



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 4 December 2013

Session 4

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 4 December 2013

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Rural Affairs and the Environment

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** Good afternoon. The first item of business today is portfolio question time. In order to get as many members in as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions and answers to match, please.

#### Air Pollution

**1. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle air pollution in cities. (S4O-02657)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** The Scottish Government is working closely in partnership with local authorities, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and others to improve air quality in our cities. We recently consulted on a review of the local air quality management system, and I plan to announce the next steps shortly. Although I acknowledge that there are still some hotspots of poorer air quality in a number of urban areas, which are of concern, we have, as a society, been able to reduce nitrogen oxides pollution by 65 per cent since 1990 and have reduced particulates by 58 per cent and sulphur dioxide by 79 per cent.

**Marco Biagi:** Almost a year ago, the Cowgate, the Grassmarket, London Road, Gorgie Road and Inverleith Row, in my constituency, were added to Princes Street, George Street and the Royal Mile as areas that are officially above the safe limits for pollution. What message would the minister give to the City of Edinburgh Council about what it can do, and when can we expect to hear about the next steps to which he alluded in his answer?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Marco Biagi is absolutely right. The Government is constantly in contact with local authorities throughout Scotland and we have regular contact with the City of Edinburgh Council on a number of issues, including its five air quality management areas. The council has produced a comprehensive air quality action plan and is working to implement it with support from the Scottish Government and others. Annual progress reports indicate that progress is being made on implementing the plan. Examples include the use of hybrid buses and the redirecting of some routes

to reduce air quality pressures. We will keep the member informed of progress on the action plan.

### Deer Management

**2. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what form the scheduled review of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 will take in relation to deer management. (S4O-02658)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** There is currently no planned review of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 in relation to deer management. However, the wild deer strategy, "Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach", which was launched in November 2008, is to undergo a five-year review to examine progress and ensure that the strategy remains relevant to the deer sector in Scotland.

**Rob Gibson:** Given the compelling evidence that has been gathered by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee on deer management, will the minister review the uneven development of deer management plans, which are often discussed in private, against the undoubted pressure of deer densities that are adversely affecting the range of native woodlands and other biodiversity markers in an already fragile habitat?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** This is an important issue, and we will be interested to hear the outcome of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's deliberations on deer management following its recent evidence sessions. The revised legislation and the Scottish Natural Heritage code of practice on deer management have not been in place for very long. It is important that SNH continues to promote good practice in deer management, to promote the deer code and to develop related best-practice guidance to support deer management groups. When the deer code is reviewed, there will be an opportunity to consider standards in deer management and whether the current arrangements are delivering sustainable deer management. SNH has a duty to monitor compliance with the deer code, and if it feels that the current deer code is ineffective, it may submit a revised or replacement code to the Scottish ministers for approval by the Scottish Parliament.

### Flood Prevention (Hamilton and Surrounding Areas)

**3. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Scottish Water on its flood prevention plan for Hamilton and surrounding areas. (S4O-02659)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** The Scottish Government has regular discussions with Scottish Water and its regulators about improvements to drainage infrastructure in the delivery of both the current investment programme for 2010 to 2015 and the one that is planned for 2015 to 2021.

Scottish Water is a member of the Clyde and Loch Lomond local plan district partnership, which covers the Hamilton area. The partnership is actively working on the development of a local flood risk management plan, which includes identifying the most appropriate actions to manage flooding in the area no matter what the source. That partnership approach to managing flood risk will enable all the partners to invest and take action where the greatest risks and benefits have been identified.

**Christina McKelvie:** I would like to make the minister aware of an on-going issue with flooding in the Chatelherault and Waterside Gardens area of Hamilton in my constituency. It is a long-term issue that I have pursued the council, Scottish Water and the feuars association to resolve. What action can the minister take to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of my constituents? What is his opinion on meetings that are being held between the council and Scottish Water, from which I have been deliberately excluded?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I thank Christina McKelvie for raising the issue. There has been an initial technical meeting, which Christina McKelvie was unable to attend, but there will be a public meeting to discuss the outcome of the studies, which will be arranged shortly, to which members of the public and elected representatives such as Christina McKelvie will be invited.

I recognise the important role that a constituency member can have in a situation such as this, to help inform her constituents of the plan and to relay feedback on it to Scottish Water and the local authority. I understand that Scottish Water and the council have been working together to understand the sources of the flooding problem in Hamilton, which is what led to the meeting in question. Officials are due to meet on 11 December to discuss the technical details arising from the on-going studies. I undertake to ensure that Christina McKelvie is informed of the public meeting so that she has the opportunity to attend.

**Drew Smith:** Last month, it was reported in the press that the Scottish National Party has diverted £800,000 from Scottish Water to the publicity budget for the Scottish independence white paper. Will the minister confirm to Parliament that that is true and tell us what impact that decision will have on Scottish Water doing its vital job in Hamilton and across Scotland?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Drew Smith will appreciate that I do not have portfolio responsibility for Scottish Water, so I am not aware of the background to his question. However, I am sure that we can write to him with the details of what funding has or has not been taken from Scottish Water. I genuinely have no knowledge of the issue.

#### **Scottish Food and Drink (Primary Product)**

**4. John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Quality Meat Scotland, the National Farmers Union and others about the sufficiency of primary product to meet the growing worldwide demand for Scottish food and drink. (S4O-02660)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** It is, of course, important that we have the supply to meet the burgeoning demand in our food and drink sector and to take advantage of its opportunities. One of the products that are most in demand is our fantastic red meat, which has a reputation throughout the world for provenance and quality. To ensure that we can respond to the growing demand, I have asked Jim McLaren, the chair of Quality Meat Scotland, to establish a short-life industry group to examine what can be done to upscale the supply of primary beef production. We hope to have its recommendations in late spring.

**John Scott:** That answer rather negates the need for my next question, but I will ask it anyway.

The cabinet secretary is better aware than I am of the decline in suckler herds, sheep numbers and overall meat production in recent years in Scotland. He will also be aware of the emerging lack of critical mass in the beef industry, as many Scottish cattle go south for finishing and processing. All that is taking place at a time when Scottish processors and retailers are growing their markets worldwide, thanks to the efforts of Scotland Food and Drink. Does the cabinet secretary agree that there is a risk to Scotland's food exporting capability, because at the very time our exports are growing, our food production is reducing? If so, what is he doing to encourage production?

**Richard Lochhead:** I urge our beef farmers in Scotland to produce for the fantastic export markets that are developing around the world. It would be unfortunate if we did not have the supply available to take advantage of those opportunities for Scotland's economy and our food and drink industry.

A number of factors affect the affordability and viability of producing beef, and they will have to be taken into account in how the common agricultural policy reforms are implemented in Scotland.

Within the industry, if the most efficient farmers were able to pass on their knowledge to other farmers and they were all able to cut costs, that would help each individual business. A number of factors need to be taken into account, which include business changes as well as having the right support mechanisms in place.

### **World Forum on Natural Capital**

**5. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the world forum on natural capital that was held in Edinburgh recently. (S4O-02661)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** More than 400 people from 35 countries attended the world forum on natural capital in Edinburgh on 21 and 22 November. The event brought together a wide range of interests. World-class speakers debated issues and concepts that affect us all and can help us understand the value of nature and the impact that our actions can have on the environment.

The First Minister addressed the conference. He was pleased to welcome the delegates to Scotland and affirm that the Scottish Government recognises that Scotland's diverse natural environment is a valuable national asset. He welcomed the formation of a Scottish forum on natural capital, which will bring together public, private and voluntary sector organisations to work together to protect and rebuild Scotland's natural capital. An early focus of the forum will be to consider how to restore Scotland's highly valued peatlands. The Scottish Government welcomes the announcement made at the close of the conference that the second world forum on natural capital will be held in Scotland in 2015.

**Drew Smith:** The minister and other members who might have received a number of emails on the subject will know that the concept of natural capital is not without its critics. However, I have read the helpful briefing that was provided by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, which argues that, although nature should be priceless, that does not mean that it is valueless. What reassurance can the minister offer to those who are concerned about the commodification of market assets because they fear that it might lead to marketisation? What work are SNH and other Government agencies involved in to gauge the appropriateness of the natural capital approach?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I thank the member for raising those points in a constructive way. He is absolutely right that we want to provide an assurance to people that this approach does not undermine the protection of the environment. We certainly want to avoid putting a price on nature, as such, but we feel that valuing nature and the services that it provides to society in this way is

not the same as placing a monetary figure on it. Natural capital is one of the ways in which we can tell whether our economic growth is truly sustainable.

SNH and others are involved in producing information such as the natural capital index, which is in its infancy at the moment but is an important means by which we can start to measure the value of what we have in Scotland and target improvements in the stock of natural capital over time. I welcome the member's interest in this issue.

### **Red Squirrel (Pox Virus)**

**6. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what research it has conducted on red squirrel resistance to the pox virus. (S4O-02662)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** Recent research by Dr Julian Chantrey, from the University of Liverpool, and his PhD student Tim Dale, which discovered that some red squirrels were resistant to the squirrel pox virus, was presented at a recent conference organised by the Red Squirrel Survival Trust. As yet, no comparable work has been carried out in Scotland to look at the presence of squirrel pox antibodies in red squirrel populations that have been exposed to virus.

The Moredun Research Institute is peripherally involved, as it undertakes all of the blood testing on red and grey squirrels. Both the study that was carried out by Dr Julian Chantrey and an earlier study that was reported in 2008 suggest that around 10 per cent of red squirrels that are exposed to the virus are able to survive the infection. The reasons for that are not well understood.

**Murdo Fraser:** Like the minister, I was interested to read the reports of red squirrels in Merseyside developing immunity to the squirrel pox virus. I encourage him to have the Government agencies work on the issue to see whether further research can be done in Scotland. At the same time, could he have some research conducted into the use of immuno-contraceptives as a means of controlling the grey squirrel population?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I recognise the member's interest in the matter. It is clearly important to control the spread of grey squirrels into areas such as Tayside, which is the heartland of the red squirrel population. We will continue to take advice from Scottish Natural Heritage and others on the most appropriate methods of controlling the numbers.

At the moment, we do not have a programme of the kind that Murdo Fraser has described.

However, it is important that we are as involved as possible in supporting all approaches to tackling the problem of the squirrel pox virus.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** Could the minister give us more details of the range of interventions to support and protect red squirrels, particularly in the south of Scotland, in light of the concerns about the situation on the Paxton house estate, where there are no longer any red squirrels, and the corridors of concern that go up into the northern parts of Scotland?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I recognise the member's long-held interest in this issue. I have met her, other MSPs, John Home Robertson and others to discuss the problems that have arisen at Paxton house.

The red squirrels in south Scotland project, which has now merged with the saving Scotland's red squirrels project to form a national red squirrel conservation scheme, is carrying out grey squirrel control to isolate squirrel pox virus outbreak zones and establish pox containment in those areas in the south of Scotland.

The squirrel pox surveillance programme, which is made up of a partnership of the red squirrels in south Scotland project, Moredun Research Institute and the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh, tests diseased red squirrel specimens for signs of the squirrel pox virus and other pathogens, and undertakes antibody and tissue tests in grey squirrels to detect and map exposure to the virus.

The programme of squirrel pox virus surveillance in the south of Scotland has been continued and extended under phase 2 of the saving Scotland's red squirrels project up to 2014. SNH and the Forestry Commission Scotland both contribute to the SSRS core funds and are part of the steering group. SNH is currently contributing £350,000 to the project over two years.

I hope that that reassures the member that we are taking every possible step to control the problem in the south of Scotland, in recognition of the fact that it is an important line of defence against the virus spreading into the red squirrel population.

#### **Zero Waste Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful (Meetings)**

**7. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** Please accept my apologies, Presiding Officer, for not being here at the start of question time. I had a very interesting meeting with Patient Opinion Scotland. As usual, I talked too much, which is why I was late.

To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the

Environment last met the chief executives of Zero Waste Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful and what was discussed. (S4O-02663)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** I met Iain Gulland, director of Zero Waste Scotland, most recently two weeks ago, at the opening of Dryden Aqua's award-winning glass reprocessing plant. It is a fantastic company—and project—for Scotland, with international benefits. During our chat, we discussed what can be done to help the company to source recycled glass from households throughout Scotland.

On 20 March this year, I hosted a summit to discuss Scotland's litter problem, at which I met all key stakeholders, including the chief executive of Keep Scotland Beautiful. We discussed a range of ideas to help to tackle litter throughout Scotland.

**Duncan McNeil:** I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement with regard to proposed Scottish Government legislation to tackle fly-tipping and all other forms of antisocial behaviour that blight the Inverclyde area and other areas throughout Scotland. In the past five years, 19,000 fly-tipping incidents were reported in Inverclyde; 4,000 of them in the past year.

When can we expect the proposed legislation and what can we do in the meantime to tackle the issue?

**Richard Lochhead:** I am sure that we all share the member's condemnation of those people in Scotland who think that it is acceptable behaviour to litter their communities and Scotland's beautiful landscapes.

The member is right that we are addressing the issue in legislation; indeed stage 2 amendments were passed this morning in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee to increase the fixed penalties for littering from £50 to £80 and to quadruple fly-tipping fixed penalties to £200 from 1 April 2014.

We will also publish our updated litter strategy next year and I would be happy to bring the subject back to Parliament for debate. In the meantime, I know that many members have strong feelings about what to do to tackle litter and if anyone has any ideas, I would be delighted to hear from them.

I hope that we can do our best to persuade the people of Scotland to look after their country and support Keep Scotland Beautiful's campaign to clean up Scotland.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The Scottish Government has published draft regulations for a single-use bag levy, which mirrors Welsh regulations. Northern Ireland's levy exempts hot food. The European Union recently



announced proposals that are very focused on reducing plastic bag usage. What is the cabinet secretary's view of arguments for increasing the exemption within the schedule to include paper bags that would be used for takeaway food?

**Richard Lochhead:** We have a desire to listen to people's views on these issues and on exemptions. However, there is widespread support for the general thrust of the legislation, which is to introduce a levy on single-use bags. Given that a range of benefits are being experienced by other countries that have similar bans in place, we should certainly follow suit in this country.

There are a number of issues to be ironed out in the detail of the legislation. I have an open mind about how we can address those.

### **Wild Fisheries Management (Review)**

#### **8. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):**

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the review of wild fisheries management that it announced during the passage of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013. (S4O-02664)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** I know that there is considerable interest, both in the chamber and outside it, in the future management arrangements for wild fisheries. I am committed to undertaking such a review and am currently considering the scope and remit of the review. I expect to make an announcement on the timing and scope of the review shortly.

**John Finnie:** I understand that a number of waters in Scotland are under community control but not under community ownership. Indeed, some have salmon rights that have been donated to a town or a club. I am particularly interested in the potential for community interests to conflict with the wider public interest and have written to the land reform review group about that.

Would the minister agree to the Scottish Government examining wild fishing rights and laws—those in New Zealand and Nova Scotia have been commended to me—to see what lessons, if any, can be learned for Scotland in order to democratise the issue?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I am happy to look at any constructive suggestions—the example of New Zealand has been given a number of times and I am aware that Canada has different arrangements that would be interesting for us to study. The first step is to identify the conservation needs of Scotland's wild fishery and then to develop solutions that fit those needs.

I am happy to look at any solutions that members feel would help to address those needs.

The hope is that the review will cover that. As I said, I will come back to Parliament and to John Finnie with more detail on the review. I would be happy to look at the examples that he cited of New Zealand and Canada.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is a brief supplementary from Jamie McGrigor.

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To aid the management of wild fisheries—particularly on the west coast, where runs have declined—and in the light of the news that recent sea-lice figures on some west coast farms are nine to 10 times higher than they should be—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I must hurry you.

**Jamie McGrigor:** Will the minister reconsider the decision not to monitor fish farms individually for sea lice?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask for a brief answer, please.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** As the member will know from the debate on what is now the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013, we undertook to look at the voluntary provision of sea-lice data and to monitor performance in practice and whether it is delivering the reputational driver that we want in order to drive down the number of sea-lice infections. I give the member a renewed undertaking that we will keep that under review. We have powers under the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007 to impose a mandatory scheme if necessary, but we are not looking at that at this stage, because we feel that more time is needed to see how the new regime works in practice.

## **Justice and the Law Officers**

### **Legal Highs (New Psychoactive Substances)**

**1. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to stem the reported increasing availability of so-called legal highs. (S4O-02667)

**The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham):** The classification of drugs is a reserved matter. However, I hosted a national event in April 2013 with representatives from the police, health services, local authorities and community and youth organisations to discuss the issue and agree on what can be done. We have already acted on a number of the proposals that emanated from that meeting. We will continue to work with partners across Scotland and the United Kingdom to learn more about the impact of the substances.

**John Wilson:** Given that recent research has highlighted that 47 people in Scotland have died from using so-called legal highs, what approach are the police and others taking to minimising their use among school-age children, especially in Lanarkshire? Much of the packaging is aimed at young people. In conjunction with the UK Government, will legislation be updated or reviewed?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** One of the difficulties is the enormous challenge that the substances present, because they are not illegal if they are not explicitly sold for human consumption, and they are marketed in that way. We take substance misuse in schools seriously. I commend to the member the know the score free helpline and website. Those resources ensure that credible information on new drugs is available and help to challenge the myth that legal equals safe, which is one of the difficulties. That is why we do not use the term “legal highs” when possible; we prefer to describe them as new psychoactive substances.

We continue to work with the UK Government, but we are also monitoring changes in legislation worldwide to see whether other approaches are feasible. Nothing has been in place long enough yet to give us certainty about whether proposals will work.

We remain on top of the issue. The member referred to the number of deaths in which such substances have been implicated. An outcome of the April meeting was that we would make such figures clearly separate in the death statistics.

**Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):** Does the minister have any estimates of the extent of the use of legal highs in Scotland? We hear statistics that indicate that drug use is reducing, but are we absolutely confident that that does not just represent a switch from illegal drug use to so-called legal drug use?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** That question is difficult to answer, because the figures are not recorded in the same way. We are in the business of gathering as much information as possible about the extent to which such substances are used. Their use is by no means widespread, but there is no doubt that they might seem more attractive in some areas and age groups, because people are equating being legal with being safe.

I reiterate that, where possible, we should not use the term “legal highs” because the fear is that that gives out a very wrong impression of those substances. We are in the process of trying to gather information—as I indicated, one of the outcomes from the April meeting relates to death statistics—and we are already putting in place some other outcomes as well. However, getting a

statistical handle on the situation is not easy given that the substances are not criminal.

### **Cashback for Communities (Fife)**

**2. Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the cashback for communities programme in Fife. (S4O-02668)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** The Government’s hugely successful cashback for communities programme is having an enormous impact on young people and their communities across the length and breadth of Scotland. Since 2008, the cashback programme has invested and committed more than £74 million in our communities and has provided 1.1 million activities and opportunities for young people. Fife itself has benefited from more than £1.3 million in cashback investment and more than 55,000 activities and opportunities for its young people.

**Annabelle Ewing:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer, wherein he detailed the significant impact that the cashback for communities programme is making in Fife. Can he confirm the steps that are being taken to ensure that local communities in Fife are fully aware of the next tranche of funding—which I believe is some £24 million—with the deadline for applications being the end of this year?

**Kenny MacAskill:** On 23 October, it was announced that £24 million is to be invested through cashback over the next three years. The application pack has been available on the Government’s website since 1 November. We have received a large number of queries about funding and applications since the start of November.

We always welcome the opportunity to discuss new projects with organisations and communities if they believe that those can add to the cashback programme. We expect that demand will exceed the funds that are available and that not all applicants will be successful. From having engaged with YouthLink Scotland and a variety of youth organisations the length and breadth of Scotland, I certainly think that the word is out. If the member wishes to encourage local groups to apply, I am sure that we will see whether we can deliver.

### **Forced Marriage (Consultation on Criminalisation)**

**3. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government for what reason it has not undertaken a public consultation on, or discussed with relevant organisations, the criminalisation of forced marriage. (S4O-02669)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** The United Kingdom Government's timescale for a potential legislative consent motion on the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill did not allow for a public consultation. We are in regular discussion with key stakeholders on the issue and we were aware that there would be an opportunity to feed in views to the Justice Committee for its consideration of the LCM.

**Claudia Beamish:** I thank the cabinet secretary for explaining the situation in relation to the LCM. However, he will know that Scottish Women's Aid, Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid and Shakti Women's Aid have concerns about proceeding to criminalise forced marriage.

Scottish Women's Aid speaks of evidence from Europe and says that it is difficult for people at risk of forced marriage to report their parents and families to the police or even to pursue civil protection. The people at risk often need to be reassured that the protection that they seek can be obtained in the family courts, and thus that their families will not be prosecuted, before they agree to make a formal statement.

Is the cabinet secretary in a position to reconsider the present process? If not, I encourage him to take careful account of those highlighted concerns about criminalisation.

**Kenny MacAskill:** I take clearly into account and understand the concerns of those organisations, which the member correctly mentioned. It is certainly the position of this Government and indeed of the UK Government that we require to legislate. It is necessary to deal with forced marriage in that way, given our agreement to the Istanbul convention. Some of the organisations that the member refers to disagree with that requirement, but that is certainly the legal advice here and south of the border, and indeed the position of the police and the Crown.

We understand the concerns about driving the practice underground. However, it appears to us that the practice is already, by its very nature, one that tends to be kept under wraps and dealt with secretly. That is why we are happy to work with members of particular organisations, and with the communities in which the practice tends to be more prevalent, to make it quite clear that forced marriage is unacceptable. We are also happy to work with the UK Government on the issue because we believe that there is benefit in having some cross-border parity. We must ensure that we always remember that the victims of forced marriage are to be treated as victims, with dignity and respect. The legislation is not meant to compound the issue; it is meant to ensure that we comply with our international obligations and that those who participate in the practice are dealt with firmly and appropriately.

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** In order to strengthen the deterrent and tackle the culture surrounding forced marriage, has the cabinet secretary considered making the breach of a forced marriage protection order an aggravated offence? The Scottish Parliament took the deliberate decision back in 2011 not to criminalise forced marriage because the evidence that was received then—and again recently—suggested that that would deter individuals from coming forward rather than encourage them to do so.

**Kenny MacAskill:** A breach of the civil order is in fact a criminal offence. I am open to considering whether there would be merit or benefit in making that an aggravated offence, but breaching such an order would instigate criminal proceedings, as can be seen in relation to domestic violence, for example. I am happy to consider the issue and reflect on Margaret Mitchell's point.

#### **Policing (Dumfries and Galloway)**

**4. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Police Scotland's divisional commander for Dumfries and Galloway and what matters were discussed. (S4O-02670)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** The divisional commander for Dumfries and Galloway last met with Scottish Government officials on 13 November, and the subject matter that was discussed was missing persons.

**Alex Fergusson:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, but I am disappointed not to hear of any discussions taking place on an event that occurred last week, which was the closure—after 558 years of delivering local justice—of the sheriff and justice of the peace court in Kirkcudbright.

The town has also just lost its front-desk facility at the police station, which means that those who are asked to act as witnesses and those who want to report a crime in person will have to do so either at Dumfries, which is some 30 miles away, or at Stranraer, which is some 50 miles away.

Can the cabinet secretary tell me how that change is meant to encourage my constituents to play their part voluntarily in bringing criminals to justice? Does he agree that those changes are likely to make them a little more reluctant to do so?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The Government and all partners involved in law enforcement encourage all members of the public to step forward in whatever capacity, whether it is to give evidence, act as a juror or appear in any other role.

As Mr Fergusson will be aware, the decision was arrived at by the Scottish Court Service. I am due to meet the Lord President later this afternoon, and I will pass on Mr Fergusson's views. However, Mr Fergusson will be aware that, as a result of the considerable budgetary cuts that have been forced on this Government by the Westminster coalition Government, all aspects of public policy and all areas of public and private life are facing financial challenges. The Lord President has made appropriate provision to deal with the financial challenges by implementing some court closures. Mr Fergusson referred to the situation in Kirkcudbright, but he knows that it is replicated and mirrored south of the border, where the court closures are even more extensive.

#### **Legal Highs (New Psychoactive Substances)**

**5. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many times Police Scotland has found so-called legal highs cut with illegal substances but not seized them. (S4O-02671)

**The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham):** When an unknown substance is believed to contain a controlled drug it would be seized by the police for the purposes of securing evidence, identification, investigation and potential prosecution. It is, of course, the potential presence of a controlled substance that triggers the seizure, and the information and intelligence that are obtained are key in that respect.

**Kevin Stewart:** I have heard that so-called legal highs—perhaps I should call them psychoactive substances—are sometimes cut with illegal drugs, but there does not seem to be any recording of seizures of legal highs, as the minister explained. Is Police Scotland aware of that problem? What can be done to ensure that drug dealers cannot entrap people into becoming addicted to illegal drugs by using those nefarious and duplicitous means?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I thank Kevin Stewart for amending his terminology. I advised him—this may also interest John Wilson—that about 10 per cent of the Scottish Police Authority's current monthly case load relates to analysis of substances that are suspected of being new psychoactive substances. The rise in those submissions is due to improved forensic capability and to increased awareness about and availability of such products.

Police Scotland is now better placed to identify and to respond to availability of those substances, particularly when they are found to be mixed with controlled drugs. To date, Police Scotland has been required to provide greater returns to the Scottish Government on traditional controlled

drugs. However, with the emergence of the particular products that Kevin Stewart asks about, there is now a requirement to ascertain more specific data on seizures and the availability of such substances. Police Scotland is well aware of the need for it to keep on top of what is happening and for us to understand what is going on.

In respect of drugs education and the information that is going out to people, I again refer Kevin Stewart to my answer to John Wilson, and to the work that is done by bodies such as Crew 2000 to try to keep people as well informed as possible.

#### **Crime Statistics (Publication)**

**6. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has had with the chief constable regarding the publication of crime statistics. (S4O-02672)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** I meet with Chief Constable Sir Stephen House on a regular basis to discuss important issues around keeping people safe in Scotland. Most recently, of course, I met the chief constable during the aftermath of the tragic incident at the Clutha bar in Glasgow on Friday. On Saturday, we were both at the Helen Street control centre and, on Sunday, we were at the service at Glasgow cathedral.

**Ken Macintosh:** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the Auditor General for Scotland's recent report on police reform and her comments that the information that is provided to the new Scottish Police Authority is more selective and less comprehensive than that which was previously presented to police boards. Is he also aware of the chief constable's comments to the Public Audit Committee that publication of crime statistics is a matter for the Government and not for him, that that is a source of some frustration for him and that it is certainly not due to reticence on his part? Will the cabinet secretary ease that frustration and assure Parliament and the public that the information will be as comprehensive as it was previously?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Absolutely—I can give an assurance on that.

The SPA and the chief constable, supported by the Scottish Government and officials in the justice directorate, are attempting to ensure that we have up-to-date figures that are comparable across the nation, as opposed to the previous situation, in which individual constabularies had different ways of reporting. That is why the chief constable welcomed the comments of Audit Scotland. The SPA, the chief constable and justice officials are working together and are working closely with Her

Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland to ensure that the best possible information is available, that it is comparable across Scotland and that it is appropriate for those who are charged with holding the police to account, in the Parliament or the SPA.

### **Firearm Offences**

**7. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the number of convictions for firearm offences in 2013. (S4O-02673)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** Our annual bulletin "Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland, 2012-13" was published on 20 November. It showed that gun crime fell by 32 per cent in the year to March, which is down 71 per cent since 2006-07, and that gun crime is now at its lowest level for 33 years.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Does the cabinet secretary share my view that, because Police Scotland has specialist services available that might not have been available to regional forces, it is in a better position to deal with serious crimes such as firearms offences?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I absolutely accept that. We have seen the benefit of specialist services and of a single service at the recent tragedies in Glasgow and Shetland. When resources were called on, they were available nationally.

Another issue is that we no longer have artificial boundaries. When I met armed response officers from Inverness who cover the Highlands of Scotland, they told me that the historical position was that they could drive to Dalcross and would then have to turn round, but they can now go on to cover Elgin, for example; it is quicker and easier for officers from Inverness to get Elgin than it was for officers from the Grampian Police area to get there from Aberdeen city. Citizens can be reassured that local policing is still the bedrock, but national services are available wherever they are needed, whether in the Highlands or the islands.

### **Police Station Closures (West Scotland)**

**8. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the closure of police stations in West Scotland will have on community safety. (S4O-02674)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** The review of public-counter provision is a matter for Police Scotland, which has focused its review on front-counter provision, not on stations. The closure of counters that are not widely used aims to help deliver a more consistent

and professional service to the public and to enable more officers to be deployed where the public tell us that they want them, which is in our communities.

The report of the independent police commission chaired by Lord Stevens, which was published on 25 November, recognises the benefit of our reform. It states:

"The Commission recommends that the social purpose of the police should be enshrined in law ... This has recently been achieved ... in Scotland. We believe that the national statement of purpose for Police Scotland has much to commend it as a model for enacting a legislative purpose for the police in England and Wales."

I commend that report, which was commissioned by the Labour Party.

**Mary Fee:** The west of Scotland, if we include Glasgow, North Ayrshire and Inverclyde, is listed as one of the top five least peaceful areas in Scotland. If a community can put forward a compelling case for keeping a counter open, will the cabinet secretary take on board those views and listen to the opinions of local people?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The police have been doing that. Assistant Chief Constable Mawson commented today that the counter consultation had received contributions from 83 members of the public—out of a population of 5.3 million.

## Housing

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08470, in the name of Mary Fee, on housing. The member has 14 minutes, although the debate is very tight for time.

14:40

**Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** Today's motion seeks to address what has been missing from the chamber over the past 15 months: a debate on housing addressing present and future challenges.

While Scotland experiences the biggest housing crisis since the end of world war two, the housing minister is absent and the Government is ducking its responsibilities on housing. Housing should be at the centre of Government policy, because it creates jobs and stimulates local economies. Scotland is on pause, as is evident from the Government's housing portfolio.

In the past year, 13,478 houses have been built. That is the lowest number since 1947. Between 2008-09 and 2011-12, the capital housing budget was slashed by 29 per cent under the stewardship of the Scottish National Party. Since taking on the role of Minister for Housing and Welfare in September 2012, Margaret Burgess has failed to front a debate on housing. Paul Martin, Patrick Harvie and the Equal Opportunities Committee have been far more proactive than the housing minister in bringing serious debates to the chamber. The lack of leadership in the Government is impacting on local communities, local people and local economies as we speak. That lack of leadership and the entrenched lack of ambition have been criticised by Audit Scotland as well as by industry bodies. Phillip Hogg of Homes for Scotland said:

"Tackling this issue will require bold vision, commitment and action from all parties in order to halt the decline of what is a key national indicator."

Scottish Labour is calling for a national housing action plan that is comprehensive, ambitious and inclusive in order to invest in our communities and reinvigorate housing in Scotland. I look forward to the minister's response to that call.

Returning to the point about low ambition, I refer to the Scottish Government's white paper on separation. In the section on housing in an independent Scotland, there is a total of seven paragraphs, or 10 if we feel generous enough to include those on fuel poverty and energy prices. There is also a very nice picture of a tenement building. That amounts to one and a half pages in a 670-page document—or 0.2 per cent—on housing.

### **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):**

Does the member accept that one of the underlying principles in the white paper is that we would have more money if we were not subsidising nuclear weapons and that, if we had more money, one of the priorities would be housing?

**Mary Fee:** If the member wants to talk about housing, I point out that Scottish Labour would not have wasted £30 million on the Glasgow airport rail link project, which has hardly demonstrated a fiscally responsible Government.

We are calling for a national action plan on housing, and it must be comprehensive and ambitious. As regards ambition, the white paper was very light on housing matters and gave us no answers as to what the Government's priorities will be. It does nothing to alleviate the concerns of Scottish house builders, which were raised in the recent Jones Lang LaSalle survey that showed that most house builders believe that Scottish independence would result in fewer housing developments. In fact, only one in 12 house builders thought that independence would deliver more housing.

If we couple that survey with the warning in the report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies that Scotland may have to make further spending cuts, the prospect of independence does not paint a great picture of the future of housing in Scotland, especially when we already know about the potential supply and demand challenges that we face over the next 50 years.

Across the chamber, there is agreement that we need more housing of all shapes and sizes. No one would disagree with the idea that well-built, affordable housing can have a positive impact on health, wellbeing, employment and education. However, there is disagreement on how we can achieve the housing targets. In its manifesto for the 2011 election, the SNP promised to build 6,000 social rented homes each year, but that has been edited to a promise to build 6,000 affordable homes a year.

A year before the minister took on her role, Shelter Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland warned the Government that unless there was a radical rethink on spending priorities, it would not meet the target that it had pledged to meet on affordable homes. That might partly explain why we now find ourselves experiencing the biggest crisis in Scottish housing since the end of world war two.

To return to the Audit Scotland report, we learn that it could be 20 years before enough new homes are built to meet the changing demographics and projected population increase. That there is a crisis in housing is reflected by

Audit Scotland's reporting of the fact that the number of new homes built by the private sector has more than halved, and that councils and registered social landlords have built 14,000 fewer homes than needed since 2005.

**John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Does the member accept that local authorities are building more houses than they did in the final four years of the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration?

**Mary Fee:** We could all bandy statistics about, but the important thing that we must remember—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, please.

**Mary Fee:** If we had not lodged the motion for debate, we would not be talking about housing.

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mary Fee:** No—I have just taken one.

Where was the minister when that information was reported in July? Why has there been no Government debate to discuss the crisis in housing?

On the funding of affordable housing, Audit Scotland warned that the Government had yielded that its approach was flawed after it accepted all the recommendations of the financial capacity, affordability and development subsidy working group. Long before the final report, RSLs had indicated to me that the subsidy levels had been cut too much and that that was having a detrimental impact on the services that they provided and on planning for future housing developments. With £3 billion of private borrowing, there was a danger that reserves would be used, and many RSLs were struggling to gain access to new lending, unless they had significant reserves.

In recent years, the housing association grant per unit has been cut from £70,000 to £42,000. The average cost of building a social rented home is around £125,000. The Scottish Government recently announced an increase in that grant but, given the extent of the cut in the grant, it is easy to see why RSLs are struggling to build new homes.

The motion also raises the issue of homelessness. Statistics show that, since 2007, there has been an increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation, albeit that that is mostly down to the recession and the tough economic conditions that followed. Despite our having legislation that guarantees anyone who presents themselves as homeless access to emergency temporary accommodation, it was reported at the weekend that our largest council has been turning people away. I hope that the minister will address that.

The Shelter Scotland campaign that states that 4,847 children will wake up homeless on Christmas day is to be commended. Labour members support Shelter, which, in addition to reaching out for public support, seeks to change the guidelines on minimum standards of temporary accommodation and to give families the legal right to challenge the appalling conditions that they are often forced to live in. Children and expectant mothers need to be protected from damp and dangerous accommodation. It is clear that, with 157,700 people on waiting lists and 23,000 houses unoccupied, more needs to be done. The need for a national housing action plan is palpable.

There are many reasons for homelessness, such as relationship breakdown, income or job loss, and, crucially, the callous Tory welfare reform agenda. However, the effects of homelessness on many areas or aspects of people's lives cannot be overestimated, especially for children and young people.

The Scottish empty homes partnership, which was launched in 2012, has returned to use only 200 of the estimated 23,000 empty properties. Last year, only 72 were brought back into use by councils. It would be interesting to assess where those empty properties can be found. Are they in rural or urban areas? Are they in areas of deprivation or more affluent areas? Assessing the location of those empty properties could emphasise returning them to use, so we call on the housing minister to address the concern about empty homes and say whether they could be included in a national housing action plan, especially when it is reported that it costs far less to return a house to the market than to build a new one.

Scotland's census results show us that population increases and changing demographics mean that greater demand is to be expected in future. The results underline the scale of the challenge and, for the first time ever, there are more single-person households—more than one third of homes are now one-person households—which can be attributed to the increase in the number of pensioners. That figure alone creates pressure on housing policy. How does the Scottish Government plan to address the expected 80 per cent increase in the number of pensioners between now and 2050, with most of the increase occurring in the next 25 years? Also, when looking at the personalisation and self-directed support agenda, we need to meet the housing demand of disabled people, to allow them more independence and more freedom.

The Parliament also faces the major challenge of ending fuel poverty. The Scottish Government has committed itself to ending fuel poverty through lower bills, which is to be achieved through the

home energy efficiency programme for Scotland. Perhaps the minister can inform the chamber whether 2016 is still the target. If so, can she explain the white paper pledge to end fuel poverty? Is it an admission that the Scottish Government cannot achieve that despite its HEEPS pledges?

Much was made in the white paper of ending the bedroom tax, and that is quite right. That unjust policy must be ended, but why does the SNP want to wait until 2016 and do it only in the event of a yes vote? Instead of playing political football with this horrid tax, will the minister say whether she will back Jackie Baillie's bill to protect tenants now? Why should vulnerable Scots be used as pawns in the SNP's attempt to break up Britain? No one in this chamber can deny that the Scottish Government can do more to mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax but, for political reasons, it chooses not to.

**Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mary Fee:** No, I am almost finished.

We have a Scottish Government that is strategising for separation, not one that is interested in the day-to-day running of Scotland. Housing in Scotland is in crisis. More people are on waiting lists. Fewer homes are being built than at any other time since 1947. What is the Government's response? It wants constitutional change despite having had the power to act for the past six-and-a-half years.

We need action now to solve our housing crisis, end homelessness and reduce waiting lists. We need action from the Government to build homes, create jobs and stimulate local economies—that is why we need a national housing action plan.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with grave concern that Scotland is facing a housing crisis; understands that the number of new homes built in 2012 was the lowest since the post-war era; asks the Scottish Government to reflect on the recent Audit Scotland report on housing that reported a 29% real-terms reduction in the capital housing budget from 2008-09 to 2011-12; notes the recent survey of Scotland's housebuilders that showed concerns regarding the impact of separation and regrets that the white paper on independence did not set out detailed plans for housing; recognises the fact that, to date, the Minister for Housing and Welfare has not led a debate on housing and is disappointed at the lack of leadership that this represents; notes that recent homelessness statistics show an increase since 2007 in the number of households in temporary accommodation, and calls on the Scottish Government to produce a comprehensive, ambitious and inclusive national housing action plan.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are tight for time. If members wish to be considered to be called to speak, they must press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:54

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** Unlike other parties in the Parliament, the Scottish Government has a clear vision that every one of us in Scotland should live in a high-quality, sustainable home that we can afford and that meets our needs. Our 2011 manifesto was the only one that contained a target for building affordable homes. No other manifesto had that and I point out that the Labour Party talked in the chamber about investigating, looking at, and possibly doing something about the issue but made no commitment whatsoever.

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Margaret Burgess:** I will not take an intervention at the moment. I have been accused of not coming to the chamber to talk about housing, so I will talk about what we have done about it, and you can listen. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, please.

**Margaret Burgess:** I welcome the opportunity to affirm and demonstrate that the Scottish Government leads, listens and takes action to ensure that we can deliver that vision. It is important that we are working in conjunction with the entire housing sector in doing so.

Of course we all recognise that challenging economic conditions continue to impact on house-building activity, but despite the prolonged economic downturn, the SNP Government has outperformed the record of previous devolved Administrations.

**Mary Fee:** Is the minister saying that, when Audit Scotland, Shelter and other organisations say that housing in Scotland is in crisis, they are wrong?

**Margaret Burgess:** What I am saying is that we are building more houses than any other Administration in the Scottish Parliament has built, despite the economic downturn. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Margaret Burgess:** We cannot get away from the facts. I will give members the facts. Some 4,117 new council houses have been built by the SNP Administration—the previous Labour-Liberal Administration built six in its last four years—and 26,781 housing association houses have been built, which is 15 per cent more than the previous Administration built. The Scottish Government and I are committed to delivering at least 30,000 affordable homes, at least 20,000 of which would be for social rent.

We are making good progress. By September, we had already delivered more than 16,000 affordable homes, nearly 12,000 of which were for



social rent. That means that we are already over halfway to meeting our 20,000 target for homes for social rent.

To ensure that we remain on track, I took the lead on confronting the issue of funding for social housing developments. I recognised that councils and housing associations faced many pressures on their finances, and set up a working group with housing stakeholders, listened to their concerns and took decisive action by increasing all social housing benchmarks by £16,000 per unit.

**Hugh Henry:** Given everything that the minister has said that she has done and that she claims that the SNP Government has a vision, why has she failed to come to the Parliament to have a debate on that?

**Margaret Burgess:** Because I have been out there talking to the stakeholders and trying to get things moving. If leadership is judged by coming to the Parliament and speaking to the Opposition parties, I am sorry; for me, it is about going out there, talking to the stakeholders, listening to their concerns and taking action—and that is what we are doing.

The £16,000 benchmark was recommended by the working group. That was its figure and we took it on board. That change enables councils and housing associations to keep social rents affordable and reduces the amount that they have to contribute from their own resources. That is particularly important, given the uncertainties of the United Kingdom Government's welfare reforms. We backed up that change with investment in the draft budget.

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** Will the minister give way?

**Margaret Burgess:** No. I am not giving way any more. I have been constantly told that I have not come to the chamber to speak about housing, so I will do that now.

Over the four years to March 2016, the planned investment in affordable housing will exceed £1.35 billion. Every new-build affordable home that we help to fund means more jobs in our construction industry, but it is, of course, also vital that we support a recovery in the market sector. Yesterday's housing statistics underlined the continuing impact on our house-building industry of challenging global economic conditions and the Westminster cuts to our capital budget. The Opposition parties that are represented in the chamber cannot deny responsibility for part of the global recession.

Despite these difficult times, Scotland's rate of new house building per head of population continues to outperform that of the rest of the UK. That is a fact. Recently published National House

Building Council statistics on new home registrations to the end of September 2013 show encouraging signs of increasing activity and recovery.

A central plank of our support for house building is our £220 million help to buy Scotland shared equity scheme. I am pleased to see the industry's positive reaction to that scheme. To date, 95 house builders have registered, and more applications are coming in. That list includes major public limited companies as well as small family firms that may want to build only a few, but vitally needed, homes.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Margaret Burgess:** I am taking no more interventions. I am sorry.

I look forward to that scheme making a positive difference in the coming months and years and increasing the demand for and supply of new housing.

Help to buy sits alongside other initiatives that we have supported or launched, such as our other shared equity programmes, the house-building infrastructure loan fund, and the private sector-led MI new home scheme.

The story of our support is rich, diverse and on-going, and throughout it all runs the theme of innovation. For example, the national housing trust initiative, the first guarantee-based model for housing in the UK, is going from strength to strength, with deals being secured with 13 developers across 10 council areas, generating around £150 million of housing development.

I turn now to homelessness. In 2003, the first devolved Scottish Parliament unanimously and rightly set an historic target to ensure that every unintentionally homeless person should have an entitlement to settled accommodation. In 2008, Iain Gray described that as

"the best homelessness legislation in the world,"

but admitted that,

"we didn't build the housing to make it work".

Instead, it has fallen to this Administration, in tough economic times, to build homes and to deliver on that historic commitment, which I confirmed almost a year ago.

At the same time, we have also made progress in reducing the number of children in temporary accommodation, alongside wider falls in recorded homelessness in Scotland. For example, in 2012-13, the number of households with children in temporary accommodation reduced by 551 or 16 per cent. Those figures are going in the right direction, but we are not complacent. We want to

minimise all time spent in temporary accommodation, and a temporary accommodation sub-group of key stakeholders, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, councils and Shelter, is due to report to the homelessness prevention and strategy group this month. We will use that and other evidence to consider what further steps need to be taken on standards in temporary accommodation. We also recognise the importance of addressing rough sleeping, and will continue to focus on preventing that from happening wherever possible. The latest statistics again indicate continuing falls in recorded homelessness across Scotland, including falls in rough sleeping.

Our record on housing leadership over the past 12 months includes boosting housing supply budgets, outperforming Labour on affordable supply, staying on track to deliver 30,000 affordable homes, launching the help to buy Scotland scheme, expanding and developing the national housing trust, and achieving the historic homelessness commitment. Now, with the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which I introduced to the Parliament last month, the SNP Government will again take the lead. The bill will introduce a regulatory framework for letting agents, create a new private rented sector housing tribunal, increase flexibility in the allocation and management of social housing, and end the right to buy, thereby preventing the sale of up to 15,500 social rented houses over 10 years.

However, only independence will allow us to deliver policies that reflect Scotland's values, support strong communities and promote social justice. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has pointed out that, under the current system—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, please.

**Margaret Burgess:** Opposition members were keen to comment on the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which pointed out that, under the current system, there is a disincentive for Scottish Governments to invest in keeping social rents affordable, because the benefits of our investment go to the United Kingdom Treasury and we get back lower housing benefit spend. Thankfully, "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland" offers a different way forward. Independence would give us full flexibility over housing budgets, allowing us to design how we use grants, loans, equity stakes or guarantees specifically for Scotland's needs and circumstances.

I can assure the Parliament that, if we become the Government of an independent Scotland, we will abolish the bedroom tax and integrate welfare and housing investment to support our housing system, our people and our communities.

I move amendment S4M-08470.2, to leave out from "with grave concern" to end and insert:

"that it is the current administration that has provided leadership and incentives to restart council house building in Scotland; welcomes the fact that over 1,000 council houses were completed last year and that this compares with only six council houses built in the four years of the last Labour/Liberal Democrat administration; recognises that, despite cuts in the capital budget proposed by the last UK Labour administration, and imposed by the current UK Conservative/Liberal Democrat administration, more social sector houses per head have been built in Scotland than in any other part of the UK over the past six years; notes the substantial contraction of private house building across the UK that has occurred as a direct result of the financial crisis, for which the last UK Labour administration must accept some responsibility, and recognises that, with independence, Scotland can achieve the level of investment required to meet its housing needs."

15:04

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate, though I feel that I must apologise to members, as I seem to have arrived in the chamber with a speech that has nothing to say about independence—I hope that it will be acceptable if I give a speech that is only about housing. I say that in relation to both opening speeches. Housing is an important issue and I congratulate the Labour Party on, and thank it for, bringing the debate to the chamber, but I feel strongly that turning the debate into yet another tiresome spat between Labour and the SNP is not going to help anyone.

There is an argument to be made about the number of homes that are being built. I say to the Government that it is important to recognise that the social rented sector is about more than simply council house builds, on which it is proud of its figures. We need to look at the numbers in relation to need and not only, as the Government's amendment does, in relation to the Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition's record or what is happening in other parts of the UK. We need to look at supply in relation to need.

We should acknowledge, as I think the Labour motion might, that the Scottish Government cannot simply wish away the context of ill-conceived and socially damaging cuts from the UK Government. We should also acknowledge the statement in the briefing from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations that

"getting the affordable housing supply programme back on track is no easy matter and not helped by the difficulties in raising private finance to complement the subsidy levels."

No Scottish Government of any political persuasion would find this an easy area to deal with at present.

If there is a housing crisis, we also need to recognise that it is not entirely about people not

having adequate and suitable accommodation available to them. My amendment leaves in the Labour Party's comments about temporary accommodation because they are important, but there are many people who have suitable accommodation for whom that accommodation is becoming increasingly unaffordable. As my amendment does, I want to focus on the private rented sector, which has doubled in size in 10 years, or thereabouts, and is continuing to grow ever more expensive. The figures in the Citylets report show year-on-year rental increases in Glasgow and Edinburgh of 5, 6 or 7 per cent or more in some areas—and that at a time when incomes are static or falling for far too many people.

To rent in the private rented sector is a choice for some and we should acknowledge that there is nothing second class about renting instead of owning a property. It is a choice for some and we should respect that, but for many other people it is not a choice—it is the only housing that is available to them. Trapped between unavailable social rent and unattainable owner occupation, and with the increase in single-person households that has already been mentioned, many people are finding that the private rented sector is their only option.

If we recognise that private renting is no longer simply a free choice in a marketplace but the only housing that our society is providing for many people, I believe that the case becomes clear for regulating the private rented sector as social provision.

There are good and bad landlords. Members will recognise that from dealing with their constituency case loads over the years. There are also good and bad letting agents. There are certainly those who regard properties simply as investments and not as homes. The imperative is for homes to provide housing for people, rather than income for landlords who do not wish to provide a quality service in exchange. A colleague has mentioned the example of a constituent who was threatened with notice to quit, against which so many private tenants have no defence, simply for seeking private rented housing panel mediation in relation to a dispute over the heating system in the home. The landlord was unwilling to provide the appropriate remediation that was necessary. The tenant simply sought mediation and was threatened with notice to quit.

Constituents have contacted me—this will be a familiar story to many members from around the country—about repairs that have been outstanding for years in some cases. Landlords have passed them from pillar to post and have simply not resolved vital problems that affect the liveability of

that housing—which, I say again, is the only housing that is available to many people.

The Government's Housing (Scotland) Bill includes measures that I welcome, such as the abolition of the right to buy and the regulation of letting agents. However, although such steps are positive, I encourage the Government to consider other options such as those relating to the provision of feedback on landlords. Many people who are looking for a property can go online and find out whether their landlord is registered but they get little more information than that, and a mechanism that allowed tenants to provide feedback on the quality of service from a landlord or letting agent would give people the information that they need to sort the good landlords from the bad ones who are out there. We also need more measures on security of tenure and energy performance standards in the private rented sector.

Finally, I want to make a case for the reintroduction of something that some European countries never abolished in the first place: some level of rent control.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** You must draw to a close, please.

**Patrick Harvie:** In certain parts of the country, rents in the private rented sector are spiralling out of control. Given that, for so many people, that sector provides the only housing option available, the case for rent controls must be brought back on to the agenda.

I move amendment S4M-08470.1, to leave out from "recent survey" to "represents" and insert:

"introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Bill and welcomes proposals for the regulation of letting agents; considers that, while private tenancy is the preferred housing option for many people, the dramatic growth of the private rented sector over recent years, combined with the lack of social rented housing and the cost of home ownership, leaves increasing numbers of people with no realistic choice other than a private sector tenancy; believes therefore that the private rented sector must be regulated in the interests of society, and urges the Scottish Government to add further measures to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, such as security of tenure, rent controls and stronger standards in relation to management, housing quality and energy performance".

15:10

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** I rise unreservedly and unashamedly to support Mary Fee's motion. Although there are many things that we will disagree on, some of which I will go on to discuss, the terms of her motion are, as Robert Burns would say, "chiels that winna ding".

The truth is that we are dealing with a housing crisis that in no small part has been caused by the

Government's failure to address it. We have already heard the usual rhetoric this afternoon. We have heard, for example, the line that the Government has been building council houses—to be honest, I think that council houses are built by the councils—and the argument contrasting the number of houses built under this Government with those built by the previous Government. Of course, that does not take into account the fact that, for many years, attempts were made to ensure that housing associations built houses. In that respect, the numbers simply do not add up, because the Government is not comparing like with like.

We have heard the minister's wonderful claim of a manifesto commitment—

**Margaret Burgess:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** No—I will carry on for the moment.

The minister made a wonderful claim about a manifesto commitment to build all these affordable houses—but no; the commitment was to build social rented houses and, in a bit of sleight of hand after its election, the Government changed its target to make it easier to meet.

That is not the only sleight of hand in which this Government has been involved. Another piece of magic was its decision to count completions as well as starts, which meant that, when taken over the whole period, one could draw in houses that were started before the period in question began. Even better, if the approach was changed mid-period, one could actually count houses started in one year and finished in the next—in other words, they could be counted twice over. The Government's figures in that respect have to be studied very closely.

There is also an in-built contempt for housing associations. The Government will deny it but, when it talks about councils to the exclusion of housing associations' achievements, it undermines the contribution of those organisations. I have never ceased to be amazed at the way in which, reminiscent of an old Hammer horror film, housing associations have batted their eyelashes and swooned as the Government, like a vampire, sucks the very life-blood from them.

As for this Government's actions and their results, yesterday's housing statistics really are a damning indictment of the Government's failure to address Scotland's housing shortage. Under its stewardship, the supply of new homes has fallen by almost half. Perhaps we should not be surprised at that, given the Scottish Government's choice to disproportionately slash the housing budget. Periodically, it unveils additions to the housing pot that are quite often funded by Barnett consequential from that evil Tory Government

south of the border. I am sorry—I should perhaps have put that phrase in quotation marks.

I believe that that is fiscal fancy footwork and that it is having a hugely detrimental effect on Scottish house-building levels. The uncertainty is, in my view, hampering progress and we need only look at the Scottish Government's spending choices to see why. Its response is not to become more ambitious; instead, it resorts to the well-worn tactic of pointing the finger at global downturns and, of course, Westminster. It is the political equivalent of saying, "A big boy did it and ran away", which is one of the three key defences that the Scottish Government regularly uses.

The long-awaited white paper on independence tells us many things. We will keep our phone numbers, we will still have mobile internet access and we will still be able to watch "Dr Who". However, it does not tell us anything meaningful about how the SNP would build enough homes to house those who need them. We can all take comfort from the fact that an independent Scotland will still be called Scotland—I believe that that is in the white paper. However, we should not be surprised. Housing is a devolved issue, and given the SNP Government's lamentable performance on housing with the powers that it already has, those who are languishing on the housing waiting list cannot expect a reversal in fortunes whatever the outcome of the referendum.

The SNP told us that it would seek to leverage in private investment to build social housing. That is a laudable aim, but where is the money and where are the houses? The best that the Government has come up with so far is the national housing trust, which is now limping along in its third incarnation. Yes, with the NHT we are seeing houses built, but let us look a little more closely. Once a tenant has moved into an NHT property, the clock is ticking. They have their home for as little as five years, and if they cannot afford to buy it after that time they are left with little option but to move out. Let us compare and contrast that with Conservative housing policy. The right to buy offered tenants the option of either continuing to rent their home or buying it if they chose to do so.

In key areas of policy, delivery by the SNP Government is unacceptable compared with that by previous Governments. Until the Government accepts its limitations and responsibility, there is no way forward. I support the motion in the name of Mary Fee.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate and six-minute speeches. We are very tight for time.

15:17

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** It was entirely predictable that the Labour Party would use its business slot today to debate housing, given Mr Kelly's question in the white paper debate last Wednesday. However, the logic of its doing so escapes me, as the assertions in the motion can be demolished paragraph by paragraph—so let me do that.

**James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Maureen Watt:** Presiding Officer, I thought that the convention was that members are allowed at least a minute before interventions. Let us stick to that, shall we?

The motion states that

“Scotland is facing a housing crisis”

and that

“the number of new homes built in 2012 was the lowest since the post-war era”.

I wonder why that is. It would not be anything to do with the complete collapse of the economy that was presided over by the previous Labour Government at Westminster, would it? The selective amnesia of the Labour Party—and, we now hear, of the Tories—is breathtaking. The decline in house building is entirely due to the downturn in private sector housing construction. With banks refusing to lend to them, many house builders are going to the wall and there is a lack of confidence among house sellers and buyers as they see the value of properties decline.

While the Labour Party sits and moans, “Woe, woe and three times woe,” the SNP is taking action and intervening wherever it can with its currently limited powers. We know from its record of inaction that that would be the Labour Party's reaction. Even in the good times, before the crisis, Labour's record on house building was woeful. It is worth repeating that Labour built only six council houses in its last four years in government compared with the 3,724 council homes that were completed by the SNP Government in the six years to June 2013. Also in the six years to June 2013, 27,023 housing association homes were completed—a rise of 16 per cent over the six years from 2002 to 2007, when Labour was in power. That can be said to be typical of Labour, as in Wales Labour has built only eight council houses in the past few years. In addition, when the SNP in Aberdeen called for the council to borrow to build more council homes, both Labour and the Tories rejected that call.

Despite the 26 per cent reduction in the capital budget from Westminster, planned investment in housing over the four years to 2015-16 will exceed

£1.35 billion. Of course we would like to do more, but we are constrained by the financial settlement.

**James Kelly rose—**

**Maureen Watt:** I am not aware that anybody on the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee or the Finance Committee suggested changes to the budget to increase spending on housing or said where such increased spending would come from. Is James Kelly going to tell us?

**James Kelly:** Maureen Watt quoted a 26 per cent cut from Westminster, but the SNP Government's housing budget was reduced by 29 per cent between 2008 and 2011, so it made more cuts to housing than were passed on by Westminster.

**Maureen Watt:** It is funny that we are still managing to build more houses—we know how to use the money better.

The motion mentions that house builders are concerned about separation. I am not aware of that, but I am aware of a Homes for Scotland press release from 27 September, which said:

“Home builders herald launch of ‘game changing’ Help to Buy scheme in Scotland.”

We know that house builders would not have adequate house-building standards if those were left to the industry itself—the industry admits that—but how many fewer houses in both the public and private sectors would be falling below tolerable standard, especially with regard to insulation, if housing standards since the war had been set to cope with Scottish weather conditions, rather than those several degrees warmer in the south-east of England? It is because housing standards have been set in the south-east of England that this Government is having to spend so much on insulation schemes in Scotland.

I thought that we could agree that the homelessness legislation had cross-party support and was being well implemented across local authorities, notwithstanding some local difficulty in East Lothian. However, at the weekend we found out that Glasgow City Council is neglecting and ignoring its duty on homelessness. Organisations such as Turning Point Scotland and Glasgow Housing Association itself will be horrified, as both those bodies were proud of the legislation and their work on meeting their obligations. Indeed, Turning Point has said that international bodies that it met were envious of the legislation.

I said at the outset that this debate was predictable. James Kelly, like so many of his better together colleagues, opened his mouth last week before his eyes were opened to the white paper. The white paper has more paragraphs than there were council houses built when Labour was in office.

Finally, Presiding Officer—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are in your last 15 seconds.

**Maureen Watt:** I want to address the personal attack in the motion on the Minister for Housing and Welfare. Mary Fee should be reminded that in the previous parliamentary session, her Labour colleagues frequently indulged in that practice—little good it did them. As a woman, Mary Fee should reject the tactics of the male chauvinist dinosaurs in her party.

Margaret Burgess is an inspired choice of minister. Her career in a citizens advice bureau gave her—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must stop, please.

**Maureen Watt:** She works tirelessly. This morning she was in Perthshire; after the debate she will be in Glasgow—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Watt, you must stop please.

**Maureen Watt:** The Housing (Scotland) Bill is coming forward—she has been working on that. I support Margaret—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are stopping now. Thank you.

15:23

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I am pleased to have the chance to speak in this debate. I have corresponded with the minister a number of times on housing issues in the north-east. Although I appreciate the replies that I have received, the policies that she has outlined again today fall very far short of what needs to be done to address the chronic shortage of social housing in this country, and certainly the specific challenges that we have in the north-east.

Members on the SNP benches may not want to hear this, but, as people on the ground in our communities know, the reality is that there is a crisis in social housing. No number of excuses and no amount of passing the buck will get us away from the fact that this Government has singularly failed to deliver on its key pledge to the people of Scotland. Why we should have any confidence at all that it will be delivered in an independent Scotland when the Government cannot deliver it with the powers that it has now is beyond me, and certainly is not illustrated by anything in its white paper.

As Mary Fee said, the fact is that fewer social housing homes were built last year than at any time since 1947. That is the wage of this Government's decision to cut the housing budget

by one third and that is the issue at hand. It dismissed the figures that were published yesterday, which showed the extent of the problem.

**John Mason:** Will the member give way?

**Richard Baker:** Not at the moment; I am just past my first minute.

The Government's amendment dodges the crucial issue by debating records on house building in a way that suggests that homes that are built by councils are good and homes that are built by housing associations are bad. What a ludicrous debate that is. The key issue is that homes are built and people are getting off the waiting lists and into those houses.

**John Mason:** If the member had to choose between more houses in Aberdeen and getting rid of the Aberdeen western peripheral route, which would he choose?

**Richard Baker:** Mr Mason knows that this party brought forward a clear budget proposal last year for building more homes and increasing substantially the housing budget, and that was not predicated on anything that Mr Mason has suggested. He should have looked carefully at our budget proposal last year.

The fact of the matter is that the previous Executive built 10,000 more homes in the last year of our Administration than this Government did last year. Whatever weasel tactics the Government is using with regard to the data it chooses to use, the fact is that we built more social housing and it has failed to deliver on the pledges that it has made in this area.

We will debate a number of statistics this afternoon, but we should remember the human impact. I think of the young woman and her partner who, for three years, had to share their bedroom with their son, and the impact that that had on their lives. I think of the families in which brothers and sisters are sharing rooms way beyond the ages that the vast majority of us would find acceptable, because their parents cannot secure the housing that they need. That is what is happening on the ground in our communities. There are many stories like that.

The Government's figures show that 1,000 households in Aberdeen and 3,000 in Aberdeenshire are defined as overcrowded, with thousands of people on waiting lists. Aberdeen City Council proposes to build 2,000 new social homes through its infrastructure plan. It is acting on that. It is the Scottish Government that is entirely failing to step up to the plate on this important issue for the north-east.

If there are more people on waiting lists, surely we must build more homes. Instead, the figures

from the Government state that there were only 99 social sector new-build starts in Aberdeenshire in 2012-13 and a round figure in Aberdeen of zero. That figure sits against a figure of more than 1,300, which is the number of affordable homes that local housing associations estimate are required. It is not surprising that, in July, Audit Scotland found:

"Aberdeen City is one of the few council areas in Scotland with a surplus of jobs, but the area received the lowest allocation per head of population for new homes in the 2012-15 plans."

That is a lower allocation of a diminishing budget.

**Patrick Harvie:** Given what Mr Baker has said about the lack of affordable homes—by which I assume he means social rented homes—in his area, does he agree that there is a need to address the private rented housing crisis, which has resulted in rents in his area reaching £800 or £900 a month?

**Richard Baker:** The member makes a good point, which I am about to deal with. That is why the issue of homes for social rent is important. That is a pledge that this Government has failed to deliver on.

The issue of rents is important. Aberdeen has had the highest increase in house prices outside London and now we have the highest rents in Scotland. That makes it all the more difficult for those who already live in the north-east but who are on low incomes and are not benefiting from the strong local economy to get the housing that they need. However, when this Government decided to cut the housing association grant to build new homes from £76,000—which it was when Labour left office—to just £44,000, it did not take a rocket scientist to work out that that would mean that fewer homes would be built, and that is what happened. Housing associations told the Government that it would happen and it happened.

Now, finally, ministers have accepted that point and have changed the position so that the cut in the grant has been reduced, and the new level is £58,000. However, I say to ministers that that figure will have to be revised again if it transpires that the 30,000 new homes target cannot be met. To return to Mr Harvie's point, if that target is met by building homes for mid-market rent, that will not be addressing the need that exists.

I hope that the Government will do more to support the housing associations of the north-east, which stand ready to move forward with the projects to deliver the social housing that our part of Scotland needs. I hope that ministers will rethink an approach to housing that has been marked by swingeing cuts and a lack of delivery. The people who are sitting on housing waiting lists today do not need a change in the constitution;

they need a change in the policy of this Government to deliver the homes that they need.

15:29

**John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Since I was elected, and despite what the Labour Party states in its motion, it should be noted that the Scottish Government has brought numerous housing debates to the chamber. If my memory serves me correctly, the first debate in which I spoke was on housing. I welcome any debate that allows for greater discussion and scrutiny of the issue of housing.

In many ways, the current direction of housing was set by the Scottish Government in its discussion paper in 2010, "Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas." When we examine housing and the issues surrounding it, we need to consider the historical context. Over the past 30 years, the UK Government has repeated policies of large-scale voluntary stock transfers, which have produced many changes in the provision of social housing.

Moreover, there was a constant push by the two Liberal-Labour Administrations in Scotland towards large-scale voluntary stock transfers of housing stock being marketed as community ownership. Some might say that that was pushing the model of community ownership a bit too far. In fact, we had Wendy Alexander, as a Labour housing minister, pushing for the right to buy to be extended to housing associations.

The critique offered by Labour's motion chimes with a well-worn theme developed previously. There was criticism that the housing association grant has been reduced. Richard Baker just referred to the HAG. I remind members that the grant is a public subsidy. When it first came into existence, it was not supposed to be there for ever and a day. Throughout the previous Liberal-Labour Administration, it was on a downward path. There needs to be recognition that the Scottish Government's capital budget was reduced in substantial terms by the UK coalition Government, hence the reason for looking at these budgets and the HAG funding that is being made available to housing associations and others.

That issue ties up with the wider issue of housing affordability. People cannot afford rents at the current rates in the private rented sector. Patrick Harvie alluded to that. The current financial climate brings more financial pressure to those in the private sector who are trying to keep a roof over their head. More people are applying to council housing waiting lists and looking to social housing to get a roof over their heads. In that respect, I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government, through various discussion papers,

has highlighted fairer rents, although rent setting is limited in many respects to the landlords from whom individuals rent their homes.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the community growth area where I live, which was proposed in 2006 by private developers, is finally going out to consultation this month. The possibility of delivering 2,600 private houses in an area of essential housing need has been continually delayed by local authority inaction and failure to sit down with the developers and discuss the issues surrounding the developments. In relation to house building, we must consider what is hampering such developments, including the issue of the international financial crisis and the effects of the situation that we faced in 2008. There are housing developers who have been keen to move forward and develop housing but who have been hampered because local authorities have not had the vision to take on those developments and look at how they can assist house builders to go ahead.

The Scottish Government does not operate in a policy vacuum. Scotland is severely constrained under the current devolved settlement. That is even more apparent in respect of the benefit changes that have been announced by the UK Government since its emergency budget in June 2010 and almost every subsequent financial statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. A more responsive and effective welfare system is not helped by arbitrary changes in the benefits system, such as the so-called bedroom tax.

I will address Alex Johnstone's point about the wonderful policies pursued by successive Conservative Governments. The right-to-buy legislation that was introduced in 1979—it is actively promoted and supported by some in this chamber—has meant increased waiting lists for social housing since the legislation was enacted. That has clearly had an impact on the achievement of homelessness targets that were set for local authorities under housing legislation.

It is important that we advocate a position of tenure neutrality. In Scotland, we have had for far too long a tenure policy rather than a fully structured housing policy. Only now, with the changes that the present Scottish Government has made to the right to buy, might we get an influential game changer that will assist people now and in future generations.

I welcome the debate—*[Interruption.]* Does Duncan McNeil want to intervene?

**Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab):** I would like to do that—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No—Mr Wilson is in his last minute.

**Duncan McNeil:** Right—okay.

**John Wilson:** I am sorry about that, Mr McNeil.

I welcome the debate. I hope that the debate will be taken forward in the coming months and years and that we can develop a housing policy that benefits all sectors—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close now, please.

**John Wilson:** —but particularly the families and individuals who rely on the social housing sector for their accommodation and a roof over their heads.

15:35

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The paucity of the SNP's ambition in housing policy is deeply depressing. We have heard again the tired old mantra that, if only we had independence, everything would be better—the sun would shine, Scotland would win the world cup and housing would be improved. However, responsibility for housing is devolved, so there is nothing to stop the SNP taking action now. Like Patrick Harvie, I will focus on what the Scottish Government can do.

Since the advent of devolution, the Scottish Parliament has passed some of the most progressive homelessness legislation in the world. Along with ending child poverty, eradicating rough sleeping and tackling homelessness were major objectives of the first Labour Scottish Executive. We established a homelessness task force to review the nature and causes of homelessness, and its recommendations fundamentally changed our approach. For the first time, we delivered a rights-based framework that put us at the forefront of the global fight against homelessness.

We phased out priority need, although they told us that we could not do that. No longer are homeless applicants assessed and categorised regardless of the underlying cause of their homelessness. All are now entitled to settled accommodation.

The current Government has built on that and has introduced housing options. On the face of it, that approach is needs based and rooted in prevention. However, I say genuinely that there is a sneaking suspicion that it is masking the true level of homelessness and that the figures are being massaged. Whether or not that is right, I hope that the minister will commit to urgent research on the subject, because the SNP must not be complacent about that.

I am proud of our achievement, but it is not a case of job done. Huge challenges are ahead. As the cost of living increases and as incomes decline in real terms, more people and families will be



plunged into crisis. For some, austerity will mean being driven from their homes by mortgage repossession; others will just be unable to sustain their tenancies.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that more people are sleeping rough on our streets—contrary to what the minister said. I hope that I do not need to tell her how brutal an existence that is. Suffice it to say that a man who was sleeping rough outside Glasgow Central station a few weeks ago died of hypothermia. This is 21st century Scotland—the SNP must do better than that.

I want the SNP Government to instruct a count of rough sleepers and I have asked the minister to do that. Why will the Government not do that? The minister sticks her head in the sand, in denial that there is a problem, but the problem is growing. There is no data to inform action and the Government is taking no specific action on rough sleeping.

An overview of homelessness data in the past 10 years, which I commend to the minister for careful consideration, shows that, although the number of applications and homelessness assessments has reduced, the number of households that are assessed as intentionally homeless has increased. The most recent quarterly data on homelessness reported that, of the 5,500 unintentionally homeless households whose case was closed, 76 per cent secured a local authority, housing association or private let as an outcome. That is welcome, but it means that 24 per cent did not achieve a positive outcome. That proportion has remained the same for the past six years. What is happening to those people? The Scottish Government does not know.

The minister requires to take urgent action on the issue. That is her responsibility and the Scottish Government's responsibility; it is not the responsibility of Westminster or anybody else. It is in the Scottish Government's power to do something now.

We know that changes to housing legislation—along with the lack of social housing and an increase in demand—have triggered an exponential increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation. According to the Government's statistics, as of June of this year there were 10,494 households in temporary accommodation. That is a significant increase since 2007 and we need to understand why. Those households in turn contain 4,574 children. That is 1,000 more children in temporary accommodation than there were a decade ago.

I said earlier that homelessness is not simply about bricks and mortar, but we have to ask serious questions of the Government when it has taken decisions to slash the house-building budget

in recent years by tens of millions of pounds. While the number of temporary households remains so high, those genuinely seem to be perverse decisions to make.

Temporary accommodation will, for many, represent that crucial first step away from homelessness and towards a home. If we are to minimise the trauma that we know is associated with becoming homeless, we have a duty to ensure that the standard of temporary accommodation is as high as possible, especially when we consider that many individuals and many families can spend not just months but perhaps even years in temporary accommodation. The evidence is there. We know the serious impact that temporary accommodation has on a child's development and wellbeing, so I genuinely say to the minister that in light of the growth of temporary accommodation, it is absolutely critical that the Scottish Government does not delay further and introduces statutory standards for temporary housing.

Housing in Scotland is in crisis. There is urgent action that the Scottish Government and the minister can take. The minister has demonstrated breathtaking complacency. I hope that she will finally take the veil from her eyes and do something to help people in Scotland.

15:42

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate Mary Fee and the Labour Party on bringing forward the debate. I do so because I believe that it takes a certain type of chutzpah or bravery—or skill, even—to seek to selectively rewrite the history of the management of the housing sector while trying to pursue the aims of the motion.

Where shall we start? How about with local authority build completions? Mr Johnstone wants the stats and I have the information. In Scotland, we know that on a calendar year basis in 2006—two years before the financial crisis—Labour built only six local authority houses, as was stated, and Labour started only 28 houses. [*Interruption.*] In 2012, we built 1,096 and we started 1,211. To bring it a bit closer to home, as Mary Fee will certainly know, on the west coast of Scotland no houses were built in 2006, repeating the wonderful successes of 2004 and 2005, when Labour also built none.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Chic Brodie:** Let me finish this point—I will take an intervention in a minute.

In that same region, we built 93 houses in 2012.

If we look at the housing association completions, again I can quote the stats. In 2007, there were 413 completions; in 2012, there were 900—more than double the number of completions that were achieved under the previous Administration.

**Lewis Macdonald:** On the matter of being accurate with regard to historical matters, can the member tell us how much social rented housing in Scotland was promised in the SNP manifesto on which he was elected?

**Chic Brodie:** Yes. We said that over a period of time, we would build 30,000 houses. [*Interruption.*] That is what we said we would do.

I mentioned the housing association, but rightly Mary Fee of course includes in her naming of a so-called crisis—at least I hope that she would—a reference to private housing. Alex Johnstone from the Conservatives missed the very point that, in Mary Fee's expansive critique, there was a not-so-detailed commentary on private housing, or indeed on the private rented sector, which has seen a severe decline and is one of the main components—if not the main component—in building stats, with a consequent effect on the completion figures since 2007-08 that we have heard about.

Mary Fee mentioned the Audit Scotland report on housing from July this year, so let us look at what it says in the round. It states:

"The recession has affected the availability of housing and the sector is now working with constraints on lending, competing and increasing demands on capital resources, and reduced government subsidies."

Those issues are not controlled from this chamber.

Mary Fee and the Labour Party now need to be honest, and honest with themselves. Who helped to cause the 2008 recession? It was a UK Labour Government that defaulted on imposing the financial regulation that it should have imposed. Who now can liberate lending for mortgages? It is the Westminster Government, although—

**Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**James Kelly:** Will the member give way?

**Chic Brodie:** No, not just now.

I welcome the involvement—I think—of the governor of the Bank of England, although his intervention in the form of releasing capital for private sector mortgage lending has yet to be proven. The current economic stimulus that we are seeing via so-called mortgage lending is a mirage and the creator of a housing bubble.

**James Kelly:** The member talked about the previous Labour Government. Can he tell us whether he supported the Government's action to

rescue HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland as vital parts of the Scottish economy?

**Chic Brodie:** Mr Kelly will—or should—know that banks incur debts and liabilities in the countries in which they operate, and those banks did not carry out all their operations in Scotland.

Who cut Scotland's capital budget allocation by 26 per cent? It was not this Government.

**Drew Smith:** Will the member give way?

**Chic Brodie:** No—I have done so enough.

I will continue the litany of statistics; I am sorry about that. The Audit Scotland report to which Mary Fee's motion refers mentions the impact that welfare reform will have in, for example, putting further pressure on the sector—

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Chic Brodie:** No, I will not.

In fact, by default, welfare reform will put pressure on the whole sector. There will be a £50 million drop in tenants' income by 2014-15 as a result of the bedroom tax—which Labour discovered six months after we did. Those are not my statistics but those of Audit Scotland.

The report goes on to mention the other pressures, such as additional households, an increase in the number of single-person households, the changing demography and so on. Those issues are all pertinent to providing a stable economy and housing sector.

Several meaningful subjects and concerns were raised when I and some of my colleagues met the Scottish House Builders Association not all that long ago. I cannot recall a member of the Labour Party attending that meeting. The SHBA representatives did not talk at that time about the impact of independence on the housing market but about the lack of clarity around lending and mortgage support.

Lastly, I appeal to the Labour Party—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are in your last 30 seconds, Mr Brodie.

**Chic Brodie:** I am coming to the end, Presiding Officer.

In the face of the challenging economic circumstances that affect us all, why does the Labour Party not work with us on this side of the chamber to get a meaningful, stable growing economy that can provide the type of housing sector that we want, instead of working with that lot and shoring them up? I beg for that support.

15:48

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** It is a pleasure to participate in this consensual debate this afternoon. [*Laughter.*] I do not know if I will help that aspect of it in any way, I am afraid.

It is telling that, while we are in the midst of a housing crisis, with tens of thousands of people languishing on waiting lists throughout the country, it has taken an Opposition debate to smoke the minister out of St Andrew's house. In the past 15 months since the housing minister took on her new role, I have given more speeches on housing at conferences than in this chamber.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Will the member give way?

**Jim Hume:** I am in my first minute.

I congratulate Mary Fee on bringing the debate to the chamber; the Scottish Liberal Democrats will support her motion later today.

Just last month the Scottish Government published its latest housing bill. The bill contains some useful measures such as the overdue regulation of letting agents, the ending of the right to buy and more local flexibility in social housing allocations for landlords. However, none of that will, in any meaningful way, drive down the appalling length of Scotland's housing waiting lists. The housing minister's own press release highlighted that there are 400,000 people on waiting lists for housing association and council homes, which is an astonishing figure.

What the quarterly housing statistics never tell us is just how long those people have been on those lists. Information that I obtained last year revealed that two thirds of the 180,000 people on the council house application lists had been there for more than 12 months—a 6 per cent increase on the year before.

More than 60,000 of those applicants had been waiting for over three years. Let us imagine someone who has arrived at the decision that their living circumstances are no longer adequate and that an application for a new home is necessary, and then let us consider that, three years later, they are no further forward in extricating themselves from those circumstances. We can then begin to imagine the damage that is being done to the welfare of families across the country.

Why have we arrived at this point? As others have said, we can probably begin with the 29 per cent real-terms cut in the housing budget, which led to the destructive policy decision in 2010 to cut the subsidies to councils and housing associations. The cut from £70,000 per home to just £40,000 has had serious consequences: a 29 per cent reduction in the number of completions of homes for social rent; a 42 per cent reduction in housing association completions alone over the

past three years; and a decline in the public sector housing stock in each year under the SNP Government. Although the minister announced in the summer an increase to subsidy levels, they are still some way short of 2010 levels.

The situation is bad now, but we need to be mindful of what lies further down the track. With people living longer and Scotland's population continuing to grow, it is estimated that an additional half a million homes will be needed by 2035. Research by the previous Scottish Government, which was undertaken before the recession and the subsequent need for more social housing, revealed that 8,000 new homes for social rent were required each year to satisfy demand. The Government's target is to build half of that.

On another note, the minister must check her facts and bring more balance to the debate. She says in her amendment that only six council houses were built in the last four years of the Labour-Lib Dem Administration. That in itself is wrong, but the minister, like all SNP members, continually fails to acknowledge the 19,704 approvals of new housing association homes under the Administration in that time. That was nearly 20,000 homes for social rent. I gently remind the minister that that is her target for the five years of the current session of Parliament and that it remains to be seen whether it will be achieved, given the recent decline in new housing association homes. In the eight years under the Lib Dem-Labour coalition, the figure for housing association new-build approvals and local authority new-build starts was 33,118. The Government has some way to go to match that record. Let us not concentrate only on council houses, because housing association houses were also built.

Prior to last week's publication of the white paper, we were promised that it would answer all our questions and would detail what an independent Scotland would look like. Last week, more than 400,000 people were asking how they would find a new home in an independent Scotland, and they are still asking this week.

Despite the white paper being heralded as an historic document—the most important in Scottish history since the declaration of Arbroath—its 670 pages yielded three on housing. In those three pages, the Scottish Government is at great pains to highlight the constraints that are imposed on it that hamper its ability to provide affordable housing. I do not recall Westminster compelling the SNP to renege on its manifesto commitment to build 6,000 homes for social rent every year or to cut the subsidy that is provided for each home.

Would it not be fair to surmise that, with just three pages of the white paper devoted to

housing, and given the Scottish Government's failure to bring a debate to the chamber, it simply does not have the answers, the commitment or the passion to solve this crisis?

15:54

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I welcome the developments that are taking place in my constituency, where Parkhead Housing Association, Shettleston Housing Association and Glasgow Housing Association have all been building homes, and there is specialist provision from Loretto Housing Association among others.

I reiterate and underline my welcome for the Commonwealth games village, which is nearing completion and which, after the games, will provide 700 homes—400 for social rent and 300 for sale—as well as a 120-bed care home to serve the east end.

We now understand that, because there has been so much interest in those homes in the east end, developers are now showing interest in the wider area. That is very encouraging and is one of the things that we wanted to see from the Commonwealth games giving a boost to the area.

We all want more to be done. There are a number of factors as to why more houses have not been built and cannot be built at the moment. The first is the general economy. Somebody mismanaged the UK economy. I do not agree with the way in which the Conservative Government is trying to fix it, but it was under the previous Labour Administration when things went badly wrong.

Let us remember in passing that, when the economy went badly wrong in Ireland, one of the problems was that too many houses were built—houses that no one could afford and, in some cases, houses that are now being demolished. Let us not be too simplistic as we consider the numbers.

Secondly, housing associations are finding it harder to borrow. That in itself has a number of reasons. One is that the banks themselves are more wary of lending, because of some of the bad lending that they have done before. That is despite the fact that housing associations are traditionally very safe borrowers.

Another reason for the reduction in lending could be the bedroom tax and the concern that tenants will be unable to pay their rent. That, in turn, makes the banks and other lenders less certain about housing association income flows.

Just yesterday evening, I attended a housing association committee, and its members reckon that one eighth of their tenants are affected by the bedroom tax. Some of them—most of them, in fact—are getting help through discretionary

housing payment, but that is only intended to be short-term assistance. There is evidence that some tenants are refusing to apply for discretionary housing payments, because they consider the bedroom tax so morally wrong.

A third factor why more houses cannot be built is that the Scottish Government's budget has been cut. We have to be realistic about the money. I have to live within my means, as do all members here. So do housing associations, so do councils, and so does the Government. All of us have to live within our means. We would all like to spend more money on many things, and housing would certainly be a top priority for me, as it continues to be the main issue that constituents raise with me.

However, if more is to be spent on housing, less is available to be spent elsewhere.

**Mary Fee:** Nicola Sturgeon, the Deputy First Minister, recently said that the Government would build its way out of the recession. Could the member tell me when that building is going to start?

**John Mason:** It has started and is going on: as I said, there are 700 new homes being built right now—more than that, in fact—in my constituency. I am trying to argue that we are constrained by the amount of money that we have. That is the reality: we all have to live within our means and, if more is to be spent on housing, less will be spent on something else.

What exactly does the Opposition mean by the phrase in its motion,

"a comprehensive, ambitious and inclusive national housing action plan"?

At the beginning of her speech, Jackie Baillie said that she would tell us what we can do. I was listening, and I was waiting to hear what that would be. All that she did for six minutes, however, was describe the problem.

She is rushing back to her seat to intervene.

**Jackie Baillie:** How about standards for temporary accommodation? How about actually looking at what is going on with the homeless register? How about actually dealing with rough sleeping, which the member's Government is doing nothing about? How about that?

**John Mason:** I suspect that the housing minister will be very sympathetic to any suggestions about how we can do things better, but the key problem as far as I am concerned—I think that I am the first member of the Finance Committee to have spoken in the debate—is a lack of money.

I intervened earlier during Mary Fee's speech. She suggested that one way of having more money for housing would have been if GARL had

not been cancelled. That is a very interesting idea. Is she saying that GARL should not have been started by Strathclyde partnership for transport—controlled by Labour—in the first place? Was it a Labour mistake to cancel it? Is she saying that it should have been completed? In that case, there would have been less money available for housing, because that money would have gone into GARL. What a bizarre suggestion.

Is Labour suggesting that we drop the Southern general hospital and put more money into housing? Is it suggesting that we drop Glasgow to Edinburgh rail electrification and put more money into housing from that? Those would all be options, albeit not my options. It would at least help if Labour would tell us where the money was to come from.

Alternatively, does Labour want the existing housing budget to fund the building of more homes? How is that to be done? Would Labour reduce housing association grant levels at a time when the Government has only recently increased them again? Would Labour cut them again?

I agree with Maureen Watt's comments that it is disappointing to see a personal attack on the minister. It should be possible to debate such issues and to disagree on how we are dealing with them, and even to attack Government policy, but we should not necessarily be attacking the person.

I am very sympathetic towards the Green amendment. Many of the antisocial behaviour problems in my constituency relate to the private rented sector.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You should be drawing to a close, please.

**John Mason:** There are many housing issues on which work is needed.

For me, housing is one of the top priorities. Let us have fewer personal attacks on the minister and more practical suggestions about what can be done.

16:00

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** Chic Brodie said that he wanted to speak about facts. He set out the case for the promises that were made and asked that things be measured against them. He then said that the SNP had claimed that it would build 30,000 houses, but if he had been completely open and transparent with the Parliament, he would have included the phrase that Alex Johnstone reminded us of—"social rented". Regardless of what the figure was, that is key. That promise was abandoned without any explanation. It would have been helpful if, at some point, the minister had come to the Parliament to explain why that promise was abandoned.

John Mason said that we should attack the policies and the Administration, not the person. That is fair enough, but earlier the minister told the Parliament that the reason why she had not come here in the 15 months since she was appointed was that she had been too busy going out to meet people who really mattered. She said that that had prevented her from coming to the Parliament to discuss the key issue of housing.

Apart from showing a fundamental contempt for the Parliament—to be honest, she is not alone in the SNP Administration in that—the minister's explanation represents a profound statement of what the SNP's priorities are. While she has been too busy meeting important people to come to the Parliament to talk about housing, we have had to debate—yesterday—Scotland's census, which hardly ranks higher than a housing crisis. Rather than debate the housing crisis, we had to debate—for two and a half hours—the fact that it was a year till the Ryder cup. We had to discuss something that we had no control over: the noble aspiration of Dundee to be a city of culture. We had to debate the fact that we wanted to celebrate Scotland's public science engagement, instead of talking about how science and money might help to improve the lives of ordinary Scots by being used to build good-quality, affordable social rented houses. We had to debate St Andrew's day: a celebration of Scotland while the minister was too busy to come here to talk to the Parliament. It is about time that the SNP Administration put on the Parliament's agenda an issue such as housing, which is fundamental to the lives of people the length and breadth of Scotland.

John Baillie, who is the chair of the Accounts Commission, made a highly pertinent comment when he said:

"Good housing is important for individuals and families but also for wider society. It can support economic growth, promote strong, resilient communities and improve health."

The problem is that the housing minister cannot be bothered to come to the chamber to discuss the things that John Baillie talked about.

There are things that can be done. John Mason and others are right to say that there are problems with the financial situation not just of the Scottish Government, but of the wider public sector. Despite that, there are measures that could be taken, decisions that could be made and priorities that could be set out. We have heard a lot about the distinction between housing association housing and council housing, but housing associations and councils are telling us that they need capital funding for new social housing developments to be restored because, without that, they will struggle to provide the houses that are needed.

There are a number of things that could be done immediately—Jackie Baillie listed many of them.

There is also the problem of mixed-tenure estates, which people have brought to the Parliament to discuss with us and work on with us—yes, let us work together—to see what we can do to enhance the power of councils to intervene and deliver improvement work that would assist the allocation of funding to help owners to deal with on-going maintenance problems. I realise that affordability tests need to be built into that, but there are still things that can be done. Unfortunately, we have heard nothing from the minister and we have not had the opportunity to discuss that with her. There has been 15 months of silence and inaction as far as the Parliament is concerned, and that is not good enough.

I genuinely accept that we should work across the political spectrum to see what improvements can be made. If the minister wants to do that through parliamentary committees as a starting point, and then produce something that can come back to the chamber, that is fine. That would be something that we could look at together when it comes to the budget. We did make suggestions during the budget process about the use of consequential to improve housing, but if those are not acceptable to the minister and the Administration, that is fair enough. Let us work together on it.

However, the prerequisite for working together is talking with each other, and 15 months of silence is unacceptable. We cannot afford another 15 months of this.

16:06

**Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):** This debate is about much more than bricks and mortar. It is about the right of every person in Scotland to a warm, secure, and affordable home. That basic human right must be at the heart of building a progressive, civilised and cohesive society. It is about giving children a safe environment in which to grow, allowing young people to have the best start in life by giving them access to employment and education or the chance to start a family, and providing our older people with a warm, comfortable, and safe place to live.

The importance of housing must therefore not be underestimated. It is central to meeting our economic objectives and to reducing our carbon footprint. It impacts on health outcomes and life expectancy. It is often critical to finding and holding down a job, and we know that it impacts on how well children perform at school.

If we are all agreed about the need for good-quality, affordable housing, we need to ensure that

the policy and investment priorities of central and local government reflect that. Social housing should not be a safety net for those who cannot afford to buy or rent; it should be part of a necessary and desirable diversity of tenure within our neighbourhoods and communities.

I echo the points that other members have made about the Scottish Government's record compared with those of previous Administrations and I will not labour that point. I also agree with the point that is made in the Government's amendment that Scotland is outperforming other parts of the UK. However, serious challenges remain. I know that Alex Johnstone does not like to hear it, but the stark reality is swingeing cuts in capital budgets being imposed by Westminster, challenges facing the private housing construction sector that were brought about by the financial crash, and the reluctance and refusal of banks to release finance for social housing, which exacerbates the financial pressures on small housing associations. All that comes before we confront the pressures that are being brought to bear on registered social landlords as a result of welfare reform.

Despite the cuts in capital spending that have been imposed by Westminster, the Scottish Government has built 16,000 affordable homes. That is the answer to Mary Fee's question when she asked when the building will start. It has started, and two thirds of those homes are for social rent. That is a good record that stands in stark contrast to that of the previous Administration.

**Jim Hume:** Will the member give way?

**Jim Eadie:** Mr Hume made the point that I know he wants to make now in his own speech, so I will not give way.

We are building council houses for the first time in a generation. Only this week, in Edinburgh, the housing minister launched Castle Rock Edinvar's 1,000 homes for Edinburgh initiative, which will provide more affordable homes in the capital. That is real leadership where it matters most. Over the four years to 2015-16, planned investment in affordable housing will exceed £1.35 billion. I defy any member to say that that is not a significant commitment in the trying financial circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Mary Fee referred to the amount of house building, but she omitted to mention the fact that the collapse in the private house-building sector was brought about as a direct result of the financial crisis, the blame for which can be laid firmly at the door of the present and previous UK Governments.

**Drew Smith:** A number of SNP members have made that point about Labour's global recession.

Surely Mr Eadie understands that the First Minister argued for less regulation. What part of the white paper that does not talk about housing sets out a plan for independent regulation of the financial sector?

**Jim Eadie:** All the detail on that is actually in the white paper. The member is betraying the fact that he has not read it.

The point that I was making was simply a statement of fact: that the blame for the financial crisis lies at the door of Westminster.

I want to talk about the serious issue of lending to the social housing sector, which is an important issue that the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations highlighted in advance of the debate. The federation rightly recognises the lack of flexibility in the UK Government lending initiatives to boost the amount of finance that is available to housing associations. It has stated that UK Government schemes are

“not appropriate for most Scottish housing association projects and will have minimal impact in delivering new housing in Scotland”.

That is because the UK Treasury rules require a minimum of £5 million in tranches that are released through those schemes, and that does not reflect the reality of the size and scale of the social housing sector in Scotland. We need greater flexibility.

Despite those challenges, registered social landlords are in good financial health, with £11 billion of housing assets protected. There is some good news. RSLs are recording deficits that have fallen to a five-year low. However, social landlords are facing financial pressure through welfare reform increasing the financial risks to housing associations. Again, the SFHA has been helpful in its independent analysis in demonstrating what that will mean. It will mean that there will be a loss of benefit income for working-age tenants in the sector of up to £228 million by 2017, which increases the financial risks for housing associations.

In evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee only this morning, the Scottish Housing Regulator confirmed that it was concerned about benefits being paid directly to the tenant rather than, as is the case at the moment, to the landlord, which, of course, provides a regular and assured income stream. That will have a knock-on effect on lending to housing associations and is something else that we should be mindful of.

The Government has done everything that it is legally permitted to do to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax. I welcome that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** I am afraid that you must close. Your six minutes is up.

**Jim Eadie:** In conclusion, there are challenges, but the Scottish Government is doing all that it can in very difficult circumstances, and it should be commended for that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have to advise the last two members who will speak in the debate that they may get five minutes each, but no more than that.

16:12

**Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con):** Presiding Officer, I will provide an unreconstructed contribution to a debate that has succeeded in clearing the public galleries.

One of the earliest interrogations—if that is the right word; it certainly felt like an interrogation at the time—that I found myself subject to by Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister was in 1982. It was about the mechanics of her right-to-buy legislation in Glasgow. The right to buy was a key, flagship policy in the Scottish Conservative election manifesto in 1979 and was hugely popular. Indeed, it amuses me to point out that it led directly to Margaret Thatcher securing more votes in Scotland in 1979 than the current SNP Scottish Government secured in 2011. That may come as a surprise to some members, but it is nonetheless an inconvenient truth.

Mrs Thatcher need not have been concerned. The right-to-buy policy was indeed popular in Glasgow and across Scotland. In the years since, some 455,000 properties have been bought, and in consequence, home ownership in Scotland has increased from 35 per cent in 1979 to over 60 per cent today.

All of that is a matter of historical record, but the huge transformational effect that that transfer of ownership had on the economy of Scotland is often left unsaid. New home owners invested in their properties much more readily and imaginatively than councils before them did.

I hear much said about the root of all difficulty today being the fact that the sale proceeds were not reinvested, but it is a statement of fact that the record of investment in much of the housing stock that was sold in 1979 was hard to perceive then from its apparent condition at the time. That investment by new home owners created jobs and in turn new entrepreneurs, who secured financial support that was underpinned by their new assets. They in turn established new businesses and created jobs.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackson Carlaw:** Perhaps later.

Had we been able to turn the clock back on the right to buy as though it never were, as is implied by the opprobrium heaped on it by the SNP, all those properties would still be occupied by many of the same families. The state would have financed and would still be financing overwhelming maintenance bills on ageing properties, which would all be funded by taxpayers, and all those new businesses and jobs and the wealth that arose from them would vanish from our history and economy. Scotland would be a vastly poorer country. All the nations that escaped the communist yoke after the fall of the Berlin wall in the 1980s would be laughing today, because they would have thrown over the shackles of state ownership only to see Scotland as the one country in the western world still clinging to poorly maintained, grim, state-owned and state-stultifying public housing at levels seen elsewhere in Europe only when gulags were the norm.

This is the first time that I have contributed to a housing debate and I have been listening with interest. It follows that all properties sold are usually lived in. The fact that they are now in the private sector, not the state sector, does not change the fact that they are occupied. If the people living in them were not living in them, where would they be living? In other words, whether in the state or private sector, the occupants of those houses today would still need to have a roof over their heads.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the member give way?

**Jackson Carlaw:** Perhaps I will give way later.

The arguments about the right to buy cannot change the basic fact that Scotland faces an acute housing shortage. Surely too often overlooked in this respect is the fact that there has been a 44 per cent increase in those seeking to live alone and we have an ageing population. All too easily, we customarily talk of the issues arising from an ageing population in terms of health and the consequence for health budgets, and rightly so, but the consequences extend way beyond health. Based on the old three-score-years-and-ten rule, most of us have known only an era in which the aspiration that most people continue to share begins with a starter home, leading to marriage and partnership and a family home, and then in due course to some downsizing, or for others the hope that they will end their days in their family home so full of memory and personal attachment.

However, our housing model has depended on houses becoming available to the market and—speaking frankly—on people dying. A radically different society, in which people consciously aspire to live alone and in which at least one adult of a couple may live on to great age, makes that

model increasingly unsustainable. If larger family homes do not become available as regularly, and if affluent singles occupy sizeable properties, we have an even more acute crisis ahead of us.

It seems to me that we have to recognise now that, if we are collectively going to live much longer and to an age when we are more frail and less able to manage a larger property, we need to evolve a model of living that actively anticipates that it is a natural transition, rather than an exceptional one, to expect to vacate a substantial family property for more suitable accommodation in order to enjoy the new fourth era of life, great old age, with as much self-sufficiency as possible. We need to plan for that by recognising that the spread of new-build housing must focus much more directly on the building of properties that make that possible—not building ghettos for the old where they will be isolated from life and from the people they knew, but using a significant planning requirement to provide within new developments properties that are specifically designed for independent living in greater old age.

If housing policy does not plan now for an ageing population, not only will we have the challenge of the huge demographic change to meet in our health service, we will be compounding it by having those in great old age living in completely unsuitable properties, however suitable they may once have been, suffering falls and incurring huge and unnecessary maintenance bills beyond their means. By doing so, we will have even more families unable to find the homes that they desperately require.

I look at all the facts, promises and claims by one side or the other to have the unique recipe for housing salvation—a wave of the independence wand or a simple change of Government or the renouncing of past policy. It is a delusion to imagine that any of those will transform our position. If we worked with a greater sense of purpose and one free of rhetorical legislative flourishes that see barely a brick laid as a result, and if we accept that we need a hugely mixed model and one that requires bold, visionary planning, thinking and financing for the future, underpinned by wider political co-operation, we might just make some progress.

16:18

**Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I am astonished by the wording of the Labour motion—not least because of its improper and personal attack on the minister. Although I agree that the housing situation is serious, I must point out that it is almost entirely due to the reduction in private sector—not public sector—house building. It seems to be typical of Labour that, in its rush to blame the Scottish Government,



it is not prepared to make a proper analysis of the problem or of what has led to it.

**Jim Hume:** Will Mike MacKenzie take an intervention?

**Mike MacKenzie:** I will not.

That is perhaps why Labour manifestly failed to deal with the housing problem when it was in power. Its technique then—as always—was to throw large amounts of money in the general direction of the problem in the hope that that would cure it.

The housing crisis has been growing across the whole UK since before the UK Government's Barker report of 2004, which placed considerable emphasis on the need for the planning system to allocate more land for housing. The Scottish Government discussion document of 2007 "Firm Foundations: The Future of Housing in Scotland" also identified the problem and stated that the lack of a supply of suitable building land has led to unsustainably high land prices.

The Institute for Public Policy Research has, in a series of recent reports, identified the planning system as being one of the root causes of the longer-term failure of housing policy. It suggests—correctly, in my view—that uncertainty in the planning system leads to excessive land banking, which ties up valuable resources that could be much better used. In addition, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's report on rural housing identified the planning system as being one of the major causes of failure in housing provision in rural areas. That is why I am glad that Derek Mackay, the planning minister, is taking steps to reform the planning system—although I accept that it will necessarily take time for the reforms to be implemented and for them to feed through into the system.

As we have heard from other members, the more immediate problem has been the credit crunch, which was ushered in by Labour in London because, when it was its job to regulate the banks, it failed to do so.

**Richard Baker:** Will Mike MacKenzie take an intervention?

**Mike MacKenzie:** No, thank you.

Is it any surprise that, when the housing bubble collapsed, it left in its wake the intensification of a long-standing housing problem? Is it any surprise that the great recession, which had a disproportionate effect on the house-building industry, should exacerbate the housing problem? Only a Labour Party that is hoping to rewrite history could hope to lay the blame for that at the door of the Scottish Government.

As if that was not bad enough, Labour's better together friends then exacerbated the problem with their austerity agenda. It seems that it is more important to Labour to support the Tories at Westminster than it is to engage with economic reality and to place the blame for the problem where it really lies.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will Mike MacKenzie take an intervention?

**Mike MacKenzie:** No, thank you. I am short of time.

In cutting the Scottish Government's capital budget by 26 per cent and by failing to require or adequately to encourage the banks to undertake responsible lending, the UK coalition has intensified the problem even further—and that is not to mention the damage that will be caused by its current plan to pump up another housing bubble as a bribe to the electorate in the south-east of England, which is the territory on which UK elections are fought and won.

It is particularly iniquitous that some banks have taken the opportunity comprehensively to renegotiate punitive terms for housing associations as a condition on lending for new projects.

Against that background, the Scottish Government is due great credit for surpassing the halfway mark in delivering on its manifesto commitment to build 30,000 affordable homes. The Scottish Government's decision to end the right to buy is perhaps the most important step towards achieving a good supply of public housing that has been taken for many years. It is something that Labour apparently lacked the will to do. Shame on it.

I look forward to the further powers that independence will bring, which will enable us really to get to grips with Scotland's long-standing housing problem.

16:23

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** As convener of the cross-party group on housing, I looked forward to taking part in this debate on housing—a debate that the Labour Party had to bring to the chamber because the housing minister, Margaret Burgess, has failed to lead a single parliamentary debate on the subject, which shows that housing is not a priority for the SNP.

We have heard that Scotland is facing its biggest housing crisis since the second world war. Under this Government, the capital housing budget has fallen by a massive 29 per cent from £534 million to £378 million, and according to Audit Scotland it is set to fall even further to just £250 million. New housing completions and new

starts have fallen across Scotland, house building in the private sector has halved in recent years, and since 2005 councils and registered social landlords have built 14,000 fewer homes than have been needed.

It is time for the Government to come forward with a plan for investment that encourages growth in the housing sector and ensures that housing is built that is affordable and adequate to meet the needs of Scotland's population. The Government promised that we would build our way out of the recession, but Scotland is still waiting.

Also, any new housing must be energy efficient. The Government has set the statutory target to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016, but the budget is underspent.

I recently attended the Scottish rural and islands housing conference 2013. It is clear that many of the challenges that affect urban areas are magnified in rural areas. It is much more expensive to build houses the further north one goes, and on our islands. Rural and remote areas also have a much higher proportion of homes that have no access to mains gas and which can be deemed to be hard to heat, not to mention that there are cooler temperatures in those areas in the winter. Those areas suffer disproportionately because of the higher costs of building new homes and by having less energy efficient housing and heating methods.

The report "A Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland" shows that a pensioner who lives in a rural area must spend two to three times as much as their urban counterpart to heat their home. I also recently discovered that the big six energy companies are not providing boiler replacements to oil fuelled homes or to liquid petroleum gas fuelled homes. That means that many residents in the hardest to heat homes are missing out on a 30 per cent increase in boiler efficiency, not to mention savings in fuel costs. What is the Scottish Government doing to support people in that situation in order to ensure that they do not miss out on energy efficiency schemes, as they appear to be doing currently?

It is concerning that the budget for energy efficiency schemes and retrofitting has had a £10 million underspend. How do we expect to meet the targets if we are not using the budget to its full potential? The money could and should be used to reduce fuel costs for the hardest to heat homes. Why has it not been used in that way, and how did the underspend occur? How does the Government intend to meet its statutory requirement to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016?

When it comes to building energy efficient, affordable homes and when it comes to fuel poverty, the Government needs to up its game to

meet its own targets for building new homes and eradicating fuel poverty by 2016. Now, more than ever, we need to get Scotland off pause and restarted. We need action now, not the promise of action after September 2014. I support Labour's motion, which calls on the Government to produce a comprehensive, ambitious and inclusive national housing action plan.

16:28

**Patrick Harvie:** Somewhere—perhaps in a parallel universe—129 MSPs sit in a Parliament that is capable of disagreeing on independence but which still reaches rational agreements and has informed debates on other social and economic policies by finding the common ground that exists for so many of us. The debate has been characterised by far too many speeches to the effect either that we could achieve our housing objectives only with independence or that Scotland is "on pause" and—how dare it?—the Government is leaving everything until after independence.

Jackson Carlaw's speech was the most significant exception to that trend. Although I disagree profoundly with his comments on the right to buy, he made a substantive speech that highlighted problems in our housing supply that none of us can wish away and that we should all be willing to consider rationally.

**Duncan McNeil:** I, too, thought that Jackson Carlaw's speech was a good one. He looked at sweating the assets that we have; we need not just new build, but to use the homes that we have more effectively. Does Patrick Harvie share my regret that there is a disconnect between the integration of health and social care policy and the Scottish Government's housing strategy?

**Patrick Harvie:** That point is well made. It is possible that Duncan McNeil's committee work will further inform Parliament of his perspective on that.

A great many of the speeches focused on supply—supply, supply, supply—and the social rented sector. Those issues are crucial, but they are not everything.

Alex Johnstone told us that supply overall has fallen by more than half and he laid the blame for that at the door of budget cuts. He may well be right, but it is pretty breathtaking to hear that from a supporter of the UK Government's austerity programme. Cuts are not coming by magic; they are coming because of deliberate political choices.

The minister made much of the fact that other political parties did not offer numerical targets for new build social housing in their 2011 election manifestos. However, one political party not only committed to reversing the cuts to the housing

budget but showed how it could be done—and it was not the Scottish National Party.

Maureen Watt's contribution suffered from a little hint of tribal aggression here or there, but she was the first member to mention bank lending, which is important. To try to understand the housing market problems that we face without addressing bank lending to developers and the mortgage market is pretty meaningless. We are cursed with the dominance of a tiny number of vast megabanks instead of the diverse network of local smaller banks that we see in countries including Germany, which has not had the same problems as our banking system has had with lending into the real economy.

John Wilson devoted some of his remarks to the welfare reform agenda. It is meaningless to discuss housing without looking at the context of incomes. That means considering welfare and acknowledging the context in which many private sector employees experience the poverty pay that many private sector employers provide, and in which public sector workers continue to see real-terms pay cuts year after year.

Those issues directly connect to the housing problems that we need to address. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, I believe that we can put more measures into the Housing (Scotland) Bill to address the affordability issues that many people face, in particular in the private rented sector.

I mentioned to Richard Baker rents in Aberdeen of £800 to £900. In Glasgow and Edinburgh there are pockets where there are similar rent levels. That is certainly not because the mortgage holders of those properties are paying very high mortgages; it is because of excessive profiteering. Rent controls have a role to play.

Energy performance standards have a role, as well. We can make a clear requirement for landlords and letting agents to bring their properties up to a decent energy performance standard before they put them on the private rented market, which would ensure that the people who live in those homes find them affordable to live in. Many people are living with extraordinary increases in energy costs.

There is an opportunity to address eviction and harassment. A relatively small number of people experience illegal eviction and harassment, but for them it is a profound challenge to their ability to live a decent life. Local authorities could be given a duty to investigate unlawful evictions and harassment and the power and resources to take cases directly to the courts.

I will seek and even hold out a little hope for a little cross-party support when I bring those measures for debate in relation to the Housing (Scotland) Bill. There is an opportunity—at least

once in a while—to put the independence issue to the side. We will have plenty of opportunities over the next 10 months to debate independence, but when we talk about the Housing (Scotland) Bill and the measures that we need to put in place to address the needs that exist in society we should put it aside—just for a wee while.

16:34

**Alex Johnstone:** This has been a bad-tempered barney of a debate and I have enjoyed it tremendously. However, I need to address a few things. If, as seems to have been established in the debate, the success of any Government is measured by the number of council houses that are built during its time in office, I make my claim for Harold McMillan and his Conservative Government of the early 1950s. It broke all records for council housing construction in Scotland and—not only that—it had the tremendous achievement of getting more than 50 per cent of the vote in the 1955 general election. However, that was a long time ago, and I am sure that there are very few people in this chamber who can remember it. With that in mind, I give way to Chic Brodie.

**Chic Brodie:** Mr Johnstone is absolutely right to say that 1955—

“You’ve never had it so good”—

resulted in a lot of houses being built.

On the basis that Alex Johnstone accepts that the number of houses being built is a measure of success, can he comment on the fact that Scotland built 295.8 houses per 100,000 people in 2012-13, compared with 201.5 in England and 177.9 in Wales? What kind of rating of success would he give to Scotland’s management?

**Alex Johnstone:** That is the “two wrongs make a right” defence, as Mr Brodie is looking at the record south of the border and claiming a marginal advantage in Scotland.

I will turn to issues that were raised in the debate. I was tremendously concerned by Patrick Harvie’s suggestions for things that should go into the Housing (Scotland) Bill. I am concerned about what is being said with regard to the private rented sector. That sector has become important in recent years, and it has done so in two ways. First, it has begun to provide social rented accommodation and, secondly, it has dealt with a huge number of younger people who, in the previous housing market, would have become home owners but who have not been able to find the money to get a mortgage in recent years and, consequently, have gone into the—perhaps more expensive—private rented properties that we have heard so much about.

The private rented sector has become vital. The landlords realise that reasonable light-touch regulation is the way ahead. However, I do not believe that that is what has been called for today. If we are going to have a successful private rented sector, co-operation between the landlords and the tenants is vital. Light-touch regulation is the only way to achieve that.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will Alex Johnstone give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** If the Government decides to come down heavily in favour of the tenant, there might be a short-term gain, but the long-term result will be less property for rent, so future tenants will suffer.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is not giving way, Mr Harvie.

**Alex Johnstone:** I want to move on to talk about issues of investment. There, too, the private sector has an opportunity to do its bit. It is not as if the private sector is reluctant to deal with local authorities in terms of investment. I know for a fact that there are investment funds that are keen to invest in housing and infrastructure, but to make that happen there must be stronger leadership from the Scottish Government than we are currently seeing.

There needs to be ambition, flexibility and a can-do attitude to get houses built with private funding, but so far all we have had is the usual navel gazing and obsession with welfare reform—recurrent once again during this debate—which ignores housing and leaves those who desperately need a home of their own as little more than pawns in Alex Salmond's game of thrones.

We need to know what the stumbling blocks are to the Scottish Government accessing private funding. Is it the Marxist dogma that it insists on pursuing at the moment? Is it an inability to understand private finance, or is there some other reason why pension funds and other investment bodies are standing with their cheque books open, ready to invest in social and affordable housing, but the houses are not getting built?

The desperate need for new social and affordable homes demands a sophisticated and comprehensive approach. We have heard that discussed in this chamber before, but we fail to deliver.

**Mike MacKenzie:** I am slightly puzzled. Is Alex Johnstone suggesting that the pension funds should invest in socially rented homes, which should then be sold to the tenants at a quarter of their value?

**Alex Johnstone:** No. I should remind Mike MacKenzie of what I said earlier. There is only one

group in Scotland that is funding the building of homes for their compulsory sale, as near as five years away, and that is the Scottish Government, through the national housing trust.

What I am talking about is the potential for affordable housing to be developed for social tenants using private investment that is available to us today, if we do the right thing to encourage that investment to be advanced. I look forward to an opportunity in the not-too-distant future to welcome to Scotland investment programmes that are funded by international private investors who are willing to do their bit to ensure that affordable homes are available for rent in Scotland, even if this Government is not.

16:40

**Margaret Burgess:** I feel that I should just read out my first speech again because clearly nobody listened to what I said. I said at the outset that the Scottish Government has a clear vision that every one of us in Scotland should live in a high-quality, sustainable home that we can afford and that meets our needs. That has been the vision of this Scottish Government since 2011. I have been going out there and ensuring that we can deliver that.

I am not that broad but I am big and I can take a personal attack. However, I took exception to Hugh Henry's suggestion that the people to whom I was speaking were more important than people in this chamber. I have been out there speaking to homeless people and to people who have suffered abuse and have been on the streets. I have spoken to many groups, including rough sleepers and families on waiting lists. I have spoken to house builders, lenders, housing associations and developers.

**Mary Fee:** Will the minister give way?

**Margaret Burgess:** No. This is my chance to respond to the attacks that have been made on me and I intend to do that.

**Hugh Henry:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Henry, the minister is not taking an intervention.

**Margaret Burgess:** I am not taking an intervention at this time. I will try to respond to some of the things that have been said.

**Hugh Henry** *rose*—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Margaret Burgess:** I will take an intervention from Mr Henry considering that I mentioned him.

**Hugh Henry:** I am glad that the minister has clarified who she has spoken to, but it was her

words in this chamber that suggested that what she was doing was more important than coming to Parliament. Whether she likes it or not, the reason why she is a Government minister is because the Government is accountable to this Parliament.

**Margaret Burgess:** I am glad that I have clarified who I have been speaking to and that that has perhaps been accepted by the member. I have been accountable to this Parliament: I have attended a number of committee meetings, given evidence and talked about the Scottish Government's housing vision and policy. We are delivering on that. A number of members have mentioned the 16,000 homes that have already been built. Mary Fee asked when it is starting. It is starting: we are building; we have got help to buy. I will explain some of our other schemes as we go on.

Jackie Baillie said that we are doing nothing about temporary accommodation. Clearly, Jackie Baillie did not listen to what I said in my opening remarks. I said that we have set up a group precisely to look at the areas that she talked about. That group includes Shelter.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Margaret Burgess:** I am taking no more interventions.

The group is reporting back to the homelessness strategy group. We are looking at all the issues, including the standards for temporary accommodation. We are looking at evidence on the standards. We cannot act on anecdote; we need evidence. We are looking at that and if we have to take action on it, we will do so.

I am well aware that we are talking about individuals and families. I am also well aware that no matter what vision we have—

**Mary Fee:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister has said that she is not taking any interventions.

**Margaret Burgess:** Clearly, there are people on waiting lists. Jim Hume mentioned 400,000. I said in my press release that 155,000 people were on waiting lists. Of course that is too many. Of course I do not like that. That is why I am out there looking at how we can reduce waiting lists. I understand that it is no consolation to any individual for us to say that homelessness is dropping or that waiting lists are falling. To any suggestion that I do not understand that I say: "Think again." I do understand it, which is why I am out talking to people in those circumstances.

I have covered waiting lists so I will say a bit to Patrick Harvie. I had written in my notes that I had forgotten to say that the Green Party had a target in its manifesto. I accept that the Green Party had a target in its manifesto and a vision.

As Patrick Harvie has said, I recently launched the first private rented sector strategy since devolution. We laid out in it how we will regulate letting agents and how we will take the sector forward, because we know that it needs to grow. We have set up an independent sub-group, which is chaired by Professor Douglas Robertson, on security of tenure in private accommodation. After that group reports, if action needs to be taken, we will take it.

**Patrick Harvie** *rose*—

**Margaret Burgess:** I said that I would not take interventions, but I will give way.

**Patrick Harvie:** The minister says that the private rented sector needs to grow. It has doubled in size in about 10 years. Is she working on measures to address the increasingly unaffordable costs that people face when they have no option but to stay in the private rented sector?

**Margaret Burgess:** We are looking at everything and the debate will come through to the chamber.

Standards in the private rented sector have been mentioned. We have agreed to introduce standards in the privately rented and privately owned sectors on energy efficiency and quality. They will apply—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, if you cover your microphone with your papers, people in the chamber cannot hear you.

**Margaret Burgess:** I am sorry. Maybe some people would be happy not to hear what I am saying.

Richard Baker said that the previous Labour Administration built more houses than the SNP Administration has, but that is simply not true. The fact is that, on average, 4,068 houses a year were built under the Labour Administration, whereas the figure is greater—it is 5,019—under the SNP Administration.

A number of members said that when we talk about council housing, we in some way do not appreciate or support the housing association sector, but we very much support that sector. I said in my opening speech that under the SNP Administration, the number of housing association houses built has exceeded the number under previous Administrations.

The housing association sector is very important and is pivotal to what we do. We listened to what

was said and we increased the subsidy. To answer a point from Margaret McDougall, the subsidy is greater for rural areas. We recognise absolutely that it costs more to build houses in rural areas and we have taken that on board.

Alex Johnstone talked about the compulsory sale of houses under the Scottish Government's national housing trust. The Scottish Government guarantees a part of the trust, but no Scottish Government money is in the houses under the trust. The trust provides an extremely popular way for people to enter the housing market. A sale is not automatic at the end of a term. Individuals who go into trust houses know exactly what they are going into. In some instances, the rental period can be extended, so I do not accept the point that Alex Johnstone made.

I will finish with some of the things that the Scottish Government has done, as we were accused of not doing anything. We have boosted the housing supply budget, which is now at £1.53 billion over four years. We have outperformed Labour on affordable housing supply, with an average of 32 per cent more affordable home completions. We have kept on track to deliver 30,000 new affordable homes. We have launched the £220 million help to buy (Scotland) scheme. We have expanded and developed the national housing trust. We have achieved the historic homelessness commitment. We have invested in prevention through housing options hubs and seen a reduction in homelessness applications. We have signalled our intention to end the right to buy. We have provided £13.5 million for greener homes for sustainable developments.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, please.

**Margaret Burgess:** We will invest £250 million this year and in the next two years to tackle fuel poverty and climate change. We have used secondary legislation to strengthen the rights of those who live permanently in mobile homes. We have published the first private rented sector strategy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, please.

**Margaret Burgess:** We have provided £20 million to top up discretionary housing payments. We have developed the MI new home scheme. I could go on and on—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that you cannot, because your time is up. Please close.

**Margaret Burgess:** The Government is delivering and is leading on housing.

16:49

**James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab):** The debate has been interesting. It has also been timely, because the housing situation has deteriorated since the Labour Party lodged its motion on Monday afternoon. Yesterday's housing statistics showed 13,378 completions, which is down significantly on the previous figure of 14,881 completions.

That shows the scale of the problem, compounded by the fact that 155,000 people are on waiting lists, which is a 32,000 increase since 2007. If we continue at this rate, we will be 160,000 homes short of the number that we require by 2030. It is therefore not a surprise that Homes for Scotland has described this as the biggest housing crisis since world war two and the SFHA has expressed real concern about the downward trend in housing association completions. The latest statistics show a 24 per cent decrease in those completions.

A lot of those issues were highlighted in Audit Scotland's July report on housing. Audit Scotland concluded in that report that what was needed was

"effective leadership and a long-term, coordinated response."

Listening to the minister, I see that accountability to Parliament is not part of that response.

**Margaret Burgess:** Will the member take an intervention?

**James Kelly:** No. I am not taking any interventions from you, minister. It has taken you 15 months to come to the Parliament on this so I will not take any interventions.

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

**James Kelly:** I acknowledge that there has been a world crisis that has contributed to the housing problems, but it is disingenuous of the SNP to try to sit on the sidelines and say that it has had no part in the Scottish housing crisis. By the SNP's own admission, the budgets have been cut by 29 per cent, which is more than the cuts that were passed on by Westminster. As Richard Baker pointed out in his speech, the HAG support levels were cut from a previous level of about £70,000 down to about £40,000. I know that there has been some restoration but housing associations are struggling severely to make up the shortfall in order to be able to bring new houses on to the market.

Patrick Harvie complained that the debate was getting bogged down on independence. He is right that the debate should not be focused solely on independence but we cannot ignore the impact of the independence vote that will take place in

September next year on housing. For a start, the SNP has taken its eyes off the ball. It has become so obsessed with independence that it is not focusing on the real issues that are affecting constituents up and down the country. Also, we are entitled to look at the implications of independence for house building in Scotland. As Mary Fee mentioned, the Jones Lang LaSalle survey that was published in September tells us that major house builders in this country fear that independence would mean fewer houses being built. Where would that leave us in addressing the crisis?

**Margaret Burgess:** Will the member take an intervention?

**James Kelly:** No. I am not taking any interventions from you, minister. As I said, it has taken you 15 months to get here.

The IFS report from a couple of weeks ago mentions the £3 billion black hole—that is why the house builders are concerned about the impact of independence. Even if people were looking for answers, as many members have pointed out, they cannot find the details in the white paper. It has two and a half pages on housing, which includes a half-page colour picture of housing. There is no detail—there are no numbers; no figures. As the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland pointed out this morning, where is the detail? Where are the numbers? Those are pertinent issues for ICAS and others to raise.

A number of important issues were raised in the debate. Jackie Baillie made a substantive contribution in which she highlighted the problem of homelessness, and pointed out that there are—unfortunately—a good number of rough sleepers in communities throughout Scotland and an increase in the use of temporary accommodation. The Government should address those issues.

**Jim Hume:** Another problem is the number of people on council and housing association waiting lists. In my speech I quoted a figure of 400,000 that appeared in a press release from Margaret Burgess herself, but she denied it and said that the number is only 150,000. Having treble-checked the figure, I can tell members that if they look at [www.margaretburgessmsp.org](http://www.margaretburgessmsp.org), they will see that it says that 400,000 people are on waiting lists for council and housing association houses. Was the member aware of that?

**Margaret Burgess:** Will Mr Hume take an intervention on that point?

**James Kelly:** I am actually speaking, minister, in case you were not aware of that.

I thank Jim Hume for putting that on record. There is an issue with the data on housing; Alex

Johnstone and Jackie Baillie both made pertinent points in that regard.

We will not support the Green amendment at 5 o'clock because it removes significant parts of the Labour motion, but I thank Patrick Harvie for his valid comments on the private rented sector. There has been real growth in that sector in recent years, although not everyone chooses to be in it. Patrick Harvie raised important issues around regulation and letting agents, and I look forward to addressing those when the housing bill comes to Parliament.

Mary Fee mentioned the issue of empty homes. We have 23,000 empty homes in this country, and a £4.5 million budget was allocated to get them opened and brought into the sector, but only 200 have been released. That is an area in which the Scottish Government has the powers to act just now, but it has clearly not been able to make progress on the issue. We need to assess the issues as we move forward.

Margaret McDougall made some pertinent points on fuel efficiency and the underspend in the retrofit budget. It is clear that the Government is not on top of some of the issues, which is why we need a housing action plan to address supply, homelessness and empty homes, and to get the most out of our budget.

People in this country will ask what the point is of the SNP housing minister, given that completions have halved and waiting lists have increased by a quarter since 2007. Young families who are living in overcrowded accommodation will have looked on aghast as the SNP held a debate on the census. While construction workers have languished on the dole, the SNP has had us debating the Ryder cup. While housing associations—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Order, order—can we settle down, please?

**James Kelly:** While housing associations throughout the country have struggled with their funding, hundreds of thousands of pounds have been wasted on postcards coming through people's doors to publicise the white paper. What an absolute scandal.

Scotland deserves better. We need an action plan to tackle the housing crisis, and it is time for the housing minister to get out of her ministerial office and to start to address the problems that exist in Scotland's communities.

## Business Motions

16:59

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-08472, 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 10 December 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Human Rights  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: End Year Fish Negotiations  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Youth Sport Strategy  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 6.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 11 December 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Portfolio Questions Health and Wellbeing  
*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Local Government Finance Settlement 2014-15  
*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.30 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 12 December 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
 12.30 pm Members' Business  
 2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.15 pm Members' Business  
*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 17 December 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)  
*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Landfill Tax (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 18 December 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions Culture and External Affairs; Infrastructure, Investment and Cities  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 19 December 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* Business Motions  
*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-08475, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Defective and Dangerous Buildings (Recovery of Expenses) (Scotland) Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Defective and Dangerous Buildings (Recovery of Expenses) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 4 April 2014.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of three business motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move en bloc motions



S4M-08476, S4M-08477 and S4M-08478, setting out stage 2 timetables for various bills.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 24 January 2014.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 7 February 2014.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 13 December 2013.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motions agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-08479, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S4M-08474, on the designation of a lead committee.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies (SG/2013/250) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Housing (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to today's debate on housing, if the amendment in the name of Margaret Burgess is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Patrick Harvie falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-08470.2, in the name of Margaret Burgess, which seeks to amend motion S4M-08470, in the name of Mary Fee, on housing, 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)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (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)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

### Against

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

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

#### Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 63, Against 55, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The amendment in the name of Patrick Harvie therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S4M-08470, in the name of Mary Fee, on housing, 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)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (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)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)

(SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### Against

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

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 64, Against 55, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes that it is the current administration that has provided leadership and incentives to restart council house building in Scotland; welcomes the fact that over 1,000 council houses were completed last year and that this compares with only six council houses built in the four years of the last Labour/Liberal Democrat administration; recognises that, despite cuts in the capital budget proposed by the last UK Labour administration, and imposed by the current UK Conservative/Liberal Democrat administration, more social sector houses per head have been built in Scotland than in any other part of the UK over the past six years; notes the substantial contraction of private house building across the UK that has occurred as a direct result of the financial crisis, for which the last UK Labour administration must accept some responsibility, and recognises that, with independence, Scotland can achieve the level of investment required to meet its housing needs.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-08479, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies (SG/2013/250) be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-08474, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Housing (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

## Maxillofacial Prosthetists and Technologists

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-07793, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on celebrating maxillofacial prosthetists and technologists.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament congratulates Michael O'Neil, a maxillofacial technologist from East Kilbride, on winning the top prize from the Institute of Maxillofacial Prosthetists and Technologists, The Wim de Ruiter Delft Plate Award, for research that he undertook to gain his masters degree; understands that Michael pioneered a technique that enhances surgical results for patients who undergo jaw surgery; notes that maxillofacial prosthetics is the clinical healthcare science that deals with specialist rehabilitation of patients requiring treatment after, for example, traumatic injury, cancer surgery or defects from birth causing malformation, and recognises the work of maxillofacial prosthetists and technologists in Scotland and what it considers the immense benefits of this surgery to those who require it.

17:05

**Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** I thank all those attending the debate tonight and all those who signed the motion.

Until I read in my local paper, the *East Kilbride News*, about the achievement of East Kilbride resident Michael O'Neil, the term "maxillofacial prosthetics" was not one that slipped easily from my tongue—it still doesn't, as members will appreciate as the debate proceeds. Indeed, it had not registered in my thoughts.

I did a bit of research, and my interest was kindled. When I visited the west of Scotland regional maxillofacial prosthetics service at Glasgow's Southern general hospital, I was absolutely fascinated to learn about the work that is carried out by eight maxillofacial prosthetists, who work between the Southern general and Glasgow royal infirmary.

The service is responsible for the provision of treatment for patients with a disfigurement in the head and neck region. The deformity can be trauma related or congenital, or it can be the result of cancer surgery. The work ranges from the fitting of simple surgical plates, which are used to aid healing, to the recontouring of a patient's skull after trauma using a custom-fabricated titanium cranial implant. The laboratory runs prosthetic clinics and fabricates custom-made noses, ears, indwelling eyes and orbital prostheses for patients who have lost part of their facial contour through trauma, cancer or congenital deformity.

I am grateful to Michael O'Neil, Fraser Walker and their colleagues, who provided an in-depth

tour and presentation during my visit to the Southern general's max fax lab—which I have decided is much easier to say. I am glad to welcome some of the team to the Parliament this evening. The presentation detailed how far maxillofacial technology has come, from post-war prosthetics—which, I mention for interest, were generally attached to spectacles—to new, life-like silicone prosthetics, which can be attached using magnets or by fixing them to bone. During the visit, Michael and Fraser demonstrated by showing personal cases where maxillofacial technology has been used to correct abnormalities in the jaw or skull.

It was clear to me that the work is life changing. Small or major enhancements to appearance promote confidence and self-esteem, and they help to remove the stigma that so often unjustifiably applies to those who look different to what we deem to be normal.

I was very much struck by the personal bond between practitioner and client. Sometimes, it is built up over years. There is a closeness that, in many cases, is beyond that of the general practitioner or dental practitioner, because of the respect that is given to the clients. In return, there is an absolute trust granted by the client to the practitioner. That caring relationship can be demonstrated by Michael O'Neil's charity work to raise funds for related causes.

I was also very much struck by the cutting-edge research and technology at the heart of the discipline, and that brings me specifically to East Kilbride's own Michael O'Neil.

A maxillofacial prosthetist, Michael O'Neil from the Southern general hospital scooped a prestigious award recently at an international conference. Michael received his Wim de Ruiter Delft plate award for pioneering a technique that enhances surgical results for patients who undergo jaw surgery operations. His technique involves pre-planning the operation on 3D models of the patient's skull that have correctly proportioned teeth.

The technique has been greatly successful in the correction of facial asymmetries and for difficult craniofacial operations. It allows pre-planning work to be done alongside head and neck cancer surgeons, which can greatly cut down operation time.

Using a computerised tomography scan, digital models can be created that allow for careful planning of the patient's operation. The use of those models, together with 3D physical models of the tumoured site, allows large bone plates to be prepared with location clips to enable accurate placement of bone grafts that have been taken from another part of the patient's anatomy. That

breakthrough has helped to reduce operation time and has made reconstructive bone grafting more accurate.

I thank the Presiding Officer for allowing me to use a prop in the debate. I was very honoured to receive a miniature version of a skull that has been used for the technique. I know that the boys in the company, in particular, will be fascinated to learn that it was produced on a 3D printer. I have christened it wee Mikey—I should say that I have done so in honour of Michael O'Neil, just in case our minister, Michael Matheson, takes it the wrong way.

There is a great deal more that I could say about this work, but time prohibits me from doing so. I know that many of my colleagues would be as fascinated as I am by the work of the team in Scotland, so I hope that many will attend when I arrange an information session in our Parliament in the new year.

I have some concerns that I would like to express. There is no specific training for maxillofacial prosthetists and technologists in Scotland. Currently there are 14 qualified maxillofacial prosthetists in Scotland, but in six years' time there will be a 25 per cent reduction in that number because of retirement. The lack of training and discrepancies in pay structure make it difficult to attract maxillofacial prosthetists and technologists to Scotland.

Because of the low number of prosthetists who are required, it may be that it is not practical to form an exclusively Scottish education programme, but imaginative thinking and recognition of a service that is vital to many people and which has such potential—as is demonstrated by the work that is being carried out by Michael O'Neil, Fraser Walker and their colleagues—can surely reach a solution.

I hope that the minister will consider those points; I will write in much greater detail. I suggest that he should consider visiting the unit to speak directly to those who deliver the service and perhaps some of those who receive it. I am sure that he would find that as fascinating as I did.

17:13

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** I thank Linda Fabiani for securing the debate and, like her, would like to welcome to the Parliament her guests from the field of maxillofacial prosthetics, as well as those who have benefited from their work; I hope that they have enjoyed their day so far and that they are enjoying the debate.

It is clear that the work of maxillofacial prosthetists and technologists can be life

changing. As Linda Fabiani said, they work to reconstruct the face after accident or disease. Those who work in the maxillofacial departments of hospitals across the country assist burns victims, cancer patients and many others who need treatment for the disfigurement of the head and neck region. In Glasgow, we know that there have often been specific reasons why such treatment has been required.

The west of Scotland regional maxillofacial prosthetics service operates from two laboratories—one is at the Southern general and the other is at Glasgow royal infirmary. It is responsible for providing a full range of highly specialist technical and prosthetic services to the west of Scotland and Forth valley, as well as to other referring authorities nationally and internationally. I look forward to visiting the unit in the near future.

The department is internationally recognised, not just for Michael O'Neil's groundbreaking work with 3D printing, which Linda Fabiani highlighted in such an interesting way. One of his colleagues in the service was also presented with an award at the same conference in Inverness earlier this year. I am delighted that George Payne from Glasgow royal infirmary is in the gallery. He was presented with the Mount Vernon award, which recognises outstanding clinical practice—although I suspect that John Mason thinks that it has something to do with him.

George is currently the principal maxillofacial prosthetist based at the Glasgow royal infirmary, providing a prosthesis service to a large number of plastic and ear, nose and throat surgeons. That involves the fabrication of all forms of facial and body prostheses, including burns therapy appliances. After almost 40 years of working in the west of Scotland maxillofacial prosthesis service, developing invaluable skills and expertise along the way, George Payne can be held up as an example of outstanding excellence in his field.

It is testament to the strength of medical research in Scotland that NHS Scotland practitioners are continually being awarded for their research excellence and expertise across a wide variety of work in the national health service. I have recently been working with a local constituency group to support ME sufferers in Glasgow under the NHS, and have been struck by the practitioner research coming out of that field. I hope that it will be as useful to ME sufferers as Michael O'Neil's research will be to those who require maxillofacial prosthesis.

That excellence is fostered through health research fellowships initiated by the Scottish Government in March 2011. The fellowships are intended to allow clinical staff to develop a research career alongside their clinical duties by

funding protected time for research activities. Some of the areas for study in those three-year fellowships include optimising treatment for patients with cardiac disease, improving outcomes for people who have dementia, developing personalised medicine for women who have ovarian cancer, and improving the management of children who have inflammatory bowel disease. It is hoped that the scheme, which has its first fellows about halfway through their first three-year placement, will continue to encourage a culture within the NHS that recognises research as a vital and important part of healthcare that contributes to improvements in patient care.

It is great to be able to speak in a debate that helps to highlight just how much research talent Scotland has to offer across such a wide variety of skills and sectors, particularly in a field such as this, which can make such a huge difference to the lives of those who are treated. Long may it continue, and I hope that Michael O'Neil and George Payne continue with their groundbreaking work for many years to come.

17:16

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):**

Although I congratulate Linda Fabiani on initiating the debate, I suspect that we are discussing an area in which most of us had to do some research prior to the debate. Despite my medical background, I am not particularly familiar with this field of expertise. Indeed, as a result of modern technology, it is achieving outcomes that would have been unbelievable when I first came across the specialty as a medical student and young doctor.

We have all read in newspapers of individuals who have sustained horrendous facial injuries in, for example, car accidents, and the previous assumption would have been that the individual involved would simply have had to accept their fate and, to put it bluntly, get on with life. However, advances in the field of maxillofacial surgery and the collaboration of a multidisciplinary team of experts mean that a person is no longer forced to endure the rest of his or her existence with life-changing facial scars or other disfigurements as the result of an accident, congenital defect, or cancer surgery. There has been an increase in the number of stories of individuals who have lost features such as their nose or an eye undergoing skilled and painstaking surgery to give them realistic fabricated replacements, allowing them to re-enter society more confidently and helping them to overcome the psychological traumas of their experiences.

This area of medical science and technology has been one of the great success stories of our time. Although the history of prosthesis stretches

back to ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilisations, it was not until the last century when prosthetics as a recognised medical field came of age. The first world war saw a huge increase in the demand for prosthetics. It was no longer the preserve of the wealthy but necessitated by the introduction of industrialised weaponry such as machine guns, which left many men horrifically scarred.

Maxillofacial prosthetics is part of that growing branch of surgery that deals with the disfigurement of the head and neck region and that, although not life-saving, can totally transform the lives of those so afflicted, giving them the confidence to mix with other people and get back to a more normal life. One person who always comes to my mind when I think about transformation after a maxillofacial trauma is army veteran Simon Weston, who was so badly burned and disfigured in the Falklands war, and who now does so much through his charitable efforts to help other people who have experienced similar traumatic events.

In reading for this debate, I was particularly struck by the moving story of a 16-year-old American girl who was accidentally blasted in the face by drunk friends playing with a stolen shotgun. Although she miraculously survived, she was left blind and horrifically disfigured. That brave young lady went on to marry and have a baby boy 11 years after the accident, but fear of her appearance frightening her child led her to wear a face mask at all times to cover the gaping hole where her eyes and nose once were.

Her life changed after she underwent pioneering maxillofacial surgery, which prepared her remaining bone structure to allow a prosthetic face that was designed on photographs which were taken before the accident, with features that were aged to reflect the passage of time, to be snapped on and off. Although she will never again be able to see and she has lost for ever any sense of smell, the maxillofacial surgeon gave her the confidence to show her son her new face.

The example that I have given is an extreme case, but the key word that I want to highlight is “confidence”. The gaining of confidence extends to all people who feel renewed by maxillofacial surgery, such as those who were born with a cleft palate, those who need a jaw realignment, and those who are deformed by cancer surgery or trauma.

The motion rightly pays tribute to the many prosthetists and technologists who work in the field, and particularly to Michael O’Neil from East Kilbride, who, as we have heard, pioneered a technique to enhance the surgical results for patients who undergo jaw surgery. That led to his winning the Wim de Ruiter Delft plate award. I am happy to add my congratulations to Mr O’Neil on

that magnificent achievement, and I once again thank Linda Fabiani for the debate.

17:21

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** I, too, thank Linda Fabiani for bringing the debate to the chamber.

As other members have done, I put on record my congratulations to Michael O’Neil on winning the Wim de Ruiter Delft plate award from the Institute of Maxillofacial Prosthetists and Technologists. I thought that I knew how to say “maxillofacial prosthetists”, but every member has said it differently, which has somewhat undermined my confidence. I will use the word “confidence” again.

I also congratulate the wider team at the Southern general hospital and Glasgow royal infirmary. Michael O’Neil won the award, but there is a variety of experts in the department who excel in the field.

I wanted to speak in the debate for a number of reasons. One is that, as a Glasgow member of the Scottish Parliament, I wanted to recognise and acknowledge the very best practice in the world—the world-leading practice—that is clearly evident there. I am also the deputy convener of the Health and Sport Committee, and am interested in finding out more about the issue. Perhaps with my Glasgow colleague James Dornan and the minister, I hope, we can go along and see in action the good work at the Southern general hospital.

I also have a personal reason that I had forgotten about for wanting to speak in the debate. As a daft laddie in Dundee around 20 years ago, I took a tumble. I questioned my relationship with alcohol on that particular day, but I took a tumble nevertheless and was left with a fairly dramatic hole in my chin. As I was regaining consciousness, the doctors who were attending to me were debating whether they should try to reconstruct the hole in my chin or put it to the plastic specialist in Dundee. Fortunately for me, they put it to the plastic specialist. The difference that that made to the scar that I was left with on my chin was quite dramatic. It is now pretty minimal.

Nanette Milne mentioned confidence. I am not comparing that trivial event with the more dramatic life-changing events that other members have mentioned, but it meant that I had a small beard for a year or so afterwards because I was embarrassed by my scar, which undermined my self-confidence. If something as trivial as that can undermine a young man’s self-confidence, I can only imagine the impact that a full facial reconstruction can have. We have to look at the major technological advances, but we should not

forget that little, minor miracles are performed every day of the week. As a young man who was making my way in the world, what happened made a huge difference to my quality of life. I have no idea who the plastic surgeon was, but I thank them greatly, as the work made a difference to my life.

I want to quote a colleague, Ken Andrew. He does not work in Glasgow, but he is involved in prosthetics—not facial prosthetics but limb prosthetics. I asked him what he had heard about maxillofacial prosthetists—I said that wrongly; never mind. He dropped me an email before the debate in which he mentioned the great expertise and the advances that there have been, but he also said a couple of things that were particularly powerful:

“The impact these technicians have on the improved well being of individuals that have suffered devastating injury through trauma and disease is very hard to imagine ... Max fax technicians are true artisans with the very best of them possessing genuine artistic talent.”

We are not talking just about the high-end stuff, but about the attention to minor details that those experts provide.

I have run over my time, Presiding Officer, and I thank you for your patience in listening. As well as thanking Linda Fabiani for bringing the debate to the chamber, I thank Michael O’Neil and his team at the Southern, as well as the GRI, for all the work that they do.

17:25

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing the debate, and I add my congratulations to Michael O’Neil on winning the award that is very much the subject of the debate.

It is important that we in Scotland nurture and develop our talent. We often lead the way in the United Kingdom for research, which means that we attract a greater share of research funding than our population would indicate, and that is down to the talents of people such as Michael O’Neil, who go ahead blazing a trail and winning awards. There are many other researchers who do likewise in Scotland, so the debate is about them as well.

We often underestimate the importance of facial reconstruction, seeing it as something that is done for aesthetic purposes rather than medical imperatives, but that point of view underestimates the impact that a change to our face can have on us, both mentally and physically. Bob Doris eloquently spoke of his own experience of having an injury that he considered relatively minor and the impact that it had on him. It is hard for us to imagine waking up in the morning and looking in the mirror and the face that looks back at us not being the one that we recognise as our own. That

must have a huge impact on people—on their sense of self as well as on their mental health.

At the point when facial transplants were being pioneered, there was a lot of news coverage about it, which talked about the amount of counselling that a transplant recipient would require, much more than if they were getting a heart or any other organ. That is because how we look is so much part of us. We do not see a heart or a kidney, but we do see our own face, and that tells us who we are, so we need to appreciate fully the importance of how we look to our sense of self.

Neither do we fully appreciate how we use our face to communicate with others, not just by speaking as we are tonight—although speech can be affected by injuries around the mouth, breakages of bones or cancer treatment—but by the non-spoken communication that we use our face for, which can be absolutely lost if we require a lot of surgery. Changes to the structure of our face can also stop us from eating, which impacts on the rest of our body and on our nutritional intake. Although that can be overcome by tube feeding and the like, it does not take into account the pleasure of eating and of taste and how important that is to us.

The ability to reconstruct a face damaged by an accident or disease can give somebody back the sense of themselves, as well as their ability to communicate and to enjoy the senses that we all take for granted. That is why I am pleased to support the motion, which brings those issues to the attention of the Parliament and pays tribute to the people who carry out that work. I hope that it will also raise awareness of the profession, so that more people will be willing to get involved and to fill the skills gap that Linda Fabiani was talking about.

17:29

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** I begin, like others, by offering my congratulations to Linda Fabiani on securing time for the debate, and I offer my personal congratulations to Michael O’Neil on his award for pioneering a technique that will enhance surgical results for patients who have undergone jaw surgery. I am more than happy to take up Linda Fabiani’s suggestion and visit the service to learn more about the important work that it undertakes. Michael O’Neil’s award is a recognition of the important work that is being done in the developing field of maxillofacial prosthetics, particularly at the west of Scotland regional maxillofacial prosthetics service.

I am sure that Michael will recognise that it is also appropriate for me to congratulate George Payne from Glasgow royal infirmary, as James



Dornan did, on the work that he has undertaken and on receiving the Mount Vernon award for outstanding clinical or technical practice. Both awards reflect the importance of the specific research of certain individuals but also the wider pioneering work in the field that is taking place within NHS Scotland. We are both grateful for and proud of that.

The west of Scotland regional maxillofacial prosthetics service is responsible for treating patients with a disfigurement of the head and neck region. A wide variety of work is done in the service, from surgical plates that are used to aid healing to the recontouring of a patient's skull after trauma. As Linda Fabiani mentioned, the laboratory runs prosthetics clinics and fabricates custom-made noses, ears, indwelling eyes and orbital prostheses for patients who have lost part of their facial contour through trauma, cancer or congenital deformity.

The field of maxillofacial prosthetics and the technology have seen some significant developments in a fairly short period of time. We are seeing increasingly sophisticated technologies such as 3D modelling to enable the accurate modelling and construction of prosthetic replacements for mouth, jaw and facial reconstructive surgery.

Having undertaken research as part of his master's degree, Michael O'Neil received his award for pioneering a technique whereby surgical results can be enhanced for patients who undergo jaw surgery operations. His technique involves pre-planning the operation on a 3D model of the patient's skull that has correctly proportioned teeth. The technique involves taking a direct impression of the patient's dentition, casting it in dental plaster and then replacing the inaccurate dentition of the 3D skull model with the accurate plaster dentition taken from the patient.

The technique is an excellent example of how technology can have a positive impact on patient care and the outcomes for the patient. As Linda Fabiani highlighted, it has helped to reduce operation times and made reconstructive bone grafting much more accurate.

I want to touch briefly on the restorative benefits of the research. It offers significant benefits to people who have lost part of their facial contour through trauma, cancer or congenital deformity. Such a loss is likely to have a serious impact on the person's self-esteem, as several members said, and their ability to fulfil their potential in our society. Reconstructive surgery brings enormous benefits in improving a person's outlook and self-confidence. As Linda Fabiani's motion states, the technology enhances treatment and improves outcomes for patients. It is right that we recognise that in the Parliament.

I also want to highlight some of the wider issues. The motion gives me an opportunity to highlight some of the issues around oral cancer here in Scotland. Although cancers of the mouth are relatively rare, more than 400 cases are still diagnosed in Scotland each year.

It is also more common in men, although rates among women are on the rise. Although the causes are unknown, risk factors are smoking and excessive consumption of alcohol. A study in 2011 estimated that more than half of mouth and throat cancers in the United Kingdom are associated with and caused by smoking. It is important that we keep that in mind when we are looking at preventative approaches to dealing with such issues.

I will reflect briefly on the role of NHS dental services in the prevention of oral cancer. Dental teams are in a unique position to detect oral cancer at its early stages, when we know that it is easier to treat and the outlook is better for the patient. Early diagnosis and treatment can increase a patient's chances of survival from below 50 per cent to 90 per cent. As well as the fact that we have free NHS dental examinations, I report that registration rates among adults are at their highest level. As at September 2013, a total of 81.6 per cent of adults are registered with a NHS dentist. The equivalent figure in September 2007 was 48.6 per cent.

I return to the motion and the need for the Scottish Parliament to recognise the important work in maxillofacial prosthetics. Although prevention has a role with regard to oral cancer, unfortunately such treatment will always be needed. It is therefore important that we encourage development in this field. The field has an exciting future in which technology and research, as we have heard, can make a difference to the quality of people's lives. Advances such as the ones that we have heard mentioned represent hope for patients in need of reconstructive surgery of the mouth, jaw or face. I have no doubt that members will be inspired by the work undertaken by Michael O'Neil and his colleagues and will recognise that that work demonstrates the significant advances that are being made in this technological field here in Scotland.

*Meeting closed at 17:37.*





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