's objection to investing in childcare under devolution absolutely absurd. In other contexts—I think it was the Deputy First Minister who said this—the Government says that it cannot invest in childcare because the economic fruits will go to Westminster. For goodness' sake—that argument undermines the whole purpose of the

Government. Why on earth is its main purpose economic development when the fruits of taxation go to Westminster? That is a completely illogical argument.

Iain Gray's second proposal related to the bedroom tax. On that matter, I merely quote Danny Alexander, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who was asked specifically whether the Scottish Government would be penalised if it gave more than £20 million to bedroom tax alleviation. He said:

"what the Scottish Government does with its block grant is a matter for the Scottish Government."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 4 September 2013; c2890.]

He was clearly signalling that how much money is given to local authorities and housing associations to deal with the bedroom tax is entirely at the discretion of the Scottish Government.

Labour has flagged up its two main priorities for the budget: childcare—particularly for two-year-olds—and the bedroom tax. I hope that the Finance Committee members will forgive me for using the last third of my speech to repeat those points.

15:19

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I commend the Finance Committee, which has been particularly methodical, thorough and persistent in the pursuit of issues that might otherwise go unobserved by the public and the Parliament.

The exchange between Gavin Brown and John Swinney was instructive and we might have a reasonable way forward on the links between policies, inputs and outcomes. I hope that in future more such links can be made, although I acknowledge John Swinney's point that taking the approach to the nth degree might be an all-consuming task that would not give value for money.

I was interested in the part of the report that dealt with the Scottish Futures Trust, which has been held up as the cure for our economic woes. It is just as well that we were not relying on the SFT to deliver economic recovery, because it has been disappointingly slow at getting through the NPD programme. The 2013-14 figures show reductions from £696 million to £338 million and then to £185 million, which is incredibly disappointing, because I thought that we had got over the difficulties that the Government had discovered with the NPD programme. The extra 1.3 million jobs—110,000 in Scotland—and the economic growth that is emerging do not have much to do with the SFT.

I am grateful to the committee for highlighting the division between savings and delayed spending. It is clear that it is more about delayed spending than it is about cost savings. It is important that we understand the split between the two.

I do not want to bring conflict into the debate. Like Malcolm Chisholm, I want to ensure that we engage seriously on the budget. I like to think that John Swinney and I have engaged constructively in previous budget rounds and I will ensure that our objectives are set out again this year. I have with me a copy of a letter that is winging its way to John Swinney's office this afternoon, which sets out clearly what we think the objectives for this budget should be.

Mr Swinney will not be surprised to know that nursery education is our top priority. Given that he has additional funding from Westminster, given that expansion in nursery education is party policy and is in the white paper, and given that he has the power to make it happen, the full complement of factors is there to enable him to deliver. Also, such an approach has the support of an unassuming character, who is probably prevented from claiming that he leads the campaign: Bob Doris. I am sure that Bob Doris's views will have a great influence on Mr Swinney when it comes to the budget round, because I know that he is a strong advocate for improved nursery education.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): An argument that I make is that if we are to achieve a step change in childcare we need consistently to invest £700 million every year. Can Willie Rennie guarantee that under devolution?

Willie Rennie: I am attracted by Bob Doris's call for massive investment in childcare, and my party advocates that. However, nothing prevents us from acting now on two-year-olds. We have suggested a modest, phased programme; some members seem to take an all-or-nothing approach. I am slightly disappointed that Bob Doris seems to dispute that we can act now, because I have held him up as a champion on the issue. I think that we can move forward together and achieve our ambitions. Perhaps we can put aside some of our differences about the longer term and, in this budget, achieve the objectives that I know that we both want to achieve.

The Finance Committee has been persistent in raising issues that it raised in previous years, and there is probably an element of frustration in the report in relation to, for example, how much money has been switched from revenue to capital and from traditional to preventative spend. The issues are opaque. I understand John Swinney's point that we should focus on outcomes rather than where the money comes from and disinvestment, but if there is to be genuine change

in how we deliver public services we need to know where the money is coming from, so that we can develop services that can endure over the long term.

We know that Scotland faces considerable challenges, not just because of the demographics, but in tackling poverty and ensuring that we meet our environmental objectives. Enduring on all those things means that we need evidence of a proper seismic shift of investment from one area to the other. I would therefore encourage John Swinney to be more open and transparent about the shift from traditional spend to preventative spend, and from revenue to capital spend. That way, we will see that we have an enduring, long-term shift in the delivery of public services.

15:25

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I rise to support the commendable Finance Committee report on the draft budget and its recommendations to the Scottish Government, particularly on its outcome-based approach in its conclusion.

If I may, I will indulge myself a bit by talking about what the creation of a budget means to me. As the former UK finance director of a very large global company, I was charged with achieving an acceptable expense to revenue ratio related to the company's policies in the risk assessment and market framework in which we operated. During the 1992 recession, I was asked to reduce that percentage of the budget by 2 per cent, which meant a reduction of £2.2 million on revenues of £100 million, which is nothing like what the cabinet secretary is confronted with every day. We had the luxury of choice. We could either increase revenues or cut costs. This Government and the cabinet secretary do not have the luxury of increasing their income element, nor is there a lot of scope for increasing other revenue streams.

That means prioritising spending within that financial planning or market framework to secure economic progress on the back of capital asset improvement and structural and social employment changes. With all good intent, I say to the Opposition—indeed, I say it to us all—there is nothing wrong with wishing to prioritise extra spending in certain areas but we should be flexible. We have an obligation or duty to see how and where we can cut to meet the new spending policies and priorities, wherever they come from within the chamber.

The fundamentals of every budget seek to establish an economic growth pattern that embraces long-term growth while providing parallel sustainability of human and environmental development. In securing those objectives, the

focus on continued infrastructure and asset investment as keys to the future efficiency of the economy is welcome, and I noted the comments on that in the Finance Committee's report. The aggregate spending of capital in the budget, enhanced by the various supplements to capital, giving a spend of £4 billion on infrastructure, is within all the policy frameworks that we wish to achieve by creating a springboard for future employment and efficiency.

As a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I want to look at a few of the considerations in our review of the budget that are related to the national performance framework. There is little doubt that proper scrutiny of increased productivity and demand, under a tight discipline of, for example, public procurement supported by European directives on procurement and the unleashing of productivity and innovation via the proposed community empowerment bill, will see a greater level of economic activity. That is, of course, part of the NPF's policy driver.

The marginal reduction as a result of the regrettable top-line Barnett cuts in the enterprise agencies and the retention of social enterprise and third sector funding provides Scotland with greater impetus to make the social and structural change to continue to find, develop and grow innovative companies that have high growth potential. Within that, we need to increase the role of women and ethnic minorities. A number of account-managed, high-growth companies will achieve their potential, as will the sustained growth of social enterprise—again, part of the wider policy framework.

I will finish by talking about a specific area that I believe is fundamental to the success of every profound and, in this case, supportable budget, and I relate it to what I consider to be a key driver in achieving our policy and financial objectives. In that regard, I return to my opening comments on the budget. We are trying to create a fairer system with a fairer pay regime in the public sector, to start to demolish the genie effect of the gap in remuneration between the lower paid in our society and those at the top of public sector pay scales, for example. I welcome our commitment to establishing a minimum basic pay increase and to starting to secure the payment of a Scottish living wage for all who deal with the public sector. I believe that that is a fundamental change, which will secure Scotland's increased performance.

In the current environment and against a backdrop of what some of us think is a nonsensical financial relationship between controlled expenditure in this place and non-controlled income—control over which is exercised elsewhere—I applaud the Finance Committee on the thorough financial analysis in its

recommendations on the budget and the wider planning framework.

15:30

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. Although I am not a member of the Finance Committee, I welcome the publication of its report on the draft budget and the opportunity to scrutinise the Scottish Government's spending priorities. I add my thanks to the committee members, SPICe and the clerks for producing the report.

As I said last week in the Scottish Conservatives' finance debate, politics is about priorities and choices. Both the UK Government and the Scottish Government have their own decisions to make. The chancellor set out his choices in the autumn statement, but with a budget of £35 billion, the Scottish Government also has big decisions and big choices to make in the coming months.

I do not intend to talk this afternoon about all the various budget streams; I will concentrate on how the Scottish Government could, and should, use the £300 million of Barnett consequential that it will receive over the next two years to take action now to support families by providing extra childcare.

Last Wednesday, my Labour colleagues and I called on the Scottish Government to invest the Barnett consequential following the autumn statement in childcare for two-year-olds, as Malcolm Chisholm said. I rise again today to make the same demand of the finance secretary and the SNP Government.

We talk all the time about the importance of the early years in children's learning and development. The committee has rightly scrutinised the effectiveness of the preventative spend agenda and issues around the early years change fund. We also talk consistently about the need to help people with the cost of living and about the importance of childcare to the economy. Families across Scotland want us to not just talk about it but take action. That is why we are proposing that the money from the Barnett consequential be used to give childcare to half of Scotland's two-year-olds now.

I lodged amendments to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill to that effect, which could save 30,000 families more than £2,000 a year on childcare costs. The proposal is very similar to the promise on childcare for two-year-olds made in the white paper. I know that the Liberal Democrats have been pushing for action on this, as Willie Rennie said again today, and I hope that the proposal will receive support from SNP and Conservative members as well.

I do not criticise the Scottish Government's aspirations in the white paper for more childcare. In actual fact, I am proposing that it deliver its pledge on two-year-olds now. However, I do criticise the Government for not even providing full costings for its proposals. The fact that it has not provided a full price tag raises the question how serious it is about improving childcare now.

The fact is that, despite all the hype about childcare, it has in reality done very little to help families with childcare over the past six years. As we know, childcare is already fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament and, therefore, the SNP Government. The SNP Government's childcare record is simple: families have yet to see any significant benefit from its childcare policies since 2007. No doubt, the Government will point to a small increase in hours for three and four-year-olds and the proposals in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. However, we in the Labour Party have said consistently that we will not solve the childcare problems of 2013 with a policy that is six years old.

Members will know that last week I compared the SNP's record to Labour's record in office. Labour's record included a childcare strategy within months of coming to power; the introduction of universal early years education for three and four-year-olds; provision for vulnerable two-year-olds; the raising of standards; child tax credits; and much, much more.

Labour is clear: families need help with childcare now. As I have said time and again in this chamber, it is regrettable that the SNP Government has yet to deliver its promise of 600 hours for three and four-year-olds, despite that promise being made way back in 2007. It is also regrettable that the Scottish Government cut back nursery programmes for vulnerable two-year-olds when it first came to power and that the SNP Government and SNP MSPs voted against Labour's proposal for a childcare commission back in May.

There are lots of ways in which families need support for childcare, and those could have been looked at by a cross-party commission. The reality is that families do not care who delivers the support as long as action is taken to address their needs. However, the SNP now has the opportunity, as it has had in every year since 2007, to put more money into childcare and help families with the cost of living.

I was encouraged during last week's debate when Mr Swinney said that he would consider Labour's proposals. I welcome that. He said that it would be up to the Cabinet to decide. The Cabinet will probably have met since last week so I ask the cabinet secretary whether that has been discussed. Will the Scottish Government support

that proposal? Are the members of the Cabinet raising concerns about this? As we said in May when we proposed a childcare commission, we are happy to work on a cross-party basis and urge Mr Swinney to act on that as soon as possible.

Labour wants extra childcare to help families with the cost of living now and to help give children the best start in life. Affordable, quality and flexible childcare has always been a priority for the Labour Party. It was a big priority for the SNP three weeks ago; I hope that it still is. There was a lot of mention of testing ambitions earlier. I think that this is a key test of ambition. It is time that we helped families with the cost of living. It is time that the Scottish Government made up its mind and backed Labour's call. The SNP Government has the powers and the resources. The only thing that it does not have is excuses.

15:36

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I would like to concentrate on the climate change targets that are mentioned in the Finance Committee's report on the draft budget. One of the 16 national outcomes in the national performance framework is that

"We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production."

Related to that outcome is the Government's two purpose targets, which are

"To reduce emissions over the period to 2011"

and

"To reduce emissions by 80 percent by 2050".

Both those targets are shown as improving on the Scotland performs website. That is welcomed by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. However, the committee notes that the statutory climate change targets for 2010 and 2011 have both been missed.

In that light, my committee asked other committees in the Parliament to consider the climate impacts of the budget from their perspective. Ahead of their considerations, I wrote to all the relevant committees with a set of questions that would allow them to interrogate their own report. The first question was

"how the draft budget delivers proposals and policies that relate to their portfolio as set out in the RPP".

The second question was

"how the draft budget supports measures aimed at making up the shortfall in emission reductions"

because of missed targets. The third question was

"how funding for those public bodies covered by their portfolio will help integrate action to tackle climate change in their business and service delivery functions".

In addition to the questions that we asked generally, SPICe provided some detailed questions for the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, the Health and Sport Committee, the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, the Equal Opportunities Committee and the European and External Relations Committee. Some of those questions seem to have been picked up, but others were not. Therefore, we had to assess exactly what the result was in terms of the climate balance in the budget discussion.

The Health and Sport Committee, the Justice Committee, the Local Government and Regeneration Committee and the Education and Culture Committee did not mention anything about the carbon content in the budget. I will give examples of the questions that were suggested for the Education and Culture Committee. We asked it:

"to what extent does funding for Scotland's Schools for the Future programme support delivery of Scotland's emission reduction targets;

to what extent does the skills and training budget support the opportunities associated with realising a low carbon Scotland; and

what progress are Historic Scotland making in integrating action to tackle climate change in its operation and service delivery functions and fulfil that duty under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act to contribute to Scotland's emission reduction targets."

We would expect each committee to use the questions that we provided to interrogate its own contributions, but the committees that I have just mentioned did not do so. I am delighted to say that the Finance Committee noted these issues and that the European and External Relations Committee, the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee all made substantive comments. However, when five other committees did not pursue any of the suggested issues, we in this Parliament need to ask whether each of its committees is taking seriously the role of climate change mitigation in all its responsibilities and whether the Parliament as a whole is meeting the aims and targets in the national performance framework. This is a serious issue. Before we get the Government's response, we need some means of measuring how some of these matters might affect our approach.

Another example relates to the Finance Committee's responsibility for scrutinising the Scottish Public Pensions Agency and its investments. How many of the investments in its portfolio boost the development of a low-carbon economy and how many have been invested in less environmentally friendly ways? We need to know that information and find some means of getting a response to such questions in future.

In its report, the Finance Committee states that it

“would welcome further details on the acknowledgement by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change that a ‘renewed effort’ is required to meet the statutory climate change targets”,

which we missed in 2010 and 2011, and that it

“supports the view of the RACCE Committee”—

my committee—

“that ‘funding information for climate change mitigation measures should be published alongside publication of the draft budget’.”

I would also add that it is essential that each committee makes its own input to ensure that we meet the aim, shared by the whole Parliament, of tackling climate change.

15:42

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I welcome this opportunity to take part in this debate on the Finance Committee's draft budget report. It is important that we remember the financial situation that the Scottish Government faces, even after the UK chancellor's recent autumn statement. According to the updated figures that were issued after that statement, the Scottish budget is being cut by £3.1 billion or 9.9 per cent over the current five-year spending review period. However, despite that substantial cut, Scotland continues to outperform the rest of the UK. The Scottish economy grew by 1.8 per cent over the year to June 2013, while the UK economy grew by just 1.3 per cent. Over the past year, Scottish employment increased by 83,000 and now stands at 72.6 per cent, which is higher than the UK rate of 72.2 per cent. Moreover, at 7.1 per cent, Scottish unemployment is lower than the UK rate of 7.4 per cent.

Over the past five years, the rate of youth employment in Scotland has continually been higher than the rate in the UK as a whole, with Scotland achieving more than 53 per cent employment for 16 to 24-year-olds compared with a figure of less than 50 per cent for the UK as a whole. The budget will also continue to support the 25,000 modern apprenticeship new starts every year to enable employers to strengthen and grow their business.

Iain Gray: Will the member give way?

Gordon MacDonald: No, thanks.

Although still too high, our latest youth unemployment figure means that only eight out of 28 European Union countries have a lower youth unemployment rate than Scotland. The situation is improving not only because Scotland has the only

dedicated Minister for Youth Employment but because of the Scottish Government's investment-led recovery strategy, which is supporting and sustaining employment as well as investing in our country's future. NPD projects worth more than £800 million, including Inverness College, City of Glasgow College and Ayrshire College, started construction this financial year.

John Henderson, the chief executive of Colleges Scotland, said:

“The Scottish Government made a commitment to maintain colleges' cash funding earlier this year and we are very pleased that this has been incorporated into the draft Budget for 2014-15”—

Gavin Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Gordon MacDonald: No, thank you.

Mr Henderson went on to say:

“We also welcome the additional resources that are being allocated to the college sector for 2015-16. We look forward to engaging with the Government on how we can use these resources in areas such as expanding school and college partnerships. Investing in the college sector is investing in Scotland's future prosperity and supporting economic recovery.”

Scotland's schools for the future programme has 13 schools that are already operational and nine that are under construction, and there will be 67 new or refurbished schools by March 2018. The draft budget highlights that more than £8 billion of investment will take place from 2014-15 to 2015-16 to continue that investment-led recovery strategy.

That strategy has helped the Scottish Government to achieve the highest level ever recorded for school leavers heading to a positive destination. The percentage of school leavers who entered employment, training or further and higher education reached 91 per cent for the year to July 2013. The Educational Institute of Scotland general secretary, Larry Flanagan, said:

“The very high percentage of young people moving on to a positive destination when they leave school is good news for Scotland and reflects the strong performance of our comprehensive education system. Our young people deserve the best start in life, and our schools are continuing to equip pupils with the education and skills that they need to move on to further and higher education, into training programmes, or straight into employment.”

The ability of our young people has been recognised in the latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development programme for international student assessment—or PISA—rankings, which rate Scotland as doing at least as well as, if not better than, a number of leading world economies in literacy, numeracy and science.

The latest PISA results from 2012 reveal that the achievement gap between rich and poor students in Scotland has closed in maths, reading and science. However, it is not only on the youth employment front that things are improving. In today's papers, there is the news that the number of women in work has hit a 21-year high at the same time as overall unemployment in Scotland has fallen.

The number of women in employment has reached more than 1.2 million, and this budget will help to sustain and improve that position by investing more than £190 million to fully fund 125 additional hours of early learning and childcare. That will mean that free nursery provision will rise from 475 hours to 600 hours per year.

Since 2007, with the limited powers that the Scottish Parliament has, the Scottish Government has been able to create jobs and boost the economy at a time of unprecedented cuts to our budget from Westminster, but Westminster's austerity agenda is holding Scotland back. The Office for Budget Responsibility has stated that the UK's economic strategy is "unsustainable" and that the UK will run a fiscal deficit in each of the next 50 years. The OBR states:

"In the absence of offsetting tax increases or spending cuts this would widen budget deficits over time and eventually put public sector net debt on an unsustainable upward trajectory."

Only with independence, where we have control over the economy, can we do things better and more effectively, bringing about lasting growth and making Scotland a fairer country.

15:48

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will concentrate my remarks on the Finance Committee's report, and specifically on the recommendations that were made to that committee by the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, which I have the pleasure of convening. A number of those recommendations were picked up directly in the Finance Committee's observations.

I think that we would all agree that we want the Scottish Government to use its budget to maximise Scotland's economic potential. In practice, that means putting in place measures that will assist with the growth of Scotland's private sector businesses and industries. A number of aspects of the draft budget will have an impact on the ability of businesses to do just that, and I will highlight those.

One issue that came up when the EETC took evidence on the draft budget was procurement opportunities, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. I am well aware that the

Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill has been introduced and is being scrutinised by the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee. It was clear to us that there is a large burden of expectation on the bill to improve the availability of public contracts for smaller, more local businesses.

During the budget process I asked the cabinet secretary what percentage of Scottish Government spend was won by domestic businesses. His reply was that 80 per cent of the contracts that were awarded through the public contracts Scotland portal go to Scottish businesses. However, what is not clear is whether the 80 per cent of the number of contracts awarded represents an equivalent share of the value of the contracts. It might be, for example, that very large value infrastructure projects are going to companies outwith Scotland; we need to know whether that is the case in order to get a true picture of the benefit to the Scottish economy from the Government's procurement spend. I was pleased that our committee asked the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee to pursue that issue as part of its scrutiny of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill.

Our committee spent quite a lot of time looking at the performance of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the business gateway. Scottish Enterprise has an ambitious target of increasing the number of its account-managed companies by 20 per cent over the period to 2015. On the basis of its record to date, it is doubtful whether that can be achieved. That is an area on which we need more evidence to see what steps are being taken by both Scottish Enterprise and HIE to accelerate the rate of increase. It is clearly in everyone's interest that we see more high-growth companies being brought within the reach of our enterprise network.

Concerns were raised with the committee about the operation of the business gateway. The committee has looked at that issue in the past, and we have asked the Scottish Government for further information on how it views the performance of the network. Specifically, we have suggested to the Scottish Government that now is the time for a review of small business support that would cover both the business gateway network and the work of the enterprise agencies. In view of the importance of those agencies to growth in the economy, it is important that we keep that under constant scrutiny.

I was surprised to see that Scottish Enterprise is seeking to fill a gap in its income for the coming year of £26.3 million from what it refers to as "further asset realisations", which are in effect property sales over and above the routine annual

disposal of excess assets. Scottish Enterprise admitted in evidence to the committee:

"This may not be the best time, in the economy, to dispose of or to realise money from those assets."—
[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 30 September 2013; c 3307.]

Indeed. If they are commercial property assets, as a great majority of them will be, it might not be the best time to sell them when the commercial property market is very depressed and they might achieve a very low value—in effect, we might be talking about a fire sale. That is a matter of some concern, and the committee agreed that we should seek further information on what is proposed; that was picked up by the Finance Committee in its report.

The Scottish Government has put great store by its principle of prioritising capital spend in order to stimulate the economy. It seems rather to turn things on their head for Scottish Enterprise to dispose of its capital assets at a time when they might not realise the best price to be achieved in normal economic times in order to fill a gap in its annual income. I am not sure that that amounts to responsible stewardship of the public finances.

Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, VisitScotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council are all part of the strategic forum, which requires to make savings of £40 million in each of the next two financial years. From the information provided to us, the projected savings amounted to £27 million for 2014-15. We must therefore assume that the Scottish funding council, which is not under our committee's remit, is contributing the missing £13 million in savings, but it would be helpful to have that clarified. There seemed to be a certain lack of detail from the cabinet secretary on that point when he gave evidence to the committee.

The committee is concerned, too, about the funding of fuel poverty programmes. We heard in evidence, as we have heard it in previous years, that £200 million must be spent annually to keep up to date with fuel poverty programmes. Some of that money comes from the energy companies, but there is a lack of clarity about how much exactly is coming from the private sector. It is important that that is identified.

As we have heard already in the debate, the Scottish Government decided to take £10 million out of the fuel poverty budget to provide support to people impacted by the underoccupancy charge for social housing. To my mind, that is the wrong priority. We already have a major issue of fuel poverty in Scotland and it is a matter of regret that the fuel poverty budget has been raided.

There is much in the Scottish Government's budget that can be supported, but there are a number of key areas of concern. I hope that, as the budget progresses through Parliament, we will see those concerns addressed and a greater focus on private sector business growth and support.

15:54

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): It does not surprise me that one of the leading cheerleaders for the bedroom tax is opposed to money being used to mitigate the impacts of the bedroom tax. However, I take a different approach from that of Murdo Fraser and welcome the use of that money by Mr Swinney and the identification of those funds to help the most vulnerable, many of whom are among my constituents.

I have a couple of observations to make. In his opening remarks, Mr Gray planted his and the Labour Party's flags on the issues of the bedroom tax and childcare. He may want to pass a memo to his colleagues who speak on housing, health, local government, education and pretty much all portfolios, telling them that those are the Labour Party's funding priorities. In every debate that we have in the chamber on all those portfolio issues, key Labour members and spokespeople demand additional revenue funding for those areas.

Iain Gray: Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: No.

It is welcome that, at least, we now have distilled and clarified where the Labour Party's priorities are. Furthermore, Mr Gray has been able to identify where he would get the money to fund childcare. I will come back to that in a moment.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: No, thank you.

Mr Gray is yet to give us a coherent understanding of where he would get the extra £30 million to top up the £20 million that the cabinet secretary has identified to deal with the bedroom tax, but I am sure that that will come in time.

Malcolm Chisholm obviously has more faith in the UK Treasury than I have. His remarks and his quotation of Danny Alexander fall some way short of the guarantee that I would seek that the block grant will not be touched. He is right to say that how Mr Swinney chooses to spend the block grant is a matter for Mr Swinney. We need only look at the recent episode regarding public sector pensions, whereby the cabinet secretary was sent a letter from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that made it clear in no uncertain terms that, if he

pursued a different approach on public sector pensions, he would see the block grant reduced on a pound-for-pound basis. In that context, I have little faith in the UK Treasury when it comes to the flexibility that Malcolm Chisholm is looking for.

Mr Chisholm claimed that the argument about where revenues from the childcare policy and the shift of people into work would go is a self-defeating one. The point is that if we use the revenues that the policy would generate to underpin, guarantee and fund that policy in the longer term, that is a critical element of the argument about the policy. We cannot deliver the one without having the other available to us to fund it. That is why the argument that the Deputy First Minister makes is critical to the debate.

I sound a note of caution to the Labour Party on its enthusiasm for the use of consequentials. We must remember that the current consequentials exist in the budget for only the next two financial years. We also do not know what shifts may take place in the overall departmental expenditure limit budget over those two years. The point that I make to Mr Gray—it is simply a note of caution—is that suggesting that a long-term policy could be funded on the basis of non-guaranteed and not necessarily recurring revenue to the Scottish Government is fraught with difficulty.

Iain Gray: The argument that the consequentials cannot be used for childcare because they are available for only two years is, frankly, ludicrous. We are considering a budget that is for only one year, and even I am not cynical enough to think that Mr Swinney is not going to fund schools or hospitals after next year because he has given us a budget for only one year. All Governments budget for one, two or, at most, three years. It is a ridiculous point.

Mark McDonald: No, it is not. We know that the Scottish Government is going to have money available to it in future years to fund what it proposes this year. What I am saying to Mr Gray is that the additional money from consequentials is additional only for the next two financial years—I am simply sounding a note of caution on that.

I will conclude by touching on preventative spend. During the budget scrutiny process, I was a member of the Health and Sport Committee and we looked at preventative spend as part of our budget scrutiny. There are two key areas that would merit further examination, on which the cabinet secretary may be able to respond in his closing comments. The first of those is how preventative spend is being modelled and monitored by public bodies. The allied health professionals said that they feel that there is a lack of an evidence base in relation to their sectors, although the Royal College of Nursing highlighted work that is under way on a pan-UK level through

the Office for Public Management. I would be interested to know from the cabinet secretary whether the Scottish Government has been able to feed into that or see the work that is being done.

The second question, which relates to how we ensure that we get the best out of preventative spend, concerns the fact that the people who spend the money are not necessarily the people who derive the benefit from that spend. Sometimes, I feel that there can be a reluctance on the part of some public bodies to say that they will make significant preventative spending decisions because it might not be their area that would derive the benefit. For example, a preventative spend in education might deliver a significant future saving not in education but in criminal justice. We need to ensure that such issues are being borne in mind and that silo thinking does not creep into the preventative spending agenda.

16:00

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I congratulate the Finance Committee on its comprehensive report, and I thank the clerks who put it together. In my speech tonight, I represent the interests of my constituents across Glasgow and my colleagues in local government.

This budget could have addressed the most dire economic circumstances that we have faced for a generation. Local authorities are the very last line of defence against Westminster austerity and Holyrood point scoring, using their scarce resources to mitigate the worst excesses of both. However, the budget limits the power to provide any real form of relief for disabled people, those on low incomes and those who are most reliant on public services—the most vulnerable in our society.

The biggest challenge that local authorities in Scotland face concerns their ability to continue to serve their communities in the face of the underfunded council tax freeze. Our councils are forced to raise funds in other ways, and have done so principally through increasing the charges for the non-statutory services that they provide, which are services that are often relied on by those who are most in need. I have been contacted by a number of constituents and local organisations, who tell me that the financial settlements from the Scottish Government are really beginning to affect them personally. They say that local services are facing increased demands and higher costs, leading to far more pressures being placed on the vulnerable groups and those with additional support needs.

Bob Doris: I do not doubt Ms McTaggart's sincerity when she talks about disabled people

and vulnerable citizens. Mr Gray has highlighted his position that any additional money should be spent on childcare. What would Ms McTaggart spend the money on? Would she give it to local government?

Anne McTaggart: If the council tax freeze were not underfunded, I am sure that we could fund both things.

The harsh reality is that the council tax freeze disproportionately benefits the rich, while an increased reliance by local authorities on council charges disproportionately affects those who are most in need. Those families who are most likely to rely on council services lose out, while people who own the most expensive properties reap the biggest rewards. The cumulative benefit of the council tax freeze to a band H home owner by 2013 is more than £1,500, in contrast to the cumulative benefit to a band A home owner of only £250.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): The member might be aware that I live in North Lanarkshire, where more than 80 per cent of properties are band D or below, and 64 per cent are band B or below. Does the member consider people in those properties to be rich?

Anne McTaggart: I most certainly was not saying that they are all rich.

For too many families, this Christmas will be a modest affair, with the tragic choice between heating and eating once again being contemplated. More families are in this situation than was the case at this time last year because of the huge number of public sector redundancies that have been necessary in order to meet yet more budget cuts. Last month's Audit Scotland report on Scotland's public sector workforce concluded that there were 26,600 fewer jobs—that is 26,600 households—in the public sector in March 2013 compared with March 2009, which amounts to an incredible 5 per cent of all jobs in our councils. That pattern of redundancy, poverty and hardship is unsustainable and much more must be done to make a real difference to the lives of those who are suffering the most.

Although the Westminster Government is damaging our economy with its misplaced priorities, we can do so much more here in Scotland to mitigate the effects of its decisions. It is time to pursue a cross-party solution to the very real problems that Scots face in the new year. That means looking for solutions that exist now, not putting Scotland on pause.

16:06

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): As I was a member of the Finance Committee in the

previous parliamentary session, before the most recent election, I am always interested in reading the Finance Committee's reports. I was particularly interested in this one, because I am a believer in having a national performance framework, such as Scotland performs, and I was interested to see it reviewed after five or six years of operation. I participated in the first inquiry into preventative spend that the Finance Committee undertook. If I remember rightly, Malcolm Chisholm was also a member of the Finance Committee when it undertook that inquiry, before the most recommendationent election. Those two things tie in very well.

I was truly delighted in 2007 that not only did the SNP win the election, but we came to government with what I believed to be an absolutely fresh approach. That approach looked at Scotland as a whole and asked what kind of country we wanted to be, how we should target policy towards that and how we should monitor ourselves to see how to achieve that. I believe that the national performance framework, Scotland performs, set us on that road. It was a bold initiative—an integrated framework for policy delivery, in the parlance that is used—and it was a mechanism to assess Scotland's performance and give us the discipline to look at successes, look at failures and look at what is best for our society as a whole, to move forward.

We heard the cabinet secretary talk about the measurements of GDP, employment, unemployment and economic inactivity and I was very glad to see in the report that he was open to reviewing and revising the indicators, based on discussion, because that is very important. Along with Patrick Harvie, I was a member of the steering group that Oxfam ran on the humankind index, and I know that the cabinet secretary was interested in looking at some of its findings. The wider discussion beyond the findings of the Finance Committee is certainly worth having.

That brings me to preventative spend, which is a major issue. Anne McTaggart just talked about cross-party action. One of my great wishes and aspirations for our Parliament, from the very start, was that we would get beyond the petty party politics that we hear so much of in here and recognise that our country faces some big issues, over which surely we could have consensus, and that no matter who was in power, we could move towards attaining some of those aims. That ties into the assessment of the nation through Scotland performs.

I found the Finance Committee's first preventative spend inquiry quite difficult, because I had to recognise that although we had the boldness of single outcome agreements for local authorities, for example, and different initiatives to

look at public service in general, our society very much works in silos. Sometimes, we found far too much of an emphasis on health boards or local authorities wanting to hold on to their own budgets and not have any kind of sensible sharing across budget lines, not only to make things better for people—it is all about people—but, in the longer term, hedge our resources better.

That brings me on to working together. I was interested to hear that, all of a sudden, the budget consequentials from the autumn statement at Westminster have all to be spent on childcare and mitigating the remnants of the bedroom tax after the mitigation that we have already carried out. I sat on the Welfare Reform Committee and the point that we should look at the bedroom tax again was not even raised as part of the budget scrutiny.

I welcome the fact that, in the budget, we are trying to mitigate and alleviate some of the effects of the welfare reform that has been imposed on us. In the news this week, I see that more than 500,000 people in the UK have turned to food banks since April and thousands have been hit by welfare penalties. Willie Rennie said at First Minister's questions that we have turned a corner and things are good. I repeat that it is about people and there are an awful lot of people that it just ain't good for.

I find it a bit galling that we have an Opposition party that talks about working together but could not even vote together to try to bring some of the powers over welfare reform to the Parliament. We hear Opposition members saying, "Use the powers you have. Use the powers you have," but we could have had many more powers. We could have been doing better than just tinkering around the edges of trying to alleviate some of the issues that are being imposed by Westminster.

It is back to what Anne McTaggart said—

Iain Gray: Will Linda Fabiani give way?

Linda Fabiani: I am just finishing.

It is about working together, cross party, to determine what is best for Scotland and how we want Scotland to perform. Let us get on and do it.

16:12

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I extend my thanks to the Finance Committee for its work in producing the report and bringing it to the chamber.

First, I will say a few words on the national performance framework. Members of the Scottish Green Party have probably been boring members over the years with speeches about why it is important to move away from narrow metrics such as GDP growth and have a broader understanding

of the economic health of our society. We need broader metrics such as the humankind index that Linda Fabiani mentioned. However, members do not have to be Greens—they do not have to take the position that says that everlasting economic growth is impossible on a planet of finite resources and that the everlasting pursuit of it will be destructive—to recognise the reality.

The lesson of history is that there have been long periods in which our country has experienced continual economic growth and the lion's share of the economic benefit of that activity has been hoarded by those who are already wealthiest—those who need the resources least benefit the most. Very often, that activity happens at the expense and exploitation of people and the environment. Very often, it means the exploitation of the environments in which the most exploited people live. Members do not have to be Greens to recognise that lesson of history.

The cabinet secretary is to be congratulated on his approach in developing the national performance framework and his desire for cross-party dialogue on its future development. However, Malcolm Chisholm was also right to say that some of those congratulations have been qualified. I think that the cabinet secretary would recognise that it is the beginning of a journey. He does not have all the answers yet on the future development of the concept and, although Scotland may be ahead of the curve in relation to the rest of the world, it is not a steep curve that we are ahead of—very few countries are doing anything at all in the area—so let us welcome the work that is being done but not rest on our laurels.

On climate change, I welcome many of the points that Rob Gibson made. I also welcome the fact that the Finance Committee included a quotation from the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Mr Wheelhouse, who acknowledged that, although we are nearly five years on from passing the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, we are yet to achieve a single annual target and that renewed effort is needed to meet the statutory climate change targets.

I make a plea to the cabinet secretary to make this the last year in which the climate change figures that accompany the budget come in right at the end of the committee scrutiny process and—in future years—to give those figures to the committees early enough to allow us to carry out robust and fair scrutiny. I hope that the Government would welcome that.

Among the areas in which we clearly need to do better as regards social justice and achieving the climate change targets are active travel and the energy efficiency programme. Mention has been made of taking money from energy efficiency to

pay for bedroom tax mitigation, and I have a concern that, in doing that, we are, essentially, taking money from the pockets and purses of the very people whom we are trying to help, particularly in a year in which Barnett consequentials are available to use and in which money is being moved from revenue into capital. Those are potential alternative sources of funding that could be used to meet the equally important need of mitigating the bedroom tax.

On active travel, I commend the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition's call for a doubling of the spend on the cycling budget. On paper, active travel—walking and cycling—is at the top of a hierarchy of transport priorities but, in reality, it is right at the bottom of the spend. The Government has increased spending on it a little this year, but the funding that is being provided is still way short of what is necessary for us to be able to meet the Government's priority of 10 per cent of journeys being made by bike by 2020. Let us see a bit more focus on that.

On the wider health impact of active travel, there is a real opportunity to complement the Government's approach on preventative spend through initiatives such as the change funds by building one around active lifestyles, healthy choices and healthy behaviour. At the moment, the Government has the community food and health (Scotland) project, which has just been brought under the auspices of NHS Health Scotland, but it has a tiny budget of around £60,000 a year. Demand massively outstrips supply, and I suspect that demand would be a great deal higher if many people had heard of the initiative.

Another Scottish Government minister, Shona Robison, has previously told us that obesity currently costs Scotland £457 million a year and that that figure could increase to up to £3 billion a year if we do not get a grip of the issue. If the Government were to take the same change fund approach to healthy and active lifestyles and to healthy food, that would be a useful way of complementing its approach to preventative spend in a way that would meet social and environmental objectives. I hope that the cabinet secretary will be willing to discuss that with me over the coming weeks and months as we move forward in the budget process.

16:18

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank the Finance Committee for its detailed and thoughtful report on the draft budget for 2014-15.

I would like to look at the moneys that the Scottish Government is giving to change funds, which is an issue that is of particular interest to

me, as deputy convener of the Health and Sport Committee. In the three years up to 2014-15, £500 million is being invested in change funds. As the report that is before us notes, the draft budget for 2012-13 said:

“Together it is anticipated that national and local government and their community planning partners will invest up to £500 million through these change funds to support the greater alignment of budgets across the public sector on a preventative and outcomes-focused basis.”

I suppose that that leaves us asking, “What does that actually mean?” For my part, it means reforming public service delivery in a way that best delivers the outcomes that we all want to see.

I have a particular interest in active ageing and the health of our older population, so among the outcomes that I would like to see being achieved—to which the Scottish Government has a clear commitment and to which I am sure that members across the Parliament have a joint commitment—are older people being happier and healthier and staying in their own homes for longer before having to move to a residential setting, if that is necessary; their making fewer unplanned visits to hospital acute services because of slips, trips, falls and so on; and fewer of them being stuck in hospital wards for longer than they need to be as a result of delayed discharge.

In recent weeks, Alex Neil, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, has talked about having a seven-day healthcare service to help achieve those outcomes. We are trying to achieve quite clear outcomes using change fund money. I hugely welcome the use of £420 million in the change fund for older people between 2011 and 2016, including £70 million in the budget that will be before us early next year.

However, we also have to scrutinise the good and effective use of those moneys in achieving those outcomes, some of which I have mentioned. For example, we want to ensure that change fund moneys transition into the core financial budgets that health boards and local authorities set in order to better mainstream any initiatives that are developed through the change funds.

As the Finance Committee has said, we need to examine how we can encourage local authorities to make a greater contribution to the change funds. Health and social care integration for older people is currently being legislated on through the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Bill, which is before the Parliament, and we need to think more carefully about how we carry out robust budget scrutiny of single accounts under the bodies corporate that will involve local authorities and health boards. We have to come to terms with scrutiny in relation to that issue as well.

The outcomes are easy to measure but they are challenging to achieve, and the framework that I mentioned will be important in ensuring that we can achieve them. The Finance Committee's report refers to what the Health and Sport Committee said about the lack of a clear link between the draft budget and the indicators. I have been on the Health and Sport Committee for a number of years and there is almost a necessary tension between the budget and the indicators, given that individual health boards have local strategies to identify and address some of the indicators and that there is also a disconnect between when the Parliament sets the budget for health boards at a national level and when health boards set their own budgets. There is a scrutiny issue in there, too. I think that we can improve, but I see a necessary tension as regards how we can go further. I think that it is up to Parliament to suggest how we can do that better.

I will come to the Barnett consequential in a second, but in relation to the moneys in the budget that we are considering—the existing moneys—I have noticed that not one person from the Labour Party has said how one existing pound would be spent elsewhere, despite Labour's repeated demands that we spend lots of money in lots of different places. That critical fault line runs through the Labour Party's approach to budget scrutiny.

I see that Mr Rennie is in the chamber. He will be delighted to hear that my commitment to extending childcare has not waned; in fact, it is stronger than it has ever been. However, I have had a commitment to kinship care payments and to the roll-out and extension of free school meals for just as long as I have had a commitment to extending childcare. Each of those commitments has to be individually funded and paid for on an on-going basis. There are challenges in that regard, and there are decisions that everyone has to make—including me, Mr Rennie.

The free school meals pilot, which was carried out by the Scottish Government in partnership with local authorities, was pretty successful, but it was discontinued because of cuts from the UK Government. That is an example of a pilot that was brought to Scotland by a Scottish Government but which was directly undermined by UK Government spending decisions. We have to bear that in mind.

As we look at the budget, it is worth putting on record other potential spending consequences for the Parliament. We know that there is a cross-party effort elsewhere in the UK to take £4 billion away from Scotland by scrapping the Barnett formula. We also know of estimates of a multi-billion pound saving from the NHS in England with the greater use of private funds there. Those two examples have potential spending consequences

that put Scotland at risk financially. Yes, I want that step change in childcare—I want to dramatically improve childcare—but I want to ensure that we get that improvement not just for a short time but in perpetuity.

16:24

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):

As a member of the Finance Committee, I endorse the very fair report by the convener, Kenneth Gibson, and thank the cabinet secretary for his speech.

The committee learned from expert witnesses that the national performance framework is internationally recognised and admired. It may not be as well known or as widely understood as we would like in Scotland, but it is a tool of international significance. The Centre for Public Policy for Regions has stated that the setting of ambitious targets across all areas is commendable. The cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government should therefore be commended for their determination to make a success of the NPF. I agree with the cabinet secretary that it is pretty well known at public sector leadership level, if not among the public. More can be done to raise awareness of the national performance framework and its national indicators, of course, and I am sure that there will be further attempts to do so.

Unfortunately, we have a race-to-the-bottom economy in Britain. As a result, Scotland is one of the most unequal societies in the world. According to Oxfam, the wealthiest households are 273 times richer than the poorest households, and the inequalities in Scottish society are deepening and being exacerbated by the declining progressivity of the UK tax and benefits system. Some 40 per cent of Scots in poverty are in work—that is a national disgrace and quite staggering for a country that is so wealthy. That figure is on the rise, as is the number of people in Scotland who are turning to food banks as a last resort. That is another national disgrace.

The Scottish Government can only mitigate those factors. It has no say over how the tax collection system is structured and has simply very little control over the issues that affect people's lives on a daily basis. I suspect that it is that frustration that has brought the argument into the Parliament today.

The cabinet secretary and his colleagues have done a fine job in balancing the budget, given the tight financial constraints that Scotland has faced over recent years. How could we say any different? In real terms, Scotland's budget has been cut by around 11 per cent over five years, and capital spending has been cut by more than

26 per cent. It is therefore hardly surprising that everybody is tightening their belts and that things are getting worse.

I find it remarkable that, under those financial pressures, the Scottish Government has committed to maintaining the council tax freeze. That is the only tax that can put a pound back in people's pockets. The Scottish Government has done that—it aims to do so for seven years. I also find it remarkable that it has committed to a consolidation of public services where possible; that it is investing further in colleges and the training of Scotland's young people; that it is committed to investing £33 million a year in a welfare fund to try to protect the most vulnerable from Westminster's austerity agenda; and that it will continue to protect the budgets of the NHS and local government in Scotland.

We are faced with a less-than-attractive future if we vote no next year. During his speech at the Lord Mayor's banquet in London last month, the Prime Minister made it clear that austerity is here to stay.

Jenny Marra: Will the member give way?

Jean Urquhart: No, thanks.

The Prime Minister called for

"a leaner, more efficient state."

From looking at the spending cuts and the desire for privatisation south of the border, we all know what he meant. Sooner or later, because of the way that the Barnett formula works, the Scottish Government could be forced to make decisions that it does not wish to make, including the possibility of cutting NHS Scotland's budget. Such decisions will be the result of continuous cuts to the overall block grant. That is the reality, and it is generally accepted that those cuts will continue in Scotland next year and thereafter. There appears to be no willingness at Westminster to end austerity or to examine and enact change in the current relationship between the UK tax system and the UK benefit system. I sometimes think that the situation seems to favour the UK Government's privatisation policies.

I believe that a fairer, redistributive tax system is crucial if we are to tackle the poverty that Scotland faces right now and will face in the future. That goal is not achievable under the current arrangements. As we know, Scotland is a wealthy country, but the Scottish Government simply has too little influence to make a real difference to people's lives. Therefore, I truly believe that independence is the only way to deliver a positive future for the people who live and work in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): That brings us to the closing speeches. I regret to

note that two members who participated in the debate are not in the chamber. I trust that they will return to the chamber for the closing speeches.

16:29

Gavin Brown: With regard to the end of Jean Urquhart's speech, I say that it is important not to overegg the so-called Westminster-imposed spending reductions on the Scottish Government. Indeed, it is worth looking at the figures that have rightly been produced by John Swinney on page 189 of the draft Scottish budget and to put them on the record. For last year, 2012-13, the total Scottish Government budget was £33.794 billion; for the current year, 2013-14, the total is £34.588 billion. Even someone who has only a casual relationship with mathematics can see that that is an increase and not a savage cut.

Kenneth Gibson: Will Gavin Brown take an intervention?

Gavin Brown: I will give way in a moment.

Next year, 2014-15—the budget that we are looking at now—the budget will increase from £34.5 billion to £35.3 billion and, just for good measure, in 2015-16 the budget will increase to £35.9 billion. Therefore, between last year and 2015-16, we will go from a £33.7 billion to £35.9 billion total Scottish Government budget, according to the Scottish Government's figures.

I have no doubt that, had we been in times of economic plenty all the way through, those figures would have been bigger. However, when people talk about savage cuts, it is worth putting on the record the amounts of money that are going to the Scottish Government.

I promised to take an intervention from the neutral convener of the Finance Committee. I look forward to hearing it.

Kenneth Gibson: Thank you very much, Mr Brown. It is a neutral intervention. Last year, Mr Brown made the point that he has just made, so I will make the same point as I did then. In real terms, once one has accounted for inflation, the budget reduction is 7.8 per cent in resource and 26.9 per cent in capital. Is that or is that not the case?

Gavin Brown: I would have thought—especially after having had the same exchange last year—that the convener of the Finance Committee would know the difference between a departmental expenditure limit budget and total Scottish Government spend, which takes in annually managed expenditure. I know that the Scottish Government wants to talk only about the DEL budget because that is the one in which it can make the most decisions, but AME budgets also represent money that is spent in Scotland.

Although the Scottish Government has little flexibility in terms of what it can do with that money, it still represents money that is spent in Scotland.

I know that it is a fact that the Scottish Government does not like to acknowledge or talk about, but according to its own figures in its published budget, the figures have increased year on year. If the cabinet secretary wishes to tell me that the total Government budget has gone down in cash terms in any of those years, I would welcome his intervention. He does not wish to intervene; I do not blame him.

Let us return to a couple of issues that were covered in the debate. Bob Doris spoke eloquently, in a fairly thoughtful contribution—for the first 90 per cent of it; I will ignore the last 10 per cent—about change funds. The committee and everybody else in the chamber buy into the concept of preventative spend; indeed, it has had cross-party support over a number of years. The committee came to a conclusion at paragraph 105 of its report that is worthy of a specific response from the cabinet secretary—if not today, then certainly in written form:

“The Committee invites the Government to update it on the progress in ‘establishing fit-for-purpose monitoring and evaluative processes’ as stated in the response to last year’s draft budget report.”

I take on board the comments that were made last year by the cabinet secretary to the effect that it is very difficult to evaluate every single public pound that is spent, but given the amount of money that is going into change funds—Bob Doris mentioned £500 million—it is worth looking carefully at that to ensure that we are spending the money on preventative spend, as opposed to covering gaps, so that we get long-term results.

Murdo Fraser made a couple of comments to which I hope the Scottish Government will respond. One was about the percentage of contracts that are awarded via public contracts Scotland to Scottish companies. We heard the figure for the number of contracts, but what is figure for the value of the contracts? That would very useful information that is important for Parliament to know.

Murdo Fraser also commented on what Scottish Enterprise said about the gap of £26.3 million in this year’s budget, which is to be covered by extra property sales over the financial year. There is the question whether disposing of property is the best thing to do. Is it a good idea to sell property at a loss now, in order to cover a revenue gap in a single year?

I will finish where the debate started. Mr Gibson talked about the national performance framework. Evidence that was heard led a number of

committees to conclude that linkages should be improved. The cabinet secretary challenged committees to come to him with more detailed proposals. That was fair; there is work for Parliament to do. However, there is also work for the Government to do. Will the cabinet secretary work in tandem with the committees and perhaps take the lead on the issue by convening a meeting, so that we can drive things forward together rather than wait for Parliament to act alone? In 12 months we will have a similar debate. Will we be able to say something more positive about linkages then?

16:36

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): In the Finance Committee’s report and in today’s debate, important points and recommendations on the Government’s proposed spending have been highlighted. A theme that runs through the report, which was mentioned in the debate, is how we can better measure and match the outcomes that are delivered through the Government’s £35 billion budget.

Not for the first year, the Finance Committee found it difficult to assess the Government’s spend against the national performance framework. The committee called for development of the tool to enable us to understand better how the money that the Government spends on delivering core policies is contributing to the outcomes that it wants for Scotland.

There is an opportunity here for the Scottish Government to be smarter and better at delivering a budget that engages the key challenges that face Scotland—as members have said throughout the debate. This is about the public’s understanding of what their Government is doing for them, because government is about choices, which are never mutually exclusive, so the need for policies that follow priorities and are linked to performance indicators is important—not least when several indicators show that there is room for improvement.

That was evidenced in the committee’s scrutiny of the Government’s prioritisation of preventative spend. In assessing the change funds, for example, the committee welcomed the additional money for the early years fund, but noted a lack of investment at local level. As the Local Government and Regeneration Committee found, part of the reason for that is the difficulty that local authorities have in reprioritising their spend to target appropriate preventative policies in extremely difficult circumstances. That point was made throughout the debate—we heard it from Kenny Gibson in his opening speech on behalf of the committee, from Iain Gray on behalf of Labour and

from Anne McTaggart and Bob Doris during the open debate.

As Neil Bibby said, there are levers that the Government can pull now to strengthen its preventative spend agenda significantly in relation to the early years. Labour's proposal to use the money and powers that we have to deliver childcare to 50 per cent of two-year-olds would benefit nearly 300,000 children through investment in their wellbeing and education from an early age, and by providing parents with opportunities to get back to work at a time when our economic recovery needs them. The policy embodies effective preventative spend, and delivery now is within our gift, given the powers of Parliament and the autumn statement Barnett consequential.

The Finance Committee considered the impact of welfare reforms on local authorities and communities. The issue has been well rehearsed in Parliament. In evidence to the Welfare Reform Committee, the cabinet secretary said that £20 million is the maximum amount that is legally allowable to mitigate the bedroom tax. However, as we have also heard this afternoon, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, in response to a question about whether the Scottish Government would be penalised for providing more than £20 million, said that what the Scottish Government does with its block grant is a matter for the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government has the opportunity to go further than it has committed to going.

Jamie Hepburn: I think that Ms Marra is mistaken. The cabinet secretary did not appear before the Welfare Reform Committee; it was the Deputy First Minister, and when she was there, not one Labour member asked for any more money for the bedroom tax.

Jenny Marra: I apologise to Jamie Hepburn for my mistake. It was actually the Finance Committee that the finance secretary appeared before, but he made the same point and said exactly the same thing. I am sure that the member agrees, and I know that members across the chamber have rehearsed many times the fact that the bedroom tax is causing misery in communities that we all represent across the country. There should be no hesitation in bringing forward the full £50 million to mitigate that impact. That is what we ask for.

We welcome the committee's report and its recommendations. This has been an interesting, balanced and enjoyable debate. The committee's recommendations are robust and challenging to the Scottish Government. They highlight several areas in which we could do better on matching our budget to the outcomes that we want to see for Scotland. Scottish Labour's proposals on childcare and the bedroom tax harness that spirit by offering

practical solutions to enduring problems, so I ask the finance secretary to use his power and the money in his budget to do those things now.

16:41

John Swinney: I will address some of the issues that members have raised during the debate.

Iain Gray has made it absolutely clear that his view of the budget priorities is that the Scottish Government has to use the consequential that we have received from the United Kingdom to extend the availability of childcare. I assume that we also have to find other resources from other areas of the budget to mitigate all the impacts of the bedroom tax. Mr Gray has clearly put on record the Labour Party's priorities.

Most Labour members were reasonably on message today on that question, although Anne McTaggart made the case for more money for local government. I was in the chamber for First Minister's question time today when I heard Johann Lamont marshalling an argument about a lack of staff in the health service in Scotland. If we are to have more staff in the health service in Scotland, I presume that they will have to be paid, and if they have to be paid, more money will have to go into the health service.

I delicately suggest that, if there is to be an iron discipline around childcare provision and the bedroom tax, the Labour Party needs to be a tad more disciplined about the propositions that it brings to Parliament on a daily basis.

Iain Gray: Mr Swinney is right in that I said that, if he wants to improve his budget, there are two things that he could do for a start. He will, however, acknowledge that I also said that, over time, our view was that the approach to many of the Government's own stated key priorities had been flawed and without plan or strategy—and we will always criticise that. In other words, the cabinet secretary is quite clear that it is not always about spending; sometimes it is about doing things better in trying to deliver outcomes.

John Swinney: I will read that in the *Official Report* to see whether I can comprehend what underlay that comment.

Mr Brown has persistently raised the link between spend and outcome. In my intervention on Mr Brown, I tried to make a bit of progress on that question, and I think that Mr Rennie acknowledged that I made a fair point.

Mr Brown rather compromised his point by saying in his closing remarks that I should take the lead in the process. I ask him to forgive me because I am not going to do that. I have designed

a mechanism that links spend to outcomes, and the Carnegie Trust said:

“We did not expect to find international innovation on our doorstep. But our work has repeatedly found that the Scottish National Performance Framework is an international leader in wellbeing measurement”.

Gavin Brown: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: In a moment.

I rather think that I have enhanced the debate. I am simply challenging the parliamentary committees to tell me how we can do this better.

Gavin Brown: The cabinet secretary knows that the Carnegie Trust quote was not referring to the linkages in any way whatsoever; it was a general proposition. There is a job for Parliament to do, but does the cabinet secretary not accept that the Government can play its part, too, instead of just sitting back and waiting for committees to report? The committees have reported already.

John Swinney: I am not sitting back. I have delivered an internationally leading performance management framework for public policy in Scotland. It could only be the Scottish Conservative Party that is prepared to see that evidence from the Carnegie Trust and run it down as somehow unacceptable. I simply say to Mr Brown that it is dead easy for people to say that we have to improve the linkage between spend and outcomes. That is a really easy thing for a parliamentary committee to say.

Gavin Brown: Your colleagues said it.

John Swinney: Yes, my colleagues did sign up to that; it is dead easy to do it. I am simply saying, “Here’s the challenge for the parliamentary committees: suggest the mechanism, I will consider it and then we will have a debate about it.”

Mr Chisholm and Ms Marra raised a point about the Chief Secretary to the Treasury’s remarks to the Welfare Reform Committee. If I am paraphrasing him correctly, I think the chief secretary said that what the Scottish Government does with the block grant is a matter for the Scottish Government. That is technically correct—I am free to give local government as much money as I want—but if I want to compensate individuals for the implications of the bedroom tax, the law of the United Kingdom says that I have to do that through discretionary housing payments, for which there is a ceiling of £20 million. That is the point of law that I have to observe.

Malcolm Chisholm: Given that the cabinet secretary is questioning the interpretation that Jenny Marra and I have put on Danny Alexander’s comments, has he written to him or will he write to him to ask him to clarify them?

John Swinney: I am not questioning the comments; I am explaining the comments. The chief secretary is technically correct: what I do with the block grant is a matter for the Scottish Government, and I can give local government as much money as I want. However, if I wish to compensate individuals for the implications of the bedroom tax, the only legal mechanism I have to do that is through discretionary housing payments, for which the law of the United Kingdom says that the most that we can contribute—the most that a local authority, not the Scottish Government can contribute—is £20 million. Those comments are not meant to be obstructive; they are an explanation of the legal position as I am advised of it.

Kenneth Gibson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: I had better give way to the convener of the Finance Committee first.

Kenneth Gibson: Was it not the previous Labour Government that brought in that law?

John Swinney: That may well be the case. I will give way to Mr Hepburn.

Jamie Hepburn: My point has already been made.

John Swinney: I am glad to see that Mr Hepburn and Mr Gibson are on the same wavelength; it is reassuring and worrying in equal measure.

Mr Rennie said that the progress of the NPD programme has been disappointingly slow. I simply point out to Mr Rennie that the NPD programme was brought in to deal with the swingeing cuts in capital expenditure that were brought forward by the UK Government. I accept that progress has been slower than I said it would be, but if we had not brought it in, we would not have been able to fund the Aberdeen western peripheral route, the Inverness College, which is currently being constructed, the City of Glasgow College, the college in Kilmarnock, and various schools. Progress has not been as fast as I would have liked. I have accepted that.

There is a great conflagration about the fact that I have decided to change the level of resource that I put into capital. I say to Mr Rennie that that is purely and simply a budgetary transaction to deal with the fact that, within the financial year, I have acquired more capital from the UK Government but I have also been given less resource. I am simply trying to defend the spending plans that Parliament has democratically voted for when my budget has been reduced by the UK Government in-year—in 2013-14—and changed compared with

the budget that I set out in draft to Parliament for 2014-15.

My final comment is to Mr Harvie. I thought that he made a very well marshalled argument about healthy living funds and more exercise being the greatest contribution that people can make to their own wellbeing. I could not agree more. I have tried to make my own contribution to that in recent months. It is a subject that I look forward to discussing with him in the new year.

16:49

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): In closing the debate on behalf of the Finance Committee, I would like to touch on a few issues that have been mentioned during the debate and make some other comments, as time allows. I echo the thanks of the convener to the various people who have contributed to the budget process, because even practical issues such as arranging our trip to Arbroath involve a lot of work. I also thank all members for their useful contributions, some of which we would agree with more than others.

If I have time, I will touch on some of the extremely useful workshops that we held in Arbroath, where we listened to local people.

The convener spoke about the national performance framework and the Scotland performs website. I will not spend a lot of time on that, as it has been mentioned quite a lot by other members. It is worth highlighting a statement that we heard in evidence from Professor Jeremy Peat of the David Hume Institute, who said:

"I think that Scotland should be proud of the NPF. It is a remarkable achievement to have got something so detailed, so regularly presented and so transparent in terms of the data, targets and information that are set out. It is a hugely positive base from which to proceed."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 2 October 2013; c 3087.]

That illustrates the point, which came through at committee, that no one is saying that the NPF is the final article and cannot be built upon. It is something that we all want to build on.

While such positivity about the NPF was welcomed by the committee, we should accept that it is not well known among the public. More could perhaps be done to promote its use, especially in supporting scrutiny of the budget.

Members made quite a range of comments about the national performance framework, including Mr Swinney. Kenny Gibson referred to it in his opening remarks. Members also referred to the positive feedback from the Carnegie Trust and the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

The point has been made that Scotland performs is a measure not just of Government but

of the whole country. That takes us into an area of complexity about who we are measuring and how we are measuring it. That is an issue not just of fact but of putting across to the public, and even to academics, who is responsible for what.

In a useful contribution, Iain Gray, I think, asked whether the cabinet secretary would accept that it was always his responsibility if something went wrong. Clearly, we would all agree that that is not the case, but it can sometimes be difficult to differentiate between what the Government has done and what it is responsible for in the outcomes and the other factors that are involved.

A number of members touched on outcomes and outputs. The NHS in particular has been mentioned, with, on the one hand, the satisfaction of much of the public with the NHS and, on the other, measures of output such as the number of nurses.

On preventative spending, it was clear in committee that if we were successful in keeping people out of hospital—which many of us would like to do—that would mean fewer hospitals and fewer nurses. However, few politically would dare to stand up and say that they welcome fewer hospitals and fewer nurses.

Gavin Brown talked about wanting a stronger link between spend and outcomes. Mr Swinney asked him how a stronger link could be achieved.

I did not think that I would say this but I was struck by what Mr Hepburn said, which was that we all have a responsibility to ask questions and use the NPF in debates in the chamber and in committee. He hit the nail on the head there, because it is perfectly feasible for all of us, when we are questioning Government ministers—or anyone for that matter—to ask them how what they are doing ties into the NPF and the indicators. I am as guilty as anyone of not doing that. There is a lot of potential for all of us to get involved in that and to move forward.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Does the member agree that in relation to longer-term issues such as climate change the NPF is extremely important, as the convener of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee highlighted, and that the indicators with regard to what we have to achieve go beyond each Government?

John Mason: Yes, I think that we would all agree with that. One question is how much of the NPF should be in statute and how much of it should be allowed just to carry on without a statutory basis; indeed, another question is whether the indicators themselves should change over time. After all, whichever Government or party is in power, society changes and priorities change. I do not think that we reached a final

conclusion on that matter; some suggested a limit on the number of indicators, while others wanted them to be expanded.

Last month, the committee met in Arbroath. We were joined by the cabinet secretary in the afternoon but, in the morning, we spent some useful time listening to the views of local people and organisations. I sat on a small group that comprised a diverse range of participants, including representatives from Angus Council, local small businesses, the Prince's Trust and Enable. It soon became clear that there was a range of familiarity with NPF, with some participants being very familiar with it while others, frankly, had little knowledge of it at all. That was very much in keeping with previous evidence heard by the committee that, although many of those familiar with it felt that it contained a lot of useful content, there was a lack of broad familiarity with it across the country as a whole.

However, despite the differing levels of familiarity, when the group started to discuss some of the issues addressed in the NPF, it became clear that many of them were tangible and of everyday relevance to people. Coming from Glasgow, with a tendency to be slightly city-centric, I found it helpful to hear different perspectives from smaller towns such as Arbroath and its neighbours in Angus. We heard, for example, that many local businesses had particular issues with competition from the bigger cities.

As has been previously noted—indeed, it has been extensively mentioned this afternoon—preventative spending has been a key area of interest. Both the current Finance Committee and its predecessor have spent a lot of time on the matter. Clearly national and local government must utilise their finite resources as efficiently and effectively as possible; however, the committee recognises the challenges faced by public bodies. These were summed up by Glasgow City Council, which said:

“the expectation is that we will treat the population and their needs as they stand right now, yet prevention and early intervention dividends will be felt much further down the track, five or even 10 years away. The reconciliation that health boards and local authorities are left to deal with comes from the fact that the pressing needs and the expected gains do not coincide.”

That issue has been touched on a few times this afternoon. For example, the benefit of the extra money that education might spend on prevention now will be felt in health, prisons and so on. Although progress towards integrating the provision of public services has been made in some areas—most notably, perhaps, in the Highlands—Fife Council highlighted to us some of the challenges that it faced, saying:

“The success of prevention and early intervention will depend on the reshaping of mainstream provision and universal services. It is not about a small, targeted response; it is about reshaping the whole system approach.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee, 9 October*; c 3144 and 3167.]

Turning to comments that were made in the debate, I note that Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the issue of disinvestment. I think that that takes us back to Glasgow City Council's comments; the difficulty is that this is a moving playing field. For example, demand for hospitals and elderly care might be increasing. Disinvestment might not necessarily mean closing a hospital; it might mean not opening an extra hospital because more people can be treated at home. We simply have to accept that these issues are tricky.

A number of members talked about priorities and where money should be spent. As Bob Doris mentioned, most of the suggestions have been about what to do with the consequential funds; there have not been many suggestions about changing the budget as a whole. We may get to that at stage 1, but at the moment it certainly seems that most of the debate is about what to do with those funds. Mark McDonald commented that Labour was asking for a lot of things—everything, in fact—and Anne McTaggart, who spoke immediately afterwards, asked for more money for local government.

In conclusion, I note that the next draft budget that we will be scrutinising will make use of the powers under the Scotland Act 2012, and will include the land and buildings transaction tax and the landfill tax. For the time being, however, I very much look forward to the Finance Committee's on-going work in that regard, and I support the motion in the convener's name.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S4M-08657, on committee membership; S4M-08658, on substitution on committees; and S4M-08659, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Patricia Ferguson be appointed as a member of the European and External Relations Committee; and

Cara Hilton be appointed as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Neil Bibby be appointed to replace Patricia Ferguson as a substitute member of the European and External Relations Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Boards (Membership and Elections) (Scotland) Order 2013 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S4M-08576, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on the Finance Committee's report on the draft budget 2014-15, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Finance Committee's 10th Report, 2013 (Session 4): Draft Budget 2014-15 (SP Paper 431) and its recommendations to the Scottish Government.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08657, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Patricia Ferguson be appointed as a member of the European and External Relations Committee; and

Cara Hilton be appointed as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08658, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Neil Bibby be appointed to replace Patricia Ferguson as a substitute member of the European and External Relations Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08659, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Boards (Membership and Elections) (Scotland) Order 2013 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

I wish members a very happy and peaceful Christmas and new year, and I look forward to seeing everyone next year.

Meeting closed at 17:01.

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