



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 1 May 2013

Session 4

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Wednesday 1 May 2013

CONTENTS

	Col.
BUSINESS MOTION	19195
<i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.</i>	
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	19196
RURAL AFFAIRS AND THE ENVIRONMENT	19196
Carbon Emissions (Transport).....	19196
Owner-occupier Decrofting	19196
Agricultural Workers (Melanoma Screening).....	19198
Bees (Health).....	19199
Ash Dieback.....	19201
Carbon Emissions (Glasgow)	19202
Assistance to Farmers (Cold Weather)	19203
JUSTICE AND THE LAW OFFICERS	19205
Police Officers (Numbers)	19205
Cashback for Communities	19206
Quad Bikes (Seizure)	19207
Police (Civilian Staff)	19208
Illegal Drugs (Seizure)	19209
Stonehaven Sheriff Court (Closure)	19210
Kerb Crawling (Prosecutions).....	19211
VOLUNTARY SECTOR (FUNDING)	19213
<i>Motion moved—[Gavin Brown].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ken Macintosh].</i>	
Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con).....	19213
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney)	19216
Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)	19219
Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)	19221
Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab)	19222
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)	19223
Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con).....	19224
Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)	19226
Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)	19227
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)	19228
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	19230
John Swinney	19231
Gavin Brown	19233
ENERGY	19237
<i>Motion moved—[Murdo Fraser].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ken Macintosh].</i>	
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	19237
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney)	19241
Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)	19244
Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP).....	19247
Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)	19248
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)	19249
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)	19250
Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)	19251
Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab).....	19253
Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	19254
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	19255
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green).....	19256
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	19257
John Swinney	19258

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	19260
LAND AND BUILDINGS TRANSACTION TAX (SCOTLAND) BILL: FINANCIAL RESOLUTION	19264
<i>Motion moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
BUSINESS MOTIONS	19265
<i>Motions moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.</i>	
DECISION TIME	19268
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS WEEK 2013	19275
<i>Motion debated—[George Adam].</i>	
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	19275
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)	19278
Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)	19279
Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con).....	19281
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	19283
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	19284
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)	19286
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)	19287
John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind).....	19288
The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson).....	19289

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 1 May 2013

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06421, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a revision to the business programme for today.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 1 May 2013—

after

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

insert

followed by Financial Resolution: Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs and the Environment

Carbon Emissions (Transport)

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment has had with the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities about action to reduce carbon emissions from transport. (S4O-02045)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I led discussions about emissions reductions and the draft second report on proposals and policies at meetings of the Scottish Cabinet earlier this year. During the discussions, I agreed with the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities a package of measures to help to reduce carbon emissions from transport.

Iain Gray: I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees that if we are ever to meet our transport carbon emissions reduction targets we need significant modal shift from the private car to public transport.

Most public transport journeys, especially in rural areas, are undertaken by bus, and bus passenger numbers continue on trend to fall. If we are to achieve a significant modal shift towards buses, we need more bus services, in which passengers can have more confidence. Will the cabinet secretary consider my proposal for a bus regulation (Scotland) bill, the consultation document for which was published today? Will he support such a measure to improve our bus services?

Richard Lochhead: The Government is always interested in ideas that might improve bus services and is looking at such ideas through the bus stakeholder group. In that context, we will study Iain Gray's proposed bill in great detail. I hope that Scotland's local authorities, which are largely responsible for delivering local bus services, are listening closely to his comments.

I am thankful that emissions from transport have reduced by 1 per cent per year for three years in a row since 2010. Things are going in the right direction, but there is a big challenge out there. As Iain Gray pointed out, the more people who use buses, the better, in terms of reducing emissions in Scotland.

Owner-occupier Decrofting

2. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government when it will bring

forward proposals to amend the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 to allow owner-occupier decrofting. (S4O-02046)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government hopes to bring forward in the very near future proposed legislation to address owner-occupier crofter decrofting. I have been exploring the means by which we will be able to resolve, by the summer recess, the decrofting difficulties that owner-occupier crofters face.

Tavish Scott: I am grateful that the proposals mean that legislation will be passed by the summer recess, if I understood the minister correctly. This morning I had a communication from constituents in Shetland, who pointed out that they cannot get a mortgage deal that expires in August this year because they have no title to the plot that they need, as a result of the decrofting shambles. Is not it time that the matter was resolved? My constituents are not alone; many other people in the crofting counties face the problem, which goes on and on.

Paul Wheelhouse: I recognise the difficulties that people such as Tavish Scott's constituents are suffering at the moment. The Government has set out its desire to resolve the issue and, with the will of Parliament and cross-party support, I think that we can do so by the summer recess.

We have had a clear steer from Registers of Scotland that title is not affected. There is an issue with standard securities—as, I am sure, Tavish Scott is aware—but title should not be affected at this stage.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the commitment to get legislation through Parliament before the summer recess. People are waiting to purchase ground on which to build; a constituent of mine is looking at a summer let option, about which I have written to the minister. Is it possible to proceed with such purchases—at least to a point at which missives are settled—before the legislation goes through, so that people can plan and make progress?

Paul Wheelhouse: The particular circumstances that Rhoda Grant has outlined are difficult. Individuals have to proceed with caution, bearing in mind that whether the legislation will be passed will be at the will of Parliament. I hope that we will have cross-party support for the measures that we will soon introduce.

I have asked the Crofting Commission to process as far as it possibly can the applications that have come in, so that when the legislative measures are in place it will be able to process the remaining applications as quickly as possible and minimise the delays that people might face.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Under the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, crofters were told that they would have to pay around £90 or £100 for registration. It now transpires that they are being charged anywhere between £250 and £400 for global positioning system surveys, which is taking the cost nearer to £500. Will the minister comment on that, and can he offer any help to crofters?

Paul Wheelhouse: That is a different issue to the one that has been raised by other members, but I am more than happy to discuss with Mr McGrigor any evidence that he has about the costs that people are facing.

The Government is using the voluntary registration process to encourage as many registrations as possible and has offered a discount until the register becomes mandatory in November. I would certainly welcome any evidence with which the member can provide me.

Agricultural Workers (Melanoma Screening)

3. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment has had with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing regarding establishing melanoma screening programmes for people working in agriculture. (S4O-02047)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The United Kingdom national screening committee, which advises all four UK Administrations on health screening programmes, does not recommend that a specific melanoma screening programme should be implemented. The Scottish Government is, however, determined to address all forms of cancer and although farm workers are not singled out, they would be covered by wider initiatives including Cancer Research UK's sunsmart campaign and the Scottish Government's detect cancer early programme.

Alison McInnes: We know that people in agricultural industries and other outdoor workers are much more at risk because of their high levels of exposure to the sun. Tomorrow, following an initiative by a constituent, Hazel Carnegie, the NFU Scotland and NHS Grampian are joining forces to host a molewatch event at Thainstone mart in Inverurie. Does the cabinet secretary agree that much more could be done to raise awareness among farmers about prevention and early detection? Will he work with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and the NFUS to build on that initiative? In particular, will he look at the scope for developing an information roadshow that could tour the summer agricultural shows?

Richard Lochhead: I thank Alison McInnes for raising such an important issue in the chamber. I agree with the sentiments behind what she says, despite the fact that there is no specific evidence that agricultural workers are at increased risk. I also congratulate the NFUS and NHS Grampian on their initiative, and acknowledge that Alison McInnes has an interest in the issue. If I can do anything to help to raise awareness among agricultural workers of the general issue, I would be happy to do that.

Bees (Health)

4. Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to safeguard the health of the bee population. (S4O-02048)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): We are taking a number of steps to safeguard the health of the bee population in Scotland. I have announced £200,000 to support restocking by bee farmers, following this winter's heavy losses. I will also work with stakeholders on the European Commission's decision to ban the use of neonicotinoids and support further research into pesticide use and the health of bee populations in Scotland and elsewhere.

We have also carried out the first Scotland-wide honey bee health survey to give us a better understanding of diseases and husbandry factors that affect honey bee health in Scotland, and we continue to work closely with the honey bee sector to implement Scotland's first ever honey bee health strategy, which the Government published in 2010.

Richard Lyle: In his answer, the cabinet secretary has more or less replied to the next question that I was going to ask. He will be aware that bee farmers estimate that around 4,000 colonies were lost during the prolonged winter weather. What further support will the Scottish Government give on top of the money he has just spoken about?

Richard Lochhead: We can all accept that there is now an increased focus on the health of bee populations in this country and across Europe. The issue is of concern to us all, especially given its implications for biodiversity, food and the wider environment.

The beekeepers and others whom I speak to who have an interest in the issue say that the biggest factors that have affected bee populations in recent years are disease—a lot of work, to which I have referred, is being done on that—and the weather, which is perhaps outwith our control. We are trying to deal with the consequences. The role of pesticides must also be analysed.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has been keeping a close eye on the issue. I ask the cabinet secretary to ensure that the public gets sight of scientific evidence of the effects on bees and other pollinators, of the chemicals that were used before the introduction of efficient neonicotinoids, so that a solution to the pesticide effect on pollinators can be found.

Richard Lochhead: I have referred to the fact that we want to carry out more research. One of my concerns is that although beekeepers accept that the science on the impact of neonicotinoids is inconclusive, they are expressing concern to me that some alternatives that may be used could be worse. That justifies greater focus on the science by Parliament, by me as a minister, and by my ministerial colleagues throughout Europe, in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that impact on bee populations and of what we can influence and do constructively to address that.

I appreciate that it is an emotive debate for many people, but I hope that we all accept that there is wide concern among all parties in Parliament about the health of bee populations. We must ensure that the public are made aware of the factors and that the parliamentary committees work together on the issue.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): With regard to neonicotinoids, the Scottish Government was unwilling to adopt the precautionary principle, which states:

"Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

What steps will the Government take to ensure that Scotland is in a position to impose a ban from December 2013, in accordance with this week's European Union decision?

Richard Lochhead: I suspected that Alison Johnstone might stand up and try to sting me on this issue.

However, she raises a serious subject. If she looks closely at my comments from over the past few days, she will see that I differentiated the Scottish Government's position from the position of the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and said that the lack of conclusive scientific evidence is not a reason for not implementing the necessary restrictions. There was a debate about the implementation date of such restrictions, but my position was different from the hard-line position that DEFRA adopted. That is an important point, especially given the wide representations that I was receiving from all sectors, which I had to take into account.

However, we have the date of 1 December by which time the ban must be implemented, and we are willing to implement that. It gives us a wee bit of a breathing space, which we can, I hope, use for better science. A wide range of other factors must be taken into account.

We will ensure that the ban is put in place and we will support the necessary science to ensure that we address the wider issues at the same time.

Ash Dieback

5. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on ash dieback in Scotland. (S4O-02049)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): We wrote to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee with an update about recent developments regarding tree health in Scotland, including Chalara—or ash dieback, as it is known—on 18 April. A copy of that letter is available on the Parliament's website, in the committee's general correspondence section. Since then, we have announced that financial support will be available to help to meet the costs of removal and destruction of infected recently planted ash trees in the sheltered and buffer areas of north-west Scotland that have been identified in the Chalara action plan for Scotland. Support will also be provided for replanting such sites with alternative tree species.

Claire Baker: The minister will be aware of research that was published last week by the University of Edinburgh that shows that 90 per cent of trees in the United Kingdom will be infected by the disease. There are real concerns that it will aggravate the effects of climate change. It has been reported that experts at a recent Scottish Government summit proposed the introduction of protection zones. Is that a policy that the Government will pursue? Given the potential impact of the loss of trees on climate change, and given concerns about other fungal diseases, is that being taken into consideration in redrafting the report on policies and proposals?

Paul Wheelhouse: On the first point about the research evidence from Edinburgh university, it is worth stating that people are portraying the situation as being the end of the ash tree in Scotland. That is not the case. Numbers will diminish over the next couple of decades and the disease may affect up to 90 per cent of ash trees—a figure that has been misinterpreted by some newspapers, although I appreciate that Claire Baker has not got it wrong in that sense. Mature trees can survive for 10 to 20 years and may not die at all. Some will also be resistant to the disease. We are using this phase to try to

identify the trees that are naturally resistant so that we can take seeds from them and develop new strains of ash tree that may be more resistant.

The Chalara disease often does not kill mature trees at all. It is the secondary fungal infections that kill the tree, so that is an area that we will consider.

As I said in my original answer, we are implementing the buffer zone and sheltered areas in the north-west of Scotland. We have announced funding to help to remove infected trees from those areas, in order to ensure that we keep those areas free of infected sites, which will give us time to do the research to try to develop other strains. The tree health strategy is looking at other fungal infections and other pathogens—*Dothistroma* and *Phytophthora ramorum*, in particular.

Carbon Emissions (Glasgow)

6. Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce carbon emissions in Glasgow. (S4O-02050)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government's second climate change report on proposals and policies was published in draft in January and sets out how Scotland can deliver its statutory annual targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions, including carbon dioxide, for the period 2013 to 2027. Action throughout the public sector, investment from the private sector and steps taken by households and individuals will all be important in meeting our emissions targets, as will the contributions from our rural communities and urban centres such as Glasgow.

For example, through the zero waste Scotland programme, we are providing support to Glasgow City Council to increase recycling rates and reduce landfill-related emissions. In particular, we are supporting a roll-out of food waste collections to 40,000 Glasgow households this year with a view to city-wide roll-out before 2016. We are also supporting Glasgow City Council, through sustainable Glasgow, to roll out a heat map for the city and have provided funding to support demonstration district heating projects, including £1.5 million to extend Cube Housing Association's district heating scheme at Wyndford estate to over 200 private owners.

Hanzala Malik: I thank the minister for that response, most of which was welcome.

I congratulate Glasgow City Council on the progress that it has made in reducing the carbon emissions from its buildings. In 2011-12, it reduced those emissions by 16,000 tonnes. However, I am keen to learn what private industry is managing to achieve across Scotland, and what

support the Scottish Government is providing in that area. Given that the Government failed to achieve its targets last year, what extra emphasis has been laid on helping private industry to achieve those targets?

Paul Wheelhouse: To correct Mr Malik, the target was missed in 2010, not last year—we do not have last year's data yet.

On the more substantive point, the 2020 group is working with Government and other partners across Scotland to identify ways in which business can address its emissions. That is leading to positive developments by a number of our major companies. Business is only one of a number of sectors in RPP2, but it is one in which there has been a good degree of progress.

I am happy to meet Mr Malik to discuss any ideas that he might have for a lowering emissions in Glasgow, as I recognise the significant issues that that presents.

Assistance to Farmers (Cold Weather)

7. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it is providing to farmers adversely affected by the recent cold weather. (S4O-02051)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): In the past few weeks, I have been keeping Parliament informed of the Scottish Government's efforts on behalf of farmers who have been affected by the extreme weather. We have delivered practical help during and after the worst snowstorms, including £500,000 of financial help towards the cost of fallen stock disposal.

Last week, I told Parliament that I was looking into what other support might be possible, and I am delighted to announce today a further weather aid package of £6 million. Clearly, the priority for that package will be the farms in the south-west that were most affected by the extreme weather of late March. However, I am aware that many farmers across Scotland have been affected by the poor weather of 2012 and early 2013. Some have potentially suffered substantial loss of income, and we know that the number of fallen stock collections for sheep is up by 50 per cent in April compared to April last year, and up by 25 per cent for cattle.

I intend to set up a Government-industry group to set the eligibility criteria, and I hope that the first meeting will take place in the next few days.

I hope that that demonstrates that the Government is willing to stand by our farmers in their hour of need and help them to cope with the aftermath of what was some of the worst weather in living memory.

Jim Hume: I welcome that answer. This past year has brought record rainfalls, record low yields of foraging grain and a long, cold spring, resulting in little grass and heavy, drifting snowstorms in my region, and sandstorms in the cabinet secretary's constituency, both of which have resulted in the tragic loss of livestock.

The cabinet secretary mentioned that the support would be available in certain areas. Will he expand on that? Will it be targeted by parish or by need? There have been extreme cases where there have been tragic losses on particular holdings but there has not been an impact at a parish level.

Richard Lochhead: I welcome Jim Hume's welcome for the investment that I announced. His question highlights the complexity of the situation. As the severity of the impact of the weather is different in different parts of the country, the priority is to help those who are most affected by the severe weather, which will be in a few areas of Scotland. I will ask the working group that we are setting up with the industry—which, I hope, will meet in the coming days—to consider how we can help the rest of the sector. The budget is only £6 million and the cost of the impact of the weather may well be tens of millions of pounds throughout the country, but we are still measuring that cost and the industry is helping us with that.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for his announcement. My constituents will greatly welcome it.

I have received a number of calls from the wives and partners of farmers and shepherds in my constituency raising concerns about their partners' mental wellbeing in the wake of the devastating impact of the recent snows on sheep flocks in particular throughout Galloway and other parts of Scotland. Is the cabinet secretary liaising with, or, if he is not, will he liaise with, his ministerial colleagues and the relevant charities and agencies to ensure that the necessary support is available to those people whenever and wherever a need for it is identified?

Richard Lochhead: Alex Fergusson raises an important issue, which is the social and health impact of the weather on the lives of farming families throughout Scotland. It is taking its toll in terms of the stress that many people are going through currently. He will also remember that we gave £50,000 assistance to one of the key charities working on that issue back in February. We continue to work closely with the charities that are most able to help the families who are affected in the farming communities. I will make a point of speaking to health colleagues in the Government to ensure that they, in turn, speak to the health authorities in the areas that are most affected.

Justice and the Law Officers

Police Officers (Numbers)

1. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to reduce the number of police officers in order to meet budget savings targets. (S4O-02055)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): We are committed to maintaining 1,000 additional police officers in Scotland, with the figure of 17,436 officers as at 31 December 2012 surpassing the 1,000 extra officers pledge. That has helped to deliver a 37-year low in recorded crime: violent crime has decreased by 17 per cent in the past year to a 30-year low; the number of recorded crimes of carrying offensive weapons is at an 18-year low; and gun crime is at its lowest level for 34 years, having decreased by 21 per cent in 2011-12.

Kezia Dugdale: On 4 February, Stephen House told Aberdeen's *Evening Express*:

"I do not think we can keep the number of officers the same and meet the budget savings."

Who should we believe: Stephen House or Kenny MacAskill?

Kenny MacAskill: Stephen House has made his position quite clear: the financial challenges are significant for the police. After all, they come from the coalition Government south of the border imposing huge and swingeing cuts on the Scottish budget. Of course, Ms Dugdale and her colleagues prefer to campaign in the better together campaign with the Tories and Liberal Democrats than to preserve fundamental services such as police.

I assure the member that Chief Constable House is confident that we will be able to maintain the police numbers pledge and that the police will continue to do the outstanding job that they have done throughout their existence, as I am certain they will.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to maintaining police numbers despite the United Kingdom Government's cuts. He will be aware of the Home Office's refusal to commit to funding the policing costs of the Liberal Democrat conference that will take place in Glasgow in September despite funding such costs when conferences take place in England. I find that quite bizarre. Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that all parties should support calls for the Home Office to treat Scotland equally in that matter?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes. I wrote to the Home Secretary on 11 March about the funding arrangements for the Liberal Democrats' annual conference in Glasgow this September. This

morning, I received a reply from Theresa May, who has declined to meet the full policing costs of the conference. The Police Service of Scotland should not face an additional funding pressure because a national party conference is taking place in Scotland. I do not propose to let the matter rest, and I will be taking it up with the UK Government. That is not how such matters are treated if the conference is in Bournemouth, Brighton or Blackpool, and I think that the council tax payers and citizens of Glasgow are entitled to parity.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 2, from James Kelly, has been withdrawn, for understandable reasons.

Cashback for Communities

3. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support Dumfries and Galloway has received from the cashback for communities scheme. (S4O-02057)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Since 2007, the cashback programme has invested more than £50 million from the proceeds of crime throughout Scotland, which has benefited more than 600,000 young people. Young people from communities in Dumfries and Galloway have benefited from more than £1.1 million of that investment, which has provided a broad range of activities for young people as well as new and improved sporting facilities, including a new, state-of-the-art 3G pitch at Annan Athletic Football Club and Dumfries's first 3G football and rugby pitch, at Dumfries high school, which I had the pleasure of opening last month.

Joan McAlpine: Could the cabinet secretary provide us with a breakdown of the amount that has been confiscated from criminals on a yearly basis? Does that show an upward trend from 2007, when the Scottish National Party Government introduced cashback?

Kenny MacAskill: It does show an upward trend, although sometimes the figures can be skewed by particularly large amounts that come in. In 2007-08, the amount was £5.6 million; in 2008-09, it was £6.3 million; in 2009-10, it was £5.5 million; in 2010-11 it was almost £26 million—although one particular matter added to that figure; in 2011-12, it was £10.5 million; and in 2012-13 it was £12.15 million. I pay particular tribute to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service—the Solicitor General is present in the chamber—and to the Police Service of Scotland. It was a pleasure to attend a briefing from Police Scotland at St Leonards police office this morning, where more than £170,000 of cash was taken from eastern Edinburgh.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): Who decides the allocation of cashback funds? What criteria are applied in deciding on the allocation? Do the criteria ensure proportional allocation across Scotland or allocations to the areas that are most affected by organised crime, or are some other criteria used?

Kenny MacAskill: We have always taken the view that areas that are significantly impacted, whether by organised crime or by poverty and deprivation, should receive some additional funding. However, the Administration has never taken the view that some people have—not Mr Pearson, but perhaps some of his colleagues, who seem to suggest that some areas should be deliberately excluded.

I have been more than happy to attend, for example, the opening of a 3G pitch in Brora. I was told that the crime rate there was one of the lowest in Scotland, but I pointed out what a perverse world we would be living in if a community where children do not misbehave should be precluded from obtaining funds to allow them to improve their life chances. We take such factors into account, and we provide an appropriate balance between those areas that are most affected and others, ensuring that every child in Scotland, no matter what their postcode, should be able to achieve their full potential.

Quad Bikes (Seizure)

4. Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many quad bikes have been seized by police under the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004. (S4O-02058)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): Figures on the Scottish Government website detail the numbers of vehicles that individual police forces seized under the provisions of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004. Those figures cover the period from October 2004 to March 2008, although they do not detail the types of vehicles that were seized.

Although we have not collected figures since 2008, Police Scotland has advised that the former Strathclyde Police seized a total of 23 vehicles from April 2011, including one quad bike and three off-road bikes, using the provisions of the 2004 act.

Paul Martin: I draw the minister's attention to the large number of complaints that I have received in my constituency concerning off-road quad bikes. I recognise the challenges that the police face in detecting the individuals who use them. Will the minister consider introducing an off-road quad bike register, which would assist the

police in detecting the individuals who own the bikes and help to deal with the concerns that a number of community members have raised with me in connection with the antisocial use of quad bikes?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am well aware that the member has a particular interest in the matter; I know that he has been pursuing issues related to the misuse of quad bikes for some time.

I would be happy to take on board the suggestion that the member has made. We would possibly have to check whether we could do what he suggests, because the information would have to come from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and I am not quite sure how that would work. However, I am happy to discuss the matter with the member if he wishes.

I am also aware that Police Scotland is developing a city-wide initiative to tackle the issue ahead of the summer holidays because, for obvious reasons, the misuse of quad bikes tends to be a seasonal issue. However, I am happy to discuss any suggestion that the member may have in respect of the behaviour in question.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5, in the name of David Torrance, has not been lodged. The member has provided an explanation and I am satisfied with it.

Question 6, in the name of Colin Keir, has not been lodged. The member has provided an explanation and I am not happy with it.

Police (Civilian Staff)

7. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to prevent the backfilling of civilian staff posts by police officers. (S4O-02061)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The deployment of officers is a matter for the Police Service of Scotland. Chief Constable House is clear that backfilling will not routinely happen, and indeed it would be counterproductive. As Chief Constable House has repeatedly said, there is no strategy predicated on support staff roles being backfilled by police officers. He and I want as many officers as possible to be on the streets in operational roles.

Drew Smith: In the cabinet secretary's answer to Kezia Dugdale, he mentioned the 1,000 extra police officers, but he will be aware of the 977 fewer police staff in the past two years. George McIlrvine, Unison branch secretary, said:

"We have been told for two years by the employers and the Scottish Government that they are not backfilling posts, but they are. There is backfilling in control rooms, in custody and in project work ... the veneer of effective policing is cracking."

Just a few weeks ago, Unison members told members of this Parliament, including SNP back benchers, the same thing in a committee room of this Parliament. Were those Unison members confused about what is going on in police control rooms or were they fibbing?

Kenny MacAskill: First of all, let us deal with some of the hypocrisy that comes from Labour. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Kenny MacAskill: Labour supports a single police service in Scotland. Indeed, despite the sedentary comments from Ms Marra, Labour actually supported a single service even before this Government came to that position. The consequence of having a single service has always been that we would not be able to continue having eight chief constables or the duplication in back-office matters that has gone on across not just eight but 10 police organisations.

The Government has given a clear view that we are grateful for the service that has been given. We accept that not everybody can be provided with a job, whether as a chief constable or in back-room services such as human resources or anything else. However, we have made sure that there is a voluntary redundancy scheme and that there are no compulsory redundancies.

It is about time that Labour recognised that its support for a single service has had consequences. It should be grateful that this Government, unlike the one that it campaigns for with the coalition south of the border, does not impose compulsory redundancies.

On matters related to backfilling, maybe Mr Smith should go and meet Chief Constable House so that he can personally reassure him regarding his pledge, his commitment and what is happening on the ground.

Illegal Drugs (Seizure)

8. Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making on seizing illegal drugs. (S4O-02062)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): Recent statistics that were published on 23 April demonstrate that our law enforcers are making good progress on seizing illegal drugs in Scotland. The statistics show that, during 2011-12, officers in Scotland's police forces carried out 29,509 drug seizures, which represents an increase of 10.5 per cent on the previous year.

Jamie Hepburn: I welcome the progress that has been made. Will the minister set out what

progress has been made specifically on tackling the illicit trade in methadone?

Roseanna Cunningham: Methadone poses a particular problem. As members will probably be aware, it is not subject to importation issues in the way that many other illegal drugs are, and there are no thefts of methadone from pharmacists and carriers. Most of the illicit methadone trade appears to take place between individuals.

One issue that will be considered by the chief medical officer's expert group, which was set up towards the end of last year, relates to concerns about the prescribing of methadone and the extent to which that is robust as a result of the decisions that are made about how individuals can access it. We hope that, when the report is published, there may be some pointers to the way ahead in respect of the illicit use of methadone.

Stonehaven Sheriff Court (Closure)

9. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what account it took of the local economy as well as access to justice in reaching the decision to close Stonehaven sheriff court. (S4O-02063)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Government has indeed considered the local economy as well as access to justice in relation to the closure of Stonehaven and other sheriff courts.

Ministers are aware that there may be a limited economic impact in the area around Stonehaven sheriff court following the relocation of the six Scottish Court Service staff who are currently employed there, the sheriffs themselves and those attending court.

However, the proposals will not reduce the overall levels of activity in Scotland's courts. As those will stay the same, the overall economic impact of the proposals at an all-Scotland level should be broadly neutral. In Stonehaven, the closure of the court will permit all or part of those premises to be put to other uses, which will provide the opportunity to offset, in part or completely, any local reduction in economic activity.

Richard Baker: In making the decision to close Stonehaven sheriff court, why did the cabinet secretary discount the view that was expressed by the Federation of Small Businesses? It said:

"closing these ... courts will hit footfall and ... put ... pressure on existing businesses".

Is it not the case that closing the court in Stonehaven means even more business for the court in Aberdeen, from which business has previously been transferred because of pressures on capacity?

Kenny MacAskill: We took on board the FSB's views, as we do all the time. Equally, as I said in my answer to Richard Baker's initial question—which he seemed to ignore—there will be a broadly neutral impact across the country because business is being relocated, in this case to Aberdeen.

The specific challenges facing Aberdeen were taken on board. However, the low volume of work coming from Stonehaven will not impact adversely on those arrangements. It may be of interest to Mr Baker that the volume that we are talking about comprises one summary criminal case, one ordinary action and two summary causes every day. That is perfectly capable of being accommodated in the larger sheriff court in Aberdeen.

Kerb Crawling (Prosecutions)

10. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many men were convicted of kerb crawling under the Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007 in the last year for which information is available. (S4O-02064)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Lesley Thomson): Kerb crawling, as it is commonly known, is an offence and is prosecuted under section 1 of the Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007. That act created two offences, of soliciting and of loitering in a public place for the purpose of obtaining the services of someone engaged in prostitution.

In 2011-12, 77 men were convicted of offences under section 1 of the act where that was the main offence for which they were convicted.

Malcolm Chisholm: I thank the Solicitor General for that answer and for the detailed letter that she sent me on this and other matters. She will be aware of the concerns of some of my constituents that men who are clearly kerb crawlers are not being charged and convicted because of a lack of what is regarded as sufficiency of evidence.

Is the Solicitor General satisfied with the criteria for sufficiency of evidence in regard to kerb crawling? Can she tell us whether the new guidelines will be helpful in that regard, or whether anything else can be done to ensure that the intentions of the 2007 act are realised in practice?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: I am well aware of the interest of Malcolm Chisholm and his constituents in the issue. Parliament's intention to tackle the demand for prostitution and target the actions of purchasers was clearly demonstrated by the passage of the 2007 act and the subsequent introduction of the Prostitution (Public Places)

(Scotland) Act 2007 (Disqualification from Driving) Order 2011.

Guidance to prosecutors reflects that intention, and instructions for offences under that act to prosecutors state that there is a presumption in favour of court proceedings. As Malcolm Chisholm is aware, in December 2012 refreshed guidance was issued to prosecutors to ensure that the parliamentary intention to tackle the purchasers of prostitution services was being enforced.

In relation to sufficiency of evidence, in every prosecution in Scotland the Crown must lead sufficient corroborated evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that an accused committed the offence alleged. As I have previously advised Malcolm Chisholm, I have had cases in the two major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh analysed regarding circumstances and evidential requirements. There are no differences in relation to understanding of evidential requirements.

For the avoidance of doubt, I say that those evidential requirements can include direct evidence; eye-witness accounts from both police and civilians; admissions at interview; and circumstantial evidence, from which inferences can be drawn, surrounding the facts and circumstances—in other words the location of the prostitution zone, time of day and behaviours such as continually driving around an area.

I hope that that gives an assurance that the legislation was appropriate in the first place and is being enforced robustly by prosecutors.

Voluntary Sector (Funding)

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06405, in the name of Gavin Brown, on funding of the voluntary sector. This debate and the debate that follows are very heavily subscribed, so the Presiding Officers will keep members very firmly to time.

14:41

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): I am delighted to open this Conservative debate on funding of the voluntary sector. Members across the chamber will applaud the critical role that the sector plays all through Scotland week in, week out. Voluntary sector workers perform their duties with professionalism and they help many of our most vulnerable citizens and those who lead the most complex of lives. Almost without exception, they have very good local knowledge, whether they work for a genuinely local charity or for a national charity with a local branch. They are specialists in what they do and they tackle some of the most stubborn challenges faced in society, whether homelessness, unemployment, poverty or reoffending. Importantly, they are trusted; they are not part of the state, so the service users who rely on them trust their independent expertise and judgment.

We could easily spend the entire afternoon talking about the merits and strengths of the third sector or the difficulties and challenges that it currently faces. However, on this particular occasion we want to see action, and in order to make genuine progress on what we think is a critical issue, we want to narrow the focus. This afternoon, we want to have a very targeted focus on the vital subject of multiyear funding for the third sector.

I will focus on why we believe that that is important. We will look at the joint statement on the relationship at local level between Government and the third sector that was signed in 2009, we will look at the results that we have seen since the joint statement was made and we will close with the action that we are asking the Government to take to move the issue forward.

Three-year funding is important because we want strategic investment in the third sector. The third sector really wants to see parity of investment and opportunity when compared with other sectors. In its briefing for the debate, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations said that it believes that it is

“strangled by annual funding”.

Let me praise the work of the SCVO, as it has been particularly helpful in driving the issue forward over the past couple of years.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: I think that this is the first time that Willie Rennie has ever intervened on me, so I will take his intervention.

Willie Rennie: It might be considered as friendly fire.

I, too, congratulate the SCVO on its support for the voluntary sector. The Liberal Democrats do not have a speaking slot in this debate, but I wanted to lend our support to Gavin Brown's efforts for three-year funding. There is an increasing focus on preventative measures and early intervention. Does Gavin Brown think that three-year funding would help those efforts to secure those long-term goals?

Gavin Brown: I welcome that Liberal Democrat support. It is not the first time that I have heard a Liberal Democrat support the three-year funding measure, but to hear it again is most welcome.

Would three-year funding help with preventative measures? In comparison with single-year funding, it undoubtedly would. There will be occasions when funding for longer than three years is deemed necessary and is the right thing to do, and there will be occasions when short-term funding is the only option and is better than nothing. However, as a general proposition, three-year funding is a far better suggestion for the third sector than is annualised funding, which is what is often provided today.

Single-year funding is just not an ineffective way in which to conduct business. It is inefficient because it means that far too much time is spent on application processes, and it diverts key staff away from the critical function of delivering for the most vulnerable service users. Any time that is spent on filling in extra application forms is time that is not spent on the front line with those who need their help.

Single-year funding can also lead to instability. What is required is stable employment for staff in the third sector and a stable and consistent service for service users. Close and long-lasting relationships are key for the most vulnerable citizens, who use the services, and any hint of instability through single-year funding is to be avoided. When inefficiency is combined with instability, that leads to a less effective service for those who truly need it and an overall negative impact.

It is important to conduct the debate in Parliament, as it is pretty difficult for individual charities and voluntary sector groups that are

going to lose out to stand up for themselves publicly. For example, a charity that is reliant on one particular local authority for survival is unlikely to complain seriously about getting only a single-year deal because of the perception—if not the reality, although it could be both—that that would count against it in the next funding round. Therefore, it takes it on the chin, crosses its fingers and hopes for the best for next year, the year after and probably the year after that. It is critical that Parliament stands up for the third sector, as it is difficult for individual organisations to do so.

The issue of three-year funding has been recognised by many in the public sector, including the present Scottish Government, which was responsible for pulling together the joint statement on the relationship at local level between Government and the third sector. That statement was signed by the Government, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the SCVO. On paper, it is a very useful piece of work that covers what successful relationships should look like, talking about funding, shared services, applications and evaluations. In paragraph 7, it states that

“as a general rule funders will aim to take a three-year approach to both grant and contract funding”.

It is there in black and white, and it has been signed up to by all parties. However, what matters is what happens on the ground in relation to three-year funding, not what appears in a document.

I accept that there is no full evidence base at this stage to outline exactly how many local authorities have followed the statement and how many have not. We will call for that from the Government later in the debate. However, the anecdotal evidence is heavy that, in practice, the joint statement has not made an enormous difference in respect of three-year funding. Many organisations say that three-year funding is the exception rather than the rule and that the statement is ignored almost as much as—and potentially more than—it is applied.

During a round-table discussion that was attended by members from across the chamber, it became apparent that annualised funding was the most common form of funding and that, on occasion, six-monthly funding happened, too. It also became apparent that some work, sometimes lasting months, is done up front by third sector organisations before a contract is put in place, which means that they bear the risk if the contract is not concluded. One particular organisation stated that it has no contract at all for 40 per cent of its engagements with the public sector, that only one in six of its contracts has multiyear funding and that, at the time—this was a couple of months

ago—with 10 weeks to go before the next financial year, it had no idea about the funding arrangements for 60 per cent of its operations.

It is clear that action is required. In the past couple of months, the Scottish Government has appeared to be listening. I call on it to take forward some of the ideas, look at the concerns and gather the evidence base that is needed to make progress and to prevent single-year funding and adopt three-year funding.

The spirit—and the letter—of the joint statement should be implemented in practice. As a general rule and a default position, the public sector ought to give three-year funding to the third sector.

How can that most effectively be achieved? Simply having a debate shines a light on the issue, particularly if consensus is reached in the debate.

As set out in the motion, we call on the Scottish Government to remind all those organisations over which it has both direct and indirect influence about the joint statement and the responsibilities contained in it. It is time to examine in more detail the credible claims made by individual third sector players and the groups that represent them. We need an evidence base to show the extent—with regard to volume and value—to which three-year funding is happening on the ground. By shining a light on the issue, we can initiate change.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the outstanding contribution made across Scotland by the third sector; recognises the importance of multi-year funding to the sector in order to allow it to maximise its contribution; notes the *Joint Statement on the Relationship at Local Level between Government and the Third Sector*, which states that “as a general rule funders will aim to take a three-year approach to both grant and contract funding”; is concerned by reports that this three-year approach does not happen as widely as it could; calls on local authorities, NHS boards and the wider public sector to take a three-year approach as a general rule, and further calls on the Scottish Government to encourage the application of the joint statement on the ground and to review how widely the three-year approach currently happens in practice.

14:51

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I congratulate the Conservative Party on securing this subject for debate, and I thank Gavin Brown for raising the issues that he has raised.

I reinforce Mr Brown’s words by paying very warm tribute to the work that the third sector undertakes in all the communities that we represent. We will all be familiar with the valuable and significant role that is performed by the third sector in community activity, in reaching some of the individuals who have the greatest challenges

in our society and in ensuring that many of the solutions that are designed to address those issues on behalf of members of the public are formed in a way that addresses the needs and circumstances of every individual.

The state could not—literally—deliver the services that the third sector provides, and nor would that be a good thing, because it would intrude on a genuine level of community development and empowerment that the Government believes in and will legislate on in due course in the bill that will be introduced by the Minister for Local Government and Planning.

The Government is clear about the role of the third sector and since being elected to office in 2007 we have taken steps to ensure that it occupies a strong and stable place in the delivery of public policy and, in particular, in delivering the Government's agenda on public service reform and community planning.

If I trace back to the initial steps that the Government took in the 2007 spending review, I see that we gave a three-year settlement to local authorities, health boards and the third sector through the third sector budget and we took steps to entrench the role of the third sector in many aspects of the design and delivery of our public policy. We encouraged the establishment of the interface organisations at local level. A criticism made by other public bodies was that the Government's demands that there be broader engagement with the third sector were difficult to pursue at local level because of the multiplicity of organisations undertaking that activity. The interface established in all parts of the country was designed to give a clear opportunity to articulate the interests of the third sector and to focus on discussion and dialogue with other public sector partners.

We made it clear in the arrangements around community planning and the formulation of single outcome agreements that we expected third sector organisations to be represented around the community planning table as equal partners with public sector organisations. I have persistently made it clear that if there are examples around the country of that not taking place, I want to know about them, so that I can remedy the position and ensure that the third sector is strongly represented.

We have also made it clear that the third sector has a strong role to undertake in the delivery of public service reform, particularly in delivering the Christie commission's recommendations on integration of services at local level. We see the third sector as being a key player in that process.

A key element of whether the third sector can be successful in delivering public services is whether

we have a broader range of organisations that are able to deliver those public services at local level. That is why we have invested significantly in some of the enterprise development programmes, to encourage the emergence of a broader range of social enterprises in Scotland—the just enterprise programme, the enterprise growth fund and the developing markets contracts. All those enterprises have served to strengthen the third sector's ability to tender for public sector activity. I enumerate that detail to demonstrate that the Government is pursuing a clear and consistent approach to strengthening the third sector at local level and to giving it more entrenched opportunities to participate in the delivery of public services.

I turn to the issue of three-year funding, which is the focal point of the Conservative motion today. I want to say at the outset that I agree in principle and in practice with the Conservative point on this issue. Indeed, Gavin Brown has fairly reflected the fact that a preference for three-year funding—I think that it is a preference, given that it is not mandatory in the joint statement—lies at the heart of the 2009 statement that was agreed jointly between the Government, the SCVO, SOLACE and COSLA. I am committed to ensuring that, wherever possible, we can deliver three-year funding allocations to public bodies to enable them to deliver on those commitments. We delivered a three-year settlement in 2008 to span the three succeeding financial years, and delivered a three-year settlement to commence in 2012 to span the next three years. Therefore public sector organisations can have a reasonable amount of confidence about the rough shape of their funding allocations. They will not be able to see precisely what resources they will have at their disposal in future, but they will certainly be able to see the general shape of those resources. In my opinion, the funding indications that the Government has given provide no obstacle to such certainty also being passed on to third sector organisations, where public bodies believe that to be appropriate.

On Gavin Brown's point about a call for action, I am willing to explore the issues around and performance on the delivery—or not, as the case may be—of three-year funding. I am willing to discuss with relevant public sector partners how we can take forward the particular concern. I accept in principle the point that if we give funding certainty to organisations, they will be able to spend more time focusing on the delivery of better outcomes for the citizens involved, rather than wondering where the money is going to come from. We will certainly explore those questions, and that is at the heart of the Government's amendment today. We look forward to hearing the points that are raised in the debate this afternoon.

I move amendment S4M-06405.2, to insert at end:

"in partnership with local authorities, COSLA, the wider public sector and the third sector itself."

14:59

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank Gavin Brown for persuading his colleagues to use their time for this useful and important debate. We will be supporting both the Conservative motion and the Government amendment. At the risk of appearing too cosy with Gavin Brown, I also thank him for hosting in January the round table on strategic funding and the third sector. It was a very worthwhile meeting that brought into stark reality the chaos that single-year funding and delayed funding decisions bring to third sector organisations.

We can all testify to the work done by the third sector and by charities in Scotland. Their efforts often go unnoticed and unappreciated, yet they are a vital cog in our society—dare I say, they are one of the hallmarks of the genuine big society: a community that cares.

We should also recognise that third sector organisations provide essential services. They do not simply top up existing services or provide recreational activities; rather, they are the care providers and the addiction services and the ones on the front line dealing with unemployment, homelessness and offending. We need to stop treating the third sector as an addendum to state provision and start thinking of it as an equal partner.

Multiyear funding must be an integral part of that approach. At the round table in January, we heard at first hand from several major organisations which, at that stage—a matter of weeks before the new financial year—still had no clue about which projects they could run, which staff they could retain, which buildings they could continue to rent and even where they would be operating from.

The motion highlights action that could be taken by local government and health boards, but it is worth noting that the Scottish Government's employability schemes, delivered by Skills Development Scotland, are also awarded to training providers on one-year contracts. Multiyear funding not only gives security to organisations that are in receipt of contracts, but provides stability for specific projects and, crucially, for service users. In turn, that provides continuity for local authorities, which do not then have to pick up the pieces when voluntary organisations' funding is cut. It allows third sector organisations to focus on long-term outcomes, rather than just short-term funding considerations, and allows time and room

for innovation in a sector that is often best placed to be the innovator of public service delivery.

As I said at the outset, we will support the motion, but we feel it necessary to amend it to raise the wider issues of third sector funding. Reorganising funding towards a strategic funding approach is an important step and one that I hope the Government will act on today, but the issue of funding the third sector generally is also important. At a time of reducing income for third sector organisations, their workload is heavier than ever. With welfare reform comes increased pressure on advice services, support for the homeless, food banks and care providers.

With more than a fifth of all funding for the third sector coming from local government, it is no surprise that the more than £200 million of cuts to local authority budgets over the next year will have a knock-on effect on the funding that is given to organisations. Many charities are supported in one way or another by local government, whether through direct core grants or the provision of services, such as transport to and from activities. All of them will feel the strain as the cuts begin to bite.

One direct fund that the Scottish Government administers is the third sector early intervention fund, which replaced two existing revenue streams. It is worth noting that, despite the rather panicky additional interim funding of £10 million that the Minister for Children and Young People rushed out, the new fund is still worth less than the support that was previously available. Even more worrying is the fact that the fund was four times oversubscribed, with more than 400 groups applying and a total of £73.4 million requested. Many organisations reported their concern about not being given enough notice of whether they would receive funding, with the result that no long-term planning could be completed and staff were put on redundancy notices. On 2 April, *The Herald* reported that many organisations are leading an "uncomfortable hand-to-mouth existence".

That is no way to support our third sector and it is the reason why multiyear funding is necessary. It is needed to remove the threat of projects ending precipitately and to end the morale-sapping practice of organisations, of necessity, issuing annual redundancy notices, despite their then finding that the funding is renewed. A practical suggestion that my colleague Richard Simpson MSP has pursued is to make it a requirement that funding decisions be made at least three months prior to the secession of funding, or to insist on three months of funding after a decision to terminate a contract so that staff are not necessarily threatened with redundancy. I hope that the cabinet secretary will reconsider that.

I look forward to the rest of the debate and, I hope, to our coming to a consensus on multiyear funding. Labour will support the motion and the amendments.

I move amendment S4M-06405.1, to insert at end:

“; further notes that the Third Sector Early Intervention Fund was oversubscribed, meaning that many organisations missed out on core funding and is concerned that the interim funding to support those organisations will shortly run out; acknowledges that the third sector is operating under extreme pressure, providing essential services with limited resources, particularly as a result of decisions taken by the UK Government on welfare reform and the Scottish Government on local government spending, and praises all those who work and volunteer in the third sector.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

We move to the open debate, with speeches of up to four minutes, including interventions, please.

15:04

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(SNP): I have carefully read Gavin Brown's motion on voluntary sector funding and I cannot find a single word that I disagree with, which is probably a first in my parliamentary career. John Swinney's amendment certainly finishes it off properly.

I have great respect for the third sector's ability, often with limited financial resources, to connect, reach and empower communities to help to address important social, cultural and economic needs, and for its ability to multiply the impact of those resources, which often gain a social return that other agencies would be proud of—or might be embarrassed about. I am keenly aware of the critical role that the third sector plays in the community planning agenda and in meeting the outcomes of community planning single outcome agreements. I therefore very much support the call in the Conservative motion for multiyear funding that affords the sector the opportunity to plan effectively to deliver sustainable services.

In my experience, the sector can and will go the extra mile. That is for one reason: it can see the need for action in society. The sector brings expertise, capacity and connectivity to communities and enables the neighbourhood approaches that we know provide the most benefit, to achieve success beyond statutory engagement alone.

We should note that, just a few months ago, the Scottish Government's budget was cut by the Conservative Administration in London. So much for the forward planning that is implicit in the motion. That suggests to me that the Conservatives do not have the same level of commitment to stability as the rest of us have.

I have no doubt that, in the coming weeks and months, the third sector across Scotland—indeed, the third sector across the whole United Kingdom—will come under severe pressure not only financially but from capacity issues. That is as sure as night follows day.

When the benefit cuts take hold and the impact is felt at all levels, some of the fallout will be picked up by an already overstretched third sector—by, for example, advice services, child and family support services, homelessness agencies and, increasingly, food banks. I know that that will happen and that the third sector will do what it can to alleviate potentially devastating effects on our communities and to help those who are least able to help themselves and who are experiencing the blunt end of the Westminster-led reform of social welfare. We are only at the start of the impact of the Westminster reform agenda, and we are already seeing a profound need for our communities to come together to help one another in the Scottish tradition of community action and support.

How can we expect the third sector to maintain its critical role without the ability to plan over a minimum three-year term? The more all the agencies—from the national Government to local authorities to the third sector—combine to ensure that every person works to their capacity and that every pound is properly targeted with little or no wastage, the more we will have a chance to use and direct our resources to address the challenges that lie in store for our country.

15:08

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):

As convener of the cross-party group on volunteering and the voluntary sector, I thank Gavin Brown for bringing the debate to the chamber. Just last week, the cross-party group heard from Handicabs, which is an annually funded, Lothian-based community transport charity. The difference that being funded over three years would make to it is that it would have security of business and hence, of course, security for service users.

The third sector does a tremendous job in tackling the problems that we face in Scotland compassionately and effectively under huge financial pressure. I am sure that all members would join me in expressing gratitude to all those who work and volunteer in that sector.

The Scottish and UK Governments appear to take advantage of charitable organisations in Scotland, as they are cutting more and more public services and expecting—indeed, encouraging—the third sector to extend itself further into vital public service delivery with

insecure and inadequate budgets. As the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has pointed out, the debate is not about giving charities more funding, although a halt to the reductions seen in Government spending on the third sector last year would be welcome, but about giving organisations certainty over how much funding they will get and when they will get it, which allows them to plan and deliver services securely, invest in their staff and communities and build projects that service users can rely on when they need them most.

Despite the joint statement on the relationship at local level between Government and the third sector, many third sector organisations are trapped in a yearly cycle of making funding applications. That not only undermines staff morale and increases turnover but reduces the time and scarce resources that are spent on reaching out to those in need and developing the organisation.

Clearly, we need a renewed commitment from local authorities that they will endeavour to increase spending commitments to a three-year cycle or more, in accordance with their agreement under the joint statement. The reality is that, due to a roll-back of public sector services, third sector organisations provide a lifeline to many communities in Scotland that they simply could not do without. It is incumbent on us all to ensure that, when organisations are threatened because of financial uncertainty, the Scottish and UK Governments act quickly and decisively to ensure their survival and their service users' wellbeing.

Therefore, I support the motion in calling for the Scottish Government to carry out a review of how common the application of a three-year approach to funding is across Scotland, to pinpoint where inconsistencies exist and use that information to draw up guidelines for local authorities, and in strongly encouraging a three-year approach to funding and therefore going some way to allowing for financial certainty across the board in Scotland for third sector organisations.

15:12

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I, too, welcome the debate, and Gavin Brown is to be congratulated on bringing it forward.

The Local Government and Regeneration Committee is in the third strand of its inquiry into public service reform. As we have gone around the country, we have found a level of uncertainty in the third sector and community-based organisations in certain geographical areas. As a councillor in my past life, I found that annual grants to organisations did not necessarily deliver the goods on the ground and that what was required was certainty about funding for the third

sector organisation that was fulfilling a contract and certainty for the council that that was being done.

It benefits all to move, when possible, to three-year funding. It offers the people who receive the services that are being delivered a sense of security. I hope that changes that are made through the proposed community empowerment and renewal bill will mean that the various bodies in community planning partnerships go to meetings before they take budgetary decisions and discuss future budgetary decisions, which I hope will lead to more joined-up thinking and more common sense, so that we will see much more joint procurement of services over three years.

We are in exciting times in that regard. I wish that we did not have to deal with the cuts that are taking place, but where we are means that we can be a bit more flexible than previously. We can come up with much more radical thinking about the delivery of services across the board.

There are always plenty of warm words for the third sector, but in many places the sector's work is still not appreciated as much as it should be. I might get a slap on the fingers from colleagues in local government for saying this, but my experience tells me that the third sector does better in many areas of service delivery than councils and the health service do. I hope that we will get to a point at which folks can take their hands off the purse strings and trust others—whether we are talking about the third sector or community organisations—to deliver services. We are getting to the point at which we will realise that hope of mine.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the issue and I hope that folk out there are listening to what has been said and are aware of the level of consensus that there has been in the debate so far. I hope that budget controllers will give a little leeway in the future.

15:16

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I know very little about being cosy with Gavin Brown, but I assure Ken Macintosh that Mr Brown did not have to persuade any of his colleagues to bring the motion for debate in the Parliament. We fully support the debate, which is as timely as it is important, given that we are approaching one of my favourite weeks of the year—volunteers week.

Everyone who takes part in volunteers week is reminded of just what a debt we all owe to the voluntary and third sector, as Gavin Brown said and others reiterated. During volunteers week every year, I remind anyone who will listen to me that, as John Swinney said, if the third sector

ceased to function, there is no way on earth that the state or the private sector—or even both together—could pick up the pieces and continue to deliver the range of services that the third sector provides.

The third sector's work is invaluable and I greatly welcome a debate that focuses on the financial security and sustainability of organisations in the sector. I commend the SCVO for responsibly saying, in the useful briefing paper that it sent us, that

"Whilst this debate is about money, SCVO are clear that it is not necessarily about 'more money' for the third sector".

The debate is, however, about getting the best value for money. No organisation, however earnest its intentions, can do that when its funding is decided annually or more frequently, often so late in the budget process that bodies are left in the dark as to whether the services that they seek to deliver will be funded at all on 1 April.

I am sure that I am not alone in having received, over the years, anguished calls from third sector organisations as the end of a financial year approaches, when they have had to issue redundancy notices to key employees as a precautionary measure, in case hoped-for funding was not forthcoming. No private or public sector enterprise could be expected to operate in such a fashion, and it cannot be right to expect third sector organisations to do so.

As has been made clear, the Government's intentions were entirely honourable when it brought out the joint third sector statement, which sets out guidelines for best practice in funding the sector. The statement says:

"As a general rule funders will aim to take a 3-year approach to both grant and contract funding."

As we all know, the best-laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley. It is all too clear that, as the SCVO put it in another briefing paper:

"in our experience three year funding is rare to non-existent between local authorities and third sector organisations".

I think that we all agree that that cannot go on, and I would like to think that the cross-party support for the motion that seems to be emerging, and which I think is achievable, might begin the process of changing the situation. Everyone wants the same thing; it is simply a question of having the will to make it happen.

In the short time that remains, I will highlight a local situation about which I harbour serious concerns. Almost a third of Scottish Government funding for the third sector next year will be delivered through the third sector interface, which has been established for entirely understandable reasons. In Dumfries and Galloway, the interface

has been put in place, but Stewartry Council of Voluntary Service and Nithsdale Council of Voluntary Service—the two most active and effective of four such councils in the region—felt that they had no option other than to exclude themselves from the new structure.

I appreciate the cabinet secretary's involvement in that debate and I understand why he felt that he had no choice other than to press ahead, but I put on record my concerns at the prospect of a third sector interface that excludes about 50 per cent of the organisations involved. That concern aside, I have great pleasure in supporting the motion in Gavin Brown's name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, and I apologise to you and the earlier speakers for the drilling and thumping that our esteemed contractors are doing outside the building. That is—allegedly—being dealt with.

15:20

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I take great delight in taking part in the debate and in the comments that have been made about the voluntary sector. My speech will be about my experiences as a volunteer and working in the voluntary sector.

It must be a good 13 or 14 years ago that I was one of the volunteer founders and youth workers at Westerton junior youth club. Before that, I was the volunteer librarian at the Marie Curie Huntershill hospice in Springburn. After my son went to school, I was fortunate that the voluntary sector came to me and asked me to come and work for it. I worked in East Dunbartonshire Council for Voluntary Service, which is now East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action as a result of the merger of Volunteer Centre East Dunbartonshire and East Dunbartonshire Council for Voluntary Service. I also worked in Carers Link in Milngavie. A lot of the comments that I will make today come out of that work, instead of my usual facts, figures and evidence.

It is interesting that Gavin Brown talked about the fact that there is no great evidence base for how we fund the voluntary sector, and I support the call for us to go out and get that evidence. Funding is important to the voluntary sector—the SCVO 2012 sector survey showed that. Funding, especially three-year funding, was recognised at paragraphs 7 and 8 of the 2009 joint statement on the relationship at local level between Government and the third sector. Each of those publications talks about something other than funding that my experience also supports, which is the third sector and the voluntary sector being recognised for what they are—skilled providers of services and support

to the most vulnerable in our communities, as my colleague Gil Paterson said.

I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary talk about another aspect that is incredibly important. The third sector and voluntary organisations are recognised as equal partners in the delivery of services, the development of policy and their role of advocating for the vulnerable communities that they support and serve. I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary say that today.

When I was on holiday in Skye last year, the Cabinet was there and, at the meeting in Portree, the citizens advice bureau asked the cabinet secretary a question from the floor. People left that meeting having heard the cabinet secretary say how much he values and supports the third sector and how he sees third sector organisations as partners in delivery. I was pleased to hear that again today and I know that the third sector recognises that.

I am also pleased to see that such recognition is coming through in legislation, such as the proposed procurement reform bill. I was in the chamber for the debate on that and it was interesting to hear members and the cabinet secretary talking about it. It is important that that is recognised in the Scottish Government's guidance note on community benefits in public procurement. I will not quote it, but I guide members to it to see how important it is.

I am pleased that the Government recognises and understands the importance of the third sector. It is incredibly important that, after today's debate, local authorities and other public agencies do exactly the same thing.

15:24

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am delighted to take part in this debate on the important subject of Scotland's outstanding voluntary sector. I thank Gavin Brown for securing the time in the chamber to consider the pressures facing third sector organisations.

The on-going economic circumstances mean that, for charities of all sizes, securing funding is a continuous struggle. In my region of Glasgow, few—if any—organisations can be confident about their ability to provide crucial services over the next few years. Many operate on budgets that represent a fraction of what they used to receive.

Welfare reforms mean that more and more ordinary Scottish people will rely on the ability of charities to provide additional support for communities that had until recently been able to survive without assistance. That hardship has been compounded by the Scottish Government's hesitation to mitigate those reforms and by the

draconian cuts that have been handed down to councils throughout Scotland.

A grave example of that is food banks. In this country, food banks are now feeding more than 14,000 people every year—that is 14,000 people who can no longer put food on the table for their families and who cannot afford to do anything other than put a roof over their heads. The number of people who rely on food banks has risen by more than 150 per cent compared with the same time in 2012 and it shows no signs of falling.

That is the devastating reality of living in the eighth-richest nation on earth. Our priorities should always be to invest in the economy to create jobs—*[Interruption.]* I am not sure whether someone wants to intervene. Our priority should also be to reduce the devastating level of unemployment throughout the country.

However, if we are to cut benefits, public sector funding and local government funding, how do we expect the most vulnerable among us to survive? We often talk in the chamber about the tragic choice between heating and eating. The reality is that some of the families whom we are talking about do not even have such a luxury.

I agree that the third sector plays a crucial role in improving the lives of the most vulnerable people in our communities. I also agree with the SCVO that steps could be taken to improve the third sector's efficiency without allocating increased financial resources at a time of economic hardship. Instead of awarding grants on a six-monthly or annual basis, we should commit to the projects that we support and offer our charities—small and large—the security of a three-year funding commitment.

Overburdening charities that are already overstretched is not a solution to the problems caused by political mismanagement. If we want the voluntary sector to deliver more, we must find the resources to fund it appropriately. To challenge effectively the growing levels of poverty and disadvantage in Scotland, the public and voluntary sectors must work together to provide assistance to those who need it most, without leaving the most vulnerable people in our communities behind.

15:28

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Gavin Brown on bringing this important debate to the chamber. For the most part, I felt that we would get through the debate in a very consensual manner. It is perhaps unfortunate that the previous speaker decided to politicise it.

I worked in the third sector prior to being elected and I was very much aware of the importance of three-year funding. The organisation that I worked for was perhaps one of the rare ones that were referred to earlier, because we had three-year funding. I was very much aware of the fact that other third sector organisations were given only one-year funding. That precluded organisations from forward planning and staff from feeling confident about their future. That had an impact on how services were delivered to the wider community.

The issue is not all about funding and money; it is about confidence. Gavin Brown mentioned professionalism. There is professionalism—and trust—in the third sector that I know. The community at large trusts the third sector.

I keep talking about the third sector rather than the voluntary sector because I believe that the use of the term “third sector” confers kudos to it. We have the public sector, we have the private sector and we have the third sector. I sometimes think that talking about the voluntary sector creates a perception in people’s minds that everyone in the sector is a volunteer. The majority of people in the third sector are employed to provide a service. Of course, they are quite often complemented by many volunteers, to ensure that the service is delivered in the way that the customer group needs it to be.

Three-year funding is essential for organisations. There is probably historical evidence that organisations have been delivering using year-on-year contracts. However, it is essential that we ensure that we are getting best value for each pound. Councils are strapped for cash sometimes, and they need to ensure that whoever is providing a service on their behalf is doing so to the best of their ability and is meeting needs fully, to the full value of the money that is being spent. That is why it is important that agencies do not replicate the work of other agencies in the sector. Those that are doing so should consider merging. When organisations consider what they can provide and who they are providing for, they should take a look at their neighbouring organisations and ask whether they are doing the same job and, if so, whether they could come together, if only for one project. That can sometimes deliver the best value for the clients in the area.

I was a service manager in the first agency in Scotland to bring sensory impairment issues under one roof. That was the result of a merger of two organisations that came together to deliver the best possible service for a community. I believe that that model should be replicated, as it is delivering the service that the client group needs it to deliver.

15:32

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate about funding for the third sector. Like others in the chamber, I used to work in the third sector, so I bring a little bit of experience to the debate. However, I will not rehearse all of my past history.

I hope that Dennis Robertson will forgive me if I get just a little bit political. If I do, that will be born out of frustration, because we have often talked about how we can best fund the voluntary sector. This is not a new debate, and we still have not achieved something quite basic, which is to provide three-year funding.

Under the previous, Labour-led, Scottish Government, we witnessed the advent of the compact with the voluntary sector. That included three-year funding. We agreed it at a national level, and we agreed it at a local level. Then, as Gavin Brown rightly pointed out, we had the joint statement on the relationship at a local level between Government and the third sector, which was signed by no less than the SCVO, SOLACE, COSLA and the Scottish Government in September 2009. All that is welcome. We all agree that three-year funding is the right approach. However, we simply have not delivered it on the ground, and we have a patchwork of differing experiences across the country. Consistency is most definitely an issue.

The other issue is resource. Although the third sector would be quick to point out that the majority of its income is self-generated, 21 per cent comes from local government and a further 21 per cent comes from a combination of central Government and the rest of the public sector, such as national health service boards. I saw the cabinet secretary’s face in response to Margaret McDougall’s point about the volume of funding, so I know that I am risking his wrath when I say that third sector funding from the Scottish Government was cut by 11.5 per cent in 2012-13, and is projected to fall in total by something like 15 per cent over the spending review period.

Ken Macintosh was equally right to point out that the third sector early intervention fund of £20 million is four times oversubscribed with more than 400 groups applying. I welcome the previous announcement by the Minister for Children and Young People that that fund will be topped up with an extra £10 million, but it feels a bit like sticking a finger in a dam that is about to burst. The fund is now less than the schemes that it replaced and, because of the delay in sorting everything out, many voluntary sector organisations have a hand-to-mouth existence while they wait to hear.

By anybody’s book, that is not good practice. We should collectively try to set the highest

standards in Government as well as in the rest of our public bodies. However, the point of the debate is three-year funding and, on that issue, we are as one. The most striking difference is in how we treat the third sector compared with the private sector. Private sector bodies regularly receive three, five and—for goodness' sake—in some cases, 10-year contracts but, in some places, the third sector feels strangled by annual funding arrangements, as we heard earlier from Gavin Brown.

I recall without any fondness spending nine months delivering a service and three months chasing money for the next year and worrying about whether I would retain committed and specialist staff. We rightly talk about how much we value the work of the third sector, whether it is tackling homelessness, providing social care or building capacity in our communities. However, we cannot expect the sector to keep doing more while looking over its shoulder to see whether the money will follow. Cuts to local government funding are having a detrimental impact on three-year funding, because local authorities are uncertain about what lies ahead.

I genuinely believe that the cabinet secretary wants to do something about three-year funding. If that is the case, he will have the support of Labour members, too.

15:37

John Swinney: Fiona McLeod demonstrated an overwhelming commitment to supporting the Government by revealing that, on her holidays to Skye, she decided to spend part of the day listening to the assembled group of ministers at the summer meeting of the Cabinet.

Jackie Baillie: That is sad.

John Swinney: There is nothing sad about it. It is purely and simply an expression of total support and enthusiasm for the Government. I suppose that there was one sentence of Jackie Baillie's speech that was overwhelming support for the Government. The rest of it was business as usual.

In driving at some of the issues at the heart of the debate, Gavin Brown fairly pointed out the absence of overwhelming evidence on the subject. There is, of course, anecdotal evidence. Alex Fergusson said that three-year funding was "rare to non-existent". Dennis Robertson explained that he worked in an organisation that had three-year funding. It is clear that there is an evidence problem.

I take from the Conservative motion and the remarks that have been made by members from across the parties the impression that there is an

appetite to get to a stronger position on evidence. I will reflect on how best that can be achieved.

Alex Fergusson: Without wishing to argue with what the cabinet secretary says, I point out that the words "rare to non-existent" were not mine but the SCVO's.

John Swinney: I am grateful for that clarification. That is, as I would expect of Mr Fergusson, a helpful intervention, because it allows me to move on to the comments that John Downie, the SCVO director of public affairs, made about the debate. He said:

"It's important to remember that this debate is not about trying to secure more money for the sector.

Instead, it's about taking a more strategic and longer-term approach to funding which gives charities and other third sector organisations extra security.

This means that they can make long-term plans and build more sustainable services, which will better meet the needs of the vulnerable people who use and rely on these services across Scotland."

I entirely and unreservedly agree with the points that Mr Downie made in those comments. That is at the heart of all the detail that I set out at the beginning of my opening speech about how the Government has taken a set of decisions to try to establish stronger foundations from which the third sector can make a contribution towards the quality of life of people in Scotland.

I am clear about my view: I want the third sector to be involved in the delivery of public services. I listened with care to what Margaret McDougall said. If I picked her up correctly, she was raising concerns about the third sector becoming more involved in public service delivery, and I completely disagree with her point of view. Better outcomes are achieved if third sector players are involved in the finding of solutions and the designing of services that meet the needs of individuals. That will certainly be a major part of the Government's agenda regarding this subject as we proceed.

A number of members raised issues about the volume of funding that has been made available to third sector organisations. Some of the Labour Party's rather confused contribution to the debate has been made on the basis of the impact on local authority funding. I have gone through this detail before, but I will go through it again in the hope that, at some stage, somebody on the Labour benches might listen to and understand what I have said. Between 2007-08 and 2012-13, the resources within the Scottish Government's control increased by 6.4 per cent. Over the same period, local government's budget increased by 8.9 per cent. I repeat: a 6.4 per cent increase in Scottish Government money and an 8.9 per cent increase in local government money. That shows

the Parliament that local government has benefited disproportionately from the Government's funding settlements.

Jackie Baillie: I listen to absolutely everything that John Swinney says. Will he also listen to what I say? Eighty-three per cent of all the Scottish Government's cuts last year were passed on to local government.

John Swinney: The problem with that terribly clever formulation that Jackie Baillie advances is that it ignores more than £2.5 billion of non-domestic rates income, which is a pretty substantial number in the process. I gently point out to Jackie Baillie and Ken Macintosh that neither of them is in a terribly strong position to come to me and complain about local government funding when, on every available opportunity regarding the budget for the current financial year, they came to me with three asks: housing, rail and colleges. There was not a mention of—

Jackie Baillie: I did not.

John Swinney: Oh—Jackie Baillie did not. I have now learned a very important revelation: I should not believe a word that Ken Macintosh says to me as representing the Labour Party, because it does not have Jackie Baillie's sign-off. We all know where we stand now. I should make it clear that I will not be offering the Labour Party two meetings on the budget process—one is more than enough.

I convey a warm word of thanks to the Conservatives for choosing this subject for debate, which has allowed Parliament to reflect on the issues around three-year funding. I commit to considering the questions and points that Mr Brown has raised on the pursuit of evidence and to advise Parliament how the Government intends to address the issues that have been raised today.

15:43

Gavin Brown: It was probably about five months ago that I attended what might be described as an outreach day, organised by the Finance Committee, when various committee members were sent to different parts of Scotland to speak to representatives of the third sector, local businesses and the public sector about employability and employment opportunities for people furthest from the labour market.

I was listening to someone who represented a particularly impressive third sector organisation with a national profile, and I heard about a range of remarkable projects that were run by that organisation. Near the end, one of its managers said, almost in passing, that she was about to issue staff with their annual redundancy warning notices. That happened each year—most staff

members were told that they were at risk of redundancy. I found that fairly shocking at the time but, having spoken since then to representatives of a number of organisations, I have found that that is not unusual. In essence, that was captured by Jackie Baillie, who mentioned that her time in the third sector involved nine months of working on the front line and three months of chasing the next funding opportunity. A combination of work since then led us to lodge a targeted motion on the issue of three-year funding, and for the most part it has been a targeted debate with good contributions from members all round the chamber.

Jackie Baillie got to the heart of the issue quite well when she said that three-year funding captures a broad consensus but that, despite positive efforts from the previous Scottish Executive and the current Scottish Government, we have not quite delivered it on the ground. Members on all sides need to look at that carefully, take responsibility for it and, most important, decide exactly how we can turn it around. There have been good intentions on the part of several Governments over at least a decade since devolution was given, yet three-year funding still does not seem to happen on the ground.

Although I entirely accept the cabinet secretary's comment that we do not have an evidence base, we have good anecdotal evidence from many organisations. I would describe it as fairly heavy anecdotal evidence and it is almost exclusively in one direction, which leads me strongly to believe that, when we get the evidence base in front of us, it will broadly back up the sense that many of us in the Parliament have about what has happened and is happening on the ground. We can call it an audit of what is going on, a survey or an inquiry. The name does not really matter. It is critical, though, that the work happens fairly swiftly. We do not want it to happen overnight. At least, we want the thinking to begin overnight, but we want to get it right so that we start to solve the problem instead of simply looking as if we are attempting to solve it.

I hope that the work will show us who within the public sector is performing, because there are examples of good practice. Some local authorities do a very good job and some health boards have excellent examples of funding. Who is performing and who is not? What are the differences between the various elements of the public sector? What are the differences between local authorities? We should also consider the differences within certain local authorities, because at the round table there was some evidence to suggest that, even within a local authority, one department will perform well and give longer-term streams of funding but the department just next door will give only annualised

funding or less. In some senses, what happens seems to depend purely on the personalities or processes of departments rather than being part of the wider culture that we all want to foster.

We have had useful contributions from across the chamber. The cabinet secretary rightly pointed out that three-year settlements are given by central Government, so there is no strong reason why we could not get three-year settlements from local authorities and other parts of the public sector to the third sector. I listened carefully to what he said. If I wrote it down correctly, he said that he is willing to explore the issues of the extent—or not—of three-year funding. I take him at his word on that and hope that we will get announcements in due course. We do not want to be too hasty, but I hope that that happens sooner rather than later.

Margaret McDougall rightly made the point, as did my colleague Alex Fergusson, that rather than being about the level of funding or about more funding, the debate is about certainty and the ability to plan. She put it particularly well when she said that it is about people being able to plan securely so that they can build projects. I emphasise, as I think that she did, the word “build”. It is pretty hard to build something over the course of a single year. She gave an excellent local example—it is local to me; I do not think that it is local to her. If people are going to build projects, they need multiyear funding. They certainly cannot do it over the course of a single year.

I was interested in Kevin Stewart’s speech, because he has some good experience from his previous life as a councillor. He said that, in his view, annual grants did not deliver the goods on the ground. I was also interested to hear that, when the committee that he convenes looked at what was going on on the ground, it found a similar picture to that which was found by the Finance Committee.

I was also interested in Dennis Robertson’s speech. He said that, although the organisation that he was involved in had three-year funding, he recognised that many others did not. Having single-year funding precludes forward planning and takes away a little bit of the confidence and security that the organisation as a whole should have, as well as the confidence and security that is passed on to the service users of the third sector; we should all have those people at the front of our minds, because it is they who make this area so important.

In the main we have had a very consensual debate, which has been particularly refreshing for me as someone who is usually involved in fairly robust exchanges across the chamber. The issue

commands widespread support, as it has done for some time, but it is critical that we move it forward.

The ball is in the Government’s court, and it is for the Government to reflect on how best to take the issue forward. I hope that we return to the issue soon and that we achieve a degree of progress, so that when we debate it in a year’s time we can say something different, and so that when we speak to various third sector organisations we will not hear the manager say, “I’m about to issue the annual redundancy notices.”

I was particularly taken by a statement from the SCVO briefing:

“These issues”—

homelessness, unemployment and reoffending—

“are generational yet public bodies fund them annually.”

Although we cannot fund them generationally, I hope that we can take a step forward by funding them for at least three years.

Energy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06407, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on Scotland needs a balanced energy policy. We are extremely tight for time. Mr Fraser has up to 10 minutes.

15:51

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

After listening to the previous, very consensual debate, I am filled with optimism and confidence that this debate will be equally consensual as we agree that Scotland needs a balanced energy policy, for the Scottish Government's current fixation with onshore wind is not only causing consternation in our rural communities but driving up consumers' bills.

I believe that it is time for a new approach to energy policy. I will set out why that policy should be based on the principles of affordability, security of supply and increasing decarbonisation, and why it would be a better way forward for our country and for this vital sector.

I start on a note of consensus by welcoming the progress that we already seem to be making. For quite some time, the Scottish Conservatives have been calling for a review of planning guidance for onshore wind farms to better protect scenic areas. Within hours of my motion appearing in the *Business Bulletin* yesterday, the Scottish Government published proposals to do just that.

I warmly welcome the adoption of a Conservative policy and the Scottish National Party's acceptance of the very important principle that wind turbines are incompatible with scenic areas—a principle that it has vigorously resisted until now. However, the new policy does not go far enough, and without other changes there is a danger that it will just increase development pressure on non-protected areas, but who knows what other aspects of Conservative energy policy the Scottish Government will adopt? Perhaps that will become clear in the course of the afternoon.

Scotland has always been a world leader in energy, which is today a key strength of the Scottish economy. One only has to visit Aberdeen to see how well the communities there have coped with the general economic downturn over the past five years, thanks to the vibrancy of the oil and gas sector, the success of which is underpinned by a favourable United Kingdom tax regime.

There is also growing potential from offshore renewables. The latest opportunity comes in the development of carbon capture and storage, with the very welcome decision from the Department of

Energy and Climate Change at Westminster to shortlist the Peterhead project as one of two schemes in the final round.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I very much welcome the inclusion of Peterhead in the Conservatives' motion, and even more so its inclusion in national planning framework 3.

In the light of Danny Alexander's remarks some 18 months ago that the money for the project had been reallocated to other projects under the Treasury's control, can Murdo Fraser tell us whether he has had the necessary assurances from his colleagues in Government at Westminster that this time—unlike in 2007—we might see some real progress?

Murdo Fraser: I welcome Mr Stevenson's welcome—what a note of consensus we are striking already in this debate. I have many functions in life, but I am not a spokesman for Mr Danny Alexander, although I am very encouraged by the progress that DECC is making. I am delighted that one of the two shortlisted CCS projects is in Scotland, and I am sure that we will see that progress.

All that is good news, but we should not be fooled into thinking that high energy prices, which sustain a vibrant energy sector, are a good thing in themselves. They may be good for the energy industry, but they are bad for consumers and bad for business. Families across Scotland have seen energy bills to soar in recent years, which has put pressure on household budgets, and now nearly 40 per cent of Scottish households are in fuel poverty—a figure that would have been unimaginable a few years ago.

There is also an impact on business, particularly heavy consumers of energy. Just last week, I visited the O-I glass factory in Alloa, which is a major local employer with more than 400 workers on the books. That company spends £20 million per year on energy, and rising costs are always a concern.

Elsewhere in my constituency, in Fife, even a decade ago the paper-making industry was a major component of the local economy and employed many thousands of people. Today, there is just one paper maker left: Tullis Russell in Markinch. Paper making is a heavily energy-intensive process and Tullis Russell has a forward plan to survive by developing its own energy source, with a biomass plant on site. The pattern is repeated in other energy-intensive industries such as the metal production and chemical industries, where we see steady decline, plant closures and jobs lost.

Undoubtedly, part of the historic rise in energy prices comes from increases in the cost of fossil

fuels. But today the fastest-rising component of energy bills is not the wholesale cost, but various Government levies to subsidise renewable energy and other projects.

It would be wrong to see rising fossil fuels costs as a one-way bet. Last week, we had the very sad news of the Scottish Coal Company going into liquidation as a result of a fall in world coal prices. However, across in the US, we have seen a cut of some 50 per cent in wholesale energy costs as a result of the exploitation of shale gas reserves.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Will Murdo Fraser take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I ask the member to let me finish this point, and then I will give way.

That is having a hugely beneficial impact on the US economy, with large-scale manufacturing jobs coming back to the country, whereas in previous decades they had been offshored to China and elsewhere. I am sure that Mr Gibson will welcome that opportunity.

Rob Gibson: Wholesale gas and electricity costs make up the largest proportion of the average household bill and amount to 47 per cent. That is a very big difference from the cost of renewables obligation certificates, which add about 2 per cent to the average energy bill. How does 47 per cent end up anywhere near the 2 per cent that is a result of the balanced policy on renewables?

Murdo Fraser: If Rob Gibson had listened to what I said, he would have heard that I said that the fastest-rising element was renewables subsidies. If he listens carefully to what I will say shortly, he will hear why renewable energy is costing so much.

Renewables are not just wind power. Hydro, solar, biomass and the emergent offshore technologies play a part, but if the Scottish Government is to meet its 2020 target, the primary component will be onshore wind. It is worth asking whether we need to subsidise a technology such as onshore wind to the current extent. Subsidies should be there to address market failure, but nobody could seriously suggest that there is market failure today in Scotland in onshore wind, when planning departments across rural Scotland complain of being deluged with applications, so attractive is the subsidy regime. In the past five years, there have been more than 44,000 individual objections to wind turbine applications across Scotland; the figure increases year on year, such is the level of public concern. That is why we are calling for a 50 per cent cut in the subsidy to onshore wind.

I gently remind those who would argue that that would destroy the industry that exactly the same forecasts of doom were made about the solar photovoltaics sector when its subsidies were cut, nearly 18 months ago. That sector has never been healthier than it is today.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Murdo Fraser may be aware that fossil fuels and nuclear are massively subsidised. For example, annual United Kingdom Government support for nuclear decommissioning is greater than £2 billion. Will he comment on those subsidies?

Murdo Fraser: Of course there is a cost in nuclear decommissioning. The projects that are being decommissioned at the moment, particularly at Dounreay, were experimental. They are from very early in the life of the technology and as such they will be very expensive to clean up. New nuclear is nothing like as expensive to decommission. In fact, even the Scottish Government's own officials told the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee that the lifetime costs of new nuclear, including the costs of decommissioning, were comparable to the lifetime costs of offshore wind. Even the Scottish Government says that there is not a problem with the cost of nuclear.

We certainly see a limited amount of onshore wind having a part to play in the energy mix, but we must be aware that that comes at a high cost. The latest research by Professor Gordon Hughes of the University of Edinburgh—a man so well respected by the Scottish Government that it appointed him the chairman of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland—demonstrates a degradation in output from wind turbines over time. The Scottish Government claims that Professor Hughes's research is flawed—indeed, it has said that it is “fundamentally flawed”—but it has not produced a single piece of scientific evidence to back up that opinion. Professor Hughes's damning conclusion is that the levelled costs of onshore wind come out at £183 per megawatt hour, not the £86 per megawatt hour that the Scottish Government quotes. That is double the comparable cost of gas. Given the latest figures, surely it is time for us to stop this madcap rush for onshore wind development and think again.

As with so much in life, energy policy is an area in which we need moderation and balance. There is a part for renewables to play, a limited role for onshore wind, a role for hydro, a role for biomass, a role for solar and the exciting potential of offshore technologies. However, we also need to take advantage of the cost benefits of utilising fossil fuels, with carbon abatement where that is practical. This week, Westminster's Energy and Climate Change Committee published an

encouraging report on the opportunities for unconventional gas extraction in the UK and what that might mean for energy prices and security of supply. We should embrace those opportunities and make maximum use of the clean, low-carbon technology that is nuclear power, not close our minds—as the Scottish Government has done—to the prospect of a new nuclear plant in Scotland.

Scotland needs a balanced energy policy. The Scottish Conservatives' approach to energy is good for industry, good for jobs, good for the environment and good for consumers, and I commend it to Parliament. I am pleased to move the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the strength of Scotland's energy sector; acknowledges the vibrancy of the oil and gas industry, which is underpinned by a favourable UK tax regime; recognises the potential of offshore renewables; welcomes the recent decision by the Department of Energy and Climate Change to shortlist the Peterhead Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) Project to progress to the next stage of the UK Government's CCS commercialisation competition funding, with a final investment decision to be taken in 2015; appreciates concern from consumers and businesses regarding the rising cost of energy impacting on household budgets and economic growth; understands that the volume of onshore wind farm planning applications is causing concern for many across Scotland; calls on the Scottish Government to end its fixation with onshore wind as an energy source to the exclusion of other more efficient technologies, and further urges it to develop a balanced energy policy, based on the principles of affordability, security of supply and increasing decarbonisation, which draws energy from a mix of sources.

16:02

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I welcome the opportunity to debate the Scottish Government's energy policy. Energy plays a central role in the life of the nation. Its generation and the economic and environmental benefits that could arise from a shift from fossil fuel generation to a portfolio comprising renewable and cleaner thermal generation are matters of considerable importance to the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government's electricity policy recognises that we need a mixed portfolio of energy generation, including renewables and thermal sources of electricity. Our draft electricity generation policy statement sets out that, although renewable energy plays a predominant role in our future energy mix, that will be backed up by a minimum of 2.5GW of thermal generation.

Over the past few years, we have seen real, tangible investment confidence in the energy sector in Scotland. Our clear commitment to renewables and our ambitious targets have played a key part in creating and sustaining that

confidence. However, not all the Government's energy policy is focused on the renewables sector. It is a balanced energy strategy that takes into account the opportunities that exist for us to develop other sources of energy generation.

The Scottish energy sector lies at the heart of the Government's economic strategy, which resulted in the Government producing the oil and gas strategy in conjunction with the industry. That has already created the climate that has brought in predicted investment, rising from £11.4 billion in 2012 to more than £13 billion in 2013. That is a clear demonstration of the confidence that investors in the industry have in the environment that has been created in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has created a similar environment to encourage investment in renewable energy. The Scottish Government's target is for renewables to generate the equivalent of 100 per cent of gross electricity consumption by 2020. In 2002, our renewables generation, as a proportion of demand, was around 12 per cent; in 2012, it was almost 39 per cent—well ahead of our 2011 interim target of 31 per cent. We remain on track to meet our new interim target of 50 per cent by 2015.

Scotland has frequently led the way in its use of the renewables obligation certificates support system to generate a positive and stable investment climate for renewables generators. Our introduction of higher support levels for wave and tidal generation in 2007 has attracted investment and established Scotland as a marine renewables hub. Six years later, the United Kingdom has followed our lead and has introduced higher support levels for wave and tidal generation.

The renewables obligation Scotland has led to renewables capacity more than tripling across Scotland in the decade since its introduction. We reduced onshore wind support by 10 per cent to 0.9 ROCs from April this year, based on levelised cost data and modelling aimed at delivering only the most cost-effective capacity. The Conservative calls that were reiterated this afternoon to halve ROC support for onshore wind are arbitrary: they are based on politics, not economics, and they will scare renewables investors from investing in the Scottish market.

Murdo Fraser: What is the cabinet secretary's answer to the scientific study by Professor Gordon Hughes on wind turbines' decline in output over their life and the consequent increase in costs? Surely the Scottish Government needs to take that extremely seriously.

John Swinney: We have done so. We have explained in parliamentary answers to—I think—Mr Fraser the basis of the Government's view of

the weaknesses and flaws in Professor Hughes's arguments.

The scale of generation and transmission investment needed to move to a sustainable, low-carbon generating future is significant. Estimates suggest that up to £110 billion is likely to be required by 2020—more than double the rate of investment. That is why setting out a clear investment strategy and a stable investment climate is important, and why we engage so thoroughly with the United Kingdom Government on electricity market reform issues to ensure that a regime is created that is in the interests of the development of the renewables market in Scotland.

A recent Pinsent Masons report recognises Scotland as the place to invest in renewables in the UK, thereby recognising the clarity and the certainty that are implicit in Scottish Government policy. However, it also highlights concerns that the speed of progress on UK Government energy policy has caused delays in investment decisions. I echo the concerns raised in that survey.

Mr Fraser mentioned that national planning framework 3 was yesterday set out by the Minister for Local Government and Planning. The NPF3 main issues report notes the strong future for the oil and gas sector and suggests that, while the framework should focus on the transition to the low-carbon economy, our natural and economic assets include those associated with the oil and gas sector, whose technology and skills are readily transferable to the development of renewable energy.

We have included in NPF3 the opportunities in Peterhead for carbon capture, and we would simply encourage an intensification of the United Kingdom Government's pace to secure progress on the Peterhead project. I remember that project being on the agenda in 2007. It was moved off the agenda and it is now back on it again. I appeal for consistency to ensure that the United Kingdom Government makes urgent progress on the project.

The national planning framework also sets out further information on the protection of our national parks and scenic areas in relation to onshore wind. I am delighted with the positive reaction that there has been to the steps that the Government has taken to listen carefully to the concerns that have been expressed by a number of organisations that have the care and stewardship of our magnificent natural environment close to their hearts. Our environment remains close to the heart of the Scottish Government, too, and we will progress our planning and energy policies in the context of what is in the best interests of all the people of Scotland.

I move amendment S4M-06407.4, to leave out from “, which is underpinned” to end and insert:

“and the estimated 24 billion barrels of reserves that remain in the North Sea; recognises the potential of offshore renewables and the continued role of onshore wind in Scotland; further welcomes proposals set out in the draft Scottish Planning Policy consultation to balance meeting Scotland's renewables targets while ensuring protection of core wild land and scenic areas; further welcomes the *Main Issues Report and Draft Framework* for the National Planning Framework 3, which focuses on the transition to a low-carbon economy and proposes a number of national developments including thermal generation with carbon capture and storage; notes the recent Pinsent Masons' report, *Scotland's Place in the Renewable Energy World*, which recognises Scotland as the place to invest in renewables in the UK, but highlights the concerns that the speed of progress on UK Government energy policy has caused delay in investment decisions.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Before I call Ken Macintosh, I note that the debate is heavily oversubscribed. If all members were to take three minutes rather than four minutes for their speeches, I might just fit in all members. Otherwise, I am afraid that some members will probably not be called.

16:09

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): In two weeks' time, the residents of East Renfrewshire will have the good fortune to welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities to open the Neilston community wind farm—they are probably cutting the bunting as I speak.

On the face of it, the Neilston community wind farm is just a small, four-turbine wind farm on the outskirts of the village but, to my mind, it is a hugely significant and hugely encouraging project, as the venture will be jointly owned by the local community and the private company that will operate and manage it.

Community ownership of renewables offers us the chance to make a real difference not just to our carbon reduction targets, but to our relationship with the big six power companies and to the needs of those people in this rich country of ours who are suffering from fuel poverty. It is an approach that I believe can help us to address some of the conflicts that exist in the planning system. Significantly, it offers local communities an income stream of an entirely different magnitude from that which is provided by even the most generous community benefit agreement.

I will return to the Neilston example, but first I welcome this Conservative Party debate. Although I will move an amendment on behalf of Scottish Labour, there is much in the motion with which we can agree. The multibillion-pound investment in our oil and gas industry is already bringing huge benefits to our economy, and although the costs of

developing offshore renewables are still commercially daunting, the potential is clearly there.

The motion also alludes to one of the more worrying developments in recent years—the increasing number of Scots who are suffering from fuel poverty. Families across the country are feeling the squeeze. Energy Action Scotland estimates that, this year, up to 900,000 households could be in fuel poverty and could struggle to afford adequate warmth. It is particularly galling that the hike in our heating bills has been accompanied by the posting of 11 per cent and 14 per cent increases in profits by Scottish Gas and Centrica respectively.

Leaving aside the rather unconvincing assertion that the Tory Government has deliberately put in place a tax regime that is favourable to the oil and gas industry, I believe that all parties are agreed on the need for a balanced energy policy. The disagreement at the heart of the motion seems to be on the issue of how renewables can help us to strike that balance. On the face of it, we all agree that support for renewables is a good thing, but the Tory motion contains a carefully worded expression of concern about the dash for wind farms and the reaction that it has provoked.

I recognise that, across Scotland, there have been some pretty badly planned and executed wind farm projects. We know of some where the turbines are too close to people's houses and some where they cause flicker, noise and disruption. We also have examples of cases in which the initial approval of small wind farms has been seen by some communities as a Trojan horse for the addition of more turbines. However, the trouble is that I get the impression that, instead of trying to address those genuine concerns, the Tories are riding on the back of that political reaction.

Rob Gibson: Mr Macintosh said that there were some badly planned wind farms. Can he name them?

Ken Macintosh: I refer Mr Gibson to the consultation on the Government's planning guidance. The point is that objections are coming in all the time. I make it clear that I am not against wind farms, but I recognise that some communities have genuine concerns about them, which we must address. I hope that the new guidance will do that.

On the other hand, the Government's language is sometimes highly gung-ho. The First Minister makes it sound as if the country is awash with renewables. We have plenty of potential, but so far the cost of developing offshore wind has been extremely prohibitive. We have very little offshore wind—of the 2.3GW of electricity that is generated

by offshore wind farms in the UK, only 180MW is generated in Scotland. I mention that not only as a gentle reminder that the wind does not stop blowing at the border, but to flag up the gap between what is planned or promised in the way of renewables and what is being achieved, which in Scotland is almost entirely reliant on onshore wind.

I am pleased to see the Government's new guidance. That is a positive sign. It is clear that we need a more strategic approach that balances our need and desire to continue to develop onshore wind with a mechanism that allows communities to express themselves. That is where community ownership has a clear role to play—and I mean community ownership, not simply community benefit. Even at £5,000 per megawatt, community benefit can sometimes have the feel of a trade-off.

Community ownership is a completely different approach. When a joint ownership approach is adopted, as is happening in Neilston, communities have far more control and are far less likely to feel exploited by commercial organisations. Such an approach fundamentally alters the perceived them-and-us relationship. From the point of view of the income that is generated, there is a world of difference. For example, the four turbines in Neilston are expected to generate for the local community an income of hundreds of thousands of pounds—or the same amount as is generated by the massive Whitelee wind farm.

Unwanted wind farms that are owned by remote multinationals that enjoy huge profits while we struggle to keep our houses warm is not a model that will sit comfortably with the Scottish people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Ken Macintosh: Community ownership offers us the chance to control and share in the benefits that stem from our natural resources.

I move amendment S4M-06407.3, to leave out from “, which is underpinned” to end and insert:

“and the potential of offshore renewables; recognises the importance of developing a balanced energy policy using a mixed supply of energy sources; supports the further expansion of the renewables sector, with greater focus on achieving Scotland's decarbonisation targets, and believes that the growth in renewables offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to develop community ownership, with all the benefits that brings to towns and villages across Scotland in terms of tackling fuel poverty, creating green jobs, addressing tensions in the planning process and generating substantial income streams for local communities.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As I said, if members take three minutes, we might just fit in everyone who wants to speak.

16:14

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): The Conservative motion pays lip service, or no service, to climate change, but the reason for the subsidy regimes and other matters that we are talking about is to tackle that issue. In “Reducing emissions in Scotland: 2013 Progress Report”, the UK Committee on Climate Change says that Scotland leads on installed capacity and that there is a “healthy pipeline” of projects. The report states that the Scottish Government provides

“longer-term certainty for industry by setting a 2030 decarbonisation target”,

but warns that

“uncertainty over post-2020 support at the UK level may feed back to current investment decisions.”

The certainty comes from the Scottish Government, and the uncertainty comes from the British position.

The question of how we tackle climate change is absolutely central to the argument. We have heard nothing, and we are likely to hear nothing, from the Conservatives about that. They present us with a motion that is a bit of a lucky bag—it contains a variety of sweets, but what flavours are they offering and whom are they aimed at? The Conservatives are aiming at a narrow base of people who do not want a balanced energy policy in Scotland.

I come from the area that is covered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and I have with me its advert from *The Times* from a couple of days ago. It points out that the area is home to more than 10 per cent of Europe’s wave energy resource, more than 25 per cent of Europe’s tidal energy resource and more than 25 per cent of Europe’s wind energy resource, as well as being home to more than 50 bio-energy related companies and more than 70 per cent of Scotland’s hydroelectric power, with investment of more than £80 million in ports and harbours since 2010.

That balance in the area that I represent is the an approach that will allow us to make progress. However, I am afraid that there is an awful lot of imbalance at present. First, on community schemes, which Mr Macintosh mentioned a moment ago, I have direct evidence that landlords such as the Applecross Trust and the Mount Stuart Trust on Bute have a policy of refusing tenants and crofters who seek to erect a wind turbine or other renewable scheme. Of course, landlords always seek their share of the profits if they give such schemes the go-ahead. Many small landholders can be severely disadvantaged in comparison with their owner-occupier neighbours.

I see nothing in the Tory motion about a shift in the balance towards crofters and tenant farmers.

We have the Scottish Natural Heritage map of wild land areas and a planning policy that recognises high nature value and so on. I can only interpret the grudging criticisms of that move, published alongside the careful planning rules, as another shot at the campaign by a tiny vocal minority who want to shun clean energy opportunities entirely. They want to hunt wind farms out of Scotland. They dismiss the climate change crisis while ignoring the blessings of Scotland’s uniquely favourable natural resource, which is a boon to our country, not a blight. In fact, the Conservatives’ lucky bag is full of acid drops and soor plooms.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I give a warning that some members might have to drop out of the debate.

16:18

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I am pleased that the Conservatives have chosen energy as a topic for one of their debates this afternoon, even if the Labour Party is unable to subscribe to the entire content of the motion.

Energy production has been and still is important to Dumfriesshire, which allows me to be parochial. Members who have known me over the past 14 years in the Parliament will know that I have consistently supported a balanced energy policy, even when that was not the policy of the Scottish Executive in the first two sessions of Parliament. Chapelcross nuclear power station was an important employer in Annandale for more than 50 years. I regret that, because of the Scottish Government’s policy, there was no opportunity to consider whether it could be replaced by a new and cleaner alternative.

As Murdo Fraser said, coal production is in troubled times. I am grateful to the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism for inviting me and others on to his opencast mining task force. I was even more pleased that all members of the task force believe that the preservation of employment in that industry over the medium and long term is a priority, and that they see the coal industry in Scotland as having a future.

I have to say a bit about wind farms, because the view of many of my constituents is that there will be too many of them in Dumfries and Galloway if all the proposals go through. I give the example of the development of 71 213MW turbines at Harestanes, which Dumfries and Galloway Council and most of the local community opposed but which the Scottish Government nevertheless consented to in late 2007. Even though that development is only under construction, Scottish

Power, which is, of course, a subsidiary of the large multinational company Iberdrola, is already proposing an extension and a further 19 turbines on an adjoining site.

I am perfectly happy to have some wind farms and I like seeing some of them as I drive up to Edinburgh, but an alarming number of potential sites is being proposed all the way up the A76 and the A701. My constituents feel that Dumfries and Galloway is doing its bit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her final minute.

Elaine Murray: Dumfries and Galloway Council approved an interim planning policy more than a year ago, but its decisions are too often overruled on appeal or when applications are referred to the Scottish ministers.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): Will the member take an intervention?

Elaine Murray: I do not have enough time.

Way back in 2004, the Enterprise and Culture Committee recommended in a report on renewable energy in Scotland that the Scottish Executive should develop a national strategic framework for wind farm applications. In October 2004, Richard Lochhead said that he was “almost begging” ministers to bring forward a framework; indeed, John Swinney urged the ministers of the time not to

“kick the issue into the long grass of 2006.”—[*Official Report*, 6 October 2004; c 11038.]

After six years of this Government—after all that time—on the eve of a debate that was prompted by the Conservative group, a planning framework and a Scottish planning policy came forward with some reference to wind farms. That offers some protection for scenic areas in some parts of Scotland, but it does not offer protection to any scenic parts of Dumfries and Galloway other than a part of Merrick. Indeed, there is concern in my area that the Government’s proposals may increase the likelihood of developers focusing on Dumfries and Galloway as they are excluded from developing elsewhere.

16:21

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I know that my time is short.

The one thing that disappoints me is that Murdo Fraser did not base his motion on the evidence in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee’s energy report. That may have given members something to support.

I come from a constituency in which oil and gas and renewables work hand in hand. My

constituency of Aberdeenshire West, where I am based, is next-door neighbour to Aberdeen, and the north-east corner of Scotland is the hub for energy. The sector works to establish a mixed energy programme for the future, and it provides skills, jobs and opportunities for the future.

I was interested in the reference in Murdo Fraser’s motion to the tax incentives for the oil and gas industry. Of course those exist, but they do so because, in 2011, George Osborne introduced a tax hike on the oil and gas industry but, after pressure from Malcolm Webb, Sir Ian Wood and others in the industry, he felt that he had to make a U-turn. That was because he got it absolutely wrong. The industry suffered from that and did not take it lying down.

At the end of the day, the industry is looking for confidence, and that is what we are looking for from the UK Government with electricity market reform. The Government needs to decide where it is going with EMR. The industry is looking for confidence, and our young people in Scotland are looking for confidence in the industry.

I remember when young people were basically told, “Don’t go into oil and gas—it doesn’t have a future.” It had a future and it has a future; indeed, it has a long future. Renewables also have a long future. We have more than 11,000 people currently working in the renewables sector, and it has been projected that the figure will be 28,000 by 2020. There are opportunities for our young people for the future.

The motion does not address the carbon issue at all, and it does not consider climate change or take into account that we need to address it in a responsible manner. The way in which we can move forward involves renewables. There is a fantastic opportunity for our young people and Scotland to develop offshore wind and tidal power. Let us take that opportunity and have an energy mix that will keep the lights on—even for Murdo Fraser.

16:24

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): As a number of members have already said, the economy of the north-east of Scotland is currently buoyant. That rides on the back of a North Sea oil and gas industry that has led the way both at home and across the world. However, it sometimes worries me that, if North Sea oil was discovered now, there might be people—even members—who would suggest that we should simply leave it where it is and not exploit it.

The Scottish National Party Government and the SNP as a whole have shown themselves time and again to be only too willing to take a luddite attitude to new ideas and new technologies. The

irrational fear of what they do not understand has been manifest with regard to sectors of the biotechnology industry, and of course it will soon lead to the death knell of Scotland's once buoyant nuclear energy sector.

The opportunity that comes our way now is that of unconventional gas extraction. The opportunities of shale gas and coal-bed methane extraction have a chance of bringing success and wealth and of giving the technology and the companies that have shown the way in the north-east of Scotland and in the North Sea the opportunity to come to other parts of Scotland and bring wealth and know-how with them. The opportunity exists for us to take advantage of those new gas sources to underpin the new thermal capacity that John Swinney has spoken about during this debate.

Of course, we have to balance the fear and the facts. What are the facts on unconventional gas extraction? The experience in the United States is that it can lower the cost of energy and can fuel growth. That kind of affordability and economic growth is vital in Scotland, particularly in the areas where the new industry could be developed. Of course, there is a downside. There is apparently a fear of earthquakes. However, the limited experience of those that have happened in the United Kingdom shows that they may have shaken Blackpool tower a little, but those of us who live in areas of Scotland that are near our notorious fault lines are used to the fact that the ground will shake occasionally, which does not seem to do any harm.

More appropriate for this discussion is to raise the subject of those who are concerned about pollution. I have to point to the North Sea oil and gas industry, whose record on the environment is second to none. It produces oil and gas in deep water, bringing up oil that is often substantially water and requires to be separated on site, and discharging the water back into the sea. We have an environmental record that is second to none, and we can bring that to unconventional gas extraction.

Given this new opportunity for growth, I ask the cabinet secretary to take the opportunity to show some courage, leadership and vision, and take this forward—do it for Scotland!

16:27

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): How do I follow that? Believe it or not, what follows is the line that I was going to start with even before that contribution.

There is a scepticism, a paranoia and a crazed zeal in many of the opponents of renewable energy—I think that we have just seen that

demonstrated—particularly when it comes to the supposed costs, which are referenced in the motion.

We had evidence from the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets just in January in “Household Bills Explained” that puts forward two important figures. One is £27, which is the annual sum that goes from a household bill to the green schemes of the renewables obligation certificate and the feed-in tariff—ROC and FIT. The other figure is £52. The schemes that are linked to the two sums are often put together as environmental schemes, but they approach from the matter from two fundamentally different angles. The £52 is for boosting energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty, thereby providing affordability.

I hope that no one in the chamber would begrudge that fuel poverty funding, not least because the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has heard repeated calls for more of it, for more surety and, indeed, for a complete absence of the convener's trademark raised hand of dissent—any comparison to Tommy Sheridan is not intended.

We should also remember the advice from the UK Committee on Climate Change, which is that green policies will lead by 2020 to bills that are £500 lower than would be the case if we depended solely on gas. Of course, we could go even lower by doing nothing at all, but doing nothing is not an option—or at least it is only an option for those who deny that anything at all is happening. The motion commits to decarbonisation, so I guess that that category does not include the Tories. If they believe that decarbonisation is necessary and their advisers say that green policies are cheaper in that context, I simply cannot understand how they can come to any doubt about affordability.

Scotland has, by any reasonable definition, a balanced energy policy. For example, the 2020 renewables route map highlights offshore wind, wave and tidal, and growth in hydro and biomass as key parts of achieving our 100 per cent target. If that is not a balanced energy policy, I wonder what is. Is it nuclear, with all its costs to the taxpayer? The UK Parliament's Public Accounts Committee identified costs of £67.5 billion in relation to Sellafield, and £12 billion to £14 billion will go to Hinkley Point, according to the nuclear industrial strategy document.

Of course, there is the interesting sight of the UK Government and EDF Energy in negotiations about just how much public subsidy is needed. It is rather odd to see a Tory Government negotiating with a nuclear energy company that is owned primarily by the French Government and the French taxpayer, about how much British tax will go to the French—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. The member must close now.

Marco Biagi: That is a testament to our close relations in the European Union on energy throughout Europe. I support the Government amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. The final three speakers must be sharp with their three minutes.

16:30

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): It is right that we acknowledge the strength of Scotland's energy sector, the potential of renewable energy sources in Scotland and the challenges that are associated with renewable energy.

The renewable energy sector's potential is well documented, as is the Government's commitment to meeting the equivalent of 100 per cent of electricity demand from renewable sources. The challenge is how we tap into resources and ensure that they are best utilised. The Government's targets on decarbonisation of the economy contribute to the challenge.

The challenge for the renewables industry and the Government is how to match supply with demand for electricity while using an intermittent source. Will the Government simply export surplus electricity at times of high supply and import Russian gas or electricity from French nuclear reactors when the supply falls, or will there be investment in a much more independent solution to the problem?

Investment in the right electricity storage technology could equip Scotland much better to manage the unpredictable peaks and troughs in the renewable electricity supply and to match supply to the far more predictable peaks and troughs in electricity demand.

One such technology is pump storage, and there is a proposal for an £800 million project at the west end of the great glen. It would be interesting to hear from the minister what stage discussions on the project with SSE have reached, particularly now that the Highland Council has decided not to object to the proposal. Perhaps the minister will also say whether the Scottish Government is focusing on other storage technologies.

There is a growing perception that the renewable energy agenda benefits only the big energy companies and wealthy landowners and that local people suffer the consequences. Communities often see little or no benefit from large-scale wind developments, for example. People are also becoming more and more

concerned—many people say that this is unfair—that the renewables agenda is pushing up their electricity bills. One in three people is affected by fuel poverty, so an issue that is already massive will get worse as earnings remain static and energy prices continue to rise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you could begin to conclude.

Mark Griffin: This has been a short but good debate. I look forward to hearing from the minister how we can overcome the challenges that come with the tremendous potential of Scotland's energy sector, in particular renewable energy, in a way that benefits the communities that we represent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Three members still want to speak. If members take two and a half minutes, I will be able to call everyone—otherwise I can call only two members.

16:34

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): If we are to place Scotland's energy future in context, we must look at the world energy situation overall. World energy consumption is set to rise sharply over the coming years. The World Energy Council has said that

"Even with improvements in energy efficiency, we expect global energy demand to double by 2050",

and the International Energy Agency suggests that demand might have doubled by as soon as 2035.

It is against that background that we can say that Scotland's oil reserves of 24 billion barrels can comfortably be valued at £1.5 trillion, at least, and that the assumption of a price of \$113 a barrel might be very conservative.

It is against that background that we can say that Scotland's renewables opportunity, which could ultimately see us generating as much as 10 times our own energy needs, is a hugely valuable resource, and that Scotland's economic and energy future will be clean, green and very bright.

The most significant risk that we face to achieving that potential is presented by the London Government. We have seen that with the oil and gas industry and George Osborne's tax grab in the 2011 budget. That industry's prospects only recovered after Mr Osborne saw the error of his ways. We are seeing the same thing with the prevarication over the UK Energy Bill, which is causing huge uncertainty. As a result of that, we are witnessing a hiatus in renewable energy investment in a situation that parallels that experienced by the oil and gas sector two years ago. It seems that Mr Osborne has a compulsion to squeeze the life out of Scotland's golden geese—the sooner that we can prise his greedy fingers from around their necks, the better.

I am deeply concerned—as, I am sure, Mr McArthur is—that Mr Osborne will also kill off the fledgling wave and tidal industry in a failure to provide interconnectors to our islands soon enough, and in failing to end the punitive island transmission charging regime.

I travel the length and breadth of the Highlands and Islands over a large proportion of Scotland's land mass, and I have seen little evidence of poorly sited wind farms. Indeed, across much of the Highlands and Islands, we barely see them at all. That is a great pity because they could bring much-needed jobs and income to communities that would otherwise die.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr MacKenzie, is it possible for you to conclude?

Mike MacKenzie: I will conclude on a positive point by noting that we have recently achieved 40 per cent of our community energy targets of 500MW.

16:36

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I agree with the title of Murdo Fraser's debate but precious little else. Marco Biagi was absolutely right to debunk Mr Fraser's assertions about the impact of renewables on household bills. Although a free-for-all in onshore wind is neither necessary nor desirable, we cannot simply wish away onshore wind or pretend that we can leapfrog technologies. That would derail our efforts to meet our emissions reduction targets and undermine investor confidence in the sector as a whole.

It is a question of achieving an appropriate mix that obviously involves the oil and gas sector. We can have a debate about what that can or should be in the future, but it will undoubtedly make a significant contribution. It is a mix that has already seen the extension of the lifespan of existing nuclear plants and which involves a mix of renewable technologies, including CCS. I am delighted that we have had confirmation that Peterhead is the front runner in the CCS commercialisation funding process.

On that mix of renewables, I have a particular interest in wave and tidal technology because Orkney is at the heart of Scotland's efforts to lead the way. Good progress has been made in the islands but things need to step up a gear. Unfortunately, delays in grid and related infrastructure and high transmission charges are holding back progress and affecting confidence. I commend Fergus Ewing for his efforts in collaborating with Ed Davey and local islands councils in seeking a resolution to that, and I hope that the consultants' report to the governmental working group can provide a key to unlocking the impasse.

We are not just talking about a mix of renewables technologies. We also need a mix of various sizes of renewables development and models of ownership, as Ken Macintosh highlighted. That can empower local communities and offer opportunities for tackling the scourge of fuel poverty in more innovative and effective ways.

I will conclude by talking about the issue of uncertainty that was highlighted by Mr Swinney and others. I certainly accept that the EMR and other changes that are taking place are difficult for the whole energy sector. Given the significance of those reforms, it is essential that we get them right, but it is also important that delays in coming to final decisions are minimised.

However, if Mr Swinney is asking us to accept that uncertainty is a bad thing—and it is—then he must accept that his plans to break up the UK are scarcely an answer to the maiden's prayer. If EMR is the latest part of the UK state that he insists will be left untouched by the SNP's separatist proposals, he must be mightily relieved that the process of reform is in the hands of my Liberal Democrat colleague, Ed Davey, and not Mr Fraser's colleagues, who I suspect would be a good deal less sympathetic to his renewables ambitions.

With those caveats and apologies for all the issues that I ignored because of the time constraints, I confirm that Scottish Liberal Democrats will support the Government and Labour amendments to the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Finally, Alison Johnstone, whom I can give only a very strict two minutes.

16:40

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Lord Stern told us six and a half years ago that it is much cheaper to deal with climate change than with its consequences. Last month, the carbon tracker initiative and the Grantham institute, of which he is chair, calculated that there are more fossil fuels held in reserve around the world than we can afford to burn. Between 60 and 80 per cent of the coal, oil and gas reserves of public listed companies must be left in the ground if the world is to have a chance of not warming by more than 2°C.

A balanced energy policy needs to recognise the difficult fact that we cannot burn all the fossil fuels we have and we need to plan a rapid transition away from fossil fuels. It does not make the oil in the North Sea redundant; we will continue to need oil to produce chemicals and for a whole host of other industrial purposes. In fact, using our irreplaceable fossil fuels by burning them starts to seem extremely inefficient when

there are safer renewable alternatives available for power. Balanced energy supply is a nice phrase, but it is actually security of supply, affordability and environmental impact, including decarbonisation, that should remain the core outcomes that we seek in any energy policy, not just a balance of sources for balance's sake.

The Green amendment was not selected for debate, but it can be read in the *Business Bulletin*. We identify the cost of energy for households and business to be of key concern and the need for Scottish and UK Governments to place demand reduction at the top of the agenda for energy policy as the clearest way to reduce energy bills and environmental impact.

I am happy to support the Labour amendment, which supports community ownership of renewables. Publicly owned renewables are important, too. The DECC attitudes survey that was published yesterday shows that support for renewables in the UK is at an all-time high: 82 per cent of people say that they support the use of renewable energy sources. Evidence heard by the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee suggests that non-conventional gas extraction is not the fix that Alex Johnstone would have us believe. Let us not be distracted. Let us focus on the proven and real benefits of renewable energy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise for the tight time.

16:42

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

This has been a good debate, albeit a short one. We must underpin our energy policy with two principles. One is to have a balanced energy strategy that meets our energy needs and the other must be to cut greenhouse gases. It must be a priority of ours to address climate change. We see poverty and famine in developing countries caused by climate change. We also see the differences to our own climate, with snowstorms in April and floods and storms where we would not have expected them. Our landscape will change beyond all recognition if those changes keep occurring. We need to stop them now. We must reinforce our commitment to renewable energy and ensure that our energy policy leads on cutting carbon emissions and thereby stopping climate change.

The Labour amendment focuses on community ownership because we have a real opportunity to build communities by allowing them to own renewable resources rather than just attracting community funding from them. Once communities are in control of renewable energy resources in their areas, they can decide how those are built and use them to build their local economy. One

idea is that communities could use them to tackle fuel poverty. If they are generating their own electricity, they can sell it more cheaply to the surrounding community and make the inroads into fuel poverty that we are unable to make at the moment. In a way, I am disappointed that the Government amendment has not renewed a commitment to community ownership. I would very much hope that the Government would re-examine the issue and ensure that it is given priority. Should we miss this opportunity, it will not come again and all our renewable energy will be in the hands of big business.

I turn to onshore wind energy generation because I think that it is really what this debate is about. Onshore wind generation is an established technology and the most cost-effective renewables technology that we have. We should remember that wind farms can be taken down as well as built, but climate change cannot be reversed. The Government has published a document protecting our scenic areas. Planning policy may give those scenic areas protection from having wind farms built on them, but they will be changed beyond all recognition by climate change.

However, communities have genuine concerns about the siting of wind farms. Elaine Murray talked about having a strategic policy, and that is missing, even though information about protection for some of our wilder areas was published yesterday. We need to address community concerns that are often drowned out by the lobby that just does not want onshore wind farms anywhere at any cost. We must consider ways of doing that.

We must also think about how we store the energy that is provided by onshore wind farms—Mark Griffin talked about pump storage in that regard. We need to do a lot more to cut the peaks and troughs of renewable power generation, because we do not have battery technology that is as advanced as we would like it to be.

We need a balanced energy mix that focuses on decarbonising our power generation. That means that we need to develop new technologies and move away from traditional generation. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to involve our communities and provide them with economic benefits that will help them well into the future. I ask that the Scottish Government consider that.

16:46

John Swinney: I will begin by responding to a specific point that Mr Griffin made about the SSE hydraulic pump storage project in the great glen. That is currently a live planning application under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, which will be determined by Scottish ministers. I hope that Mr

Griffin will forgive me for not saying any more on that, but we are unable to comment on live planning applications.

I am not quite sure whether Dr Murray accused the Scottish Government of publishing the national planning framework and the Scottish planning policy specifically in advance of this debate. I am sure that, from her ministerial experience, Dr Murray realises that Governments do not produce documents of this intensity and magnitude with four days' notice of a Conservative Party debate. A listening Government, such as we are at all times, puts a considerable amount of thought into such documents.

A rather unfortunate juxtaposition of comments occurred in the first sentence of Mr Biagi's speech, when he started talking about "crazed zeal" shortly after Alex Johnstone had given a good demonstration of what crazed zeal looks like. I hope that that has not failed the test of courtesy towards other members of the Parliament, but I think that Mr Johnstone managed to exceed even his own capacity for hyperbole. I also thought that the way in which he was manoeuvring around might create an earthquake in the parliamentary chamber, but we will leave that until he undertakes the innovative means of energy generation that he was talking about.

As I conclude the debate on the Government's behalf, I will address a couple of key points that were raised. On the point about the contribution of renewables to household bills, I simply say that material that was published by the UK's Department of Energy and Climate Change forecast that renewable energy, energy efficiency and climate change policies will result in an average household energy bill being £166 less by 2020 than it would be if we continued to rely on fossil fuels. That is the justification for the steps that we are taking. The point that Mr Gibson made was an important one in that respect.

There has been a great deal of focus on the nuclear sector. That was at the heart of Mr Fraser's contribution. I will share with Parliament a couple of points concerning the nuclear industry. On 3 December, EDF in France published an update on the construction costs at Flamanville, which is the site of the first new nuclear power station to be built in France for 15 years. The cost has increased from €3.3 billion to €8.5 billion. That is even worse than the cost increases on the Edinburgh tram project, which is saying something. Further, other investors are refusing to take part in nuclear investments. After investing £1 billion in developing projects, Centrica said that

"uncertainty about overall project costs and the construction schedule"

had led it to withdraw from the UK's nuclear rebuilding programme. Before Mr Fraser takes us on a dash to nuclear, we must bear in mind the significant obstacles that he must overcome in sustaining that argument.

Murdo Fraser: Mr Swinney will be aware that, as I said earlier, his own officials told the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee that the lifetime cost of new nuclear, including decommissioning, is no more than the lifetime cost of offshore wind. The advantage of nuclear is that it provides base-load and a degree of efficiency and certainty that does not come with renewables. Surely, if we want low-carbon power, nuclear is a better bet.

John Swinney: There is not much certainty in a cost that goes from €3.3 billion to €8.5 billion at a time when offshore wind costs are reducing, which is a significant advantage to the development of the offshore renewables sector.

We have also talked about oil and gas. One of the reasons why we are seeing such welcome growth in the oil and gas sector in Scotland today is that the UK Government has realised the folly of the tax grab that it made on the sector as part of its budget proposals. The delivery of a strong and stable climate for investment is essential.

That brings me to the point on renewables and the constitutional debate that Mr McArthur raised in his speech. The fact that the UK has now signed an agreement with the Republic of Ireland to obtain access to renewable energy resources in Ireland demonstrates the necessity of cross-border co-operation between countries such as Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the UK to satisfy the renewables targets that are obligatory on the rest of the UK.

That is why we see such investment in the Scottish renewables sector, driven by the policy certainty that this Government has offered and by this Government's determination to establish a leading position in the renewable energy sector in the world. That is why Mr McArthur's constituency is an epicentre for wave and tidal developments. We have demonstrated the leadership that is necessary to take the sector forward.

16:52

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members that I have an interest in the debate, as my son is a project manager who builds wind farms in Aberdeenshire—indeed, in Dennis Robertson's and Maureen Watt's constituencies.

I am pleased to close this wide-ranging debate entitled "Scotland needs a balanced energy policy". It has mainly been a constructive debate. It

has been almost consensual at times. It has been adversarial at other times and interspersed with references to soor plooms—members can decide for themselves who that may refer to.

I thank Elaine Murray in particular for a thoughtful and balanced speech. I also say to Rhoda Grant, Alison Johnstone and Ken Macintosh that we are comfortable with community ownership and welcome the points that they made.

In particular, I thank Mark Griffin—as Rhoda Grant did—for a well-researched and considered speech. He raised the necessity for electricity storage, which has been highlighted by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, as well as the need to reduce our dependency on gas imported from Russia.

The first part of our motion

“welcomes the strength of Scotland’s energy sector”

and

“the vibrancy of the oil and gas industry, which is underpinned by a favourable UK tax regime”.

Despite the fact that the Government and the Labour Party amendments both delete

“which is underpinned by a favourable UK tax regime”,

it was noticeable—I listened carefully—that neither party informed the Parliament what tax regime it would apply to the North Sea oil and gas sector, what changes it would make or what part of the tax regime it would reject and why. They could have graciously acknowledged the current tax regime, particularly given the extent of their criticisms in the past.

Ken Macintosh: The question that I was trying to ask was simply whether the Government made the decision to introduce that favourable regime out of choice or whether it was forced to introduce it after the outcry and outrage that followed the previous year’s tax increases.

Murdo Fraser: Given what Gordon Brown did—what a cheek!

Mary Scanlon: One of my colleagues refers to what Gordon Brown did, but we are looking forward, rather than back. I would have thought that Ken Macintosh would welcome the fiscal forum that was set up between the Treasury and the oil industry. As a regular attendee at the cross-party group on oil and gas, I know that the industry has welcomed the new fiscal forum on many occasions.

It is worth putting on record again the fact that oil is a volatile commodity, which would provide up to 20 per cent of revenue in a separate Scotland but less than 2 per cent of United Kingdom revenue. For that reason, oil is central to debates

in this Parliament. In 2011, almost 52 million tonnes of crude oil was extracted from the North Sea, compared with 1999, when 137 million tonnes was produced. In 2011, oil extraction was at its lowest level since 1978. Since the SNP came to power, the production of crude oil has fallen by one third.

As Murdo Fraser said in his opening speech, there is no doubt that the vibrancy and confidence of investment in the sector are as a result of the closer working and understanding between the industry and the Treasury. The brownfield and small-field allowances, along with other reliefs, are now targeted to respond to the needs of the industry and to ensure optimum extraction. The price of oil was \$18 a barrel in 2002 and \$141 a barrel in 2008. Last year alone, it fluctuated between \$91 and \$126 a barrel. For all those reasons, it is difficult to predict with any certainty the revenues from this volatile commodity, which depend on production, price, sterling-dollar exchange rates, capital and operating expenditure and tax rules and rates.

The second part of the motion relates to the rising cost of energy. I commend Ofgem’s approach in fining SSE £10 million for prolonged and extensive misselling at every stage of the process and for misleading customers into believing that they could save money. I hope that we all agree that that is unacceptable practice, which justified that significant fine. Unfortunately, however, that has meant a loss of reputation for one of Scotland’s leading companies.

Ofgem is now introducing a simpler, clearer and fairer energy market by reducing the confusing array of tariffs so that consumers are put on their supplier’s lowest variable rate. Even more measures are being introduced as a result of the UK Energy Bill. I am sure that everyone would agree with that.

Demand reduction is critical, as was highlighted in the Royal Society of Edinburgh briefing paper. I was pleased to note that Scottish Enterprise is now helping firms to reduce overhead costs by reducing energy—a sensible approach to help businesses compete and reduce overheads.

The volume of onshore wind farms is undoubtedly causing concern, of which Fergus Ewing is fully aware. We have long said that wind turbines are not compatible with scenic areas, and we welcome the fact that the Government and its highly competent Minister for Local Government and Planning have reached that conclusion, with the protection that has been outlined this week. We have waited a long time for Derek Mackay but, now that he is here, he is doing the job that the Parliament is looking for.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The member is now in her last minute, Mr Stevenson.

Mary Scanlon: Finally, I will use a local example from Moray. A section 36 application for Brown Muir wind farm received more than 2,000 objections, and the council unanimously agreed to object to it. Local people have called for the company to withdraw the application, given the level of opposition and the unanimous vote in the council, as well as the fact that it is against local policy.

The Presiding Officer: I ask you to start winding up.

Mary Scanlon: The matter continues to be pursued, despite the cost to the council and so on.

We have set out a paper on a balanced energy policy that is based on the principles of affordability, security of supply, increasing decarbonisation and drawing energy from a mix of sources, set against a background that provides a favourable and stable tax regime, which I trust will be supported by all members.

Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-05608, in the name of John Swinney, on the financial resolution for the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill, agrees to—

(a) any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3(b) of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any charge or payment in relation to which Rule 9.12.4 of the Standing Orders applies arising in consequence of the Act.—[*John Swinney.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06423, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 2 May 2013—

delete

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate:
 Redesigning the Community Justice
 System

and insert

2.30 pm Motion of Condolence

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
 Redesigning the Community Justice
 System—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06426, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 7 May 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Public Petitions Committee Debate:
 PE1441 Flood Insurance

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 8 May 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Health and Wellbeing

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 9 May 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Young
 People, Supporting Scotland's Economy
 Today and Tomorrow

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 14 May 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 May 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Culture and External Affairs;
 Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Aquaculture and
 Fisheries (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 May 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06420, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for consideration of the Landfill Tax (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the

Landfill Tax (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 1 November 2013.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06422, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for consideration of the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 11 October 2013.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06425, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for consideration of the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill at stage 2.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 14 June 2013.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on energy policy, if the amendment in the name of Fergus Ewing is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Ken Macintosh will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-06405.2, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06405, in the name of Gavin Brown, on funding of the voluntary sector, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S4M-06405.1, in the name of Ken Macintosh, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06405, in the name of Gavin Brown, on funding of the voluntary sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 76, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-06405, in the name of Gavin Brown, on funding of the voluntary sector, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the outstanding contribution made across Scotland by the third sector; recognises the importance of multi-year funding to the sector in order to allow it to maximise its contribution; notes the *Joint Statement on the Relationship at Local Level between Government and the Third Sector*, which states that “as a general rule funders will aim to take a three-year approach to both grant and contract funding”; is concerned by reports that this three-year approach does not happen as widely as it could; calls on local authorities, NHS boards and the wider public sector to take a three-year approach as a general rule, and further calls on the Scottish Government to encourage the application of the joint statement on the ground and to review how widely the three-year approach currently happens in practice in partnership with local authorities, COSLA, the wider public sector and the third sector itself.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-06407.4, in the name of Fergus Ewing, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06407, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on Scotland needs a balanced energy policy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 44, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Ken Macintosh therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S4M-06407, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on Scotland needs a balanced energy policy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 96, Against 13, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the strength of Scotland's energy sector; acknowledges the vibrancy of the oil and gas industry and the estimated 24 billion barrels of reserves that remain in the North Sea; recognises the potential of offshore renewables and the continued role of onshore wind in Scotland; further welcomes proposals set out in the draft Scottish Planning Policy consultation to balance meeting Scotland's renewables targets while ensuring protection of core wild land and scenic areas; further welcomes the *Main Issues Report and Draft Framework* for the National Planning Framework 3, which focuses on the transition to a low-carbon economy and proposes a number of national developments including thermal generation with carbon capture and storage; notes the recent Pinsent Masons' report, *Scotland's Place in the Renewable Energy World*, which recognises Scotland as the place to invest in renewables in the UK, but highlights the concerns that the speed of progress on UK Government energy policy has caused delay in investment decisions.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-05608, in the name of John Swinney, on approval of the financial resolution for the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill, agrees to—

(a) any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3(b) of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any charge or payment in relation to which Rule 9.12.4 of the Standing Orders applies arising in consequence of the Act.

Multiple Sclerosis Week 2013

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-05976, in the name of George Adam, on multiple sclerosis week 2013. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes MS Week 2013, which takes place from 29 April until 5 May, and understands that, during the week, the results of the My MS, My Needs survey conducted in 2012 will be revealed, detailing information about people with MS and this information will produce an insight into the condition and the lives of the estimated 10,500 people in Scotland and 100,000 throughout the UK who have personal experience of MS.

17:08

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Members will be aware of my involvement with the Multiple Sclerosis Society; I am a member of the Paisley and district branch. They will also be aware that my wife Stacey has MS, and I welcome everyone to what is effectively her debate. If I think for one minute that the debate has anything to do with me, I am surely kidding myself on, because, like a lot of people, I did not know much about multiple sclerosis until I knew Stacey and we were married. There are quite a lot of things about the condition that a lot of people do not know.

Stacey is here today with her mum and dad. Incidentally, her dad is 75 years old today—[*Applause.*] Part of his birthday present was to work for me as a volunteer in the office for the past couple of days, and he is currently the oldest intern in the Parliament.

Stacey's family is one of many who are dealing with this indiscriminate disease. Stacey was diagnosed at 16 years old. I said earlier that people can misunderstand MS, and Stacey's family is a perfect example of that. Tom, Stacey's dad, just told me this story last night. Stacey's mum, Rosemary, was a nurse—a health professional—when she was working and she understood what MS was. When Tom went to see the consultant, Rosemary asked him to ask specifically about multiple sclerosis. He came back that night and said, "Yes, Rosemary, you're correct. It's multiple sclerosis." Tom had no idea what MS entailed or what it was—he just gave Rosemary the message. Rosemary, who is a very strong woman, broke into tears and started hugging Tom. From then on, Tom knew exactly what they had ahead of them.

Lots of people misunderstand MS, which can be very difficult for people with the disease. There are various versions of it: benign, relapsing and remitting, secondary progressive and progressive.

Stacey has gone from having relapsing and remitting MS to secondary progressive.

MS makes a difference to people's lives, and their families. Most people who are diagnosed with MS are between the ages of 20 and 40, at the peak of their life and a time when they are looking to the future, thinking about their careers and thinking about family. Being diagnosed with such a devastating, complex condition can really change the course of someone's life and what they want to do. However, I have always found that the people with MS whom I have met do not mope and say, "Woe is me," or complain about their situation. They all seem to be very positive. They say, "Yes, I have this incurable condition, but I will grab life and make the most of it."

When I first met Stacey, one of the reasons why I was attracted to her was her sheer lust for life—members thought that I was going to say "for me" there, did they not? [*Laughter.*] Her sheer lust for life was the main reason that I found her so attractive; she lived every day as if it were her last.

MS is an incurable condition. It is the result of damage to the myelin—the protective sheath that surrounds the nerve fibres of the central nervous system—which interferes with messages between the brain and the body.

There are a couple of interesting women's Facebook groups—more women than men get MS—with names almost about those women's sisterhood. I will not mention them here, because that would probably not be polite in this company, but members should check them out at a later date.

The symptoms of MS can include intense pain, problems with mobility and co-ordination, severe depression, deadening fatigue, incontinence and loss of vision. No two people have the same type of MS; every person can have different symptoms.

The statistics are difficult for anyone to comprehend. Scotland is among the countries with the highest prevalence of MS in the world. An estimated 10,500 people with MS live in Scotland, but MS does not just affect the individual. As I have mentioned, it affects their family, friends and colleagues, so the actual figure of people affected by MS in Scotland is more than 63,000—only 10,000 fewer than the population of the great historic town of Paisley.

Members: Oh!

George Adam: It is quite a lot of people.

There is some dark humour around MS and there are some funny stories about how people deal with it. People can have a positive outlook. Not long after Stacey was diagnosed, before the family built their extension, Stacey and her mum fell down the stairs and landed on top of each

other. Instead of lying there in a heap, crying, they just looked at each other and started laughing, because it was such a bizarre situation for the two of them to be in.

Stacey once left for high school for a higher exam, wearing a patch on her eye because she had double vision, and wanting to be independent and do it on her own. Her mum watched from the highest point in the house to try to see her get to school and be sure that she was okay, while remembering that she was a young, independent woman who wanted to live her own life.

Two weeks after we got married, Stacey turned round to me and said, “George, I’ve got double vision. I’m seeing two of you.” How lucky can a girl get? During the first 10 years of our marriage, because of Stacey’s short-term memory loss, I won every argument. I said, “I told you that. That’s what I said.” These are some of the things that happen. In Liam McArthur’s MS debate, I mentioned a rather personal way in which the condition affects Stacey. I think that I got away with it, although other people may say otherwise. I will not go down that route now.

In October, the MS Society conducted the “My MS, My Needs” survey, which went out to 10,000 members throughout the United Kingdom. Some of the figures that were reported from that survey were interesting. Fifty-three per cent of respondents had been offered the opportunity to attend a self-management course in Scotland—that is one of the questions on which we scored highest. However, a quarter of people said that they could not see their neurologist when they needed to, only 9 per cent of people who wanted to be involved in clinical trials had been given that opportunity and only 36 per cent were eligible to take medicines that alter the course of MS.

Those are the facts and figures, but below them are the kind of stories that I have been talking about, involving real people’s real lives and real issues. We must look at the challenges that will come up in the next couple of years. Welfare reform will have a massive effect on people with MS because people do not understand that the symptoms are different for everyone and because there is a lack of understanding and belief regarding the condition and a lack of expertise in its assessment. There is also the fluctuation of multiple sclerosis in individuals. We are talking about a disease that can change not just from week to week or from month to month, but from hour to hour. That is one of the big things about MS.

Positive work is going on out there. Revive MS Support, which is based in Maryhill, in Glasgow, is doing some great outreach work in Paisley, Cathcart, Hamilton and Douglas. I absolutely love the work that it does because it works with

individuals, talking to them about how they are dealing with their MS. A lot of the time, some tea and sympathy make a big difference to people who are dealing with the condition on an on-going basis.

I will stop at this point, Presiding Officer. You have been more than kind with the time that you have given me.

We must remember the real families behind the statistics—real people dealing with real issues. Working with the public sector, charitable organisations and health professionals, we can start to make things better for those who are dealing with the challenges of multiple sclerosis.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are quite tight for time. If members could restrict themselves to four minutes, that would be very helpful.

17:17

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate George Adam on introducing a very important debate in an informative and humorous way. It is important that people should learn more about the condition. An earlier report by the MS Society, “Fighting Back: Ordinary people battling the everyday effects of MS” highlighted that a lot of the problems that people with MS have spring from the attitude of others, which is often based on a lack of knowledge. It is important that we find out more.

Today’s report, “A lottery of treatment and care—MS services across Scotland and the UK”, which George Adam highlighted, tells us about some disparities in the level of service. We recognise that it is a balanced report that contains some good news—for example, in what it says about self-management, which George Adam emphasised. The levels of self-management in Scotland are much higher than in England, and credit should be given to the Scottish Government for investing resources in that and ensuring that more than half of people with MS have the opportunity to be on a self-management course. However, it would be remiss of us not to highlight some of the more disturbing figures in the report.

The general issue that the report raises is the perennial tension between local decision making and national standards, which gives rise to what is often called postcode care. Again, however, we should give credit to the Scottish Government for having national neurological standards—that was a really important development in the previous session of Parliament. Some of those standards are generic, but some—three of them, I think—are specifically about MS. Not only do we have the standards, but a peer-reviewed report came out last year. I cannot pretend to have read it all, but I looked at the Lothian report. Although some of the

generic standards were not met, the specific MS standard on access to a multidisciplinary team was met. I was pleased about that, although the people on the MS stall outside said that that did not always reflect the experience of individuals with MS. George Adam cited the fact that only 75 per cent of respondents said that they were able to see a neurologist when they needed one. We must recognise that there is more to be done on access to the multidisciplinary team, which is vital.

I hope that the minister will tell us when he sums up what the follow-up is to the neurological standards. I believe that a neurological advisory group is overseeing the implementation of those standards, but I am not entirely clear about its role or powers. Having standards is only the first part of the process, and ensuring that there is progress in implementing them is clearly the necessary follow-up.

I would be particularly interested to hear from the minister about access to drugs. That issue is very much featured in the report, and George Adam referred to the worrying figure that only 36 per cent of people have access to the drugs that might benefit them. That is a matter of concern. I certainly remember from my days as health minister that in 2002 a risk-sharing scheme was set up for beta interferon in particular, which was supposed to improve access to that range of drugs for MS. I have lost track of what has happened to that over the past 11 years but, as part of the minister's summing up, I would be interested to hear about drugs in general and about what happened to that scheme.

As I indicated, the report says that we are good on self-management. There are also loads of examples within and outwith the NHS of excellent services. On Friday, I will visit the MS Therapy Centre based in Leith, which has outstanding person-centred holistic care for people with MS, and provides services such as oxygen therapy, neuro physiotherapy, reflexology, aromatherapy and massage.

As I am nearly out of time, I will close by quoting from today's report:

"The Clinical Standards and upcoming changes to health and social care put Scotland in pole position to improve services for people with MS."

While recognising that there is still a lot to do, I think that there are grounds for optimism and that we can expect further progress.

17:21

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate George Adam on securing this debate to highlight MS week and some of the great work that is done by the MS Society, which

is a UK charity, across the country in dealing with that terrible disease.

I have no great knowledge of MS—I am not an activist like George who campaigns for MS—but, like many families in Scotland, I have a close family member who suffers from MS. Therefore, my main reason for speaking is to show solidarity with other families and carers who deal day in, day out with the sometimes devastating effects of multiple sclerosis.

Multiple sclerosis is a complex disease, as George Adam has highlighted. What we know is that it is the most common disabling neurological disease among young adults. It affects nearly 100,000 people in the UK. MS is most often diagnosed in people between the ages of 20 and 40 so, at the age of 16, Stacey was diagnosed even younger than is the norm.

Research suggests that a combination of genetic and environmental factors may play a role in the development of MS, which is why it is such a complex disease that involves not only biomedical science research but genetic research. There are many contributing factors, so we simply do not know what may cause MS, which makes the disease difficult to treat. As George Adam has also mentioned, every single patient's experience of MS is different.

There is also around a 2 per cent chance of a child developing MS when a parent is affected, which is higher than might be expected in the general population. Although it is not considered an inherited genetic disease, there may be genetic factors that we simply do not understand.

MS is almost unknown in places such as Malaysia or Ecuador, but it is very common in the UK—and particularly in Scotland—North America, Canada, Scandinavia, southern Australia and New Zealand.

I want to highlight some of the great work that the MS Society has done. It has produced the wonderful "My MS, My Needs" report, which gives us a picture of what is happening around the country and gives us cause for concern and food for thought. The survey would not have been possible without the groundbreaking work in setting up a database of those who have been diagnosed with MS. That project throughout the country has been groundbreaking because it provides the MS Society with a source of patients for such surveys, for example, and it is invaluable to researchers who might want to contact people to inform them of some of the groundbreaking treatments that are available for MS.

It would be remiss of me, as a politician, not to mention the devastating impact that the welfare reforms are having on some people who suffer from MS, simply as a result of the lack of

knowledge about what the disease does, how it can affect people and how their condition can vary from day to day. Cases have been highlighted to us in which people have been very badly treated when their ability to work has been assessed by people who have not understood their condition. That is extremely worrying, and it applies to the assessment of people with other neurological conditions, such as motor neurone disease, who have faced some of the same complications. We should put that right.

One of the first questions that I asked as an MSP was about the guidelines for general practitioners on vitamin D. Although we still do not have a firm consensus on the view that vitamin D could play an important role in preventing the development of MS, there is no doubt that the health benefits of vitamin D are well documented. It is important that, as people who live in a country in the northern hemisphere, we all ensure that our dietary requirements as regards vitamin D are met.

17:26

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank George Adam for initiating what has become an annual debate during MS week, and I congratulate the Multiple Sclerosis Society on its excellent report on MS services across Scotland and the UK, which resulted from the “My MS, My Needs” survey that it carried out last year.

Given the widespread occurrence of MS in Scotland—some 10,500 people here live with it—it is likely that all of us, myself included, will have some connection with an individual who has been diagnosed with it, so I hardly need to remind members of the varied symptoms of the disease, from the cruel wasting of muscles to chronic fatigue and problems with speech and sight. A disease of unproven aetiology and with, as yet, no known cure, MS is a complex condition that can be difficult to diagnose. That is why the work of the MS Society Scotland, through events such as national MS week, is so important in raising awareness.

I turn to the motion and the MS Society’s report. It is clear that there needs to be far more emphasis on providing information for people with MS on the treatments that are available to them, and on the planning and provision of appropriate support services. In the time that is available to me, I would like to highlight a few factors that are specific to Scotland.

One of the striking findings of the survey that the MS Society carried out is that as many as 29 per cent of people in Scotland do not have enough information about medicines that can alter the course of MS, and that only 36 per cent of those

who are eligible for such treatment are getting it. Moreover, given that treatment is advancing all the time, it is concerning to learn that in the Highlands and Islands and my area, North East Scotland, only 9 per cent of those people who wish to participate in clinical trials of new and evolving medicines can do so.

The situation with regard to other issues, such as access to care and support services, reinforces the existence of the oft-mentioned postcode lottery. The report highlights regional differences: 80 to 100 per cent of people in Edinburgh and the Lothians who needed to see a neurologist have done so, whereas in Scotland at large around 25 per cent of people said that they could not access a neurologist when they needed to. That is despite the conclusion in last year’s NHS Scotland final report on neurological health services that all but four health boards were meeting the peer-reviewed criterion for access to an MS multidisciplinary team.

I think that the MS Society Scotland’s suggestion that every person in Scotland with MS should have two comprehensive reviews a year to assess their needs, and the level of care and support that they require, should be heeded. Perhaps the minister will comment on progress in that area in his speech.

The report provides a more positive response in the field of mood and emotional support for people with MS in Scotland, where we perform better than the rest of the UK, with 58 per cent of need being met, compared with a UK average of 51 per cent. However, as with all things, the fly in the ointment again lies with regional differences. People in the Highlands and Islands do not feel that they have the same access to emotional support as people elsewhere in the country. Let us remember that, for an individual with MS, emotional support is every bit as important as any other form of treatment and help.

There is a clear need for people with MS to be helped to self-manage their condition, which requires education and the provision of appropriate information. When we debated the issue at around the same time last year, members, including me, spoke about the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Bill, which is now an act of Parliament. The key aim of the bill was to ensure that people with disabilities could be supported to lead a normal life and to participate fully in society by having a greater say in planning for their care and a greater choice in the support that is available to them, so that care could be tailored to meet their individual needs.

To achieve that, the Government and the statutory sector need to work together with the third sector to provide the tools and support that people with MS and other long-term conditions—

and, importantly, their carers—require to manage their lives. I would be interested in finding out about how self-directed support is working so far and the benefits that it is bringing to individuals who live with MS.

Once again, I thank George Adam for leading this important debate.

17:30

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I join others in congratulating George Adam on securing this debate during multiple sclerosis week. I also congratulate Stacey Adam on educating George and on going further than that and ensuring that he did not share some of the personal stories that I have witnessed him sharing in previous debates. It is clear that his passion and conviction have been born out of Stacey's experience.

We are right to recognise that 100,000 people across the UK live with MS, with twice as many women as men. Almost 10,500 people in Scotland live with the condition, which means that we have one of the highest rates of MS in the world, if not the highest. The condition appears to be random, and Clare Adamson was right to describe some of the complexity that underpins it.

As one of the few original members of the Parliament—I said “original”, not “older”—I can recall that, in 2000, campaigners descended on the Parliament to protest about the lack of treatment and care services. They rightly challenged us to do more, particularly given that the prevalence of the condition in Scotland is so much higher than it is elsewhere. We listened, and we agreed that action needed to be taken. Malcolm Chisholm has described some of the action that he took personally, and the issue has been a priority for successive Governments. Circulars have been issued, standards have been set and resources have been made available, but it must depress us all that a postcode lottery remains and that the experience that people have on the ground is not what we would want for them.

I remember that, at that time, we were told that people in Turkey had a better chance of receiving the drugs that they needed to deal with MS than people in Scotland had. Now, only about one third of people who would benefit from taking MS drugs actually receive them, which is about half the figure in Northern Ireland, never mind the rest of the UK. Only MS sufferers in Poland and Romania get worse treatment than we provide in Scotland.

The MS Society survey is extremely helpful. It tells us that about a quarter of MS sufferers say that they cannot see a neurologist when they need help with their symptoms. In 2009, the Scottish Government published clinical standards for neurological services, which I recall being

welcomed by members from across the chamber. However, although the standards might have improved for those who get a service, it is clear that not enough of a difference has been made for those who require services at particular points in time.

I am reminded of the debate that we had earlier on funding for the third sector. We have a policy framework that is largely right and members from across the Parliament agree about what needs to be done but, 13 years on, the frustration is that there is no consistent delivery on the ground. We must not allow that to continue. I hope that the minister will drive real change so that people's experience of treatment and care improves.

The survey also considered the emotional, social and employment impact of MS. We need much wider consideration of the actions that we can take to mitigate some of those wider impacts. Of people who are diagnosed with MS, 44 per cent are depressed because of uncertainty about the future. Therefore, Nanette Milne was right to talk about the emotional support that can be provided. Some people reported experiencing social stigma because of a lack of knowledge and understanding in wider society, while others expressed huge fears about having to give up work prematurely. Ultimately, people with MS want to live as full and active a life as possible before their condition progresses. As George Adam rightly said, they are real people and families and we need to provide them with treatment and support so that they can do just that.

17:35

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, warmly congratulate George Adam on his motion, on securing the debate and, if I may be blunt, on the turnout that he has managed to achieve. As Jackie Baillie said, his speech was excellent. While I do not think that anybody should discourage Scottish men from sharing, it was quite obvious that on this occasion there had been a degree of vetting by Stacey of his speech that was dramatically absent when we had a similar debate back in March.

On that occasion I led the debate. There has been much talk of the prevalence of MS in Scotland. I take no pride in saying that the incidence of MS in my own constituency of Orkney is the highest anywhere in the world, at around 400 people per 100,000—a number that has doubled since the 1980s. I fully concede that in preparing for that debate, I went on a voyage of discovery about what the condition is, how individual it is—as George Adam has already indicated—and how generally misunderstood it is.

It is very timely that this evening's debate coincides with MS week. The MS Society is to be warmly congratulated on its efforts to try to raise public awareness.

The report that has been published to coincide with MS week helps to extend our understanding of the condition and of the problems experienced by each individual with MS and their family and friends. Malcolm Chisholm pointed out that the report identifies where we are getting it right and the good aspects of the improvements that we have been able to deliver—over successive Administrations, as Jackie Baillie said. The report also identifies, quite rightly, where we are falling down.

There has been much reference to disparities in relation to access to medication in Scotland in comparison with other parts of the UK. It is interesting to note the disparities in relation to access to medication between different parts of Scotland itself. There is a clear message that more needs to be done.

Obviously, the issue is not simply about medication; Malcolm Chisholm mentioned his imminent visit to the MS Therapy Centre in Leith. Shortly after being elected, I had the privilege of visiting the MS Therapy Centre in Kirkwall. I was struck by the commitment of the volunteer staff there who, led by Bruce Mainland, provide support for about 30 clients in Orkney.

Nanette Milne touched on the fact that the issue of isolation can often be overlooked. I would not say that isolation is an issue solely in rural areas, although perhaps the challenges in such areas are even greater. When I spoke to Bruce Mainland at the time of my visit I was struck by the problems that the centre experiences in encouraging people to engage with it in the first place.

I note from the briefing for the debate about MS therapy centres that the first centre, which was founded in Dundee in 1982, took the motto, "Self-help is our way of action". The briefing explains that:

"Every person who uses a Centre has taken the decision to take personal charge of the management of their symptoms."

That is a very important ethos, but it brings with it challenges in terms of getting people to engage in the first instance.

Once again, I warmly congratulate George Adam on his speech. I suggest that Stacey perhaps should have oversight of more of his speeches on other areas, too. I look forward to joining others at the reception this evening.

17:39

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I, too, congratulate George Adam on his motion and on securing the debate.

The first reception I attended at the Parliament was an MS Society event at Our Dynamic Earth, not long after our first meeting of the session. We had the opportunity to talk to a number of MS sufferers that night, and I probably learned more about MS than I had previously known, even though I know families with an MS sufferer and had visited the Stuart resource centre in Aberdeen, in my former council ward, on previous occasions. I was struck by the bravery of a number of the folk present that night. I went to the Stuart resource centre again to talk to folk there and to see an exercise session in practice, which was a bit of an eye opener.

Great as the service provision that we have in Aberdeen may be, what I and others fear most is the welfare reform agenda. On 5 February this year, the Parliament's Welfare Reform Committee listened to Marlene Hepburn, an MS sufferer from Stirling. She was originally from the north-east of Scotland, but teaching jobs took her elsewhere. She worked as long as she could and was quite blunt about the difficulties that she faced. However, I think that the most galling thing for Miss Hepburn was not the disease itself but her recent work capability assessment.

Vulnerable people may be denied lifelines if various benefits are withdrawn from them. Nanette Milne talked about constant assessment, which is fair in relation to ensuring that people get the best possible treatment. However, one constant assessment that I cannot agree with is the constant work capability assessment that folk with MS and other debilitating diseases will face under the current regime.

The UK Government needs to get this absolutely right. It needs to rethink Lord Freud's refusal to designate vulnerable groups and take certain folk out of work capability assessment. I agree with Nanette Milne about constant medical assessment, but we do not want constant work capability assessments. We must ensure that folk who want to grab life, as George Adam described it, and have their independence can have it for as long as possible. That is why it is so important that we ensure that the welfare changes do not affect people's independence.

Some of the evidence that the Welfare Reform Committee has heard at the have your say evidence sessions has been quite shocking. Folk should look back and see what Marlene Hepburn and others have said about what is going on.

17:43

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I apologise to members, as I have to go after my speech.

I congratulate George Adam on an excellent speech. I know that the illness is close to the hearts of a number of members in the chamber. It is a horrible, frustrating illness that affects young and old alike. In my family, my auntie suffered from it in the latter years of her life, and my brother John was diagnosed with it in his very early 30s. The illness has resulted in his progressive deterioration to the stage where he has been using a wheelchair for the past six years. He has to use a car with hand controls and he needs assistance in many areas of his life, given all that the disease entails. However, he maintains as much independence as he can, which I think is very much a characteristic of the people who suffer from the disease.

My concerns—I have no doubt that they are shared across the chamber—are about inconsistency of treatment and advice. Different health boards operate different policies, with access to consultants almost impossible in some areas but much easier in others.

Access to specialist nurse services in some areas is very inconsistent, too. Some people have their nurse's mobile phone number and can speak to them almost immediately. Others have never seen a specialist nurse. It has been suggested that each patient should have two comprehensive medical reviews a year, which would be a revolution for some sufferers.

When new specialist drugs become available people have to go through an exhausting, endless process of application and appeal, pleading their case time and time again. In my brother's case, that happened when beta interferon came out. The lengthy process that he went through—to get a drug that made him worse when he took it—added to the stress and anxiety.

A big issue with MS is the mental exhaustion that accompanies the physical exhaustion. If someone cannot walk a step or swing their body around, just getting out of bed in the morning and getting dressed must be massively stressful and exhausting. I do not think that many members can imagine how it would feel to go through that every day, before our day had even begun.

MS patients are hugely resilient and cope tremendously well with an illness that currently has no cure, but they need our help. They need hope, and they need our support. In some areas, such support is significantly lacking. I make no party-political point when I say that; I make the observation merely as someone who has family experience of MS.

17:46

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I congratulate George Adam on securing the debate and I wish the MS Society well with MS week. I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I am on the board of directors of the MS Therapy Centre in Inverness.

I spoke in the previous debate on MS about the trauma that is associated with diagnosis. We heard from George Adam about the circumstances of Stacey's diagnosis and the trauma that was associated with that. As he said, the issue is very personal. We can talk in terms of statistics and percentages, but when we put a name to a case it becomes very meaningful.

I understand that approximately 85 per cent of people with MS suffer

“an initial, short-term neurological episode known as clinically isolated syndrome ... A definitive MS diagnosis is based on a combination of factors, including medical history, neurological exams”

and

“development of a second clinical attack”.

That was a direct quotation, and it is the only medical reference that I am likely to make.

I had a look online at the research and found a layman's summary, which included some interesting points. Pregnancy appears to afford female MS patients a precipitous drop in symptoms during the second half of gestation, and researchers are considering how the benefit could be extended to people who are not pregnant. I thought that that sounded exciting. The Swedish Neuroscience Institute is considering matters.

A year on from the previous debate, people still have care and support demands. We heard about the challenges that are associated with that, and Liam McArthur talked about how the problem affects people in rural and landward areas. I will be parochial and talk about NHS Highland, which has an identified nurse, Anne Stewart, who is based at Raigmore hospital. She sees patients in hospital and at home, and she provides advice and support for people with multiple sclerosis and their families, friends and healthcare professionals—we should not forget that some healthcare professionals find MS very challenging.

Anne Stewart also liaises with local MS groups and the MS Therapy Centre in Inverness, which offers a range of treatments, including a hyperbaric chamber. I pay tribute to Jackie McIntosh, the centre's manager, and all the centre's staff, volunteers and supporters—and indeed my fellow board members—because the centre is a great rock for a number of people.

Links with social services are part of the specialist nurse's remit, which is particularly

important in the context of the integration of health and social care, on which Highland Council and NHS Highland have taken a lead.

A year on, there are still financial challenges. The Scottish Government's provision of £270,000 for MS therapy centres is welcome. The Multiple Sclerosis Centre Mid-Argyll is looking at developing its services and transporting them to people who are further afield and currently out of reach.

I note from the report, "A lottery of treatment and care—MS services across the UK", which members have mentioned, that 68 per cent of folk said that they receive care from someone who is unpaid and that 89 per cent said that they require assistance, of whom a quarter said that they require constant assistance. Press coverage indicates that the minister welcomes the report and I welcome that.

Malcolm Chisholm talked about the neurological clinical standards. The national neurological advisory group has identified MS as a priority, which is very welcome because efforts need to be co-ordinated.

A number of members have spoken about welfare reform, which is a compelling and dark shadow looming those who have MS as well as a number of other people. However, not everything is right with the existing arrangements. I know someone who was unable to secure reasonable adaptations in their workplace, which should have been readily achievable in this day and age.

A year on and there is still hope. In last year's debate, I said:

"In any fight, we need resilience and strength of mind, and in my experience that is to be found in abundance among MS sufferers and their supporters."—[*Official Report*, 2 May 2012; c 8671.]

That is still the case.

I again congratulate George Adam on securing the debate.

17:50

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I begin by congratulating George Adam on securing time for this important debate.

As a minister who has to respond to members' business debates on a range of conditions, I should say that the value of someone's personal experience always throws into relief the impact that a condition can have on the life of an individual and their family. George Adam has done that in debates on MS on a number of occasions and it is to his credit. I am not sure whether Stacey appreciates some of the personal information that he discloses to us, but I congratulate George on

the work that he has undertaken to pursue MS issues.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate the MS Society on its 60th anniversary. It does a tremendous amount of work with individuals in helping to improve their lives. It also does a vital amount of promoting new research and raising awareness and understanding of the condition. All that is extremely valuable.

I welcome the report that the MS Society published this week. It is balanced and it reflects on the areas in which good progress has been made in Scotland and other parts of the UK, as well as illustrating areas in which further work and improvements are required. I share the MS Society's aims that everyone who has MS should be able to access the care and support that they need, and we clearly need to do more, especially given the high levels of MS in Scotland.

A number of members referred to the national neurological standards, which were introduced in January 2010 specifically to address some of the issues that Neil Findlay brought up in his contribution about trying to reduce the variance that can exist between different health board areas. Some detailed work went into the development of those standards, and work was done with all 14 of our territorial boards.

Within those standards, three are specific to MS. They cover access to specialist services, diagnosis, and on-going management. The standards specifically state that people who have MS should have access to a multidisciplinary team, including a consultant and an MS nurse. The MS Society acknowledges the fact that, on the whole, people in Scotland who have MS have access to a broad range of specialists.

The standards also set out the requirement that people who have MS should have access to a review from an MS specialist service at least once every 12 months. It is important that, if necessary, that review can take place at an earlier stage through self-referral.

The implementation of the national neurological standards is key to delivering the improvements that the MS Society's report is looking for. To achieve that, we have provided health boards with funding of £1.2 million to develop local neurological improvement networks. All 14 boards have demonstrated a real desire to move forward and improve local services, although I recognise that some are starting from different points from others and still have to make progress.

I was very conscious that, having established the national neurological standards and completed the peer review, and given the willingness that had been established on the part of boards to make progress, we needed to ensure that we maintained

momentum and oversight in the process. That is why we established the national neurological advisory group, which is a collaboration between NHS Scotland and the third sector to oversee and support our boards and to ensure that they continue to improve on their plans.

As has been mentioned, the advisory group has already identified as one of its initial workstreams the need to ensure consistent and equitable access to MS services throughout Scotland. I hope that I can reassure members that we are not just taking that forward within NHS Scotland; the MS Society is a key partner in delivering on that workstream and has a member of the workstream group to assist with that.

Malcolm Chisholm referred to the work that still has to be taken forward within the boards on the neurological standards and the opportunities resulting from the integration of health and social care. The report recognises that and provides us with good opportunities to build on the progress that has been made.

One of the key issues highlighted in the report is the concern about access to disease-modifying drugs. The United Kingdom MS risk share scheme, established in 2002, includes a number of drugs that patients in Scotland can access provided that they meet criteria from the Association of British Neurologists for those who can benefit from the drugs in question. More recently, the Scottish Medicines Consortium has licensed further drugs to help to treat patients with MS.

Clinical care is a matter for clinicians directly, and the Routledge review is looking at how access is provided to new drugs. However, if MS patients are unable to access drugs for their condition in their area, whether that is down to lack of knowledge on the part of clinicians or a lack of information about what the options are, it is a matter of concern to me. I have asked officials to explore how we can identify the barriers and what action can be taken to remove them.

A number of members talked about the need to ensure that those who have MS receive the type of care and support that they require within the community. I believe that the best type of care and support is person-centred care, which is why I place so much value in the benefits that come from self-directed support. The Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 will come into force this time next year.

The MS Society report highlights the areas where progress is being made and where further progress needs to be made. I can assure the chamber that this Administration is determined to ensure that we build on the progress that has

been made so that further improvements are gained in the years to come.

Meeting closed at 17:58.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78307-923-0

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78307-939-1

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
