



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 6 November 2013

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 6 November 2013

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

Portfolio Question Time

Health and Wellbeing

Asylum Seekers

1. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it meets the health needs of asylum seekers. (S4O-02532)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Microphone, please.

I ask the minister to respond.

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): We have always been clear that—

Bob Doris: On a point of order, Presiding Officer, I do not mean to be contrary—I appreciate, of course, that it is not a point of order—but the microphones in the chamber are not working. Can that be rectified?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Is your microphone up?

Bob Doris: Yes. It is lit, but it is not working.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for that point of order. We now have action. We will move to the minister. Did Michael Matheson hear Mr Doris's question or does he want him to repeat it?

Michael Matheson: Take two, Presiding Officer. I heard his question.

We have always been clear that asylum seekers should be welcomed, supported and integrated into Scotland's communities from day 1 and have access to health services. National health service boards are required to ensure access to health services to meet individuals' needs.

Over the past year we have been working in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Refugee Council to develop a strategy for asylum seekers and refugee integration. The strategy, which will be launched next month, recognises the importance of good health and access to quality healthcare to the successful integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The strategy will increase understanding of their rights and how to access them.

Bob Doris: I will raise the specific case of one of my constituents who is an asylum seeker. I know

that Mr Neil, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, is aware of the case.

My constituent was taken off the kidney transplant list when he was unsuccessful in his asylum case—that automatically triggered removal from the list, based on English NHS guidelines not Scottish ones—although legal moves are pending. My constituent has still not been put back on the NHS transplant list and the case is being peer reviewed by Lothian NHS Board. Is the minister open-minded to reviewing the treatment of asylum seekers in the Scottish NHS to ensure that Scottish NHS boards are properly following the requirement to treat asylum seekers the same as any other Scot resident in our nation?

Michael Matheson: There is already guidance available for NHS boards that sets out very clearly that those who are in Scotland as asylum seekers should receive the same healthcare provision as any other resident of Scotland. Clearly, on the issue that the member raises, which he has previously raised with the cabinet secretary, clinical decisions have to be made about whether someone should be put on the transplant list. That is about not only the clinical benefit that they would get from a transplant but whether they are able to meet the treatment requirements following the transplant.

If the member has specific information that he thinks would help in addressing his constituent's concerns, I or, I have no doubt, the cabinet secretary will be more than happy to explore the matter with him, to ensure that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde properly addresses those concerns.

Food Banks

2. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has had with the Minister for Housing and Welfare on food bank provision. (S4O-02533)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The cabinet secretary and I hold regular meetings with our ministerial colleagues, including the Minister for Housing and Welfare, on a range of issues that affect the health and wellbeing of the Scottish people. Our discussions focus on the most vulnerable groups in our society and how we can help to tackle issues around health inequalities.

Claire Baker: I recently visited Dunfermline Foodbank, and this week I heard about increasing demand at the Levenmouth Foodbank Community Support Project. Although benefit changes and delays are a key driver of demand, volunteers report that people with mental health issues are presenting for support. The report on health

inequalities that the Scottish Government published last week showed that there is a bigger impact on mental wellbeing in areas of deprivation, which is where inequalities are increasing.

The Scottish Government has rolled back some of the anti-poverty programmes that were in place. What plans does the minister have to target resources more effectively to address health inequalities?

Michael Matheson: I will correct the member, because we have not rolled back any of our anti-poverty strategies. If anything, we have increased the range of anti-poverty strategies in order to try to tackle the issue. It is important that we keep the issue in context.

Inequality, particularly health inequality, is very much rooted in social inequality. Income inequality and lack of opportunity and educational attainment all contribute to inequality in society. We need to take concerted action to address those issues effectively.

The member said that she had visited a food bank in her region. I have done the same in my constituency. The number 1 reason for individuals having to make use of a food bank in Falkirk, in my constituency, is delays in welfare payments due to the welfare system reforms that are taking place. I believe that the most effective way in which we can deal with such issues is to ensure that this Parliament has the powers to manage the welfare system here in Scotland so that we can tackle the root causes of people being forced to use food banks, rather than use food banks to mitigate the impact of the welfare system being ripped apart by the member's colleagues in the better together campaign.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I disagree with the minister's simplistic understanding of the need for food banks. There is a much more complicated situation, which we need to better understand. Will the minister give an undertaking that the Government will commission independent research into why there is an increasing demand for food banks in order to ensure that we understand whether the situation is more complicated than his representation of it?

Michael Matheson: I am sure that it is not lost on the member that there is a direct correlation between the increasing number of food banks in the country and the welfare changes that his Government at Westminster is introducing, which are causing real difficulties and crisis for many individuals throughout the country. I am sure that he is no different from me and other members, who, on a weekly basis, see constituents at their surgeries who are having difficulties with the changes to the welfare system and experiencing

delays in payments being made to them, which is forcing them to get food from food banks.

Food poverty is on the increase in this country, not because of the inaction of the Scottish Government but because of the action of the UK Government and the direct impact that the introduction of welfare changes is having on people. I hope that the member will acknowledge that, although we will do everything that we can within our powers, in order to deal with the situation effectively we need full control of our welfare system so that we can effect the change that is more appropriate for the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 from Malcolm Chisholm has been withdrawn for understandable reasons.

Commonwealth Games (Accessibility)

4. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what opportunities there are for people with mobility issues to participate in viewing events during the Commonwealth games at Hampden. (S4O-02535)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): The Glasgow 2014 organising committee is working to ensure that accessible seating and associated facilities are available for people with mobility issues at Commonwealth games events. To that end, it is currently conducting accessibility audits at all competition venues to understand existing provision and identify areas for improvement.

Accessibility improvements have already been made at Hampden. A new upgraded lift has been installed, along with four new wheelchair-accessible WCs and additional facilities for users with reduced mobility. For the games, a temporary athletics track will be installed and the wheelchair viewing spaces will be temporarily relocated.

George Adam: The minister will be aware that there will be much welcomed new viewing areas for fans with mobility issues during the Commonwealth games. She may also be aware that that is only a temporary measure. Many disabled fans who follow Scotland at the national stadium currently have a choice of only trackside or restricted view seating. Does the minister agree with me and the Scottish Disabled Supporters Association that the new seating should be retained by Hampden Park? Will she meet me and members of the SDSA about that issue?

Shona Robison: The organising committee has been working with all competition venues to try to ensure that solutions can be made on a permanent legacy basis wherever possible, although it is recognised that temporary solutions will sometimes be necessary.

However, I recognise that the Scottish Disabled Supporters Association is doing excellent work to ensure that issues for its members are being raised and considered. While the specific issues raised by the member are the responsibility of Hampden Park Ltd, I would be happy to meet the member and the SDSA to discuss that further.

Health Visitors

5. Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what role it considers health visitors have in making Scotland the best place in which to grow up. (S4O-02536)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Health visitors play a vital role in contributing to the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families through their focus on early intervention, prevention and provision of universal services. With other members of the multi-agency team, health visitors help to ensure that the wellbeing of every child is at the heart of our public services and that families get the support that they need when they need it.

Jayne Baxter: The Scottish Government has committed to fully fund local authorities to deliver the named person provisions in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. Should the bill be passed, will the Government show equal commitment to children aged zero to five by fully funding health boards to train, recruit and employ health visitors to fulfil the named person role?

Michael Matheson: The financial considerations around the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill are in the financial memorandum that sits alongside the bill. The memorandum has already been set out by the Minister for Children and Young People, Aileen Campbell, who is responsible for the bill.

Health visitors clearly have an important role to play for those aged zero to five, as part of the named person provisions in the bill. Since 2007, we have increased the number of health visitors in Scotland by some 13 per cent, along with a 77 per cent increase in the number of public health nurses.

We intend to work closely with our boards to ensure that they have the capacity in place to allow health visitors, who will be responsible as named individuals, to carry out that role effectively. We expect our boards to put plans in place to ensure that they do that in time for the bill coming into force.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that, ideally, health visitors should be placed within general practice and primary care as part of the team so that they are closely involved with families in a relatively small locality of their health board area?

Michael Matheson: It is important to see health visitors as part of that multidisciplinary team, including the general practitioner, the public health nurses and other health professionals who are engaged in working with children, young people and families.

It is important that we continue to improve the education provision for health visitors. NHS Education for Scotland is already undertaking work to consider how we can do that to allow health visitors to continue to progress in their careers.

Health visitors are a key part of the multidisciplinary team, working with general practitioners, social workers and teachers to ensure that we meet the needs of children and young people effectively.

Victoria Hospital A and E

6. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent measures NHS Fife has put in place to improve the accident and emergency department at Victoria hospital. (S4O-02537)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): NHS Fife appointed additional consultants to the emergency department in 2012. That enabled the introduction of a fast-track process for the care of patients presenting to the emergency department with minor injuries. It also enabled extended consultant weekend working—there is now consultant weekend working in the department from 9 am to 11 pm each day.

Further consultant posts have now been approved for the emergency department, which will further enable increased senior decision making across the 24-hour period.

The redirection policy that was introduced in May 2013 has resulted in the redirection of some patients who do not require the specific services that the emergency department provides to a more appropriate care setting, such as a general practice. That allows faster access to treatment for patients who require the services that only accident and emergency can provide.

Additional senior nurses have been recruited to the emergency department to provide additional resource to manage the patient journey and to provide clinical leadership to the multidisciplinary team across the 24-hour period.

David Torrance: What steps does the Scottish Government intend to take to ensure that the extra resources given to the accident and emergency department at Victoria hospital have a positive impact on helping to reduce waiting times and, in

the long term, offer a higher and more effective level of care to the public?

Alex Neil: The national unscheduled care team has established a robust performance framework to monitor NHS boards' delivery of improved and sustained performance across the whole system, including in relation to A and E waiting times. As part of accessing an additional £50 million, boards submitted detailed local unscheduled care action plans, which set out their approaches, described how new service provision and personnel would positively impact on service quality and performance and offered an improvement timeline that showed in detail by month the progress that would be delivered.

Since September, the unscheduled care team has established weekly and monthly performance protocols for reviewing the implementation of local action plans and the delivery of improved performance. A clear and explicit intervention and support system is available and will be deployed when agreed performance and/or quality is not demonstrated, to ensure that boards deliver effectively, according to their plans and the national plan.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Claire Baker.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will know that I recently wrote to him about concerns over Victoria hospital's patient care. I thank him for the reply that I received. Given the concerns about A and E and the missed targets in Fife, is he confident that NHS Fife is in a robust position for the winter months and the challenges that are ahead?

Alex Neil: I am confident that NHS Fife is in a much better position today than before. We are in constant contact with the board to ensure that, week by week, it is meeting not just A and E turnaround times but other performance targets, such as the treatment time guarantee.

NHS Provision (Visitors and Temporary Migrants)

7. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what the annual cost is of providing national health services for visitors and temporary migrants to Scotland. (S4O-02538)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Figures on the cost of overseas visitors and temporary migrants accessing NHS healthcare in Scotland are not held centrally. Overseas visitors are managed effectively in Scotland through a combination of regulations and Scottish Government guidance for NHS boards.

Alex Johnstone: The minister will be aware that an independent report for the Department of Health estimated that the total cost of visitors and temporary migrants accessing NHS services in England could be about £2 billion per annum. If we extrapolate that on the normal basis, the cost to Scotland could be as much as £200 million a year. Will the minister immediately inquire into the cost in Scotland and how we might recover that money for the NHS?

Michael Matheson: It is important to recognise the report that was produced on the NHS in England, but the number of migrants and so on in England is different from that in Scotland. We view migrants as an important part of the Scottish economy. They are provided with healthcare in the same way as other individuals in Scotland are.

We have robust mechanisms in place for those who are not from Scotland and who require to pay for NHS treatment. That system is managed effectively by our boards.

The figure that Alex Johnstone referred to is probably pretty excessive. There is no evidence whatever of such a level of expenditure in Scotland and no indication from any of our boards of difficulties that have resulted from the number of migrants who use healthcare services.

It is important to treat people equally and fairly while they are in Scotland. We should not try to use our healthcare system to manage immigration and migration.

Community Pharmacies

8. Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its review of the regulatory framework that supports the community pharmacy applications process and the power that national health service boards are given in relation to dispensing general practitioner practices. (S4O-02539)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The review that I announced in September is making steady progress and is nearing completion of its first stage, which has involved identifying the full range of powers that are available in primary and secondary legislation and how the framework can be better constructed to deliver the best possible outcome for patients and NHS pharmaceutical care and primary medical services in rural communities.

As part of that process, officials have identified a range of important and complex issues that will be central to the review's next stage, which will lead to amended regulations. I expect to announce shortly the next steps in taking that forward,

including any consultation on the key issues that are identified.

Jean Urquhart: I know from previous exchanges in the chamber that the cabinet secretary recognises the impact on medical services in remote and island areas of the opening of community pharmacies. I continue to receive correspondence from North Uist and Benbecula about the proposal there. What further assurances can the cabinet secretary give those communities?

Alex Neil: I am very familiar with the situation in Uist and indeed in other parts of Scotland—in particular, in rural Stirlingshire. I explored the possibility of having a moratorium until my review was completed but I do not have the legal powers to impose a moratorium. If I had those legal powers, I would have used them.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for the answer that he has already provided. As he is aware, I have taken a close interest in community pharmacies.

Is the cabinet secretary aware that new applications have been made to open pharmacies in Aberfoyle and Drymen and that therefore there is understandable local concern about the potential impact those applications will have on existing dispensing GP practices as well as on other pharmacy businesses operating in the area?

The cabinet secretary has made very clear the Government's position with regard to a moratorium. Does he recognise the importance of going through the process as quickly as possible to ensure that any regulatory change that is required is brought before the Parliament at the earliest possible date?

Alex Neil: I totally agree with Bruce Crawford. We are doing everything that we can to ensure that progress is speedy while, of course, adhering to overall rules and guidelines in terms of consultation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Many thanks. I call Rhoda Grant—please remember that time is of the essence.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware that Andrew Walker, who was a lay member of the pharmacy practices committee in the Western Isles, was asked to step down from that role when it became public that he held it and when he committed to listen to the concerns of the community on the application that was in hand. Surely that flies in the face of transparency and of needing to consult and listen to the views of those affected by decisions that are taken on their behalf. Can the cabinet secretary perhaps advise the Western Isles NHS Board how it should proceed and give interim

guidelines until he is in a position to come forward with a proper review?

Alex Neil: I am very much aware of the situation that Rhoda Grant describes. I need to be rather judicious in any comments that I make because of the potential implications, but I am keeping a close eye on the situation. If Western Isles NHS Board requires my guidance—if it asks for any guidance—I will be happy to provide it.

GP Casework

9. Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the medical profession regarding the casework of general practitioners. (S4O-02540)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Scottish ministers are fully committed to working with general practice professionals to ensure that the framework within which primary care is delivered is fit for purpose and responsive both to local circumstances and to patient need.

The Scottish Government is in regular dialogue with the Scottish general practitioners committee on those issues and on other important issues affecting patient care and service delivery. Freeing up GP time that is spent on bureaucracy to enable that time to be spent on patient care remains a priority for the Government in the development of a more Scottish contract, and it is something that we wish to explore with the SGPC at every opportunity.

Stuart McMillan: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. In relation to S4W-16841, I wrote to BMA Scotland questioning the impact on GPs of the United Kingdom Government's welfare reforms. In the response that I received, BMA Scotland indicated that there is anecdotal evidence that the UK Government's welfare reforms are increasing GPs' workloads, as patients are very concerned and confused about health assessments that they are being forced to take.

Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns that the welfare reforms from Westminster are having a damning and detrimental effect on the most vulnerable in society? Does he also agree with me that we need to continue to campaign against such reforms? Finally, does he agree that, with a yes vote next year, Scotland can have a welfare system that aids our people as compared with one that punishes those who are less well off and those who are disabled?

Alex Neil: I agree with all Stuart McMillan's points. The UK Government's damaging cuts—which started under Labour and are being continued by the coalition Government—and

challenges to the welfare system could reduce benefit expenditure in Scotland by more than £4.5 billion in the five years to 2015, impacting on some of the most vulnerable in our communities, including women, children and disabled people.

We are doing all that we can to mitigate the impacts of the cuts where possible. However, we can only do so much within our existing powers and strapped resources. The solution is for the Scottish Parliament to have full control over welfare so that it can put in place policies that benefit the people of Scotland. In the meantime, we continue to press the UK Government for fairer reform and to ensure that safeguards are in place for those who need them, while doing what we can to help those affected.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I know that the cabinet secretary is aware that many things impact on the workload and case load of GPs. However, I draw his attention to the current difficulties with waiting times in NHS Lanarkshire. Does he recognise and understand that those difficulties cause great frustration for GPs because of the backlog that they build up and their inability—as they see it—to get the best service for their patients?

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the current review by Health Improvement Scotland could examine the impact on GPs and consider healthcare for people in Lanarkshire holistically?

Alex Neil: I am very much aware of the issues to which Linda Fabiani rightly draws attention. I have a meeting later today with the chair of NHS Lanarkshire in which I will highlight those issues, and I will work with the board to try to address the pressures on GP surgeries and the wider issues that are being addressed in the review by HIS.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that GPs who refer cancer patients to the Aberdeen royal infirmary for radiotherapy are concerned at the lack of specialist oncology services and staff at that hospital? Will he acknowledge that patients who travel from Shetland are now being referred to other hospitals throughout Scotland? Will he discuss with NHS Grampian how best to avoid that happening in the very trying circumstances in which patients are finding themselves? It is of great concern to GPs locally in cases in which there is a considerable need for the patient to be treated as quickly as possible and in particular at Aberdeen royal infirmary.

Alex Neil: Tavish Scott raises a legitimate question. I am aware of the particular challenges in oncology in Grampian, specifically in colorectal cancer. We are working with the clinicians and the boards to address those issues and, where necessary, we will continue to offer alternative

sites for treatment for patients from Shetland and Orkney.

Of course, the main issue is to address the challenges, which are not confined to that part of the country but are part of a general shortage of certain oncology skills throughout the UK.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Yesterday I welcomed the cabinet secretary's announcement that there is to be a new GP contract and a review of access to GP practices. Will he respond today to my party's request to convene all-party talks on those two very important issues?

Alex Neil: I am always delighted to meet members of other parties, particularly when they have something positive to contribute. I look forward to Neil Findlay's positive contribution as a new departure from his previous contributions.

Stroke Care

10. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making on developing a new stroke care action plan. (S4O-02541)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Our "Better heart disease and stroke care action plan" is backed by more than £1 million of Scottish Government funding each year. It is aimed at ensuring that people with stroke are able to access effective, safe and person-centred care as quickly as possible. The priorities that the action plan sets out are monitored and updated annually and approved by the national advisory committee on stroke.

Nanette Milne: I thank the minister for his answer, but does he agree that more must be done to ensure that stroke survivors have adequate access to psychological services, including clinical psychology services in stroke units and psychological support in the community as set out in the original action plan? To what extent is that support available in the community? How many stroke units provide clinical psychology services?

Michael Matheson: I know that there has been an issue with access to psychological therapies for patients who have experienced a stroke. As part of our wider mental health strategy, we have increased the availability of psychological therapies. That is why there has been an increase in the number of psychologists and in other therapies being made available in the NHS.

We want to continue to increase capacity, and we have introduced a HEAT—health improvement, efficiency and governance, access and treatment—target for access to psychological therapies to ensure that boards are more consistent in making those services available. The

HEAT target will come into force at the end of 2014 and it will ensure that all boards put in place the necessary measures to make psychologists and other talking therapies available in their area, including for patients who suffer stroke.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Can the minister say what measures are being taken to encourage more blood pressure testing in the workplace and in the wider community, including in community pharmacies, as a preventative measure for strokes?

Michael Matheson: There is no doubt that having one's blood pressure checked regularly is an important element in helping to reduce the likelihood of experiencing a stroke. I am aware that in January 2014 the Stroke Association will run a "Know your blood pressure" campaign, which we are more than happy to support and which will be taken into community pharmacies in order to encourage people to get their blood pressure taken.

Alongside that, the general practitioner contract continues to contain provisions to ensure that GPs take the blood pressure of the patients who are at greatest risk of heart disease, stroke and hypertension.

Within the workplace, through the Scottish centre for healthy working lives we are taking forward work to assist employers and workplaces in general to help to promote good health and wellbeing among the workforce. The centre will support companies and individuals on issues such as providing blood pressure checks for the workforce on a regular basis.

Dumfries and Galloway Health Services (Seasonal Pressure)

11. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what plans are in place to address seasonal pressures on health services in Dumfries and Galloway. (S4O-02542)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): All health boards have plans in place to ensure the quality and continuity of local health services during the winter period. NHS Dumfries and Galloway's winter plan was endorsed at its October health board meeting and is available on its website. Such plans are informed by national guidance such as "National Unscheduled Care Programme: Preparing for Winter 2013-14", which was issued to all health boards on 27 September. The plans are supported by additional Scottish Government investment, such as the £50 million unscheduled care action plan that was announced on 25 February to improve accident and emergency performance over the next three years.

Elaine Murray: According to the annual review of NHS Dumfries and Galloway, wards in Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary were closed on five separate occasions in 2012-13 due to outbreaks of norovirus. Just last month, two wards had to be closed due to another outbreak. Does the health secretary intend to issue further guidance on the prevention both of the introduction of viral infections to hospitals from the community and of their spread within hospitals? Does he recommend restrictions on visitor numbers and visiting times when such infections are circulating within the wider community?

Alex Neil: Already whenever there is an outbreak of such a virus, limitations are placed on visitors and on the availability of particular wards. As part of our unscheduled care plan, every board has been asked to prepare contingencies in the event of something like norovirus breaking out and wards having to be closed, given the knock-on impact on patients, visitors and staff. Some particular challenges that we faced due to the norovirus outbreak last year were that, first, it started earlier than usual and, secondly, as well as the impact on wards and patients, quite a number of staff went off sick after contracting the virus. We are saying clearly to all health boards that they should have in place contingency plans for wards, bed availability, staffing and all other aspects of dealing with an outbreak of a virus such as norovirus, so that if there is an outbreak, the contingency plan can be implemented immediately.

Prescription Charges (Abolition)

12. Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the abolition of prescription charges will have over this coming winter. (S4O-02543)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The abolition of prescription charges has removed a barrier to good health for many people across Scotland, particularly those on low incomes or those with long-term conditions. Taking the prescriptions that they need, without the worry of cost, will help those people to keep well over the winter months.

Jamie Hepburn: The United Kingdom shadow health secretary recently told *Holyrood* magazine that he wanted to see health policies that can be consistent across England, Scotland and Wales. He said:

"Wouldn't that be a good thing, pulling in the same direction ...?"

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, given that Labour at Westminster has shown no enthusiasm for free prescriptions and given that nothing is off the table for Johann Lamont's cuts commission, in

the circumstance that Labour were in government Andy Burnham's formula would threaten free prescriptions in Scotland?

Alex Neil: I remind the member that when Andy Burnham was the health minister in England, he introduced the £20 billion of cuts in the health service down south that have been taken forward by the coalition Government. Of course, he was also very enthusiastic about privatisation of certain aspects of the health service. Certainly, the last thing that the people of Scotland need is the reimposition of prescription charges at £7.85 for a single prescription or £104 for an annual prepayment certificate. I look forward to the report of the Labour Party in Scotland's cuts commission and to seeing whether it will reimpose those prescription charges.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was under the impression that question time is about the responsibilities of the Government and not of anyone else. I wonder whether you could rule on that, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As you will be well aware, Mr Findlay, that is not a point of order—you have made your point nonetheless.

I take it that the cabinet secretary was finished, so we have a supplementary from Jenny Marra.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary consider removing his ban on advertising free prescriptions for minor ailments to those who are most in need in our society, such as single mothers on benefits, who could actually get a cough bottle for their children? They really need prescriptions, but his Government currently has a ban on advertising the service to those in need.

Alex Neil: That is a total misrepresentation of the situation, as we have come to expect from Jenny Marra.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 13 has not been lodged, and an explanation has been provided.

Aberdeen Maternity Hospital Inspection

14. Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has received assurances from NHS Grampian that it will act swiftly on the Healthcare Environment Inspectorate's recommendations following its inspection of Aberdeen maternity hospital. (S40-02545)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): NHS Grampian has already put in place an improvement action plan addressing the issues that were raised by the recent very unsatisfactory HEI inspection at

Aberdeen maternity hospital. The chief executive has been required to take personal responsibility for delivery of the plan and the board will be held to account against that. The HEI will undertake further announced and unannounced inspections to ensure that there is robust evidence of progress against the actions that have been identified.

NHS Grampian stated publicly in its media release of 30 October that all the issues that were raised in the report have been tackled as a matter of urgency and that all the requirements and recommendations are being addressed. It also stated that most of the actions have already been completed and that the remainder are at an advanced stage of implementation.

Christian Allard: Constituents whom I represent in the north-east, including patients and parents of newborn babies, deserve to have confidence in the cleanliness of wards and the quality of care. Which agencies of the Scottish Government have been tasked with supporting NHS Grampian in improving its standards?

Alex Neil: Last week, at the Scottish Government's instruction, Health Protection Scotland visited Aberdeen maternity hospital to determine how the failures occurred, to co-ordinate support for NHS Grampian, to quickly rectify the problems that have been identified and to ensure that NHS Grampian puts in place systems so that those events are not repeated. Health Protection Scotland will co-ordinate support from other national agencies as necessary, including Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Health Facilities Scotland, NHS Education for Scotland and the Information Services Division.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Is it not the case that the need to upgrade maternity services at NHS Grampian has contributed to the problem? What action is the cabinet secretary taking to ensure that the health board has the resources and support that it needs to put in place the much-needed new maternity facilities at the hospital?

Alex Neil: I make it absolutely clear that there would be no excuse for what the Healthcare Environment Inspectorate discovered in any hospital, no matter its age. As NHS Grampian has accepted, what was found at Aberdeen maternity hospital was certainly unacceptable. As the member knows, there is an issue about the capital programme for either upgrade or replacement of Aberdeen maternity hospital but, when we receive detailed proposals on that, they will be given due consideration. Of course, it would be easier to confirm that capital programme if our overall capital programme had not been cut by 26 per cent in the coming year.

Glasgow Airport Rail Link

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08173, in the name of James Kelly, on transport. We are extremely tight for time in today's debates, so I ask members to stick to their allocated times. Mr Kelly, you have eight minutes.

14:40

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party and to move the motion in my name.

This is an important debate because it is about the story of a scandal at the heart of the Scottish Government. It is not only about how £30 million of public money, including more than £8 million lost in land sales, was wasted, but about how the Scottish National Party Government does business. Let us not forget that the Government was too arrogant to come to the chamber and explain how £30 million was wasted on the cancelled Glasgow airport rail link project. Recently, the SNP was happy to spend two and a half hours on a debate looking forward to next year's Ryder cup, but it did not want to make a statement on the millions of pounds of public money that has been lost. I am therefore delighted that we have the time this afternoon to hold the Government to account.

I get the clear impression of a Government that is out of touch and not in control of what is happening. George Adam seems to think that it is a laughing matter, but I can tell him that when millions of pounds of public money is lost or wasted by the Government it is no laughing matter.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Money has been saved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stevenson.

James Kelly: In answer to parliamentary questions last week, Keith Brown revealed that the land sales, which account for more than £8 million in lost funds, were processed by officials and there was no ministerial oversight of those transactions. It is a bit like what happens on a Saturday night, when the television newsreader tells viewers to look away when the football scores come up. I get the impression of millions of pounds swishing about in the transport budget and the minister looking away, out of his ministerial office.

There is a theme of incompetence in the way that the issue has been handled. We have heard from the Government that it had to sell the land because it was surplus to requirements. The reality is that, while one part of Transport Scotland

was involved in selling the land, the other part was involved in an airport study group that was considering the possibility of a new GARL project. I have here the answer to a freedom of information request that shows that, in March, April and May this year, Transport Scotland was involved in discussions with a transport study group that was considering a new GARL project. At the same time, another branch of Transport Scotland was involved in the sale of the last piece of GARL land. Questions remain about that. Was it sheer incompetence on the part of the Government and Transport Scotland, or was it a show of political spite in killing off the GARL project? It is clear that Keith Brown is not in control of his department or his brief. The civil servants in Transport Scotland are pushing the policy context in different directions while Mr Brown sits in his ministerial office and twiddles his thumbs.

That theme of incompetence also runs into the SNP amendment, although the minister should be congratulated because he has achieved what engineers have failed to do—a U-turn on the railways. The SNP amendment describes the GARL project as “ill-conceived”. The SNP—or whoever drafted the amendment on its behalf—seems to have forgotten that it was a great supporter of the GARL project in 2006. Furthermore, when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney, proposed the cancellation of the project, he did so on the basis of affordability, not desirability. The amendment is not competent, as it does not represent the SNP's real position, and it should be withdrawn.

When we look at—

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

James Kelly: Just let me make my point.

When we look at the SNP benches, we do not see Sandra White, Nicola Sturgeon or any of those MSPs who, in 2006, were making enthusiastic speeches in favour of the Glasgow airport rail link.

Annabelle Ewing: If the member is suggesting that the amendment is incompetent, presumably that is a direct challenge to the Presiding Officer, and he may wish to comment on that.

I did not have the privilege of being a member of Parliament at the time to which the member referred. However, I wonder who it was that conducted the initial land deals for GARL. Was the land not purchased by Strathclyde partnership for transport, which was chaired by a Labour councillor?

James Kelly: All land deals were subject to due diligence when they were added to the Scottish

Government's balance sheet. That is why we need a full audit—to scrutinise the transactions carried out by the Scottish Government. Keith Brown has not carried out that scrutiny; he left the matter to his officials.

There is no doubt of the strong economic case for an airport rail link—

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

James Kelly: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

Next year, the people who arrive for the Commonwealth games will do so at an airport with no rail link. However, similar cities, such as Manchester, Newcastle, Paris, Milan and Copenhagen, all have airport rail links.

The situation is not just a scandal of money wasted but a failure of Government. The Government is too arrogant to come to the Parliament to explain the misuse of public money and too out of touch to know what is going on and it has a transport minister too incompetent to manage Transport Scotland. The Minister for Transport and Veterans is culpable and questions remain unanswered, which is why we need a full and independent audit. If we are to be a serious Parliament, we need answers to those questions and we need them immediately.

I move,

That the Parliament deplores that £29.91 million was spent prior to the cancellation of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link project, including an £8.17 million loss on land transactions; regrets that the land sales lacked transparency and accountability and were processed with no ministerial oversight, and demands a full and independent audit of all transactions associated with the project.

14:48

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): It is more than four years since John Swinney came to Parliament to explain the reasons why we cancelled the GARL project. That was the right decision then and it is the right decision now, yet here we are again going over the same old ground with the Labour Party.

We knew that the costs associated with the cancellation would be around £30 million—we made that clear to Parliament at the time. However, we had to balance that cost against the £176 million in savings from not going ahead with the project. Let us not forget that the project was one in which the costs and risks had been massively underestimated by SPT, the original promoter.

I have just heard in the background a comment on the trams. I wonder what the people of

Edinburgh would say if we could go back in time and not spend £776 million on that project.

Labour's motion conveniently ignores the fact that, in the intervening four years, there has been a massive investment in the rail network that serves Glasgow, Paisley and Inverclyde. More than £660 million has been provided, with £230 million being spent on upgrades to the track and the stations and new platforms at Glasgow Central, and £430 million being committed over 16 years to the new fleet of class 380 electric trains, which are now running. That underlines our focus on delivery for the people of the west of Scotland, and our determination to prioritise the right investments and not to flinch from taking hard decisions to drop projects that simply do not deliver value.

I turn to the context in which the decision to cancel GARL was made. It was taken in a period when maintaining capital expenditure was vital to Scotland's economy. Action was required to ensure that the impacts of the exceptional cuts that Westminster had imposed were kept to a minimum. We can all remember the words that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury wrote as Labour departed from office in 2010:

"There is no money left."

In those circumstances, we faced some extremely tough decisions. The cuts had started well before that, when Labour drove the economy into a ditch.

This Government was prepared to take the resulting difficult decisions. A contributing factor in our decision to cancel GARL was the fact that the costs associated with accommodation work within the campus of Glasgow Airport Ltd were escalating. Let us look at some of the facts. Work by Transport Scotland in the first half of 2009 identified a fourfold increase in the scope and capital compensation costs that we had inherited from SPT.

James Kelly: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: In a second.

In January 2007, SPT estimated that work in the airport campus would cost £7.8 million. In May 2008, when the project was handed over from SPT to Transport Scotland, it was estimated that SPT work in the airport campus would cost £16 million. Following a thorough review of the potential scope of the project from January to July 2009, Transport Scotland estimated that work in the airport campus would cost £70 million.

James Kelly: The minister mentioned Transport Scotland. Was he aware that, earlier this year, Transport Scotland participated in an airport study group that was looking at GARL at the same time

as another branch of Transport Scotland was looking at selling off the final plot of land?

Keith Brown: Yes, of course I was aware of that. Transport Scotland has said the same thing throughout the process, which is that we do not support a replacement GARL project. Nobody who was involved in that study group said that there should be a publicly funded GARL project. Two of the partners in that study have said that they are willing to look at a private sector-funded bid for GARL. They are pushing that, but the Government position has not changed throughout the process.

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

Keith Brown: No, I will not.

The Government was not convinced that that level of public expenditure to compensate what was a private company could be justified at a time of significant cuts to public budgets and services. The cancellation saved £176 million of our hard-pressed capital budget. Parliament was kept informed of our intentions at the time, and has been kept informed of them ever since.

Labour's accusation that the disposal of land lacked transparency is simply not true. We kept Parliament informed of the costs associated with the GARL cancellation and of our intention to dispose of the land throughout 2010. We could not have been clearer in doing that. We also made clear time after time that the land would be disposed of in accordance with the guidance and principles that are set out in the "Scottish Public Finance Manual".

Some of the disarray in the Labour Party can be explained by the fact that its leader accused the First Minister of being too close to the issue. Johann Lamont insinuated that there was a connection between one of the people involved and the First Minister. Labour has gone from saying that the Government was far too close to the process to saying that we are not involved in it enough. That is despite the fact that we are following exactly the same procedures—those that are set out in the "Scottish Public Finance Manual"—that the previous Administration followed; I do not know whether Mr Kelly was a member of the previous Administration. We have done exactly what was done in the past, but the Labour Party has to find something to criticise. It does not want to be held to the same standards—

James Kelly: Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: No, I have already taken an intervention. I have less time than the member had.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: No, I do not have enough time.

We made it clear time after time that the land would be disposed of in accordance with the "Scottish Public Finance Manual". It sets out the requirements on how Scottish ministers and officials should go about ensuring propriety in land transactions. It is for officials to ensure that those guidelines are followed. The decision to declare the land surplus was taken only after an extensive trawl of other Government departments had been carried out to determine whether the land could be used for some other purpose.

Our record of investment in west of Scotland transport infrastructure speaks for itself. I have already mentioned some of the figures. On the rail network, we have continued to invest in works at Glasgow Central station and the rail corridor that serves Glasgow, Paisley, Ayrshire and Inverclyde at a cost of around £230 million, and £430 million has been invested in the introduction of the new class 380 trains, which are providing 9,000 additional seats and between 50 and 120 additional seats in the peak hours.

With regard to roads projects, members might remember the M74. There was a time when the Labour Party was committed to that and was going to see it through; once again, it did not, but we did at a cost of £692 million. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps some members think that the Labour Party completed the M74 project. Well, it did not—it was the SNP Government that completed it.

The M80 Stepps to Haggs project, which, incidentally, won a saltire award last week for the excellence of its engineering, was delivered on time and on budget at a cost of £320 million. As for the future, we are looking to the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement project, which will deliver longer trains and extended platforms at Glasgow Queen Street station and the electrification of the core Edinburgh to Glasgow via Falkirk line.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is in his last minute.

Keith Brown: I should also mention the £80 million electrification of the Cumbernauld line, which will introduce electrified services in advance of the Commonwealth games; the electrification of the Paisley canal line; the completion of the M8 motorway link; and the upgrading of nearly 7 miles of the existing A8 between Baillieston and Newhouse. Those investments will bring real benefits to Scotland; for example, the Paisley corridor improvements have delivered 61 operational jobs, whereas GARL promised 67. In total, the Paisley corridor improvements have delivered 45 per cent of the construction and operations jobs that were forecast for GARL and,

of course, the new class 380 trains will provide an additional 9,000 seats.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close now, minister.

Keith Brown: The Government is not afraid to make difficult decisions when it has to and, once we have made a decision, we move on from it. Our focus is to prioritise investment as an essential tool in enhancing productivity and delivering faster, more sustainable growth. The private sector is free to develop proposals to construct a rail link to Glasgow airport. It should not require support from the public purse for project development, but the fact is that no credible proposal has come forward in the intervening four years.

I move amendment S4M-08173.2, to leave out from “deplores” to end and insert:

“recognises the saving of £176 million from the cancellation of the ill-conceived Glasgow Airport Rail Link project; notes that the Parliament was informed of the decision to dispose of surplus land in March 2010 and accepts that this was carried out in accordance with the principles and guidance in the *Scottish Public Finance Manual*; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has made substantial investment, including the successful implementation of the £660 million of improvements to rail infrastructure, trains and services serving Glasgow, Paisley, Inverclyde and Ayrshire, and notes that all of this was achieved by the Scottish Government at a time of reductions in capital funding through prioritisation of the transport projects that will provide the greatest benefit to the people and economy of Scotland.”

14:56

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I have no particular desire to become involved in this unsightly spat between the Labour Party and the SNP. However, as the opportunity to speak in the debate has come to me, I will use it.

Once upon a time, we could say that, although every major airport had a railway running past its perimeter fence, none of them had a rail link that passengers could use. In fact, the only one with an effective rail link is Prestwick and that probably came about only because the Secretary of State for Scotland at the time, George Younger, happened to have the airport slap bang in his constituency. It occasionally pays to elect the right member.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: If the member will excuse me, I will carry on and try not to get too involved.

This afternoon, the Labour Party has made a number of suggestions about some form of impropriety surrounding the cancellation of GARL and subsequent actions. If it has facts to support

such accusations, I suggest that it brings them forward. However, as it stands, it appears that there are very few facts involved other than those that have been very simply and clearly laid out.

Jackson Carlaw: Is Mr Johnstone, like me, curious to know whether Ms Lamont took up Mr John McGlynn's invitation for a private meeting after certain allegations and whether, as a consequence, Mr McGlynn received a written apology? If so, does Mr Johnstone think that we should be told?

Alex Johnstone: I would be very interested to have that information. As I have said, I would like to see all the facts laid out.

In looking at those facts, however, we should take one or two things into account. First, I would be a little reticent in accepting the SNP amendment's description of the GARL project as “ill-conceived”. When it came forward, the scheme itself seemed very reasonable. Indeed, it seemed so reasonable that I think every party in the Parliament supported it. Who would not? It was a simple means of providing a valuable service. However, as the minister has pointed out, the estimated costs of work on the campus of the airport rose from £7.8 million to £16 million and then to £70 million. That should have set alarm bells ringing all over the place, especially with the Government. When the estimated costs of the whole project doubled and then doubled again, alarm bells should certainly have been ringing. When grave concerns emerged about not only the likely outcome but the reasons for the increase in prices, I believe that the Government did the right thing and called a halt to the project.

That said, that does not solve the problem that we still have: there is still no rail link to Glasgow airport. That is why I chose to lodge what many might describe as a naive little amendment, and one that I do not expect to survive to be voted on. We simply encourage the Scottish Government

“to explore options for the future provision of a low-cost rail link that will connect Glasgow Airport to the national rail network.”

I have already heard some encouragement from the Government. In spite of the fact that there is continuing reluctance by the transport minister to become involved in a Government-sponsored project, he has spoken about the possibility of achieving that through private sector investment. As a Conservative, I believe that private sector investment has a great deal to be said for it. First, it will control the project costs, and, secondly, it will deliver a link that does what it is supposed to do and nothing else. There will be no bells or whistles—the expensive options that we see in some of the other transport projects around.

We should not take from the debate the negative—the arguing that will go on between the SNP Government and the Labour Party Opposition and the petty political point scoring that is inevitable in such situations. Perhaps we may have turned around and be facing in a different direction at the end of the debate. We may have decided that, instead of arguing about the past, we can look forward to the future, when we might eventually be able to catch a train to Glasgow airport.

I move amendment S4M-08173.1, to leave out from “deplores” to end and insert:

“encourages the Scottish Government to explore options for the future provision of a low-cost rail link that will connect Glasgow Airport to the national rail network.”

15:01

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I will try to remain positive, as Mr Johnstone said that we should, but that is extremely difficult when we get the bile that we are getting from the Labour Party. It seems that there is the reality of the situation, and there is the paranoid planet of the Labour Party. Is the Labour Party really now trying to tell us that there is a strong economic case for the GARL project? The line was going to have 11 passengers per train. The costs were spiralling long before the SNP was the Administration. At one point, the cost was £140 million to £160 million. Tavish Scott then said that the cost was £170 million to £210 million. The costs constantly moved on. We are talking about 11 passengers per train and £3.1 million of subsidy every single year.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): Will the member give way?

George Adam: I would love to do so but, unfortunately, there is not enough time in the debate. I have much to get through to stop some of the misinformation from Labour.

There were reports early on that Sinclair Knight Merz had said that only 5 to 6 per cent of Glasgow airport passengers would use GARL. Have members ever tried the bus from Glasgow airport into the centre of Glasgow? It is very efficient and quick, and it gets people there on time

As always, I encourage everyone to go to the nearest town, via Gilmour Street, and see what is happening in Paisley. Let us talk about the positive Paisley aspect of the story, which the minister mentioned. The work that was completed in February 2010 has delivered extra capacity to the Glasgow Paisley corridor and two additional peak-time services. The Scottish Government delivered 61 jobs; at its best, GARL was going to offer only 67 jobs. That is what Labour is arguing about. We

have managed to move things forward and make things better for my constituency.

The Scottish Government has been up front about the costs of cancelling GARL. What exactly does the Labour Party want? The Scottish Government cannot be more transparent in everything that we are talking about. Again, I go back to the Labour Party's paranoia. It is desperate to find something and cause trouble. It is pure political mischief. That is the problem, but the public are not buying that. They are not buying into that idea, because they can see the desperation in the Labour Party.

GARL was acquired by SPT, or Strathclyde partnership for transport—that organisation has changed its name so many times that we forget what its name is. Since its inception, it has been run by the Labour Party. We might ask why Labour-controlled SPT bought the land at such a high cost?

James Kelly: Will the member give way?

George Adam: Unfortunately, I do not have the time to give way. If the Labour Party thought more of the debate, perhaps it should have used its whole time for it, instead of putting the debate into a small part of that time.

We have also had the pantomime, as has been said, of the Labour Party leader coming into the chamber and accusing the First Minister of all types of things. However, it was not only the First Minister who was accused but someone who was not here and could not represent himself: a local businessman who has offered jobs to people in my constituency.

We must ask ourselves what the Labour Party's motivation is and what it is trying to achieve in this matter. It is not about the Labour Party trying to scrutinise the Government; it is about the Labour Party trying to create something that is not there. However, the information is available and the Labour Party should stop playing games and join the real world with the rest of us.

15:05

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this Labour debate on the Glasgow airport rail link, because it will interest many constituents in Renfrewshire and West Scotland. We should have had a full ministerial statement several weeks ago on the issue; it is telling that Labour has had to bring the issue to Parliament today.

The minister spoke for several minutes on the Government's actions on the Glasgow airport rail link and we heard many words, but the one word that we did not hear was “sorry”. We should have had a full apology from the minister today for three

reasons: for cancelling an important infrastructure project for the region and the country; for costing an estimated 1,300 jobs in the Renfrewshire and Glasgow area; and for scandalously wasting our constituents' taxes in the process.

We need transparency and we need accountability for this mess. It is completely unacceptable for ministers to hide behind officials, which is why Labour is calling for an independent audit into the land transactions, as James Kelly outlined earlier. The cancellation of the rail link has cost at least £30 million. However, it is not the Government's money, but our constituents' money that has been wasted. The £30 million is a staggering figure. If the minister does not think so, that shows just how out of touch he is and how badly we need an independent audit.

I firmly believe that a rail link to Glasgow airport would have been beneficial to the whole country, with Scotland's biggest city being linked by train to its airport. The SNP's record on the issue means that we can get a direct train from Glasgow Central station to Manchester airport but not to Glasgow airport.

I note, as others have, that the minister's amendment describes the Glasgow airport rail link as "ill-conceived". He must disagree, in that case, with both John Swinney, who previously described the project as "desirable", and Derek Mackay, who when he was leader of Renfrewshire Council acknowledged the "economic and transport benefits" of the rail link. The Government's amendment also points to

"£660 million of improvements to rail infrastructure, trains and services serving Glasgow, Paisley, Inverclyde and Ayrshire".

However, the reality is that weekday off-peak train services from Paisley Gilmour Street to Ayr have been halved, despite the minister's continued denials. What sort of improvement is that? In addition, the investment in the Paisley corridor and the rolling stock that has been put on the route was done to facilitate the Glasgow airport rail link. The Government's misrepresentations and failure to be open are not just reasons for an audit, but are a demonstration of a behaviour pattern.

We should not forget, as James Kelly said, the delayed publication of the Aecom study that the Government was part of, as the transport minister has confirmed, which recommended a rail link at the same time as the Government was selling off the land. Four years on from the cancellation of GARL, rather than seeing the benefits of a rail link, all that we are left with is an expensive mess and more questions than answers. This is not the SNP governing in Scotland's interests. In relation to George Adam's speech, what is even less forgivable are the actions of SNP MSPs who purport to stand up for Paisley and Renfrewshire

and who supported the Glasgow airport rail link until Alex Salmond and John Swinney told them not to.

We all know that unemployment is too high and that we need jobs for young people and people who have been made redundant. In Paisley, we heard the announcement of 141 job losses last week. The SNP's response to that is to sell off the land for the rail link cheap in a fire sale and, while they are at it, to slash college places for training and retraining opportunities.

It is about time that the SNP Government apologised for the mishandling of the Glasgow airport rail link and the loss of jobs to Renfrewshire, and time that we had an independent audit. It is also time that SNP MSPs who represent Renfrewshire started standing up for Renfrewshire.

15:09

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

First, I think that we want to emphasise that rail is a good thing. Last night, we held an inaugural meeting of the proposed cross-party group on rail. I thank the 10 members who attended and others who want to be members of the group, but sent their apologies. I very much hope, despite some of the remarks in his speech, that I will be able to work with Neil Bibby, as co-convenor of the group, to take it forward. The reality is that many, if not all, of us agree on the importance of rail and want to develop it, even though there can at any time be disagreements about the priorities.

Let us be realistic about what has been achieved. In my case, the Airdrie to Bathgate link allows trains to run from Helensburgh all the way to Edinburgh. I mention that not least because it links six stations in the east end of Glasgow right through to Edinburgh. It was delivered on time and on budget, and I went on the first train.

Of course it is desirable to have rail links to all airports. If I remember correctly from my SPT days, there was cross-party support for a rail link, as there was for a number of other rail and transport projects. One of Prestwick airport's big advantages is its closeness to a railway station. When I go to visit other countries, I often use the train from the airport to the city centre, but not exclusively. The last time I flew to Rome, Paris, Athens and Brussels, I took buses to the city centres. I admit that I use the cheaper airlines, so that might be a factor.

We have to live in the real world, where there are limited finances, even in the good times. That means that we have to set priorities in the transport budget. We can ask, "What if we didn't have the Edinburgh trams scheme?" or "What if we didn't need to replace the Forth road bridge?",

but the reality is that we were forced to spend money on both projects.

We also have to set priorities between transport and other objectives. I am clear, and I think that most of my constituents in the east end of Glasgow are clear, that if we have to choose what to spend a limited amount of money on, housing has to be top of the list and transport must just accept its place. When setting priorities, we also have to remember that Glasgow airport, as has been pointed out, is exceptionally close to the city centre. The distance is some 8 miles and the journey takes only 20 to 25 minutes by taxi or bus. By comparison, Heathrow is 15 miles from the centre of London, and Gatwick is 29 miles.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Should the Forth road bridge have been built differently? Yes. Should the Edinburgh trams system have been handled differently? Yes. Should the Scottish Parliament building have been built for less? Yes. Should the land for GARL have not been bought in the first place? Perhaps the answer is yes. However, it is not unusual for the public sector to sell a piece of land and then to have to make a further decision. For example, in Glasgow City Council, it was not an unusual situation that land was sold and then had to be bought back at an inflated price because, for example, we wanted to put the Commonwealth games on the site.

The reality is that the people who authorised those projects considered that they were doing the right thing at the time, and in the case of SPT there was cross-party agreement that we wanted an airport rail link. We did not realise that the financial crisis was coming down the track towards us, so I think that it is somewhat unfair to go back now and criticise SPT or others who were involved in the decision.

The motion also calls for an audit. I wonder what is meant by that, because the auditors are there anyway and are doing their job. Is that a criticism of present or past auditors?

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

John Mason: Are we saying that the auditors, who are professional people, are not independent? Is this an attack on the accounting and auditing professions?

15:13

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): The debate is not one that is designed to maintain the usual standard political posturing that can be witnessed in the chamber, but to address serious questions that remain about the cancellation of the Glasgow airport rail link project, and to ensure that we have

the clarity that taxpayers want about the cost of cancelling that vital infrastructure project.

We on the Labour benches want to know why £30 million has been spent on closing GARL and—especially—why almost £8 million has been lost on land transactions. Those questions are why we believe that there should be an independent audit of the handling of the land transactions to expose any lack of accountability and competence. If the minister and the Scottish Government maintain that all aspects of the cancellation of GARL were above board, they should have an audit and clear the air once and for all.

John Mason: Will Mary Fee give way?

Mary Fee: No. I am sorry but as time is tight in this debate I am not minded to give way.

In 2009, when John Swinney axed GARL, I was a local councillor, so I know of the anger and dismay that constituents felt when they heard that the GARL project was to close. To this day, many of my constituents vent those feelings at surgeries and on the doorstep.

The more information that surfaces about the cancellation of GARL, the more local people remember that it was this Scottish Government that let them down. Not only did the local economy lose investment, but jobs that were promised to Renfrewshire were taken away at a time when they were desperately needed. For my constituents—constituents I share with George Adam and Derek Mackay—clarity is required and it should come from an independent audit.

Such was Derek Mackay and George Adam's support for the project that the then council leader recognised the transport and economic benefits of the rail link and continued to support the project until his boss axed it. I am not sure which position Derek Mackay takes these days when standing up for Renfrewshire. The same goes for George Adam, who was also a councillor at the time and was also in full support of the project.

George Adam: Will Mary Fee take an intervention?

Mary Fee: No. I am sorry, but time is too tight to take an intervention.

When John Swinney made his announcement, he maintained that we could not afford the project. The viability of the project was never questioned and the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Act 2007 has never been repealed. With that in mind, and given the sale of the land at ludicrously lower prices than it was bought for, I urge the Scottish Government to listen to Scottish Labour and allow an independent audit to take place.

Looking at next week's business, the Scottish Government has scheduled a debate entitled "Modernising Scotland's Transport Infrastructure, Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century". What a shame that the country's largest airport experiences poor connectivity to all our rail networks. To ask visitors who land at Glasgow airport to take a bus to get a train to travel 9 miles hardly makes Scotland seem like a country that is meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

The GARL saga really embarrasses this Government. The information that led to this debate being sought was obtained only after sustained use of parliamentary protocols and questions in the media. A recent Audit Scotland report shows that the Government needs to improve its reporting to the public on major projects. The GARL affair best exemplifies the lack of accountability and transparency of this SNP Government.

Let us have an independent audit and find out why £30 million of taxpayers' money was wasted on GARL.

15:17

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I am never one to intrude on personal grief, and I know that Labour Party members have had it hard over the past few weeks. However, I find it inconceivable, and even unbelievable, that poor Mr Kelly—for whom I have the greatest respect—should again have been sent out of the Labour trenches to do battle with such a poor armoury and infantry.

Last week, Mr Kelly's—pro tem—senior officer, General Lamont, launched what she thought was a pre-emptive strike against our transport minister, which is a dangerous thing to do against a former Royal Marine who is a successful Scottish businessman. Her pre-emptive strike used dud ammunition, and she launched it in the full knowledge that Mark Griffin MSP, head of her transport division, had made a similar foray in the weeks before and had been given a straight and clear answer by the transport minister, who told him that the land that he was asking about had been purchased by Strathclyde partnership for transport—I will come to the sale in a minute—although it was subsequently bought by the Government.

General Lamont therefore knew the answer before she asked her question. It appears that as well as not talking to her support in the Falkirk outpost, she does not talk to her transport lieutenant. In the course of her attack, she fired innuendoes about the sale at a perfectly reasonable Scottish businessman. I echo Jackson Carlaw. Has she apologised to the general

concerned in writing? She knew that her salvo at Government ministers would miss its target. She knew—or she should have known—that there were clear guidelines and restrictions on the valuation, purchase and sale of land, and the role of ministers in relation to those activities. She knew—or she should have known—that the rules of engagement on the sale of land are, and were, laid down in the "Scottish Public Finance Manual", as per Westminster Treasury rules.

James Kelly: Will Chic Brodie give way?

Chic Brodie: No. I do not have time.

General Lamont knew—or she should have known—that surplus land cannot be held speculatively by Governments and must be sold at an independently assessed market value.

We have a written answer on the involvement of Transport Scotland—which, apparently, did not know that. The written answer says:

"The sale prices were based upon a professional assessment by Transport Scotland's property services consultants of the current market value of each plot."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 30 September 2013; S4W-17215.]

Not only that, but I have here a copy of the minutes of a meeting at Strathclyde partnership for transport, which say:

"After consideration, the Partnership approved the acquisition of Airlink Security Parks Ltd based on the terms outlined in the report".

In the previous item, the SPT was talking about another property, its headquarters. What did it say about that? It said that

"the circumstances of both the property market"—

that is the value of property—

"and SPT's Landlord had changed".

Further on in the minutes, in item 10, we have, at item (e), under "Contract",

"GARL—Branch line advance works—utility diversion. Advance ordering of gas pipes"

at the sum of £1.2 million. Who gained or lost from that presumption? The leader of the Opposition's comments were not, as it was kindly put by the businessman who was affected, "regrettable in the extreme". In fact, they were way wide of the mark and very badly misplaced.

It did not help that apparently there was no meaningful or sustainable business case for the whole project in the beginning. I have just been through the 2009 financial reports.

With respect to Mr Kelly and his fellow troops, I think that it is time for their general to return to the ranks.

15:22

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I am sure that Mr Brodie will reflect on that speech and the tone in which it was delivered, and that he will consider whether it was the right speech to make.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I have said it before in the chamber and I will say it again—the decision to cancel the Glasgow airport rail link was wrong. It was a project that had the potential to stimulate the economy, create jobs and boost tourism. It would also have provided a public transport link to Glasgow airport that would have got cars off the road and made the journey easier. It was an infrastructure project not just for Glasgow and the west of Scotland but for the entire country. I remind Parliament that the delivery of an airport rail link was a commitment that was made in our bid for the Commonwealth games.

However, the Scottish Government decided to cancel the project without any real review or appraisal and without discussion with the other stakeholders. Much has been made about the escalation in costs in the transfer from SPT to Transport Scotland, but I also remind Parliament that when that official transfer took place, Transport Scotland carried out three months of due-diligence inquiries. What did it conclude? It concluded that no significant cost increases or overspends had been identified. In fact, a scant three months before the decision was made to cancel, the then Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change said that the project was on time and on target. How quickly they forget.

As we know, as the then Opposition, SNP members including the Deputy First Minister, Mr Swinney, Mr Stevenson and Sandra White, made strong arguments in favour of GARL. Ms White in particular bemoaned

“the lack of a direct rail link to Glasgow Airport”—[*Official Report*, 15 November 2000; c 62.]

and suggested that

“The benefits of the link are overwhelming”.—[*Official Report*, 29 November 2006; c 29844.]

However, once the cabinet secretary had decided to axe GARL, SNP members fell silent and their views about the necessity of the project were swiftly forgotten. Not one of its Glasgow members had the courage to speak out and say that it was the wrong decision.

Today, the audacity of the SNP has been revealed by no less a figure than the minister himself. In the amendment, he refers to GARL as “ill-conceived”. I confess that I was genuinely taken aback when I saw those words in the

Business Bulletin because I can recollect no occasion in the past when an SNP minister has described GARL in that way. Indeed, John Swinney described the project as “desirable” when speaking about its cancellation, and the Scottish Government seemed at the time to be suggesting that it regretted having to make the decision to cancel GARL but had been forced into it by economic circumstances.

Parliament deserves an explanation from the minister as to the Scottish Government’s real opinion of GARL. Is it against the project in principle, as the minister seemed to suggest, and if so, why has it not said so before now? I remind the minister that, if a private GARL were to go ahead, it would still need rails to run on and those rails would have to cross land between Glasgow and its airport. What land does the minister think could now be used for a revised GARL project? Perhaps we will have a monorail, at the kind of cost that that would involve.

In coming to a close, Presiding Officer—I am conscious that your generosity goes only so far—I will mention another Glasgow rail line that has been the subject of much discussion. I speak, of course, of the Anniesland to Queen Street line in my constituency.

I sincerely welcome the Scottish Government’s recent commitment that that line will be electrified, but an idea of the timescale and a discussion of the implications for passengers would be welcome. The line is a vital link for people in my constituency, and they deserve to know what the Scottish Government’s plans are. I sincerely hope that the commitment to electrification of the Anniesland to Queen Street line lasts longer than the commitment to GARL.

15:26

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): It was an American President who once said that, when he came into office, all the things that he had been saying were bad turned out to be much worse. That, perhaps, was the case with the GARL project.

The Labour Party motion rather unwisely invites Parliament to agree to an “audit of all transactions”. The word “transaction” is, of course, defined in “Webster’s Dictionary” as “a business deal”. It is not just about finance, so let us look at some of the transactions and delve deep into the *Official Report* of the Parliament.

We will look first at 3 October 2006, when the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee was meeting and John Halliday, the assistant chief executive of SPT, was before the committee. He made the position clear:

"SPT was the architect of the agreements and we negotiated the terms."—[*Official Report, Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee*, 3 October 2006; c 300.]

We know where it started: with SPT.

We heard from a number of members that there was "a strong economic case" for GARL. James Kelly said it in his opening speech, and Mary Fee said that

"the viability of the project was never questioned".

However, in paragraph 32 of the committee's preliminary stage report, Glasgow Airport Ltd is reported as saying:

"As the bill stands, we think that it is as likely to have an adverse effect on the airport as it is to have a positive effect".—[*Official Report, Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee*, 8 May 2006; c 57.]

Right at the outset, even the airport operator was unconvinced.

Patricia Ferguson said that the rail link would take "cars off the road". Well, at paragraph 38 of the report, we read about

"reductions of 0.5% and 0.8% in total M8 traffic flows by 2030."

We are talking about single-figure numbers of cars being taken off the motorway. At paragraph 40, we read that the bus operators expected the number of people who would use the bus to double. Therefore, GARL would hardly be displacing anything.

The committee recorded its slight scepticism about the claimed economic benefits at paragraph 26. In paragraph 17, it said:

"patronage figures are low."

Looking further, according to paragraph 221 of the consideration stage report, it was certainly possible that the project could cost as much as £210 million.

Drew Smith: Will Stewart Stevenson give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Stewart Stevenson: From paragraph 34 of the consideration stage report, it is clear that not all the evidence was available to Parliament. Commercial confidentiality prevented negotiations with the airport from being fully revealed to Parliament, so we made the decision in some ignorance. Paragraph 36 of the report says that

"The Committee remains extremely disappointed"

by that.

The costs on the airport campus were to be £5 million but ended up at £70 million. In the detailed costings that were brought to Parliament, not a single line item approaches the figure of £70 million.

I supported the project initially, but it was ill conceived in its detail. The reason for that lies at the door of parliamentary colleagues in the Labour Party and their allies in SPT.

15:30

Alex Johnstone: In my opening speech, I described the debate as a spat between the Government and the Labour Party. The debate has been that and little else.

We have learned some interesting facts. We learned that John Mason has undertaken a form of world tour to assess airport rail links in a number of countries. I was glad to hear that he is a frugal man after my own heart; he assured us that he travelled on budget airlines.

A number of the serious issues that have been raised have been confused. Some members have sought to confuse and conflate issues to try to make something where nothing exists.

The whole argument comes down to the questionable business case. Rising costs called that business case into question, even if we accepted it at the outset. The Labour Party used the line that the decision to cancel the project was based on affordability rather than desirability. That indicates that Labour does not understand the importance of a business case in such a project. I would fully expect a business case to be produced for any such project or any attempt to restart the project in the long term.

The facts are simple. We can question the comment that the project was ill conceived—there is a side argument to have about that—but the project quickly demonstrated itself not to be justified on the ground of a business case, given the outturn costs of which we quickly became aware.

As I said, costs on the campus rose from £7.8 million to an estimated £70 million. The cost of the project went to an estimated £176 million—that is the figure that I have, but we have heard the suggestion that it could have run to £210 million. The project was proposed for the right reasons, but the costs got out of hand. I therefore believe that the Government took a responsible move in ending the project, although I would like to think that we could revisit it some day and achieve the objective.

A key issue that the Labour Party has put at the centre of the debate is the suggestion that something was wrong with the land deals. It is always a disappointment to buy something that is expensive and sell it cheaply. Anyone who has ever been involved in business might well have experience of that. However, the economy of the country and the value of things for buying and

selling changed dramatically in the intervening period. That might have had something to do with the behaviour of a Labour Government elsewhere, but let us give it the benefit of the doubt.

As far as I am aware from the information that has been made available to date, there was no impropriety in the land deals. If the Labour Party suggests that there was, I am still waiting for the evidence to be presented to support that.

As a consequence, I find it hard to recommend that my Conservative colleagues vote for the motion or the SNP amendment, so we will abstain on both. I hope that we can put the debate behind us and begin to take a more optimistic approach to the provision of useful and usable local rail services to link Glasgow airport to the Scottish rail network.

15:35

Keith Brown: We have heard a very different view of GARL in the last two speeches—and of the committee stage 1 report, from Stewart Stevenson. The stage 1 committee report also stated, in relation to the people who would use GARL:

“the largest of these groups in patronage terms is ‘Non Airport related trips’ (60% of the total GARL patronage in 2009). Even by 2030, this group will still account for almost half of the trips, while actual air passengers will still be a minority”.

I have mentioned the work that has been done on the Paisley corridor delivering the additional capacity on that part of the network. I have also mentioned the class 380 trains on the Ayrshire and Inverclyde routes, which are providing more than 9,000 additional seats to the existing fleet and between 50 and 120 additional seats in the peak hours. I know that there are still Labour MSPs who are determined to see that as a bad-news story for their own reasons.

As we have heard, the business case for GARL estimated that 67 operational jobs would be created. The Paisley corridor work that we took forward delivered 61 of those jobs and 45 per cent of the construction and operations jobs that were forecast in the business case were delivered by the parts of the project that were delivered.

In 2009, we asked the Labour Opposition which budgets it would cut to enable the continued delivery of the project and it offered none. We looked at a number of alternative funding options at the time, but none was viable.

Patricia Ferguson has been scaremongering relentlessly about some of the services in Glasgow. If Labour intends that the £176 million—now substantially more than that—that it would take to reinstate GARL is to be found by cutting the services that Patricia Ferguson professes to

defend, perhaps we should be told that by the Labour Party. We have made perfectly clear, a number of times, our commitment to the services that Patricia Ferguson mentions.

As I said, we looked at a number of alternative funding options but we could not find any at that time that was viable. It is interesting that, at the time, the current supporters of a rail link were not prepared to contribute to its costs:

“The only direct financial support from the council would be through the contribution that is made to the running costs of SPT.”—[*Official Report, Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee*, 24 April 2006; c 15.]

That was Glasgow City Council’s position on 24 April 2006. There is also this comment from BAA Scotland’s finance director, again in 2006:

“The rail link is about enabling Glasgow city centre to benefit from the airport, rather than allowing the airport to benefit.”—[*Official Report, Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee*, 8 May 2006; c 55.]

The study that has been commissioned and led by Glasgow Airport Limited has been mentioned and Alex Johnstone will be pleased to hear that one of the proposals—one of the options—is a light rail study. That option is being looked at in relation to the study, which will inform the next surface access strategy. The airport is leading the study with other partners. In the longer term, the study may inform future investment by those partners.

As I have said, ministers will give due consideration to any private sector proposal to construct a rail link to Glasgow airport. However, no support will be given from the public purse for project development, construction and/or on-going operating costs.

The land that we have been talking about, of course, was acquired—as has been pointed out—by Strathclyde partnership for transport in February/March 2008 at the height of the property market. We are well aware of what happened to the property market in the wake of the global recession towards the end of 2008. We could never expect to recover the purchase price of the land when we came to sell it, given the downturn in land and property prices. We have followed the principles and guidance that are set out in the “Scottish Public Finance Manual”. Mary Fee says—

James Kelly: Just to be clear, can the minister put on the record whether he had any visibility of the land transactions when the Scottish Government was selling off GARL land, or was it done solely by officials?

Keith Brown: The crucial point—I have said this three times now, I think—is that the land transactions were carried out in accordance with the “Scottish Public Finance Manual”. The

member will know—I think that he will know—that officials regularly buy and sell land—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Order, please.

Keith Brown: —and not every transaction comes to ministers unless there are specific reasons for it. I was going on to say that it was exactly the same process.

James Kelly has questioned my competence in this and that is up to him. Let us look a little bit at competence. The Labour Party, when it raised the issue most recently, did not even seem to know that the land was bought by SPT. The Labour Party did not know that its own councillors had been involved in buying the land in the first place. First it alleged, or tried to insinuate, a connection between the First Minister and a businessman who we have heard was not here to defend himself; it will be interesting to find out about the apology, which has been raised already. The Labour Party then moved from saying that ministers—the First Minister in particular—were too closely involved in this to saying that I am not involved enough.

The Labour Party is not exactly demonstrating competence in relation to this issue. It has all the figures, which have been released into the public domain. In response to Mary Fee's comments, ministers have said that there has been no untoward activity, so there should not be an inquiry. If Labour thinks that there are untoward activities, it should demonstrate that if it wants an independent inquiry.

Labour has come up with absolutely nothing so far. As for being reluctant to debate the issue, I will debate it every time that Labour brings business to the chamber if it wants to. We have nothing more to say—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. The minister is in his last minute.

Keith Brown: You have nothing left to say about it, and nothing to fear in releasing the figures.

The incompetence, in my view, lies in the Labour Party. You have been six years in opposition and you still cannot work out how to be an effective Opposition. It is absolutely appalling.

Going back to the same subject, we do not have any evidence to support some of the accusations that are being made. I understand that the Labour Party might still aspire to be the next—or a future—Government of Scotland. Before you do that, you will have to become an effective Opposition—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, please speak through the chair.

Keith Brown: This is not effective opposition, believe you me.

I have mentioned the things that we have delivered. We made the right decision at the time, and we stand by it, so let us look forward to the future. We have focused in the intervening four years on delivering record investment to improve and upgrade the transport infrastructure. There are many jobs that Labour never managed to complete, and we have completed them. I mentioned the M74; there is also the Airdrie to Bathgate line and the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line. We are the first Government to commit to dualling the A9, and there is the Borders railway too.

Those are things that the Labour Party did not do. Your Liberal Democrat pals—the ones who were working with you in the past—are not here at all to defend what you have put up today. That tells its own story.

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

Keith Brown: The investment has been key to the continuing economic recovery of this country—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Keith Brown: I ask members to support the amendment in my name.

15:41

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): It is outrageous that the Government has had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to the chamber to outline how it has wasted almost £30 million of taxpayers' money to cancel a project that would have had tremendous benefits for the economy of Glasgow: the driver of growth in the west of Scotland.

However, it seems that the Government has had no hand in that loss; it is all the fault of the civil servants who sold off land that cost the people of Scotland £8.5 million for a grand total of £359,500. That is a massive loss to the public purse of more than £8 million for the land transactions alone.

Let us be clear. The minister has stated again and again that he has played no part in those transactions. A civil servant in the Scottish Government has, therefore, taken the decision to declare land surplus to requirements, despite the fact that there is still an act of Parliament—the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Act 2007; the fact that GARL still appears in the national planning framework; and the fact that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney, stated at a parliamentary committee:

"Essentially, the decision not to proceed with the Glasgow airport rail link was taken on the basis of the affordability of the project in the context of the Government's programme."—[*Official Report, Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee*, 3 November 2009; c 2258.]

So, it was nothing at all to do with the project being ill-conceived, then.

Why, given those three facts, is a civil servant acting without any ministerial direction or oversight—which is what the minister has said—and declaring the pieces of land on the GARL corridor surplus to requirements and initiating their disposal? There is something there that does not quite make sense. I take on board the points from Government members that GARL was not a Government priority and that it had no intention of funding it. However, that does not mean that the Government should take a scorched-earth approach and ensure that a different Administration would not be able to implement the project. Even in the unlikely event that the Government achieves its aim of independence, the first Scottish Administration will now be unable to go ahead with the GARL project.

There is a precedent here. The Queensferry crossing, which could possibly be described as this Government's flagship capital investment project, would not be going ahead if the previous Administration had taken the same view on projects as the current one. When Sarah Boyack was a minister, she was approached by officials regarding the sale of the land that was required to build the Forth replacement crossing. She insisted that, although it was not a priority for the Government at that time, it would be wrong to tie the hands of a future Administration. Where would we be now with the Queensferry crossing if the previous Administration had taken the same approach as the current one?

However, the land was declared surplus and sold at a fraction of the purchase price not by a Scottish Government minister but by an unnamed civil servant. A civil servant has acted independently of ministers, an act of Parliament and the national planning framework, but another twist is that this particular official also seems to have operated independently of other members of staff within his department. While all that was being done, a group of individuals, businesses and local authorities were sitting down with Transport Scotland to discuss the public transport options for Glasgow airport. As a result of those discussions, Transport Scotland part-funded a report that included an option recommending a train line to carry passengers direct from the airport to the centre of Glasgow—

Keith Brown: The member is making it up now. [Interruption.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Members should not speak to each other across the chamber.

Keith Brown: I ask the member to reconsider that last point, because there was no recommendation contained in that study that there should be a heavy rail link to the airport. Given that the member says that the civil servant whom he keeps on talking about acted alone, is he saying that ministers should be involved in such decisions and that the manual that proscribes us from being involved—the same manual that Labour followed—is wrong? Perhaps he could clarify that.

Mark Griffin: I have looked at the Aecom report, although I do not know whether the minister has done so. I said that the report includes a recommendation for a train line to carry passengers direct from the airport to the centre of Glasgow. If the minister can point to the section of the report where it does not say that, I will happily come back to the chamber.

Officials at Transport Scotland seem to have spent public funds on a report that recommends a train line to Glasgow airport, while a different official has sold the land at a massive loss and killed the possibility of the recommendation ever being realised. We have two parts of Transport Scotland working against each other, and we have a minister with no knowledge or oversight of any of it. When we have two parts of the same Government department acting independently of ministers, working against each other and wasting public money, the only reasonable option is for a full independent inquiry. I think that the public will be wondering why the minister has not already instructed one.

Local Police Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08172, in the name of Graeme Pearson, on justice. I will allow only a few seconds for members to change places, as we are extremely tight for time in the debate.

I call Graeme Pearson to speak to and move the motion. Mr Pearson, you have a maximum of eight minutes.

15:48

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):

Prior to the 2011 election, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice's resistance to the creation of a single police force was well known. Post the election, economic realities affecting countries across the western hemisphere obviously persuaded him otherwise. After years of inaction, we witnessed a hell-for-leather pursuit of reorganisation. Promises came from the cabinet secretary, the convener of the Scottish Police Authority and the new chief constable of a national police service committed to delivering local policing and dedicated to local community partnerships, but the Government's actions have delivered otherwise.

Our debate today is driven by the effects of two Scottish National Party directives to the Scottish Police Authority: that there must be 17,327 police officers across the country, at an added cost of around £35 million to the budget; and that, at the same time, the police force has to deliver £140 million in savings by 2016. As a result of those directives, 1,200 police staff posts have gone. Although the chief constable has "no policy" on backfilling those posts, when he appeared before the Justice Committee this week he finally accepted that some officers are having to engage in administrative tasks. I know that those tasks include personnel, recruitment, warrant management, intelligence analysis and others that have been announced recently.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Will the member enlighten us as to the Labour answer to those two directives? What number of police officers does he think that there should be in Scotland? From which budget should the £40 million be deducted?

Graeme Pearson: I hope that, if the cabinet secretary gives me time to develop my argument, he will see where we are coming from.

Seventy of the people who have been given voluntary redundancy previously delivered citations for the court, and those duties are to be passed to police officers on patrol. So we are moving from backroom bobbies to police posties.

It will be useful to hear from front-line officers whether they can spare the estimated 123,000 hours that it takes each year to deliver those citations. The absence of comment from the Scottish Police Federation and the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents seems to indicate that street officers have sufficient time to take on additional administrative tasks and postie duties. All of that is to deliver on Mr MacAskill's cuts.

The amendment that has been lodged reeks of complacency. Although crime is down to a 39-year low, that outcome has not solely been delivered in the past few years; it is thanks to 20 years of hard work by all concerned. There are 1,000 additional officers but, depending on who one speaks to, that number might or might not include up to 350 officers who are paid for from local authority budgets. We should remember the 1,200 support staff whose jobs have been lost. In any case, the £35 million cost of the additional posts pales in comparison with the £140 million of budget cuts. Mr MacAskill would do well to keep company with Theresa May, who also lauds the continuing drop in reported crime—in the case of England, to 1980 levels. She has also pursued a reduction—in her case, of 14,000 officers across England. He could keep company with just about every justice minister in Europe, Canada and America.

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member take an intervention?

Graeme Pearson: I ask the cabinet secretary please to let me continue.

The Government's budget decisions have resulted in the need to consider the closure of 65 police office counters and reductions in service at a further 75. That means a cut in service in more than half the offices in Scotland, even though not one additional police officer will be placed on the street. I am sure that, during the debate, we will hear about the impact of that, as it affects virtually every region and city in the country. To name but a few, the changes will affect stations in Airdrie, Coatbridge, Wishaw, Portobello, Anderston in Glasgow, Oakley and Bucksburn.

Kenny MacAskill: I wonder what Mr Pearson's comment is on Labour's shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper, who has said:

"They"—

that is, the UK Government—

"need to change course and accept Labour's argument and the expert evidence that a 12% reduction in police spending would be manageable".

Does Mr Pearson support a 12 per cent reduction in police spending?

Graeme Pearson: If the cabinet secretary spent more time worrying about Scotland and getting it

organised, we might have a better outcome in the political life of Scotland.

The statistics that are given in support of the closures are largely admitted to be rosey and historical. The closures are not driven by the desire to deliver better local policing or to support local partnerships, as we are told; they are driven by budget cuts, and that is shameful. Although some are of the view that the use of police stations is no longer necessary and that we should move to mobile phones, the internet and Twitter, in many places, the police office is the heart and soul of the community. For parents worried about a missing child, relatives worrying about a missing grandparent, a youth going home early in the morning worrying that he is going to be accosted, a young woman worried about a stranger who is following her, or a homeless person who is facing a bout of anxiety, a counter staff member offers the quality of service that they need.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will Mr Pearson give way?

Graeme Pearson: I am afraid not.

Some years ago, a householder watching the BBC news at 9 o'clock saw that a terrible murder had been committed in Glasgow in which a woman and child had been stabbed to death. He realised that a workmate, who had unexpectedly called at his home and who was then seated in his kitchen alongside his wife and baby, was the likely murderer. The householder left the house in panic and ran half a mile to an open police office and made a report at the counter, which, thankfully, resulted in a successful outcome—a murderer arrested and no possibility of further mayhem. In such circumstances, I do not think that a tweet would offer any solution or that an e-mail would support us. We must value the work that our counter assistants carry out.

Mr MacAskill says that we are investing in local policing and enhancing services, but the Government looks increasingly like the ministry of truth. It keeps repeating the mantra, "Crime down, numbers up, life good." However, the findings of the Scottish policing performance framework—the cabinet secretary's own framework report—announced that, in some communities, 50 per cent of people do not believe that the police prevent crime, 87 per cent believe that the crime rate is the same as or worse than it was a year ago and two thirds do not bother to report thefts or housebreaking. Communities are under stress and need support.

I suggest that members look to their communities and support my motion. I hope that they have the courage to back their local police service and avoid being caught up in the mantra of "Crime down, numbers up, life good." Life will be

good if we can maintain a local police service that is worthy of the name.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government's budget cuts are having a significant impact on the link between communities and their local police service; notes concern at plans to close police station public counters and reduce opening hours; also notes concern at the use of police officers to cover for cuts in the number of police staff; encourages people to make the case to save the service offered by their local police station and stand up for their local police service; condemns the practice of back-filling of staff posts by police officers, and calls on the Scottish Government to defend local policing.

15:56

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I welcome the opportunity to respond to Graeme Pearson's motion on behalf of the Scottish Government. It may be helpful if I start with the context, which will bring some balance to what we have heard so far.

Policing in Scotland is performing excellently, notwithstanding what Mr Pearson suggests. Crime is at a 39-year low, violent crime is down by almost half since 2006-07 and homicides are at their lowest since records began. The risk of being a victim of crime is falling, and confidence and satisfaction in the police are high, as figures that were published yesterday demonstrate.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Although the figures that the cabinet secretary has quoted are welcome, does he accept that reported crime is on the increase?

Kenny MacAskill: Across the board, statistics and evidence show that policing in Scotland is doing remarkably well, and the onus is on the chamber to support rather than denigrate the police.

The situation in Scotland is in stark contrast to the situation in England and Wales. We have more than 1,000 more police officers than we had in 2007. The backdrop to the debate is strong policing that is valued and trusted by communities throughout Scotland, not the negative picture that is painted by Graeme Pearson's motion. Furthermore, the establishment of the single service will safeguard and sustain what we hold dear about our police service.

Money is tight. We all know that—even Yvette Cooper. However, it is the UK Government that is cutting budgets, not the Scottish Government.

Graeme Pearson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Kenny MacAskill: I will give way in a moment.

Westminster is cutting our budget by 11 per cent in real terms over five years, so we must cut our

cloth accordingly and ensure that every penny is invested wisely. Yvette Cooper wants a 12 per cent cut. Perhaps Mr Pearson can tell us what Labour in Scotland wants.

Graeme Pearson: I take it, from what the cabinet secretary says, that there is no cut in Scotland. However, £140 million is a substantial cut and is having such an impact that the chief constable does not believe that he can sustain current police numbers much longer.

Kenny MacAskill: We know where the cuts are coming from—Westminster. They started under Darling, they are continuing under the coalition and they would be maintained under Yvette Cooper.

The single service will remove the duplication that was built into the previous structures, in which there were eight police forces as well as the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency and the Scottish Police Services Authority. We no longer need directors for each corporate function or eight chief constables. The new structure allows more resources to be focused where they can have the greatest impact, supporting outcomes and, above all, keeping people safe. Local policing is the bedrock, which is why there is now a local commander for each division in Scotland who works with communities, councils and other partners to shape and deliver policing. There is a local policing plan for every council ward, every local authority has a named contact on the Scottish Police Authority board and more councillors than ever before have the opportunity to have their say on policing in their areas.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): The cabinet secretary is at pains to tell us all the things that will not now be needed. Does he really expect the people in my constituency in Possilpark, which is adjacent to the Baird Street and Maryhill police stations, to think that the cut to their stations' opening hours is good enough? In the case of Possilpark, does he think that a Monday-to-Friday, nine-to-five service is really what that area deserves?

Kenny MacAskill: As I can say is that what I think people want is a solution to the problem.

"If you are the victim of a crime you don't really care where the officers come from so long as something is being done."

I agree. That comment was made by Graeme Pearson MSP in the *Daily Record* on 22 August 2010.

Local matters are being enhanced by access to national—

Graeme Pearson: I remind the cabinet secretary that my colleague asked him a question.

He was asked whether providing daytime-only services is sufficient in a place such as Possilpark.

Kenny MacAskill: I responded with what I thought were your quite credible and appropriate remarks from three years ago, Mr Pearson. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. I ask members to speak through the chair.

Kenny MacAskill: As I say, we now have access to national and regional expertise, helicopters and a specialist crime division.

We know that we face unprecedented budget challenges, but the work that Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority are undertaking seeks to deliver the savings that this Parliament agreed and ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources.

The review of public counters at police stations, which has generated a lot of interest, is being progressed by Police Scotland in discussion with the SPA. I emphasise that that review is about public counters, not stations. Front counters that are not used will close; some will retain their current opening hours; others will open for longer; and some will provide an improved service by relocating. For example, the counter in my constituency will move into the Edinburgh east hub, which is a much more sensible location.

Budgets are tight. The police are using the 101 non-emergency number and social media. Social media is not a matter to be denigrated; many on the Opposition benches use it themselves to communicate with their constituents, so why should they criticise the police for using it? Proposals are under way, and we must support our police in that work.

I do not accept the premise of Graeme Pearson's motion. Policing continues to perform excellently, and has the confidence and trust of communities and partners. It should not be denigrated by politicians.

It bears repeating:

"Crime is at a 39-year low, violent crime is down by almost half since 2006-07 and homicides are at their lowest since records began."

Alex Ferguson: I ask the cabinet secretary once again whether, despite the splendid figures he gives, he will accept that reported crime is on the increase.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, you are in your last minute.

Kenny MacAskill: We have 1,000 additional officers—*[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Kenny MacAskill: —unlike the collapse in officer numbers faced south of the border.

The record of our Scottish police service is quite outstanding; it ill behoves politicians to denigrate those who have done an outstanding job.

This Government will not implement the Winsor package and we will not privatise policing. We will support local policing in our communities and we will ensure that expertise is available to every community and that Police Scotland can perform continually the outstanding service that it provides day in, day out. Others may denigrate the police—some of them should know better, given their service, and should not join in that catcalling. We should recognise the outstanding police service that we have in Scotland. I reject Graeme Pearson's motion and move my alternative.

I move amendment S4M-08172, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"recognises that recorded crime is at a 39-year low, with homicides the lowest since records began, crimes of handling offensive weapons down by 60% and violent crime down by almost a half since 2007; welcomes the 1,000 additional officers that the Scottish Government has delivered since 2007; acknowledges the significant progress made by Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to ensure that policing in Scotland continues to perform excellently, despite UK Government budget cuts; recognises that local policing remains the bedrock of the new service, supported by the ability to share expertise and equipment as required, and fully supports Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority in their work to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources."

16:03

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate the Scottish Labour Party on lodging its motion on the proposed closure to members of the public of police counters.

The closure of police counters at more than 60 stations and the reduction of the opening hours at 80 stations are a significant blow to communities. The importance that people place on that service, which provides not only a direct means of contacting the police at a time of their choosing but reassurance that there is a police presence, has been summarily dismissed by both the cabinet secretary and Police Scotland's chief constable. Consequently, while many police stations will remain open to deal with offenders, either to question them or to take them into custody, the proposal remains that many stations, in which police counters are one of the most visible examples of front-line and local policing, will be closed to the public.

The proposals for police counters vary and will have different impacts throughout Scotland. In my region of Central Scotland, for example, the proposal is to remove public counter services from

Shotts and Uddingston. With no public counter service in Shotts, local residents will have to travel to Wishaw, which is 7 miles away, to access a public counter service. That journey can take more than 40 minutes by public transport.

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Mitchell: I have a further point to make first, if the cabinet secretary does not mind.

In addition, given that the East Kilbride station is designated as a prescribed station under the sexual offences regulations, offenders who are under notification requirements need to access the counter service at that station to report to an officer, but that service will no longer be open 24/7. Instead, it will be open only from 8 am to 6 pm each day. That is a real cause for concern, especially in view of the number of sex offenders in the community who are already breaching the terms of their licence.

Kenny MacAskill: Is the member saying that no counter should close or have its hours varied—even counters that have had only one or no visitations within a four-week period? Is that the position of the Conservative Party?

Margaret Mitchell: The cabinet secretary is on very shaky ground with some of the information that he cites about the use of the police station counter service. Given that it is a front-line service, rather than being reactive and closing counters, we should do more to ensure that they serve the public who use them.

When we ask the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government legitimate questions about policing, the automatic response is twofold: they state that such decisions are operational matters for the chief constable and that it would be wrong for ministers to get involved; and, when they are pressed about budget cuts, they blame them on Westminster.

However, the police budget is decided by this Government, and even a cursory examination of the facts reveals the truth—namely, that the Scottish Government has decided that the police budget is set to fall by 6.3 per cent in real terms in 2014 and by more than 9 per cent in 2015. Meanwhile, the inconvenient truth for the Scottish Government is that, by contrast, the amount of money that it has to spend will fall by only 1.3 per cent in 2014 and 1.9 per cent in 2015. It is clear that, instead of blaming Westminster, the SNP needs to accept responsibility for the cuts in the police budget.

Furthermore, the Police Scotland public consultation on police counter closures was far from adequate. In the first instance, it was carried out online and without any meaningful equality

impact assessment being done, which meant that the elderly and less technologically savvy people were excluded. In addition, the footfall analysis that was carried out by Police Scotland was done years ago. Crucially, it was done before 43 stations closed and 23 had their hours reduced, which means that it is highly likely that footfall will have gone up. In some rural areas, no footfall analysis was carried out, so Police Scotland just guesstimated. In those circumstances, the case for rerunning and extending the consultation to ensure that it is properly representative is compelling.

The Labour motion mentions the backfilling of staff posts with police officers, which makes no economic sense. According to Unison, 200 police officers are involved in drawing up documents to do with police reform, at a cost of £7 million.

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

Margaret Mitchell: That is economic madness, and the Scottish Conservatives will support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. We are extremely tight for time, so I ask for speeches of less than four minutes.

16:09

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): On the subject of counter closures and hours, I remind Graeme Pearson of what he said on Sunday, when we were talking about the issue. He asked why Giffnock and Helensburgh police stations were not closing. I wonder what his colleagues Ken Macintosh and Jackie Baillie would think about that.

Graeme Pearson *rose—*

Sandra White: That is what the member said.

It is important to restate some of the Scottish Government's achievements. I will name but a few. Crime is at its lowest level in not 10, 20 or 30 years, but 39 years.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab) *rose—*

Sandra White: Youth crime has been halved and an additional 1,000 officers have been provided. All that and more has been done against a background of unprecedented cuts from Westminster. Those achievements should be welcomed across the chamber, as they deliver for the people of Scotland.

What people want to know—indeed, the question has been asked before—is the number of police officers that Labour would cut. Labour's leaders at Westminster—and we know from recent events that Labour in Scotland takes its orders

from Westminster—want to cut the budget by 12 per cent, which would mean a cut of more than 2,000 police officers from Scotland's streets. Is that what the Labour Party in Scotland supports? Does it think that that will make our communities and people feel safer? The simple answer is no, it will not.

Drew Smith: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: Such a move will simply put our communities at risk and will, as the Labour motion puts it, have

“a significant impact on the link between communities and their local police service”.

It is the Labour Party in Scotland that is the threat to local policing. However, we do not know whether that is actually Labour's policy because the one thing that it is good at is having no policy, other than the promise of a cuts commission to scrap the idea of universality—

Drew Smith: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Smith.

Sandra White: That is something that it supposedly supports in order to end—as its leader stated then later denied—the something-for-nothing culture. Although the comments in question have been removed from the Labour website, everyone can still watch them being made on YouTube—and I would advise them to do so.

How, then, can we believe what Labour says? The member who lodged today's motion, Mr Pearson, recently said that

“breaking up the UK could have direct impact on the ability of Scottish police officers to do their job”,

but he was contradicted by former director of intelligence at the old Strathclyde Police force, who said:

“I simply do not accept these criticisms of Scotland's abilities to have effective security arrangements ... An excellent Scottish intelligence organisation could be developed in an independent country.”

Who are we to believe: the member or the former director of intelligence? Is that just another example of Labour's project fear?

Graeme Pearson: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: Is today's motion not yet another example? Only last week, the head of Police Scotland told the member that there is “no policy” on backfilling. Members can read that in the *Official Report*—it is there for everyone to see. Who, again, are we to believe: Mr Pearson or the current head of Police Scotland?

Patricia Ferguson: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I do not know what axe certain members have to grind—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Sandra White: We need to work with rather than against Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to ensure that any reform benefits people over politicians.

According to Alison McInnes, who I notice is in the chamber,

“Community policing must be able to adapt to local circumstances and need”,

which is exactly what the Government is doing. We are responding to changes in and cuts to Scotland’s budget that are being driven by Ms McInnes’s party in the coalition at Westminster. As far as I can see, the Liberals have no policy other than to impose, through their man in the Treasury, further cuts on Scotland and have nothing constructive to offer other than to join their partners in project fear and doom-mongering.

This SNP Government is protecting local communities by putting police on the street and combating and preventing crime. That is what the people want and surely what this Parliament should be delivering.

16:13

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Sandra White had four minutes in which she could have mentioned her police station in her constituency, which is closing; instead, she chose to defend her ministers on the front bench.

Sandra White: Will the member give way?

Kezia Dugdale: I am afraid that you are not getting any of my speech to do what you should have done in your own.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I ask that members speak through the chair.

Kezia Dugdale: My apologies, Presiding Officer.

I will talk specifically about the cabinet secretary’s constituency, in which three stations—Howdenhall, Portobello and Craigmillar—are affected. Howdenhall and Portobello’s working hours will change from 7 am until midnight to 8 am to 6 pm, while Craigmillar will close to the public altogether, despite 1,201 demands having been made of the station assistant in the two weeks during which the review took place.

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member give way?

Kezia Dugdale: I would like to get a bit further into my speech.

Kenny MacAskill: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it appropriate for a member to state that Craigmillar police station is closing when it is not? As I have stated, the counter is relocating to the Edinburgh east hub. Is it not appropriate for the member to be accurate in what she states in the chamber?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: What members say in their speeches in the chamber is entirely up to them, not me.

Kezia Dugdale: If the cabinet secretary had let me get further into my speech, I would have commented on the shared facilities. He is clearly a little bit tetchy today.

Although I was instinctively against the cuts, I decided to ask my constituents what they thought before I sent in my submission to the police. When I surveyed 2,000 people in Portobello, just under 200 people responded. I asked three questions and gave constituents space to reply without responding to any questions. I asked for their views on local accessible policing, what they felt about the 101 number, and whether they supported the changes. Ninety-six per cent of people opposed what the cabinet secretary is doing, a handful of them said that it was okay, and one said:

“Never mind the Police Station, tell the Council, my grass needs cut”.

Ninety-six per cent of people, or 96 per cent of the cabinet secretary’s constituents, think that what he is doing to Portobello police station is wrong. I will tell him why, in their words.

When asked about the 101 number, a constituent said:

“The 101 number is ok for general enquiries but useless for anything else. Face to Face contact is very important when reporting crime or requiring re-assurance.”

Another said:

“If you are upset by something happening it can be difficult to speak to someone on the phone especially for people of my generation—I am 74. It is much easier to speak to someone face to face.”

A third person said:

“I would much rather prefer to discuss a situation face to face. Officers are more likely to assess how stressful the impact of the situation is on an individual. A lot of older people are unable to convey their message over the phone.”

The person said that a lot of older people cannot hear or understand, or they have no confidence, and that the approach could lead to a reduction in reported crime.

Another person said:

“101 is faceless and does not inspire confidence. Not happy to use 101. The person at the other end is not local

to the area. Police on the ground are familiar with Portobello, and the people as a whole."

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member give way?

Kezia Dugdale: No, thank you.

When Graeme Pearson took some of that survey to the police last week, he was told that my questions were loaded and that I should not have asked them.

In the space that was given to constituents to raise any other issues that they felt were important, one said:

"Part of the reason I, and my family, have moved to Portobello is the family-friendly nature of much of the town, and the security the local police station offers."

Another said that it was ironic that on the same day that they received my survey, they received a survey from the cabinet secretary, who was concerned about the rising spate of break-ins and recent antisocial behaviour in the area. Will he share with members the results of that survey?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her final 30 seconds.

Kezia Dugdale: There is much more that I could share. I have the full survey responses, and they are with the police. I am happy to share them with the cabinet secretary.

Portobello is a bustling town. When the sun shines, Edinburgh goes to Portobello. It needs a local police station on the High Street. It has been there for 117 years, and it will be the local constituency MSP who closed it. That is an absolute disgrace.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speeches should be less than four minutes.

16:17

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Crumbs.

Graeme Pearson said in a Justice Sub-Committee on Policing meeting:

"I indicated that the business case might well justify some offices closing or amending their hours. My position is not that there should be no closures".—[*Official Report, Justice Sub-Committee on Policing*, 31 October 2013; c 259.]

Fair enough; I have said it.

I think that we all accept that there is a background of swingeing cuts to the Scottish budget, and that that is reflected in the budgets that we have to apply. Police Scotland therefore had to look to cut £64 million from the budget this year. It is almost there, but it has more next year.

What do the public want in a time of austerity? If a choice—it is about choices—has to be made

between police counters being serviced when there is little usage of them and the police being visible and acting on the streets of our towns and villages, I think that we can all predict the answer. The question is: are police counters necessary in all circumstances? When did members last use a police counter? If we look at the usage figures from the earlier police review and the consultation, we will see, frankly, that it would be hard to justify keeping them all open, as people use mobiles, emails, texting, 101 and 999 in emergencies.

Graeme Pearson: Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: I do not have enough time.

I want to deal with Kezia Dugdale's point. In a recent meeting with the divisional commander for Midlothian, Jeanette McDiarmid, we had a discussion about the availability of police officers if somebody dials 101. She raised the whole profile of the diary car. Somebody will phone up, say that there has been an incident, and it will be determined that it is not urgent. They are asked when it would be suitable for the police to call, they are put on a list in the diary, and one police officer—two are not always needed—goes out at the person's convenience to their home. If they are working or picking up children from school, that visit is done at their convenience. It is a face-to-face approach.

The importance of keeping contact with the police beyond reporting incidents is also important. I think that Margaret Mitchell raised the issue of the public simply being able to go in and tell the police about things that have happened. It is a good thing that the police go out, as I do. I do not sit in my Galashiels office; I do surgeries in supermarkets such as Tesco three Saturdays a month. I collect intelligence and hear from people. The police are thinking of doing their surgeries in supermarkets and libraries to be in touch with the public where the public are and at their convenience, rather than asking them to have to travel to the location of a police counter.

In my patch, it has been proposed that some hours will be marginally reduced, such as in Penicuik, Peebles and Galashiels, and that there will be two counter closures, in Lauder and Melrose.

Despite the publicising of the proposals, I have had not one email of concern about them from any constituent. I received one email that sought clarification as to whether it was the police station being closed or the counter, but the sender also praised the fact that they were seeing police in their village as they had never seen them before.

As for the visibility to which Margaret Mitchell referred, Gorebridge in my constituency has no counter availability but the big police station is highly visible, with a big "Police" sign, and it is very

busy. I know that because I have been on shifts with the police officers. The police have briefings in the station before going out. The folk in Gorebridge are not unhappy about not having a police counter.

We could go the way of England, with police officers disappearing like snow off a dyke and money being spent on 41 police commissioners, elected on less than 20 per cent of the vote and with annual salaries of between £70,000 and £100,000 a year. I think that the Scottish people would prefer to see us spending our money on police officers on the beat, on crime detection and reducing crime across the piece and, frankly, keeping the peace.

16:20

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I, too, welcome the opportunity to raise concerns about proposals to close police stations, particularly those in my constituency. The proposals will have a detrimental effect on the link between communities and the local police service. On this, the Scottish Government has been left wanting, but instead of defending local policing it is trying to evade and make excuses.

As the motion clearly states, the proposals are part of a wider programme of cuts to police staff that can result, and is resulting, in the backfilling of staff posts by police officers. That does not make financial sense and it means that officers are distracted from tackling crime and are instead sat behind a desk. In my constituency, the Selkirk and Coldstream stations are set to close to the public, with Eyemouth moving to a category E station, meaning that it will no longer have full-time cover. Just outside my constituency, in Christine Grahame's constituency, the nearby Lauder and Melrose stations, which I know are used by my constituents, are also set to go. In the Police Scotland consultation, which we already know used old data, no figures are provided on footfall for any of those stations, so their closure is being proposed without any knowledge of how often my constituents use them.

The fact is that even if those stations are not heavily used, they provide an important local service and give residents the chance to interact with the police. The Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland has warned that town centres such as Selkirk's could be under threat because closures will sever the link between the police and the local business community. In the face of the closure of courts and now the closure to the public of police stations, many residents in the Borders will feel that justice is being withdrawn from the area. Frankly, given the sheer extent of the proposed closures and the refusal of the

Scottish Government to intervene, I am shocked by the audacity of the Government's amendment, which claims that local policing is the

"bedrock of the new service."

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): John Lamont mentioned the fact that local businessmen were complaining to him about the closure of police counters. Are you aware of any businessman who has approached you specifically to say "I'm concerned about the issue because I've been into a police office in this way", or are they more concerned about post office closures in their own area? Is that not the reality?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members must speak through the chair.

John Lamont: All that I can say is that businesses have expressed concerns to me about closures. I also have disabled residents who are unable to use the phone service or get to other locations but who can get to the counter in the local police station. As a result of the reforms or changes—the closures—such residents will no longer be able to interact with the police in the way that they have done in the past. Mr Crawford might be happy to support the proposals, but I am not.

It is worth being clear about why Police Scotland is having to make the savings: it is because the Scottish Government decided that moving to a single police force would save over £100 million a year. Where did that figure come from? It came from an outline business case, drafted in 2011, about which the financial memorandum to the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 said that it

"does not provide a plan or blueprint for the future delivery of the services and it is not intended to be used to set future budgets".

My party wanted the Scottish Government to provide a full business case for police reform so that we were all clear on the savings that would be made under the single police force; instead, the Scottish Government has plucked figures out of the air and imposed huge budget cuts on our police.

There is no wriggle-room for the Scottish Government on this, because it made the decision on the policing budget and the cuts are a direct result of decisions made by the Scottish National Party Government. This is its mess and it needs to intervene to ensure that local policing is protected.

16:25

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Local policing is being protected by the Scottish Government. The significant impact of changes to links between communities and their police service can be seen south of the border rather than here,

where I think we are doing very well. South of the border, some 4,516 officers disappeared between March 2012 and March 2013. It was the fourth consecutive year of cuts, and 14,186 officers, or 10 per cent of the police, have disappeared south of the border since 2009. A total of 1,300 stations have closed in England. In *The Sunday Telegraph* on 18 March 2012, Jill Grieve of the Countryside Alliance said that this is the

“death knell for the bobby on the beat.”

That is happening because of Con-Dem policies south of the border.

I believe that we are getting things right here. I am not saying that everything in the garden is rosy, but the reality is that we have to deal with the austerity cuts that have been passed on by Westminster. I believe that the cabinet secretary and the chief constable are taking the right decisions in ensuring that bobbies are on the beat, which gives the public confidence and has resulted in a 39-year low in crime. Having been an elected member in Aberdeen City Council and here for some 14 years, and having served on a police board for 13 years, I have to say that complaints about the police are at an all-time low in my mailbag, too. That is something for which congratulations are due.

I find it bizarre that, as Christine Grahame mentioned, Mr Pearson said on 31 October:

“I indicated that the business case might well justify some offices closing or amending their hours. My position is not that there should be no closures”.—[*Official Report, Justice Sub-Committee on Policing*, 31 October 2013; c 259.]

Yet today, we see something different in the motion. I think that Labour is grandstanding and trying to grab headlines, rather than dealing with the realities that we have to face.

Graeme Pearson: Will the member take an intervention?

Kevin Stewart: No. I do not have time.

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

Kevin Stewart: At that meeting of the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, the chief constable read out extracts from an email from a member of staff who was on counter duties, who decided to take voluntary severance. That person said:

“I did not take this course of action lightly but having experienced a vast reduction in workload over the years, it seemed to me only a matter of time before this happened. We have also been constantly warned for the past three years that this may happen ... The workload has been affected for a variety of reasons, the first being the advent of the Force Contact Centre taking away a huge percentage of phone calls to the front office”.

These are the realities of the world that we live in. People are phoning, emailing and tweeting. People are using modern communication methods to get in touch with the police.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish, please.

Kevin Stewart: The other thing is that they want bobbies on the beat, not the nonsense that we are getting south of the border. The motion is just grandstanding.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members cannot take more than four minutes and really ought to be taking less.

16:29

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): It concerns me that Police Scotland finds itself between a rock and a hard place and is forced to look at unpopular, unhelpful and unwanted cuts thanks to a cabinet secretary who has carved police numbers in tablets of stone while making massive budget cuts that threaten the character of Scottish policing.

It is not surprising that the cabinet secretary has not taken responsibility for the consequences of his actions, because we all know that when the going gets tough he passes the buck and hides behind the facade of operational matters. Hundreds of staff posts have been axed, and now police accessibility is under attack. The public—our constituents—are being pushed towards using centralised call centres, instead of being able to visit a local station. That is Kenny MacAskill’s doing, and it is only the beginning, given that £140 million will be cut over the next two years—and that is the Scottish Government’s doing.

The programme of station cuts affects how Scotland is policed. Most people would not call that an operational matter. In my area, the public are very concerned about Wishaw police station, but my call for a public meeting was rejected. Last year, 1,000 people and local businesses said clearly that they wanted a 24/7 police station in Wishaw, and this year they have been joined by hundreds more. Wishaw is a large town, not a small village, and it merits a full-time police station.

This is not just about people’s ability to visit a police station when they need to do so. It is about an important element in the community: a station and a police presence. Downgrading station hours downgrades police availability, and cutting corners by closing stations undermines front-line public contact.

Stephen House said—and I have never heard the cabinet secretary disagree—that a single force would bring stronger community connections, create more equal access and improve local

policing. How can that be consistent with cutting and closing police stations and thereby restricting community contact and access?

The proposed changes will create confusion about how to contact local police. Many people will not travel or indeed be able to travel to remote offices, and many will not use call centres. The 101 number is no substitute for local police stations, as the cabinet secretary knows.

If the changes are desirable, why were they not proposed prior to the cuts?

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member take an intervention?

John Pentland: No.

The cabinet secretary's mantra that almost everything is an operational matter has created a policy vacuum, which Police Scotland fills by default. He leaves the police to make policy decisions, with inadequate consultation, on matters such as Taser use and slashing stations. The main exceptions to that are his insistence on Police Scotland maintaining officer numbers, whatever the cost to police effectiveness, and his recent comment that he will prevent former supermarket managers with less than 10 years' police service from getting promotion.

How such minimal involvement enables the cabinet secretary to claim credit for falling crime rates is a mystery worthy of investigation by Rebus. Meanwhile, major policy decisions are left to unelected officials, leaving the Parliament to ask when the Scottish Government will take back ownership of Scotland's policing policy.

16:33

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): We are all aware that police stations are reassuring to the public. Everyone likes to see them. However, the issue is how much they are used and how they are used.

The key issue is how we carry on providing a service to the Scottish people when we are under constant attack from vicious budget cuts from London. We have heard all about what we should be doing and what we should keep; it would be really great if any of the Opposition parties said what it would cut.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Colin Keir: No, I am sorry.

I came across a press release on the Scottish Police Federation website.

Hanzala Malik: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I just want to point out that that is the

fourth member who has not taken an intervention despite having made all sorts of accusations.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was not a point of order, and I am afraid that I must now take time out of the remainder of the debate.

Colin Keir: Brian Docherty, of the Scottish Police Federation, said:

"If under used police offices can be shut to save money then we have no problem with that. It would be nice to have a police officer on every street and a police office in every community but we have to live in the real world."

Even the police are saying that. Police officers—front-line officers—are saying that.

We accept that we do not live in a perfect world and we are trying to do our best. We are doing an awful lot better than our colleagues down south are doing. I wish that the other parties would at least accept that, because it is their parties and their colleagues who are responsible for what is happening to people down south.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will Colin Keir take an intervention?

Colin Keir: Sorry, but I do not have an awful lot of time left.

How do we produce a modern police force? Surely it is like any business in the sense that it is about communication and speed of action.

I am very lucky. In my constituency, Edinburgh Western, under the leadership of Chief Inspector Dykes and his team, the police work in conjunction with the local community and local council officer. They are moving the Corstorphine front office up to the Drumrae hub. They are doing something similar over in the cabinet secretary's constituency, and it puts the whole set-up together. There is, I suppose, an issue of cost—whether it is cost neutral or saves money—but whatever happens it is partnership working. It is doing the best for our communities.

The record low figures are not just national but local. The people who accept the figures are the people who live there.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Colin Keir: Here in Edinburgh, the local newspaper is running a campaign on saving the counter facilities. Like at least one other member, I have not received one letter or email about the issue. The campaign is not run on the back of what the police or locals want; it is a campaign that is run by Opposition parties. Quite frankly, I would rather see police out on the street, doing what they are supposed to do, producing record

figures and coming out with results that the people accept and realise are the best in 40 years.

16:37

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): SNP ministers are very vocal in attacking other levels of government when they make bad policy. They attack councils forced to implement their Government's cuts and they wash their hands of any responsibility. They rightly attack the coalition Government at Westminster for its health service reforms. In doing so, they do not put any blame in the hands of national health service trusts or NHS bureaucracies; they blame the Government.

Contrast that with their attitude to what is happening with the police service in Scotland. When the chief constable takes a wrecking ball and seeks to wipe out one in three of our local police station front counters, does the cabinet secretary rear up in condemnation? Does he tell the chief constable to stop? No. The cabinet secretary is uncharacteristically silent—not a word of condemnation, just a faint whisper of "This is an operational matter for Police Scotland." He is like a wee laddie with his hand caught in the biscuit tin. Instead of taking responsibility, he turns round and wants to blame somebody else.

I want to focus on West Lothian, in my region. West Lothian is an area that the cabinet secretary knows only too well, having fought and lost six elections there. It is an area with the largest projected population growth in the country. Take a place such as Armadale and Blackridge, where the cabinet secretary stood for the Lothian regional seat. The population is 14,000, and a train station development will see another 3,000 houses built. It is a growing area, with many new items of infrastructure, including two train stations. To complement all that positive development, it will have a closed police station on its main street.

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member taken an intervention?

Neil Findlay: No, thank you.

What about Linlithgow, the cabinet secretary's home town? It is, again, a town of 14,000 people, which attracts large numbers of visitors throughout the year. Guess what, though? It has no publicly accessible police station. Does the cabinet secretary seriously believe that the good people of Linlithgow have no interest in that issue and that they have made no representations on it? He knows them better than that.

What about West Calder and the Breich valley, where villages such as Polbeth and Addiewell—communities that really need police support and access to a station—will be left without that support and access? At Addiewell, there is a

prison of 800 inmates. For the village in the vicinity of a prison to have no accessible police station is just plain stupidity.

Christine Grahame, who I see has left the chamber, says that she works in new ways, including by holding surgeries in Tesco. I bet that she does not close her constituency office for ever when she does those surgeries.

For only 70 or so members of the public to have responded to the Police Scotland consultation shows not that people are not interested but that the process is fundamentally flawed.

In West Calder, I conducted my own consultation. In that town of 5,500 people, I received more than 100 written replies to my questionnaire, all of which have been passed to the chief constable. Why are they not included in the consultation response numbers? I also received 120 emails—he will know about that because 120 copies were sent to him as well—and a petition complaining about the attack on community policing, which was also sent to the chief constable.

Had there been time to do so, I would have done the same in other affected communities, but of course the consultation period was unbelievably short. If we had, however, I believe that we would have got the same response.

The cabinet secretary is, as he famously said, tired of marching, but surely even he can muster up the energy to stop that sham in its tracks. He is politically accountable for the decisions, and I am afraid that, on this one, he is guilty as charged.

16:40

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): Six months on from the dissolution of our local police forces, we are seeing the true face of the SNP's centralisation agenda: asset stripping and the erosion of local services. That is why we need to go back to first base and ask whether we want a police service that is rooted in our communities, open, accessible and welcoming, or whether we are willing to settle for a faceless, increasingly impersonal enforcement agency.

Modern policing is a complex business that relies on the interaction between police officers, specialist civilian staff and—crucially—members of the community. To portray it in the way that SNP members have done in the debate—that bobbies on the beat somehow trump everyone else—is trivialising and damaging. We are being offered a one-dimensional version of the police force and we should say no thanks.

Civilian staff have been a vital part of Scotland's community policing. Intelligence analysts, custody officers, community wardens, control room staff

and counter desk staff—we could go on for ever—are the people who have helped us to reach the 39-year low in recorded crime. The Government is quick to laud that figure but it seems all too slow to recognise the role that police support staff have played in achieving it. That 39-year low in crime—a trend across the UK—is due to the hard work of the legacy forces and testament to the community-based policing model.

In the past two years, 1,400 civilian posts have been lost. The haemorrhaging of civilian staff must be staunched. It is threatening the health of our police service. The SNP Government needs to take heed or risk losing the community focus and, thereafter, the public trust that, until now, have been the foundation of policing in Scotland.

Dozens of front desks from Stromness to Kirkcudbright are to close or have their opening hours slashed based on a questionable review and out-of-date figures. More than 6,000 hours of public contact will be lost each week and police control rooms are to close. That is more than just an inconvenience for people; it is indicative of a wider problem: the new police service does not recognise how important community policing and public trust are to reducing and preventing crime.

The mantra from the Government members of 1,000 extra officers no longer fools many people. Having more officers benefits no one if it is an illusion because they are unable to get on with the roles that they have been trained to do. Just now, we have a police service that values community interaction and says, “Our door is open to you if you need us or can help us.” Police Scotland proposes to turn its back on our communities, lock the station doors and say, “Don’t even bother trying to come and see us.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to closing speeches. I call Alex Fergusson with a tight four minutes.

16:43

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The topic is no trivial matter, as most members’ speeches have shown. However, it has nothing to do with the effectiveness of the police, as some members have tried to imply. We are talking about the closure to the public of a third of our police stations and significant reductions in opening hours for many more. Unlike some members, I have had a lot of emails about it.

The Scottish Government may want to wash its hands of the proposal and say that it is an operational matter for the police, but it will affect communities throughout Scotland and the SNP Government cannot and should not continue to ignore it.

As a Scottish Conservative, I believe that justice is best and most effectively delivered locally and that the Government is failing to support local policing. The Government should at the very least make it clear to Police Scotland that the closures should be reconsidered. Instead, all that we have had is characteristic bluster from the cabinet secretary and rather limp figures from the First Minister.

Police Scotland is a creation of the Government that my party did not support. We expressed concerns that the single police force would encourage centralisation and that the Government’s legislation would neither enhance nor protect local policing. I believe that those concerns have been fully justified.

The Scottish Government told the Parliament that the single police force would not result in centralisation, yet we now face the closure of front desks across the country and of regional control rooms. The Scottish Government told the Parliament that, by reducing duplication, the single police force would protect front-line services. I must ask: what could be more front line than the front desk of a police station?

As has been highlighted, there were clear flaws in Police Scotland’s consultation process. Some of the footfall analysis was carried out in 2009, since when a number of stations have closed. In my region, which is Dumfries and Galloway, the Dalry, Gretna, Moffat, Machars and Thornhill police stations are set to close to the public—without any analysis having been done—simply because they do not have a permanently staffed front counter. I argue strongly that the presence of those stations gives the community a huge feeling of security and reassurance.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Fergusson: Not when I have four minutes—I am sorry.

The removal of those stations will have a seriously negative impact on the affected communities.

I fully accept that some stations that are earmarked for closure are not exceptionally busy. In my constituency, Dalbeattie, Kirkcudbright and Newton Stewart are set to lose public counter provision, and a significant reduction in hours is proposed for the stations in Lockerbie, Sanquhar and Annan in the wider region. Those stations are the interface between the public and the police in Dumfries and Galloway. It is not as if they are not being used. In the 13-day review period, Dalbeattie received 82 visitors over 10 days, Kirkcudbright had 105 visitors and Newton Stewart had 110 visitors in 12 days.

Let us be honest—we have all been here before. Relatively recently, the Scottish Court Service proposed the closure of a third of Scotland's sheriff courts, including that in Kirkcudbright, in my constituency. As with the proposals for court closures, the closure of police stations to the public flies in the face of the local delivery of justice. As with the court closures, the consultation process has been flawed. As with court closures, the SNP Government is failing to stand up for local communities.

In the debate on court closures, I made the point that people are already putting up with an enormous amount of inconvenience to play their part in ensuring that justice is done. The Government is undermining people's willingness to do that. It did so with court closures and is doing the same with the station proposals.

I argue strongly that increasing centralisation is no way to encourage people to engage with our justice system, and it is most definitely not in the interests of local justice. I support the motion.

16:47

Kenny MacAskill: I will refer to the substantive motion from the Labour Party and to the SNP amendment in my name, but a subtext from the Opposition parties has run through the debate, and I will refer to that, too.

The motion refers to counter closures. Christine Grahame gave the clear position on what the police want to be done and why that is common sense. Colin Keir confirmed that we have heard a lot of manufactured outrage in the chamber. Indeed, we have heard a lot of cant and something that is, if not hypocrisy, not far off it, given what is happening south of the border.

The real facts are as stated by Christine Grahame. I found Kezia Dugdale's speech rather bizarre. Perhaps, on her travels, she interacted with the inspectors in Portobello, Craigmillar and Howdenhall.

Kezia Dugdale: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Kenny MacAskill: Perhaps Kezia Dugdale would like to intervene to tell me the names of the inspectors at those stations.

Kezia Dugdale: In my speech, I reported the concerns of 200 of my constituents, who also happen to be the cabinet secretary's constituents. Will he really ignore the views of the people whom he seeks to represent?

Kenny MacAskill: Kezia Dugdale might do herself a favour if she interacted with Inspectors Hardie, Clyde and Bowie—that might do her some

good and she might learn what is happening on the ground.

We have an outstanding police service in east Edinburgh, which we should not traduce. Kezia Dugdale knows as well as I do that officers in that area have dealt with the discharge of semi-automatic weapons.

Backfilling has been raised, as has the 101 number, which Sandra White dealt with eloquently. One reason why the 101 number was introduced was because of the difficulties that people had in being able to access a number when they were not in their home locality. If someone was from Grampian and they were in Glasgow, what number did they call? If they were in Lothian and Borders and were visiting Dumfries and Galloway, what was the local number?

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Kenny MacAskill: Perhaps Siobhan McMahon would like to tell me what the number was, prior to 101, that people dialled in Lothian and Borders.

Siobhan McMahon: I did dial 101 in that particular locality only a few weeks ago, and I was told not to report the crime on the phone but to go into the local police office, which I do not understand. Why was that?

Members: Oh.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Kenny MacAskill: First, I will just advise the member that the number for Lothian and Borders—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Kenny MacAskill: The number was 311 31 31.

Equally, there are incidents that the control room quite correctly says must go to a police station—such as, understandably, incidents of a sexual nature or assaults. Such incidents would have to be dealt with by the police station—those are the facts that are dealt with, without the manufactured outrage.

There is a subtext here, so let us realise that and refer to it. We know that we have a better together campaign in the chamber, as indeed we have outwith it, in which we have unity between the coalition partners of the Tory Government and its Liberal Democrat allies along with their Labour colleagues.

Patricia Ferguson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Kenny MacAskill: Not at the moment.

We know that their better together campaign is about working together—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Kenny MacAskill: We are seeing a traducing of the police service south of the border. In some ways, the police have to answer and account for any omissions or commissions, but let me say that I have a high regard for the police service south of the border.

What is shameful is that matters that have affected the police service south of the border should result in a traducing of the police service north of the border. People should have more support for a police service that has served us outstandingly. It has a considerable record and should not face being challenged when we have a 39-year low in recorded crime, when we have the lowest number of homicides since records began and when we have a 60 per cent drop in violent crime and in knife carrying since we came into office.

Graeme Pearson: Would the cabinet secretary look at the motion again and acknowledge that we do not seek to denigrate police officers in any way? What we criticise is the cabinet secretary's responsibility for policy in future.

Kenny MacAskill: There are two factors there. Perhaps Mr Pearson would like to comment about whether we are in fact taking power back here. Mr Pentland said that the Scottish Government should take back ownership of Scottish policing. I thought that we had decided in this chamber that that would not be the position that any justice secretary would ever have, whether that would be me or my successors. If Labour is changing its policy, it should tell us. I have to say that I think that that would be a wrong step. It would not be appropriate and we will not be heading in that direction. If I am wrong, Labour should perhaps tell us.

Graeme Pearson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is approaching his last minute.

Kenny MacAskill: Equally, we have to say that we have an outstanding police service. Let us be clear: whatever the substantive motion has been, the subtext has been to trash the outgoing and on-going service of the Scottish police force.

What we have to remember, as we face a better together campaign, is that Labour is now considering its position on universal services. It is considering whether matters that we viewed as sacrosanct should be jettisoned: whether tuition fees should be reimposed; whether bus passes should be removed; and whether free personal care should be taken away. That is shameful enough on its own, but when those who went through higher education pull up their drawbridge

and seek to take away that opportunity from those following, they should hang their heads in shame.

Equally, I have to put it on record that those who served with honour and credit—as Mr Pearson did—ill-serve themselves to trash and traduce the record of their successors, who serve the Scottish police force and their communities magnificently well. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I call Elaine Murray to wind up—six minutes, please.

16:53

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I intend to—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. If I have to call for order again, the time will come out of the closing speech, and that is not acceptable.

Dr Murray.

Elaine Murray: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I intend to address the issue of policing in Scotland not south of the border, which Mr MacAskill frequently referred to in his diversionary tactics. Scottish Labour supported the creation of a single police force. We believed that it could provide the most effective and efficient use of policing resources, especially at a time of financial constraint, and that it could enable all parts of Scotland to benefit from specialist units that smaller units in particular would not be able to maintain.

We also believed—this is very important—that economies of scale should release resources to strengthen local policing. Of course, there were always concerns about local accountability, although we were assured that it would be enhanced following the creation of Police Scotland. It was always difficult to see how this would work in the case of Dumfries and Galloway, which had its own force, but the arguments throughout Scotland that policing would be accountable to every local authority rather than to multi-authority police boards implied that, generally speaking, accountability to local government would be improved.

However, in the first six months we have seen increasing centralisation rather than the preservation and promotion of local policing. The wholesale destruction of employment in the police staff sector has contributed to the disappointment that is felt. Police Scotland stated in written evidence to the Justice Committee that it was expecting 800 jobs to be lost in 2013-14 alone; that will contribute £25.5 million to the required savings of £70 million for next year.

The chief constable told the Justice Committee last week that, although savings would be sought elsewhere, there was “no doubt” in his mind—given that almost 90 per cent of Police Scotland’s budget goes on staff costs—that

“as the years pass, there will be further reductions in the number of civilian staff.”—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 29 October 2013; c 3406.]

Those posts are being lost even before the number of control rooms is reduced. We are told that the decisions about the number and location of control rooms have yet to be taken, but part of the process of reducing the numbers of civilian staff involves closing police office counters—and the primary reason for those proposals is the SNP Government’s budgetary cuts.

Unison, as the union that represents police staff, believes that the police and fire reform exercise has been rushed, and that a massive de-civilianisation exercise—which is designed to reduce the budget rather than duplication—is in full swing. As Unison has consistently argued, posts in certain areas of the organisation must be backfilled by police officers to allow staff to be released on voluntary redundancy or early retirement schemes. The chief constable argues that there is no strategy to use police officers for backfilling, but that does not mean that it is not happening.

Kenny MacAskill: Redundancies are required because of duplication. Elaine Murray criticises the numbers that are being considered by the SPA. How many civilian posts does she think should go?

Elaine Murray: That is not my argument. My argument is that, while you dictate the number of police officers, you say when we come to discuss the number of police staff that that is an operational matter. There is a double standard in the way you treat staff in the police service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member should speak through the chair, please.

Elaine Murray: My colleague Graeme Pearson highlighted the use of police officers to deliver citations. We have heard it argued that that is police out on the streets, but people want to see police on the beat, deterring and preventing crime, not chapping on the door and delivering citations.

Christine Grahame implied that the counter closures were somehow releasing police, but that is not the case. The counter closure proposals have nothing to do with releasing police officers to give them time to work in the community. The jobs that will go are, again, civilian posts.

The argument that the counters that are being closed are not used is hollow too. Some might not be used, and in those cases there will be very little

public resistance, but some are very well used. The *Edinburgh Evening News*—which is hardly an organ of the Labour Party—has pointed out that 100,000 visits are made every year to the 10 police counters that are proposed for closure in Edinburgh and the Lothians. A third of those counters are in West Lothian, as my colleague Neil Findlay pointed out.

The times of operation of other counters are being drastically reduced. We heard about counters in large stations in Glasgow that it is proposed will have their hours reduced from 24-hour opening to daytime only, many in unsuitable locations. The idea that the 101 number or social media can somehow replace the reassurance of contact with a member of police staff at a police office counter at a time of crisis is risible.

I was interested to hear what Kezia Dugdale told us about Kenny MacAskill’s constituents, and I was even more amused by the idea that he is, at the same time as boasting about an all-time low in crime, surveying his constituents about an increase in break-ins and anti-social behaviour.

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

Elaine Murray: I am pleased that Police Scotland has recognised public concern, and has agreed to extend the consultation period—or at least to accept and consider late responses—for another 30 days.

The revelations in the press last Friday that Police Scotland may be considering promoting some senior officers with pay rises of at least £8,000 is hardly going to increase the morale of the much-put-upon civilian staff. It is no wonder that so many of them are offering to leave on ER and VR schemes.

The cabinet secretary loves to argue that these are operational matters for Police Scotland. However, the Government cannot continue to claim credit for all the good news such as 1,000 more police officers—320 of which are paid for by local authorities—while distancing itself from the unpleasant consequences such as the loss of civilian posts and the police counter closures.

John Pentland was right to say that the Government needs to take responsibility for the consequences of its actions. It cannot claim operational distance on some issues and claim credit on the rest.

Business Motions

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-08185, 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 12 November 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Dundee, City of Culture

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Water Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 13 November 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Portfolio Questions
Infrastructure, Investment and Cities;
Culture and External Affairs

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Modernising Scotland's Transport
Infrastructure, Meeting the Challenges of
the 21st Century

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 November 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Scottish
Independence Referendum Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 19 November 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 20 November 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Education and Lifelong Learning

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 21 November 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 Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-08188, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 28 February 2014.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-08189, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 6 February 2014.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-08186, on the designation of a lead committee, and motion S4M-08187, on the office of the clerk.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government and Regeneration Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Defective and Dangerous Buildings (Recovery of Expenses) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on Friday 27, Monday 30 and Tuesday 31 December 2013.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time, to which we now come.

Decision Time

17:02

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on transport, if the amendment in the name of Keith Brown is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alex Johnstone falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-08173.2, in the name of Keith Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-08173, in the name of James Kelly, on transport, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 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 West) (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)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (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)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 42, Abstentions 15.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As the amendment in the name of Keith Brown is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alex Johnstone falls.

The next question is, that motion S4M-08173, in the name of James Kelly, on transport, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunningham North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (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)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)

Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 60, Against 43, Abstentions 15.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the saving of £176 million from the cancellation of the ill-conceived Glasgow Airport Rail Link project; notes that the Parliament was informed of the decision to dispose of surplus land in March 2010 and accepts that this was carried out in accordance with the principles and guidance in the Scottish Public Finance Manual; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has made substantial investment, including the successful implementation of the £660 million of improvements to rail infrastructure, trains and services serving Glasgow, Paisley, Inverclyde and Ayrshire, and notes that all of this was achieved by the Scottish Government at a time of reductions in capital funding through prioritisation of the transport projects that will provide the greatest benefit to the people and economy of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-08172.2, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S4M-08172, in the name of Graeme Pearson, on justice, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 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)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (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)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (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)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 56, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08172, in the name of Graeme Pearson, on justice, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (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)
 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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 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 West) (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)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 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)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (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)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 57, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that recorded crime is at a 39-year low, with homicides the lowest since records began, crimes of handling offensive weapons down by 60% and violent crime down by almost a half since 2007; welcomes the 1,000 additional officers that the Scottish Government has delivered since 2007; acknowledges the significant progress made by Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to ensure that policing in Scotland continues to perform excellently, despite UK Government budget cuts; recognises that local policing remains the bedrock of the new service, supported by the ability to share expertise and equipment as required, and fully supports Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority in their work to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08186, 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 Local Government and Regeneration Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Defective and Dangerous Buildings (Recovery of Expenses) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08187, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the office of the clerk, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on Friday 27, Monday 30 and Tuesday 31 December 2013.

No More Page 3 Campaign

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-07500, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on no more page 3. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I call Ms Baillie to open the debate.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern reports regarding a connection between the portrayal of sexualised images of women in the media and attitudes that reinforce sexist attitudes, sexual harassment, abuse and violence toward women; believes that this has been demonstrated by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the UK Government-commissioned Sexualisation of young people review; welcomes the No More Page 3 campaign, which calls on *The Sun* to refrain from printing pictures of topless women; applauds the campaign for what it considers a successful first year in operation; recognises that a motion in support of the campaign was agreed by the National Assembly of Wales and that numerous organisations, including UNISON, the British Youth Council, UK Girlguiding, the National Union of Teachers, the National Association of Head Teachers, and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers have also shown their support for the campaign, and notes calls in Dumbarton and across the country for *The Sun* in Scotland to stop printing pictures of topless women.

17:09

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Who can forget the excitement of the Olympic games? Just last year, in homes throughout the country, we witnessed the dedication and achievement of our British athletes. We cheered them on, whether it was Andy Murray winning a gold medal for tennis, Sir Chris Hoy winning gold for cycling or Jessica Ennis winning gold in the heptathlon. What achievements! I remember, as others will, the wall-to-wall coverage in our broadcast and print media. It was one of our most successful games ever and we rightly celebrated.

In that context, 36-year-old Lucy-Anne Holmes, an actress and writer, noticed that the largest female picture in *The Sun* on the day was not of Jessica Ennis celebrating her gold-winning performance, but of a topless page 3 model. Lucy-Anne wrote to the editor of *The Sun*, calling on him to drop the feature, and her letter soon became an online petition that has garnered more than 122,000 signatures. I welcome supporters of the no more page 3 campaign to the gallery this evening.

The campaign's slogan is, "Say no to the wrong things and the right things will happen." Today, we are saying that there should be no more page 3 in Scotland. I hope that the editor of *The Scottish Sun*, Gordon Smart, will do the right thing. I strongly encourage him to take his newspaper into

the 21st century by consigning page 3 to the dustbin of history.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): Hear, hear!

Jackie Baillie: I thank Annabel Goldie—I will take all supporters.

The Scottish Sun is one of the biggest-selling daily Scottish newspapers. It is read by hundreds of thousands of people every day, all of whom are subjected to a picture of a half-naked woman over their cornflakes, on the train or bus to work or in their workplace. The picture is not just on page 3, either, because the model is sometimes advertised on page 1, so there is no getting away from it. I am told that *The Sun* does not print pictures of half-naked women at the weekends out of consideration for children. Where on earth does it think those children are during the week?

Page 3 is a throwback to the 1970s. It is a relic of the male-dominated, smoke-filled press room that rightly belongs in the past. It belongs to a long-gone era, and it is well past its sell-by date. “Tired”, “demeaning”, “depressing”, “disrespectful” and “embarrassing” are just some of the terms that are used to describe page 3. Women are not objects, so I ask *The Sun* to stop treating us as though we are. Men are usually portrayed in the media as doing things, achieving things and conveying important information, and they do not do any of it half naked.

Page 3 not only objectifies women, but glorifies and celebrates the objectification of women. *The Sun* cannot style itself as a family newspaper and pretend that female nudity is just a bit of harmless fun. Objectification is all about power: the strong objectify, and the weak—or those who are perceived to be weak—are objectified. Page 3 perpetuates defunct and discredited gender stereotypes that portray women as the weaker sex, sweet and silent—although members will find that hard to believe about me.

When we stop and think, we see that page 3 feeds into the wider narrative of gender inequality. Yesterday, we rightly debated domestic abuse and identified that abuse, at its root, as an abuse of power. That abuse of power arises from inequality between the genders, and page 3 affords inequality mainstream legitimacy. Some of us are old enough to remember Clare Short trying to introduce legislation to ban page 3 in 1987. She was vilified. *The Sun* and others described her as—wait for it—“fat”, “ugly” and “jealous”. However they describe those of us who contribute to the debate this evening, we should make no mistake that there is a movement of men and women, young and old alike, who want to see an end to page 3.

I will give members an idea of the campaign’s supporters. The organisations include Girlguiding UK, the Girls Brigade, the British Youth Council, Women’s Aid, Rape Crisis, Unison, the National Association of Teachers, the National Association of Head Teachers—the list goes on and on.

The National Assembly of Wales has already backed unanimously a motion to demand an end to page 3. Rebecca Evans AM, said:

“Page Three normalises the trivial objectification of women, entrenches inequality and sexist attitudes, and, well, quite simply, half-naked women just aren’t news!”

I could not have put it better myself.

Let me be clear that support for the campaign is not only from politicians. Girlguiding UK said:

“The Sun is a family newspaper. Anyone can pick it up, turn to Page 3, and think that it is normal for young women to be treated as objects. This is just wrong.

It is impossible to nurture your ambitions if you are constantly told that you aren’t the same as your male equivalent. It is disrespectful and embarrassing. We need to get used to the idea that women are not for sale.”

Let me tell members about Terri Smith. She is a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament for Edinburgh North and Leith who lodged a motion calling for no more page 3. The motion was passed overwhelmingly and is now SYP policy. That is the next generation of newspaper readers making it abundantly clear that they do not support page 3.

I ask Gordon to do the “Smart” thing and remove page 3. *The Irish Sun* has done so; *The Scottish Sun* can do likewise. Page 3 does not sell newspapers; news content sells newspapers. I hope that the minister will confirm the Government’s support for the campaign. Let us together consign page 3 to the dustbin of history, where it rightly belongs.

17:17

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I am very pleased that Jackie Baillie has brought this issue to Parliament for me to make my first speech in a members’ business debate. I will look at the issue from a different point of view and agenda and as someone who was not born in this country—a fact that members may have heard before.

I am not a prude and neither am I easily shocked or embarrassed, but when I came to this country and saw my first page 3 I thought that I was in another time. I did not think that Scotland was a place where such photographs should be on display.

When I came to this country I worked in the haulage industry—I was even a lorry driver at one point, so I am very used to seeing those pictures.

When I opened my first office in Glasgow, there was a large wall next to my room with lots of pictures of topless women on it. As I say, I was used to that and it did not shock or affect me. That was in the 1980s, when Clare Short suggested that legislation be introduced to ban page 3.

Something happened that changed my mind. I was waiting in my office for a visitor from the islands in the north. I realised that the visitor, who was the head of a salmon company, was a woman and it dawned on me to ask myself how I would feel as a man visiting a woman in another company who, on making his way to her office, saw a wall full of pictures of men with no clothes on. I would have thought it totally ridiculous, yet here I was, waiting for my visitor to come, with all those pictures on the wall.

Despite many protests from the workers, I told them that we must take the pictures down; from then on, we did not have such pictures on that wall. That measure made a lot of sense. Why should that be the case? It is because it makes business sense. I put that same message to the editors of British newspapers: having a page 3 is not a selling factor.

Page 3 is repellent; people do not want to see it. When I buy one of those newspapers, get on the train and turn the page, I feel embarrassed when I get to page 3, so I turn the page quickly to get to the next page. As a father of three daughters, what is on page 3 is not something that I want to see in today's world. It is not the time or the place for it.

In Dundee in my region two weeks ago, as Jackie Baillie said, 160 MSYPs at the Scottish Youth Parliament voted in favour of a motion against such portrayals in the media. That is extremely important, because they are the customers of tomorrow for such publications. Editors should think about that; it is a question of doing business properly in this time and this place, not in the 1970s. Those MSYPs are the democratically elected voice of Scotland. The young people have spoken, and they should be listened to.

I have a proposal to make to the publication in question. We should use page 3 to celebrate the great achievements of women of today. When I looked at one of those papers again this week, I saw that, in 28 pages of sport, there was just a little report about and a little photo of a lady—Shelley Kerr from Broxburn, who has been shortlisted for FIFA world manager of the year in women's football. The news was buried on page 24. What a missed opportunity in a 28-page sport supplement full of pictures of men. My proposal to the editor of *The Sun* is that I would like to live in a country in which journalists report the achievements of the young women of today on

page 3, rather than burying them on page 24. Instead of being a page to inspire aversion and distaste, page 3 could be a page to inspire young girls and young people in general, whatever their gender, and to celebrate their many achievements.

17:22

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on lodging the motion, and I congratulate the great no more page 3 campaign, whose petition I believe has now garnered 122,000 signatures. I also congratulate all the groups that are mentioned in the motion and, of course, my constituent Terri Smith on her success in getting the Scottish Youth Parliament to oppose page 3. An increasing number of people now oppose page 3.

It was 43 years ago, in 1970, that a group of men—forgetting the half of the population who are women—decided that they would introduce page 3 for men. I hope that an increasing number of men are now challenging that and seeing that page 3 is negative not just for the rights and wellbeing of women—as it clearly is—but, ultimately, for the wellbeing of men as well, because it damages and poisons their relationships with women.

Of course, some men are fighting back against the campaign. Yesterday, I discovered a Twitter account—which I will not name—that had on it the message, “No to the few.” It was quite wrong about that, as I will show in a minute. It also said:

“No to those who despise the female form.”

How wrong it is. I hope that I speak for a large number of men who love and respect women in their totality, body included, but who oppose the sexual objectification of women, the subjugation and belittling of women, and the rampant sexism and inequality that are splashed across page 3 every day under the cover of press freedom. I am sure that we all support press freedom in principle, but I reject the freedom of men to exploit and oppress women, I reject the freedom of men to objectify and stereotype women, and I reject the freedom of men to deprive women of their rights, respect and equality.

The men who introduced page 3 in 1970 certainly did not think about how women would feel about being represented in such a way. I referred to the Twitter account that said that just a few people are opposed to page 3. An increasing number of men oppose it, and I am sure that the vast majority of women do. I do not know any women who are happy with page 3—except, of course, the few women who benefit financially from being photographed for it.

It is not surprising that women are negative about page 3, because they know a lot better than I do what a negative effect it can have. There is a great deal of evidence and research on the effect that page 3 has in terms of stereotyping women and the effect that it may have on the self-esteem of young women and girls, in particular. They know how page 3 is negative for them. If we look at the no more page 3 website, we see a large number of such testimonies, including from a vast range of bodies, such as Girlguiding UK, to which Jackie Baillie referred.

Of course, the other side of the coin is page 3's effect on men, which is something that women experience throughout their lives in many different forms. They know—I certainly do not—what it feels like to be treated as a sexual commodity, to be sexually objectified and to be harassed partly because of the messages that are sent by page 3 and other such representations. Ultimately, of course, there is the sexual violence that is not unconnected—as research again shows—to many of the messages and influences that affect men in our society. It is therefore not at all surprising that the vast majority of women are opposed to page 3; I hope that an increasing number of men are, as well.

As I have only half a minute left, I have no time to talk about the flash mob at the Unison conference, which members might have read about. The point behind it was that although such images are illegal in the workplace under equality legislation they are, nevertheless, splashed across workplaces and public places every day.

I have two grand-daughters and do not want to have to explain to them why they are being treated differently from boys and men. I want them to grow up in a society where there is increasing gender equality and where they are not subjected to the misogyny of lad culture and all the other negative male attitudes that are fed by page 3, as well as by other features of society. No one is saying that getting rid of page 3 will in itself create gender equality, but it will be another step in that direction. Finally, as one woman on the no more page 3 website says, all women are asking for is to be treated, and represented, with respect—as men are.

17:26

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Jackie Baillie for bringing this important issue to the chamber. In doing so, she underlines the vital role of a Parliament in finding common accord across party boundaries to highlight something that is wrong.

That is no trite moral judgment. This is not about prim ladies of propriety of a certain age, who might

be of ample proportions, pursing their lips in disapproval at the antics of their juniors. This is about how we wish the image of Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st century to be represented, and particularly how we wish women in that society to be portrayed. I should also clarify that the views that I am expressing are my personal opinions.

To put this debate in context, I point out that women died that we might be given the vote; rent strikes were women fighting for their families and the justice of fair rents while their husbands were at war; women fought for our right to university education; and down the ages women have made sacrifices of all kinds for their families and their society that others might be given chances and opportunities. Given those heroic achievements, it is no surprise that women have risen to the highest levels of every activity imaginable. Their influence and success are as impressive as they are beyond dispute. In 2013, how do we celebrate that? With the consistent portrayal of topless women in a tabloid newspaper. That tasteless and demeaning portrayal of some women is actually a gross and offensive betrayal of all women. For example, when Jessica Ennis won an Olympic gold medal, which was a major achievement in sport, an occasion for national celebration, and a fantastic representation of female ability and signalled the creation of an excellent role model, *The Sun* recognised that triumph by giving greater pre-eminence to a photograph of a topless woman.

To me, Lucy-Anne Holmes, with her petition to stop this tacky and questionable practice, is a new heroine. She is right and I support her position, as do more than 120,000 others. However, she, I, Jackie Baillie and all the other signatories also recognise that there is a darker side to this practice, a sinister and disturbing element that is referred to in the motion. As has been confirmed by research, there is a known and proven link between the portrayal of sexualised images of women in the media and attitudes that reinforce sexism, sexual harassment, abuse and violence towards women. That alone should justify stopping the publication of photographs of topless women in newspapers; the practice is indefensible, as are the purported arguments advanced by those who support such activity.

We are told that freedom of the press must prevail. As a proposition, that does not bear even superficial scrutiny; it is more naked than the page 3 offerings. Publishing material in the public interest is not the same as, and can never be confused with, producing salacious material to satisfy the prurient interest. We are told that commercial freedom justifies that, and that, after all, no laws are being broken. If that proposition is intellectually robust, we should expect First

ScotRail to employ topless ladies on the catering trollies, our supermarkets to have topless female staff stacking shelves, and topless women at the counters of our banks and building societies. Can members imagine that? That will not happen, because those businesses not only have to defer to public taste and acceptable conduct but they cannot afford to be associated with practices that induce and reinforce sexist attitudes, sexual harassment, abuse and violence towards women. It is a no-no. If it is a no-no for them, it should be a no-no for *The Sun*.

The Sun needs to act up to its name. It needs to reflect the light of its title on the darkness of the shadows that are cast by its topless feature on page 3. When groups as diverse as UK Girlguiding and the other organisations that are mentioned in the motion and that Jackie Baillie mentioned in her speech, not to mention the Scottish Parliament, raise the cudgels, *The Sun* needs to listen. As UK Girlguiding pointed out:

"*The Sun* is a family newspaper. Anyone can pick it up, turn to Page 3, and think that it is normal for young women to be treated as objects. This is just wrong."

I agree with UK Girlguiding. In 2013, women deserve better from *The Sun*, and *The Sun* can and certainly should do better by women.

The motion is timely. In the Scottish Parliament, as in the National Assembly for Wales, we should build on the momentum that Jackie Baillie has generated.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Due to the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

17:32

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I, too, welcome the debate and congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing it.

I commend the recent motion from the Scottish Youth Parliament, which was, I understand, the result of a debate in which concerns were expressed about the portrayal of people as sex objects in the mass media. Page 3 of *The Sun* was highlighted as a prime example of the kind of portrayal that there was concern about.

As colleagues have said, the debate is not new; as Clare Short would testify, it has gone on for years. There have been concerns about the portrayal of women in the media for years, but

there is now a body of research that explores the impact of sexualised images in the media that we have a duty to reflect.

I want to reflect in particular on the research that the Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust has pulled together, because it is concerning and we need to listen to it. One issue that it has highlighted is that, in response to a recent campaign by Mumsnet about retailers, a survey by *The Guardian* found an array of items available in major chain stores, from a T-shirt for a three-year-old that bore the slogan "Future WAG" to a top for a toddler with a pink bikini appliquéd on the front, and that New Look sells a range of high heels that start at size 1, which is the shoe size of an average eight-year-old, and a pair of £16 dark-blue platforms with 3.5 inch heels, pointed toes and four straps. That is not necessarily a good role image for young women, and girls in particular.

Zero Tolerance has highlighted the concerns about the impact of gender stereotyping and suggested that girls are overly concerned with their body image; that there is bullying of girls who do not conform to gender stereotyping ideals; and that girls who do not conform to those stereotypes experience negative feelings about themselves. We are quite rightly focusing on page 3, but we need to take a wider look at sexualisation in our society, whether in retailing or in other media.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Does the member recall that our Equal Opportunities Committee conducted an inquiry into sexualised goods that are aimed at children?

Sarah Boyack: That was a good inquiry for our Equal Opportunities Committee. We need to look at a range of issues, but I will briefly highlight social media and technological change, which have led to a host of new pressures, particularly for young people.

One study quoted by Zero Tolerance suggested that girls as young as 12 had experienced pressure to send topless pictures of themselves by text and instant messaging. We should be really concerned about situations such as that, which are adding more and more pressure to young people as they are growing up. Increasingly, there are websites and online magazines that encourage user-generated content that people can rate and comment on.

This debate is timely, because we should be considering the impact of the sexualisation of our culture, which should concern us all. A survey of 15 to 19-year-old girls found that 63 per cent considered being a glamour model as their ideal profession and a quarter thought that lap dancing would be their ideal profession, but only 4 per cent chose teaching as their ideal profession. That is deeply worrying. We need to focus on the negative

impact of sexualisation on not just young women but young men, too. Malcolm Chisholm was absolutely right to focus on the fact that the issue concerns us all, not just women.

Research shows that sexualisation limits young people's aspirations and affects how they think. It impacts on their physical and mental health and on what should be their healthy sexual development. It is an issue for not just one small group in society or the majority of women; it is an issue that should concern us all. All of us in the Parliament should come together and say that page 3 has been there for a long time; it has been criticised for a long time; it is time for it to go.

17:36

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I thank Jackie Baillie for securing this important debate.

Pictures of naked or half-naked women do not upset me in the slightest, nor do they upset any of the men or women whom I have met who share Lucy-Anne Holmes's view that it is time that a popular national newspaper stopped printing pictures of half-naked young women on page 3. What upsets us is that those images condition readers to view women as objects; what is wrong with page 3 is the context. As campaigners have said, we would not expect to see a picture of a half-naked young woman appear during a national television news bulletin, accompanied by some sickly sweet description. There would be an outcry if that happened. I thank Lucy-Anne Holmes, whose no more page 3 campaign, which began last year, has galvanised this long overdue outcry.

The debate is about what sort of society we want to be. How often does the Government minister in Westminster who naively suggests that it is for adults to choose what they read sitting in a busy bus or train where *The Sun* and the daily drip-fed visual diet of women in passive and sexualised poses are increasingly hard to avoid? Why does that matter? Do those women not have a right to choose to do that? Of course they do, but we also have a right not to be exposed constantly by the mainstream media to a presented ideal of a topless young woman who is usually white, always very slim and frequently sharing print space with important-looking men who, it has to be said, are mostly wearing clothes. I went to the newspaper section of the Scottish Parliament information centre today hoping to disprove that theory but, frankly, I was very disappointed indeed.

As colleagues have underlined, there is evidence linking the portrayal of women as sexual objects with attitudes that underpin discrimination and violence against women and girls. That has been demonstrated in the United Kingdom

Government's "Sexualisation of Young People Review" and by CEDAW: the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

On days when I catch the bus, I read a free newspaper in which I am far more likely, as Christian Allard has alluded to, to find a picture of a scantily dressed woman in the news and gossip pages than to find a woman in the sports pages. Indeed, I could not find one picture of a woman in the sports pages of *The Sun* or the *Daily Star* today. If we look at the average magazine shelf in an average supermarket, we would be forgiven for assuming that most women have massive breasts and are more than likely, despite the fact that we live in the northern hemisphere, to find it unnecessary to wear any clothes. Those are the supermarkets where we shop with our impressionable young sons and daughters. Those images were not at eye level when I was a child, but the blurring of the lines and the insidious objectification of women is relentless.

I take this opportunity to thank Object and UK Feminista for their work to challenge the sale of so-called lads mags, and the everyday sexism project's Twitter feed is well worth a read today, commenting as it does on Ryanair's latest advertising campaign, which relies on two bikini-clad women to promote its flights. It really does belong in 1973.

Elaine Smith: I add that ordinary people can challenge these issues in supermarkets, often very effectively. I have done it myself.

Alison Johnstone: Indeed. Object and UK Feminista have made it quite clear that there is the possibility of legal challenge.

I do not have a great deal of time left, but—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can have more time if you want.

Alison Johnstone: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The magazines that I am talking about are often found next to sport magazines, because sport is still seen by the media as something that women are not interested in. Many organisations are challenging that, including the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation. The titles in the women's interest section of a magazine display might include articles on how to lose a stone in four weeks or how to never have a bad hair day again. We get the picture. The no more page 3 campaign is battling away, but it is difficult and we have a lot of issues to overcome.

Let us look at the BBC. Who decides who is worthy of a place on a BBC panel show? I mean not just political panels, which have had more scrutiny lately than previously, but shows that

discuss music, satirical shows, current affairs shows, shows such as "Mock the Week" and "QI". A colleague in my office suggested that it should be called "QIB"—quite interesting blokes. Why are those programmes so entirely unrepresentative of the population? It seems far more difficult for women to entertain, never mind sustain, a career in television, sports journalism or many of the most public-facing media from which we get our news and views.

We want our daughters, nieces and granddaughters to grow up in a world where there really are equal opportunities. It is time for women to be equally represented in the boardroom, on the sports pages and leading our schools and higher education institutes. However, while the blatant sexism that is page 3 is part of society, it is clear that we have a long way to go. If *The Sun* will not remove page 3, I say that we call for the removal of *The Sun* wherever and whenever we can.

17:42

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I do not often get the opportunity to speak in debates, which might explain my keenness to intervene on members.

I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing the matter to the chamber for debate and I congratulate the campaigners, but it is sad that we are still debating page 3 in 21st century Scotland. It is not always easy to raise such issues due to the backlash from the industry. I know that well, having served on the Equal Opportunities Committee for 12 years, trying to tackle pornography as part of the spectrum of violence against women and children.

Pornography, prostitution and other forms of commercial sexism are all parts of an industry that makes millions of pounds out of human misery, and the industry is predicated on female subordination and objectification, as we have already heard this evening. Some people argue that women choose to participate in the industry. We need to be clear that pornography exists not because of women's choices but because men use it for sexual gratification at the expense of women. It causes harm to those who are involved, it affects respectful sexual relations and it underpins women's inequality. Page 3 is undoubtedly a part of that industry.

Although research on the effects of pornography has been somewhat limited, a report in the early 1990s that was published by the Home Office acknowledged that women find pornography distressing and that women who suffer domestic violence frequently have partners who use it heavily. I refer to that report in this evening's debate because it stated:

"it might be that sexually violent pornography is the most dangerous but that newspaper nudity is still to a small degree harmful and because newspapers are more everyday than extreme pornography their aggregate effects might be greater."

As we heard, in the late 1980s, Clare Short introduced a bill to try to ban page 3, and she received thousands of letters supporting her. Some of the letter writers told personal stories of rape, others told of the damage and insult that they felt when their partners used pornography, and some even spoke of the humiliation of watching their partners looking at topless women in newspapers when they had lost a breast to cancer. Men, too, said that they had changed their views when they had children and started to think about the world in which their children would grow up. Members talked about that.

Clare Short described pornography in everyday newspapers as depicting

"women in poses which really say take me, use me, throw me away."

Pornography, whether we are talking about page 3 or *Playboy* or soft or hard core, says the same thing: women for sale.

As Jackie Baillie said, Clare Short suffered at the hands of the newspapers for bringing forward her bill. Busloads of page 3 girls parked outside her house and she was harassed and vilified. I know about that and about the examples that she used because I used them when I was preparing for a speech at the University of Durham debating society in 2007. At that debate, I argued, along with Frances Curran, that

"This house believes that pornography is degrading to women."

We were debating with a student and a certain Martin Daubney, who was editor of *Loaded* magazine at the time. We were narrowly defeated, but that was not surprising. In fact, the result was better than I expected, because pornography was becoming ever more mainstream, creeping into everyday media and becoming more normalised and more extreme.

Although we were defeated in the debate, we might have had a lasting effect on Martin Daubney, who now campaigns against pornography. He said of *Loaded*:

"With its frequent nudity and lewd photo spreads, I'd long been accused of being a soft pornographer, and after leaving *Loaded* I agonised that my magazine may have switched a generation onto more explicit online porn."

Martin Daubney's conversion came about while he was making a documentary and listening to a talk about sex with a group of young people aged 13 to 14. He said:

"In the past I'd even defended pornography in university debates, on TV and on radio. I claimed it was our freedom

of choice to watch it and said it could actually help add to adult relationships. But what I saw during the making of the film changed my opinion of pornography forever.”

He went on to say:

“The moment I knew internet pornography had cast its dark shadow over the lives of millions of ordinary British teenagers will live with me for ever.”

It is good that Martin Daubney had a conversion on the issue. His voice is undoubtedly that of a high-profile man who was previously involved in the industry, so it is powerful.

It is important that we support the campaign. Page 3 helps to normalise pornography, and eradicating it would be a good start to eradicating pornography from our society and lifting the dark shadow from future generations of teenagers. It would at least start to take pornography out of the main stream.

I will finish by asking this: what kind of society is it where images of bare breasts that objectify women are accepted as everyday images, while breastfeeding is expected to be discreet? It does not make sense. I congratulate Jackie Baillie on bringing this debate to the Parliament.

17:47

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing the debate. Given that yesterday’s members’ business debate was on my motion on Glasgow Women’s Aid—the member spoke most eloquently in that debate—the Parliament seems to be very successful on such issues this week. It makes me want to mention—I will not sing it, because I cannot sing—the great song that Annie Lennox and Aretha Franklin sang, “Sisters are doin’ it for themselves”. Perhaps that should be the title of debates this week.

I should thank the gentlemen who are here for coming along, too.

I fully support the motion and congratulate everyone who is involved in the campaign—members have mentioned various universities and so on. I do not want to repeat what other members have said and lots of things that I wanted to say have already been said. From the speeches, from the work that has been done in the background and from the evidence on the subject, there is no doubt whatever that sexualised images of women—whether we are talking about pictures of topless women on page 3 and in lads mags or indeed lap dancing and the general portrayal of women and young girls—objectify women.

We have talked about Women’s Aid and the objectification of women and I absolutely take on board what Sarah Boyack said about the problem going far, far deeper than we are led to believe.

When I was on holiday I saw the T-shirts that she described on wee kids who were two or three years old, and there are stores on the high street—I will not say that they are upmarket stores—that sell bras for kids as young as six or seven. There is something pretty wrong with society if not just women but young girls think that the only way in which they can be successful is by looking like a page 3 model.

Christian Allard suggested that we should celebrate the activities and achievements of women. Sarah Boyack talked about teaching. Many women here are lawyers and so on. Why can we not celebrate those things in newspapers and magazines and give young women a positive image to look to? The issue lies not just in page 3 but in education. We must educate young women that women are better than that. They are not an object, a body to be looked at by men.

When I am on the train, subway or bus, and I am sitting next to a man—or sometimes a woman—who happens to be reading *The Sun*, if they turn to page 3 I feel not just embarrassed but angry, because someone might be there with kids, who are also looking at it. What does it say about our society that it is A-okay for somebody to read a newspaper, which is supposed to educate people, in which there is a picture of a topless woman? It says that women are objects. I think that it was Alison Johnstone who said that the women on page 3 tend to be young and white with nice figures. That says to young women that that is the only way in which they can be successful.

I make a plea to *The Sun*. It has a real opportunity here: it could be one of the first newspapers in the country to say, “No more page 3. We’ve moved beyond that. We’re in the 21st century and we’re going to dedicate a page to women’s achievements.” That would say something not just to young girls but to women. It would also say to the media industry that we can celebrate women for what they are and what they have achieved and not because they have breasts, can appear on page 3 of a newspaper and look what they might call sexy.

I would say to the editor of *The Scottish Sun*, as Jackie Baillie has done, that if he is smart and wants to do something, he should be the first to move things on and take page 3 away. He should celebrate the fact that page 3 is no longer needed and say, “Here we are, celebrating the achievements of real women. We will give a positive message to young women in this country that they do not have to be topless models to get on in the world.”

I congratulate Jackie Baillie once again on securing the debate.

17:52

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing this important issue to the chamber. The opportunity to discuss the issue must give many parents relief that someone cares. I give special thanks to Jackie for securing the debate.

There has been a lot of debate recently regarding our young having easy access to inappropriate materials. In September, a leading retail chain banned lads mags from its shelves after the publisher refused to put them in sensitive, modest bags. Last month, Channel 4 aired its thought-provoking documentary "Porn on the Brain", which looked at the effect that the availability of pornography is having on our teenagers. In Westminster, the idea of pre-set internet filters to protect our children has been debated. It is a very live debate and is happening all over the place.

However, what we are not achieving is the goal, particularly in relation to *The Sun*. I worry that the casual acceptance of what is essentially porn in family newspapers is harming our children. When a young boy sees his father reading *The Sun*—I use *The Sun* as an example, but I hasten to add that it is not the only one—it normalises the idea that one of the main purposes of women is as sex objects. Looking at naked women and commenting on them becomes a normal activity, which is okay because dad does it. That in itself speaks volumes.

Even more disturbingly, young girls see that it is okay to pose naked for pictures because it is in the paper at home. They see it regularly and they do not feel intimidated. How can that not twist the minds of our children? How can it not make them confused about what is and is not appropriate? Why are steps being taken to eliminate searching by children for inappropriate materials when they can find such materials at home? One of the questions that I take on board—Christian Allard alluded to it briefly—is: how do we feel about our family members' pictures ending up in the newspaper?

We have aspirations around equality, dignity and nationhood. Such pictures in our newspapers do us little credit. If the newspaper editors are not prepared to listen to reason, we need to take positive steps by boycotting newspapers such as *The Sun*.

It is shameful for a newspaper when its editor is told by our young that enough is enough. That is fantastic. I am really proud of our young people who took the initiative, and I am proud that they took the initiative before we did. I genuinely wish them every success in what they are trying to achieve. I am sure that the Scottish Parliament will

do everything to assist them and that it will be one of the first organisations to take steps to cancel that newspaper if it continues to produce such photographs.

17:56

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): As other members have done, I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing the motion before Parliament. It is pretty rare to sit in the chamber of the Scottish Parliament for nearly an hour and to hear so little to disagree with. I thank members very much for that.

Other members have acknowledged that page 3 of *The Sun* is by no means the only example of a trend and tendency that we are identifying in the media and wider culture. In its written submission to the Leveson inquiry, the organisation Object provided examples of sexualisation or demeaning articles about women from *The Sun*, *The Daily Star* and the *Daily Sport* from a single week in November 2011. Leveson concluded:

"all three titles contained what can only be described as objectifying material. All three included numerous articles with no other purpose except to show an image of a scantily clad or topless woman ... all three included articles which appeared to eroticise violence against women."

Page 3 of *The Sun* is by no means the only example of the issue, but Sarah Boyack, I think, described it as the prime example. There is something about the context of it—it is not only about the content. It is a form of expression that seems to expect men who look at it to respond with a blandness in sexuality. In reality, many men respond—as I always have—with a frisson of discomfort. It is important that, as part of a campaign to persuade *The Sun* to drop page 3, many men express that discomfort and state why they feel it.

Later on in his report, Lord Leveson addresses the issues that Jackie Baillie and others mentioned around Clare Short and others having campaigned against page 3:

"she was described by The Sun as 'fat', 'ugly' and 'jealous of beautiful women'. When the Rt Hon Harriet Harman proposed legislation ... in 2010, she was described as a 'harridan' and a 'feminist fanatic' on a 'furious rant'."

When Lynne Featherstone raised the same issues,

"she was described as a 'battleaxe'."

Leveson concludes that paragraph by saying that

"Describing the female critics of Page 3 as fat, ugly, jealous, feminist fanatics, harridans, and battleaxes goes some way to proving their point."

That is very well put.

When reading some of the online comments that are critical of the no more page 3 campaign, it

is easy to find the same tired old arguments that we have seen over many years: “It’s just a bit of harmless fun”, or “You’re only jealous.” Many members have demonstrated—through evidence of a connection to serious acts of sexual violence, or of the driving of attitudes that inform a countless myriad of thousands upon thousands of smaller examples of everyday sexism, whose cumulative impact is just as important in our society—that it is not harmless fun.

Other arguments focus on the idea that critics are anti-sex. People say, “What’s wrong with seeing naked bodies?” and “It’s celebrating beauty.” As others, including Alison Johnstone, have said, page 3 highlights and promotes only one fixed, narrow, rigid and quite unusual form of body; it celebrates only a narrow concept of what constitutes beauty.

As someone who would hate to be described as anti-sex, I want to live in a society that is comfortable and confident in expressing a range of attitudes about sex, sexuality and—yes—eroticism, as part of human nature. However, I want to live in a society that does that with honesty and which recognises the diversity of real sexuality and real human beings in all our forms of beauty. Page 3 undermines that idea.

Page 3 of *The Sun* and other expressions like it in our media try to narrow, confine and police sexuality to an unusual and unnatural form. That is one reason why we should unite—I am glad that we have done so—in trying to persuade *The Sun* to drop the tradition and to consign it to the dustbin of history, as Jackie Baillie said.

18:01

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing to the chamber the important issue of the sexual objectification of women. As members have said, it has been a week of important members’ business debates that have brought us together.

I thank all members for their positive, insightful and constructive speeches. Although the issue is serious, the contributions have also often been humorous. Sometimes, using humour is a good way to make a point.

I was struck by Annabel Goldie’s description of how ridiculous it would be for women in other jobs to be portrayed in such a way; that made the point well. I particularly liked Christian Allard’s suggestion of replacing page 3 with a page that promotes positive stories about women. I also liked Alison Johnstone’s reminder about the lack of women on the sports pages. Our national women’s football team is having a hugely successful world cup campaign, and I want more

to be written about that in the back pages of our newspapers.

The Scottish Government believes that achieving gender equality is one of the key building blocks that are required if we want to create a more successful Scotland. The routine reduction of women to their appearance—or a particular appearance—or to a combination of body parts is a barrier to achieving that aim.

As members have said, it can be easy for people to laugh off page 3 as a harmless bit of fun, to tell people not to buy the paper or to argue that, at the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen, people can access a huge amount of more explicit and violent images on the internet. However, such views ignore the fact that page 3 forms part of everyday sexist behaviour, which affects the lives of women in Scotland daily.

Like all the members who are here, I applaud the work of the no more page 3 campaign. In just over a year, it has managed to encourage thousands of women and men to take a stand against negative, demeaning and limiting portrayals of women.

Our commitment to tackling gender discrimination and all forms of violence against women has been demonstrated in a number of ways, although there is always more work to do. One of the key strands of the approach that we have taken is to address negative portrayals of women in the media.

We know that one of the principles enshrined in the new framework of press regulation is that it remains for newspapers themselves to determine their content. That framework has received cross-party support.

The decision of the Privy Council to approve the royal charter on press regulation is an extremely welcome one and, following the Scottish Parliament’s unanimous decision to support the charter earlier this year, we have secured amendments that ensure that it properly reflects Scottish circumstances.

I am sure that everyone here would agree that getting the framework right for establishing an effective system of independent self-regulation of the press, including cultures and practices, is an important step forward. In my view, getting a framework that can properly respond to concerns about the portrayals of women in the press is the most important priority. Of course, Fiona Hyslop continues to take forward that work.

Those measures are essential because we do not want our young people—as many have said during the debate—exposed to a culture that repeatedly tells young women that they are sexual objects and that tells young men that it is

completely acceptable to perceive young women in that way. As a mother of a young daughter, I want her to grow up in a society that does not portray women in that way. Many others have spoken similarly about the impact of having daughters; it is a powerful tool in changing many men's attitudes as well.

I was very impressed by the porcupine campaign. It is an innovative project that is supported by the women's support project and the Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust. It is run by a group of young people who aim to give real, honest advice to their peers about the porn industry.

Last week, I had the pleasure of meeting two young people from the campaign who have been involved in some peer research into young people's experiences of and exposure to pornography. It is a significant piece of work because young people are increasingly being bombarded by pornography—largely online. That includes extreme pornography, which can have a negative impact on young people, their perception of sex and what a healthy relationship is. Sarah Boyack touched on that point as well.

The findings of that research are currently being written up. I very much look forward to seeing those findings and, more importantly, to discussing with the campaign what more we can do.

As a Government, we take the protection of children and young people extremely seriously. It is an offence to publish indecent material and to possess material that depicts acts of extreme violence of a sexual nature. Although regulation of the internet is a reserved matter, we have established a group on child internet safety—with representation from a wide range of sectors—to discuss issues that relate to online safety, and we continue to work to increase understanding among parents and children about the risks of internet use.

I want to put this evening's debate into a wider context that includes our debate on domestic violence last night. As I am sure that members will be aware, the Scottish Government is currently developing a strategy in partnership with others for Scotland to tackle violence against women. It will be the first such document in Scotland, and it will shape the way in which we tackle violence against women in the years ahead.

We will continue to recognise the need and demand for intervention services that provide support for women and children who are experiencing men's violence, and to work with men who use violence. However, our strategy will emphasise the need for an increased focus on prevention and early intervention, and it will reinforce the links between all forms of violence

against women—from domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault to honour-based violence—and commercial sexual exploitation.

We know that women experience a spectrum of violence and that many women experience many forms over their lifetimes. In Scotland, we are exceptionally lucky to have a wide range of active and engaged individuals and organisations that are working to further the protection of children and young people and to ensure that tackling violence against women remains at the top of the public agenda.

Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust, Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland will, in collaboration with the National Union of Journalists, be hosting the inaugural write to end violence against women awards in the Parliament next week, which is another step forward. The awards aim to raise the standard of media reporting of violence against women and gender inequality in a bid to lower public tolerance of both, and they are well timed to follow this debate.

That is a positive development, because we need to make connections with those in the media who also believe in positive portrayals of women and to make common cause with them. I know that there are many who want to change the media reporting that perpetrates damaging stereotypes of women and myths about violence against women, and we need to highlight high-quality reporting too.

We also need more women in the media. The fact that there are so few women in the front line in the media is very visible, particularly in this place, and that needs to change.

Elaine Smith: Does the minister agree that it is somewhat astonishing that the media—in popular soap operas, for example—cannot show women's beautiful breasts feeding babies if the nipple is on show, and yet we can have all those breasts everywhere else?

Shona Robison: That point is well made. The situation that Elaine Smith describes is part of the bizarre nature of a morality that is uncomfortable with women's bodies feeding babies but has no difficulty with page 3. We are continuing to fight to overcome those issues.

Dealing with such issues requires a cultural shift. We must work towards that together, as the Scottish Government cannot change things on its own, despite—as I have outlined—all the work that we are doing. We need members on all sides of the Parliament to come together and join with the women and men out there in progressive Scotland who want to make those changes.

It is good that, not only in this debate but in last night's debate, women and men across the

political spectrum have said essentially the same thing. It shows that we are in a good place in Scotland in that respect and that we can display leadership among all parties in making the cultural changes that will mean that we will look back on page 3 in years to come as pretty old-fashioned and of its time as we move forward to a different, progressive Scotland.

Meeting closed at 18:12.

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