



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 24 June 2014

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 24 June 2014

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection, and our leader today is the Rev Graham Daniels, the general director of Christians in Sport.

The Rev Graham Daniels (General Director of Christians in Sport): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

For a Welshman living in exile in Cambridge, addressing the Scottish Parliament is a moment in life that I am unlikely to forget. I hope to add it to a catalogue of fond memories, which includes an entry in the Guinness book of records for the 1983-84 football season, when my football team, Cambridge United, achieved the record for all football at the time—in English league football at least—of playing 31 games in a row in the second division between October 1983 and March 1984, drawing four and losing 27. I played in them all. It really hurt at the time but—here is the thing—I have laughed about it so many times since then with pals who were in the team of shame.

That is why I love sport. It tests your character while building community. It makes life so much richer.

Maybe today will prove as long standing a memory as the annual prize day in the upper sixth, when the headteacher sent me from the stage because I refused to stand for prayers. As a young man, I was a convinced atheist. I was so proud to be a martyr to the cause and went home pretty proud, apart from a very sharp retribution from my mother.

However, I bumped into a boy from school the next day and he challenged me and said, “You’re all show, Daniels, but have you ever actually read one of the Christian gospels?” I had to confess that I had not, and it took seven or eight years of thinking about these things to come to the conclusion that God had revealed himself to his world through Jesus Christ. As a young adult, I became convinced that the Christian faith was not just a matter of taste but a matter of truth. That is why I love the Christian gospel. It can surprise you. It can turn your life around.

It is my honour this afternoon to open the meeting by addressing you as a Christian in sport. I spent the morning in Glasgow, preparing with the

churches there for the Commonwealth games. Many people in this great country have a Christian faith. Many people in this great country have a huge passion for sport. A significant number of people in this great country combine a passion for sport with a love for Jesus Christ. May Scotland continue to be a country that cherishes and nurtures both those things as it looks to its future.

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-10440, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out revisions to the business programme for this week.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 24 June 2014

after

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Support for Armed Forces and Veteran Communities in Scotland

insert

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Appointments to the Scottish Fiscal Commission

followed by Membership of the Regional Chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

(b) Wednesday 25 June 2014

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

7.15 pm Decision Time

(c) Thursday 26 June 2014

delete

followed by Final Stage Proceedings: City of Edinburgh Council (Portobello Park) Bill

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Partnership Action Continuing Employment (PACE)

and insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Update on Polypropylene Mesh Devices

followed by Final Stage Proceedings: City of Edinburgh Council (Portobello Park) Bill

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

4.30 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Teachers (Criminal Convictions)

1. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on reports that people with serious criminal convictions are teaching in schools. (S4T-00747)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The Scottish Government is determined that appropriate steps be taken to ensure that our children are safe and secure and that parents have confidence in the arrangements that are in place for safeguarding their children.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland has been an independent body since April 2012, and it is for the GTCS to satisfy itself about the credentials of teachers who work in Scotland. It is important that the GTCS keep its procedures under review, to ensure that parents can be confident about the safeguards that are in place.

Liam McArthur: The minister will be aware that figures reveal that, since 2007, around 400 staff who have criminal records have been teaching in our schools. Although a number of the convictions were for offences that have nothing to do with the staff's roles as teachers, a number will cause concern among parents, pupils and the wider population. Some offences are of a sexual nature and some relate to assault. Notwithstanding what the minister said about the independence of the GTCS, is he prepared to consider discussing the matter with the council, to ascertain whether the rules need clarification so that certain offences result in debarring of individuals from the teaching profession?

Dr Allan: Liam McArthur is right to regard the issue as worthy of serious discussion. I sought information from the GTCS, which is independent of political control. It is important to put the figures that the member mentioned in some context—without in any way reducing a vital issue to figures. There has been discussion in the press about there being around 400 criminals, including sex offenders, working in our schools. I sought the figures from the GTCS: in 2011-12, 105 out of 113 cases that were dealt with related to road traffic offences, such as speeding; and in 2012-13, 146 out of 158 cases related to road traffic offences.

I do not want to trivialise road traffic offences, but it is worth saying that, in that two-year period, which is the only period for which reliable figures exist, only two cases related to convictions for sexual offences. Again, I do not trivialise such offences, but neither case involved a child or a

non-consenting adult. One case was to do with an incident in 1966, when the teacher concerned had had sex when they were 17, in contravention of what was then the law.

We should take the whole issue extremely seriously, and the GTCS does so, but it is important to put the figures in context.

Liam McArthur: I thank the minister for that clarification. When we discuss such issues, it is entirely sensible to put the figures in context. We are talking about a small minority, in a workforce that does excellent work with our children and young people. Nevertheless, there is concern about a small number of incidents, one of which relates to an assault that led to a community service order, which was running while the individual remained in the profession. Notwithstanding the independence of the GTCS, will the minister commit to further discussion with it about whether the rules need to be tightened slightly, in light of the figures?

Dr Allan: It is for the GTCS to bring forward new procedures that it wants to introduce.

I hope that I have reassured the member that some of the figures that are in circulation have tended towards giving an inaccurate impression of the situation. The GTCS and the Government take child safety extremely seriously, and I think that the 71,000 people in Scotland who are registered with the GTCS do so too.

Developing Scotland's Young Workforce

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment, Angela Constance, on developing Scotland's young workforce. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:09

The Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment (Angela Constance): I am grateful for the opportunity to set out the Government's initial response to "Education Working for All! Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce Final Report", which Sir Ian Wood presented to me earlier this month. I fully welcome the report, and I share without exception its ambitions for young people, employment and prosperity in Scotland.

I know that we all support the positive vision for Scotland's young people that is evident throughout the report. I record my thanks to Sir Ian and the commission, and to all the people who contributed to their work, for presenting such insightful, pragmatic and clear recommendations.

When we asked Sir Ian to lead the work some 18 months ago, the Government was anticipating the need to address youth unemployment in the context of a more positive economic outlook. We presented the commission with an extremely challenging remit in asking it to explore how we might develop a modern, responsive and valued vocational training system, and how we might emulate the labour markets of the best-performing European countries.

In recognising the need to make most effective use possible of the skills of all our young women and men, I asked the commission to consider in particular how all young people could benefit from education and employment regardless of gender, ethnicity, or disability.

I was delighted to receive the report and its 39 recommendations, which represent a coherent, practical and powerful set of ideas about what more needs to be done to align our education system firmly, and for the long term, with the needs of the economy. The report's treatise for further change and improvement is inarguable in my view, which is why we are embarking on a campaign to develop Scotland's young workforce, taking the report's recommendations as our starting point.

Our ambitions for economic growth will not be realised without higher levels of employment among young people. We acknowledge the scale of our ambitions and the radical reduction that is required if we are to reduce the rate of youth unemployment to among the lowest in Europe, so the Scottish Government's goal is to reduce youth unemployment in Scotland by 40 per cent by 2020. Today I will set out what the Government will do to take immediate action on the young workforce and to work towards that goal. I will return later to the role of our partners.

As Sir Ian Wood said, developing the young workforce demands a culture change from all parts of the education and training system, and from employers, young people and those who influence them in the medium term. We have a world-class higher education system in Scotland; our young people deserve a vocational education offer of the same quality and value. The report recognises that the Government's education, training and employment policies and programmes, including curriculum for excellence, college reform, and employer support measures, have established the right platform on which to create a world-class vocational education system that is valued by, and valuable to, our young people.

As the commission's final report says:

"The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence in primary schools and in S1-S3 is already making a difference as a new approach to teaching and learning is helping pupils to develop many of the skills and attributes they will need to be successful in their working lives."

Of course, there is more that we can and will do to act on the report now.

A key feature of a world-leading vocational education system is that it is shaped by employers and meets the needs of industry. I can announce today that I will make an initial £1 million available for the establishment of industry-led invest in young people groups, which will make the crucial links between employers and education that will, in turn, improve opportunities for young people. We will work with local authorities and other partners to develop those groups.

Strong and committed employer leadership will be the key to successful implementation. To achieve that, we will seek to work with a number of established groups, including those in Glasgow, Renfrewshire and Edinburgh that the commission highlighted. In the parts of the country where such groups do not already exist, we will work with local employers to support the establishment of new groups, in partnership with existing organisations and service providers.

I fully agree with the report's recommendation that employers should be publicly recognised for the contribution that they make to developing

Scotland's young workforce. The Government is working with Investors in People to develop an investors in young people award, which I expect to be in place soon.

I turn to how we will further develop training opportunities for Scotland's young women and men. Our modern apprenticeship programme stands out as an exemplar of an employment-based vocational training offer, and I want it to expand, flex and focus to help us to achieve even more for our economy and for all our young men and women.

This Government has committed to creating more MA opportunities by expanding the programme to 30,000 starts a year by 2020. Today, I announce further improvements to the modern apprenticeships programme, building on the recommendations from the commission's report.

As we work with Skills Development Scotland to implement our expansion plans, we will deliver the report's recommendations on modern apprenticeships, which will include offering more higher level MAs, and developing pilots for advanced apprenticeships, including to graduate level, thereby encouraging more MAs in the crucial science, technology, engineering and maths subjects.

I will also look to SDS to begin pilots for foundation apprenticeships. That will see SDS work closely with schools and colleges to develop more structured pathways from the senior phase of schools, where young people will be able to combine their general education with elements of work-based learning. Foundation apprenticeships will provide a practical grounding that will help to prepare young people for future apprenticeships, employment or further study.

I am pleased to announce that, in August, the first pilot of a foundation apprenticeship will begin in partnership with Fife College for school pupils who are taking engineering. That is an exciting development and one which will see the principles that are set out in the commission's report made real for a number of young people in the coming months.

The campaign to develop Scotland's young workforce is also a hearts-and-minds campaign to transform the view of what vocational education offers in terms of engaging learning and desirable employment prospects. Young people and the people who guide them should have access to high quality and current advice about the labour market and routes into that market. Better careers guidance tools will, in line with the report's recommendations, be developed to inform young people and their parents about future labour

market opportunities and the skills that they will need.

SDS will work with Education Scotland, local authorities, the unions and, importantly, employers, to develop services that will be designed to inspire and challenge young people's career aspirations, informed by labour market intelligence.

The final area that I will address is equality. I was keen that the commission's work should explore, in depth, problems around access to vocational opportunities. The report delivers that with an ambitious set of recommendations, which have been widely welcomed by a number of equalities groups.

Everyone in the chamber should acknowledge the disappointing figures on equalities that are contained in the commission's report. Despite making significant progress in increasing the proportion of women who have benefited from the MA programme from 27 to 41 per cent, it is clear that tackling occupational segregation must remain a vital priority.

The report recognises the difficulty in changing the perceptions and culture that can drive the behaviours of young people and employers. In order to make progress, we must develop coherent approaches that look at all stages of the pathways to work.

Across the approaches, I have asked to see renewed focus on the needs of different groups of young people—in particular those who face the greatest disadvantage and barriers to good training and work. We will work quickly with Skills Development Scotland and the expert groups to develop action plans that will build on the good work that is under way.

I expect SDS to lead work to improve opportunities for the groups that are underrepresented on the MA programme. That will include encouraging young women and men to consider career options in non-traditional sectors, and supporting careers coaches, parents, carers and teachers in challenging and breaking down gender and cultural stereotypes.

It is important that Skills Development Scotland develop specific plans to address the gender balance in certain frameworks, and to increase participation by minority ethnic young people, young people with disabilities and care leavers. The action plans will help to ensure that all young people can secure real and lasting equality of opportunity.

In very large part, achieving our ambitions for young people is about focusing our existing resources in the most effective way. However, to kick start this important activity, I am allocating an

additional £3 million to Skills Development Scotland to progress the work on modern apprenticeships, careers and equalities with immediate effect. Education Scotland will also receive an additional £500,000 to support action on developing the young workforce.

On the basis of those early actions, this Government will lead a concerted effort, jointly with local government, to develop Scotland's young workforce. As ever, early intervention is crucial. That means action that is very often focused on young people who are still in the school system. Consequently, the development of Scotland's young workforce will be a joint endeavour between us and partners in local government.

Many partners are involved in acting on the report's recommendations—in particular, local government; the Government will work in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities over the coming weeks to plan for implementation. Together, we will develop detailed plans over the summer, which we will publish in the autumn, as we proceed to develop our 2015-16 budget plans. We have already made it clear that the resource implications of that effort will be taken into consideration in the development of our budget, and I look forward to sharing those developments with Parliament over the coming months.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): We welcome the cabinet secretary's statement on the important final report of the Wood commission, and we welcome her announcement that she will make detailed plans over the summer. I look forward to debating them with her after the recess.

I have met Sir Ian Wood since publication of the report, and I want to put on record the thanks of the Labour Party to him and the members of his commission for their work and their commitment to youth employment, which is one of the most critical issues that our communities face.

There is much in the report that we welcome. We welcome the renewed focus on, and rehabilitation of, vocational training, which will no longer be seen in Scotland as the Cinderella option but will take its rightful place as a valued, respected and prosperous option for young people who are planning their work and their careers. I particularly like Sir Ian's recommendations that school pupils get more work experience and that there be more intense relationships between schools and colleges.

According to the Scottish Government's own figures, youth unemployment has fallen by 25 per cent since the cabinet secretary was appointed. That leads me to ask her why we have such a modest target of reducing youth unemployment by

40 per cent by 2020. If youth unemployment has already been reduced by 25 per cent, why is she supplementing that by just 15 per cent? To me, that seems to be quite a modest target. I think that we should be seeking to eradicate youth unemployment.

My final point is about our colleges. The recommendations in the final report are underpinned by the success of our colleges. We have had many debates in Parliament about underfunding of our colleges. The cabinet secretary pledged to provide £12 million on the report's publication but, as far as I can see, only £4 million has been allocated. Will the rest of that money be spent on our colleges?

Angela Constance: I thank Ms Marra for her supportive comments, particularly those that she made about the value and importance of vocational training. It is imperative for the future of our young people and for the future of our economy that, in tandem with our world-class higher education system, we have a world-class vocational training system.

I say that because of what we have learned from other European countries. The European countries that have the lowest levels of youth unemployment—those that have maintained youth unemployment at the same level or have reduced it, despite the global economic recession—are all countries that have well-established vocational training systems that are highly valued by employers and in which employers have an active role.

In relation to the 40 per cent target, my understanding of the commission's work is that, as I have done, it has looked at the best-performing European countries. At present, Scotland has the ninth-lowest youth unemployment rate in Europe. I concede that youth unemployment remains far too high—I am sure that that is a point on which we can all unite. The 40 per cent figure is illustrative of what we would need to do if Scotland were to become one of the top three or five best-performing European economies.

I reassure Ms Marra that we have not dampened our ambition one bit. We can unite around the fact that we want to eradicate youth unemployment, although we might have a difference of opinion on how best to do that.

I would certainly rather see this Parliament have a fuller range of job-creating powers. That is one aspect, but in terms of the here and now of the report, I very much hope that we can work together as we develop the implementation plans.

Ms Marra is right that £12 million has been allocated to kick-start our work to progress the Wood commission's recommendations. I have allocated £4.5 million of that today. What I now

want to do—I have started this—is work with our partners in local government, colleges and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council to discuss how we might utilise the rest of those funds. Those very important discussions have commenced and will continue over the next few weeks. We will, of course, report back to Parliament on them.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

In the one minute that I have, I welcome the statement and the proposals, and put on the record the Conservatives' support for Sir Ian Wood and his commission. It would be helpful to get an update on the careers guidance tool, which is to help parents understand better the merits of vocational education.

How can we track the progress of people who engage in vocational education, as was recommended by the commission through the new senior phase benchmarking tool? I very much welcome the additional levels 4 and 5, but as the cabinet secretary correctly stated, only 10 females did level 5 in the past year, while 114 males did so. How will that situation be addressed? Finally, like Jenny Marra, I would like to know whether the colleges will get their fair share.

Angela Constance: I am grateful to Mary Scanlon for her support. I know that she has tracked the work of the Wood commission from its very early days and has attended and participated in a number of events with stakeholders, which is certainly appreciated.

In terms of the work and funding that I have announced today, it is around implementing the recommendations in the report with regard to earlier careers advice, information and guidance. We must, of course, do that in full partnership with local government; anything in and around schools requires very close partnership working. I am very keen that as we engage with our partners, Government agencies such as Skills Development Scotland are funded and ready to proceed with the recommendations about earlier careers guidance, because that is certainly something that chimes with me. We must get the right information to young people prior to their making subject choices.

In terms of the equalities agenda, we really need to start engaging with young children while they are at primary school. Many people would argue, with regard to the work that my colleague Aileen Campbell does on the early years, that there is work to be done on equalities even earlier in order to break down the crucial barriers that exist.

In essence, SDS will be primed to engage on earlier careers advice, and it is developing national resources and tools that can be used in primary

schools and, crucially, with parents. I attended Forth Valley College yesterday and heard about the great work that it does, not only in engaging with and advising young people in that area on vocational opportunities, but in selling a message to parents as well. I feel that parents are absolutely crucial to the agenda, which is first and foremost about our young people. We cannot do without those who support our young people, including teachers in schools and colleges and employers, but we also need to ensure that the right information gets to parents.

Some work will be done around an occupational outlook that will take labour market information and information from skills investment plans and translate it into—if you like—simple and digestible language so that we can get information quickly and easily to the people who are helping young people with their choices and informing their opinions.

I know that time is short, Presiding Officer. I want to say that we have had many debates about how to improve the quality and participation of various young people, but the crucial thing about our modern apprenticeship programme is that it works. We know that it leads to sustainable employment, so there is an increased onus on us all to ensure that, irrespective of gender, ethnicity or disability, more young people, including those from care backgrounds, can get access to that opportunity. There is a wide range of recommendations, which take a life-stage approach that considers what is happening in schools, SDS and the colleges and makes us all accountable for that. Of course, we will all have to report back in due course.

The Presiding Officer: If we could have shorter answers, cabinet secretary, that would be extremely helpful. That goes for the questions, too.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I am particularly pleased to see the report's plans for schools and colleges to join employers in sustained, fruitful partnerships, which will be to their mutual benefit.

There are already employers in East Kilbride that are interested in those ideas. The same must be the case in many other places. Has any consideration been given to fast-track pilot projects for companies that are already concerned about skills shortages and that very much want to encourage local people into employment? That would be an excellent way to spearhead this very exciting initiative.

Angela Constance: Yes, indeed. Employers are absolutely crucial to this agenda. The hearts-and-minds campaign, which involves persuading young people and their parents about how their

career prospects will be enhanced by pursuing vocational training, is imperative.

The hearts-and-minds campaign also seeks to engage with employers. Many of them realise the value of young people in their workforce and the economic case for investing in young people. Given the nature of some of the employers in Ms Fabiani's constituency, she might be interested to know about some of the early progress that we are making, in particular with the pilots for advanced apprenticeships. These career-level apprenticeships are likely to have an engineering focus, which might be of interest to some of the employers in Ms Fabiani's area.

There is a lot of interest among employers the length and breadth of Scotland in advanced apprenticeships, and my attitude would be the more interest, the better. Anything that Ms Fabiani could do to encourage that would be great.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary and I very much welcome the content of her statement. I also put on record my gratitude and that of the Scottish Liberal Democrats to Sir Ian Wood and his colleagues, not just for his accessibility to MSPs throughout the process, which Jenny Marra mentioned, but for the positive vision that he has set out and the clear, comprehensive recommendations that he has put forward.

One of those recommendations is around closer collaboration between colleges and schools. That makes sense, and it should be an objective. It is not new, however. It has been tried in the past but has, to some extent, been thwarted, not least because of issues around funding and problems with double funding. Can the cabinet secretary share anything with us at this stage to give us confidence that some of those problems, which have perhaps inhibited closer collaboration, can be overcome?

Angela Constance: Mr McArthur is right to intimate that there are already examples of good partnership working between schools and colleges. In West Lothian, my own area, there is a shared timetable for pupils in the senior phase.

I take the point that some measures have been tried before. What is different this time, I think, is the level of ambition, which has not been seen before either in its scale or in its purpose.

Liam McArthur is right about issues in the past around double funding. As we move forward, we are building on existing assets. The one thing that is different about schools now compared with in the past is curriculum for excellence. It was encouraging to see that Sir Ian Wood recognised the existing assets. He described our colleges as being re-energised, following the reorganisation, and he had deep praise for curriculum for

excellence. There are now two things that will set us up for good progress and success with what I would describe as renewed partnership working between schools, colleges and businesses. Both schools and colleges must now be much more outward facing as they engage with industry.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

The recent Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 has put in place significant steps to change the outcomes of people leaving care. Sir Ian Wood states, however:

“care leavers ... experience some of the poorest educational and employment outcomes of any group of young people”.

I welcome the recommendations on people leaving care. Will the cabinet secretary—I am sorry, I mean the minister—advise of any further detail on how they will be taken further?

The Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary.

Roderick Campbell: I am sorry.

Angela Constance: I am not precious about titles—Mr Campbell does not have to worry about that.

I assure Mr Campbell of my absolute commitment to care leavers. The Government and members across the chamber are committed to improving care leavers' career and life prospects. I am a former social worker—I know that I talk about that a lot—and my former career has left a mark.

The report makes a number of recommendations on care leavers, which we are discussing with our partners. I am open to suggestions and particularly to anything that recognises and deals with the delayed and disrupted education that some care leavers have. I am open to suggestions about increasing age criteria for care leavers and other groups to access incentives and support.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Labour has long argued that the Scottish National Party's obsession with hitting the target of 25,000 modern apprenticeships has come at the expense of meeting the economy's skills needs. Does the Wood commission's renewed focus on MAs at level 3 or above, tied to growth industries, prove that we were right?

Angela Constance: No—I say with respect that it does not. The Government has always tried to do three important things, which will be expanded on as we progress with implementing the Wood report. I am pleased that 62 per cent of the provision under our modern apprenticeship programme is at level 3 or above. That compares

favourably with the position south of the border and is a positive increase on the previous year.

I return to the three things that we are doing. We all know that apprenticeships work and that they provide young people with a great transition from education to work. We want to expand the numbers and to increase the focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics and on growth areas, but we need to do so in a way that increases the representation of underrepresented groups. We could quickly increase the numbers, but that might be at the expense of STEM or women. We could increase the STEM numbers quite quickly, but we would not want to do so at women's expense.

The three planks of how we will move forward are increasing the numbers, increasing the focus on STEM and growth areas, and increasing the representation of underrepresented groups. The progression is being carefully planned and needs to be implemented with care. The report talks about “a carefully managed expansion”. The Government accepts the report's recommendations on the apprenticeship programme.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):

I was pleased to note the general reference in the statement to equality issues, which are important. Will the cabinet secretary outline the concrete steps that the Scottish Government will take to improve the gender balance in subjects that are traditionally dominated by one sex, such as STEM subjects and childcare?

Angela Constance: I am glad that Ms Ewing recognises that it is important to get more women into STEM subjects; however it is also important to get more young men pursuing careers in childcare, particularly as Ms Campbell plans to expand the childcare workforce. That expansion will be much needed as we progress with our aspirations for universal childcare.

It is important to note that the report recommends for the first time that Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish funding council should report on progress that is being made on detailed action plans. We have made it clear that we need to have a life stage report that starts in schools and that there should be a range of actions and activities throughout the education system and the pathway to work.

I am very struck by current examples of pre-employability and pre-apprenticeship programmes, which seem to me to be well placed to target specific groups. However, there is no magic bullet, and Scotland is not alone. When I look around the best-performing European economies, I see that some of them do very good things on equalities

and occupational segregation in particular areas, but there is no obvious world leader in tackling occupational segregation. There is a space there for Scotland, with collective will and action, to become a world leader in tackling things such as occupational segregation.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I welcome the minister's statement and her support of the Wood commission's work.

The minister will be aware that the number of young people between 18 and 24 who become economically inactive remains stubbornly high; in fact, the most recent figures show another increase, to 129,000 this year. So far, the Government has found it very difficult to halt that rise. Which things in today's announcement does the minister expect to be of greatest benefit to those in that group who have withdrawn from the workforce altogether?

Angela Constance: The part of my ministerial statement that I did not reach was about how we will progress the recommendations in the Wood report and how we need to refresh the youth employment strategy as part of that. We know that the economy is improving now, but the big task for us is to ensure that our young people benefit from economic growth. In essence, that was partly why we desired to commission the work that Wood undertook.

Youth unemployment and those who were disengaged from the labour market in Scotland in good economic times remained too high. I talk about this a lot, but in 2006-07, in a time of economic growth, youth unemployment in this country peaked at 14 per cent. We need a world-class vocational training system that establishes better pathways to work for all our young people when the economy is in good times and bad times.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): What steps is the cabinet secretary taking to ensure that the expansion of modern apprenticeships is properly aligned with the skills that are required to support economic growth, as Sir Ian Wood recommended? How does she see the introduction and development of an industry quality and improvement regime that contributes to the development and promotion of higher-level modern apprenticeships, which she mentioned, and the development of pilots for advanced apprenticeships?

Angela Constance: I hope that I outlined some of that in my statement. As a Government, we certainly accept Wood's recommendations around the modern apprenticeship programme.

Education Scotland has an important role in the quality assurance of the job aspects of apprenticeships, and it is certainly involving more industry specialists. Having a range of good-

quality apprenticeships and access to apprenticeships and enabling people who would not otherwise get access to the pathway to an apprenticeship are important, and having foundation apprenticeships in schools is very important in incentivising businesses to take on apprentices. Much of the work can be done in schools and our education system to prepare people for the employed status apprenticeship.

On the advanced apprenticeships, there is a really important message that vocational education is challenging and is not just for young people who have not done as well in their highs as they had hoped. Vocational training and education are for young people of all abilities and young people with a range of abilities.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): The Wood commission commented on the need for additional funding if there is to be longer-term growth in the modern apprenticeships programme, but sectors are facing a reduction in funding right now after a 10-year freeze in contribution rates. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that the report does not deal enough with contribution rates as they currently are, and that they should have to rise to sustain the quality of apprenticeships in future? Will she include training providers in any discussions, as they are among the major players in the delivery of the modern apprenticeships programme?

Angela Constance: I absolutely agree that training providers are major stakeholders. I certainly have discussions with them and I am happy to have more. If Ms McCulloch wants to have a discussion with me involving training providers on the Wood report in particular, there is absolutely no problem with that.

As the member will know, the contribution rates are an operational matter for Skills Development Scotland. The rates have to align with things such as the cost of assessment and training and they have to reflect the Government's economic strategy. Given the publication of the Wood report, Skills Development Scotland will have to have another look at everything in the round.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary outline what recommendations the commission has made to encourage an increase in the number of employers who recruit young people directly from education, which is currently at 29 per cent?

Angela Constance: Many of the recommendations in the report are focused on making a contribution to increasing the overall proportion of the young workforce. In Scotland, 29 per cent of employers recruit directly from education. I most certainly want that figure to increase. A crucial part of that—although not the

only part—are the invest in young people groups, which in essence will act as local campaigners and champions. Those groups have to be employer and industry led, which is why I announced today £1 million to support the local employer partnerships to help to get that work off the ground. I am absolutely committed to making life easier for employers so that they can offer good-quality opportunities to young people.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call Alison Johnstone, I say that I noted that the member came in almost halfway through the statement. I do not think that that is acceptable for any member. I remind members that you should be in the chamber from the beginning of a statement, because I promise you that, when we come back from the recess, we are going to enforce that rigidly.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I apologise unreservedly for missing the beginning of the cabinet secretary's statement.

I welcome the recognition of the importance of vocational training and increased investment in it. In Scotland, as is the case globally, rates of business ownership among women remain stubbornly low. Will the greater focus on vocational training, equality and improved careers guidance result in more young women considering an entrepreneurial future?

Angela Constance: I most certainly hope so. There is strong evidence that careers information, advice and guidance that bring to life earlier the world of work can encourage that. Employers, including female employers, can do much to promote entrepreneurial activism and aspiration among our young people. Although the Wood report is not about women in business as such, it would be credible to suggest that there will be direct and indirect spin-offs.

I certainly hope, Presiding Officer, that when we come back from recess I will have learned to be much briefer.

The Presiding Officer: One can live in hope, cabinet secretary.

Armed Forces and Veteran Communities

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-10427, in the name of Keith Brown, on support for armed forces and veteran communities in Scotland.

14:49

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): Recently, the 70th anniversary commemorations of the D day landings on 6 June 1944 took place in Normandy, France, with widespread recognition across generations, young and old. We have to ask why the marking of an event that took place so long ago had such a draw and such an impact and why it generated so much interest. Why is that event in our national psyche?

The events of 6 June 1944 changed the world and led, ultimately, to the end of the second world war and a much more peaceful Europe. I very much look forward to going to Contalmaison, where many members of McCrae's battalion—which included players and supporters of Hearts Football Club and other Scottish football clubs—perished on 1 July in the push on the Somme. We have seen an increase in peace since the second world war, and the sacrifice that was made on 6 June 1944 in Normandy by so many—those who died and those who survived—has always been recognised and acknowledged. Those who defended our freedoms past, present and future deserve our respect, gratitude and appreciation.

Of course, commemorations were not confined to Normandy. I was honoured to join the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the head of the Army in Scotland, politicians from across the political spectrum and veterans and their families at a reception in the great hall of Edinburgh castle. It was a genuinely enjoyable and uplifting occasion, and I met many remarkable people at that event.

The Scottish Government is playing its part in commemorating world war one, and a number of events in Scotland were recently announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs. As members will know and welcome, Stirling will host armed forces day this Saturday. It is the second time in five years that Scotland has played host to the event, and I believe that that is deserved recognition of the esteem in which Scotland is held by our armed forces community. I can confirm that a grant of £80,000 has been given to the council by the Scottish Government for armed forces day, and the First Minister will join the principal guests on the day. I will be there, too, and look forward to showing my support for

our service personnel at what is, after all, one of my local armed forces day events. I strongly encourage members to attend their local events or to come along to Stirling—I am sure that they will be impressed if they do.

In the weeks to come, the support of Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel in making the Commonwealth games the success that they will undoubtedly be will also be a testament to their professionalism and skills.

Amid all this recognition, we should not forget about the cadet forces—the Army, sea, marine, air training corps and combined cadets. They are to be found all over Scotland and are a shining example of young people at their best. I met two RAF cadets today, who displayed many characteristics of that. The United Kingdom Government has recently announced funding for the Department for Education to expand cadet forces. I support that and wish to investigate it further. I made it clear to the two cadets whom I met today—this is one of the things that cadets have asked about—that, in an independent Scotland, the important role that cadet forces play would be maintained. We would also expect them to flourish, as we value what the cadets do and what people get from the cadet forces.

Members will recall that, back in January, I announced that we would create a new Scottish veterans commissioner. There was broad support for and consensus around the creation of that post. I acknowledge the opposition, to some extent, of the Liberal Democrats and the reservations that Alex Fergusson expressed at the time. Nevertheless, the Parliament was generally supportive of the idea of the commissioner's role and I very much welcomed that non-partisan approach to discussing ways in which we can support our 400,000-plus veterans. A thorough and detailed process has been followed to get the right appointment. The advertising process elicited considerable interest and a strong field of candidates. I believe that the commissioner will be in a pivotal position to improve the ways in which veterans access public, private and voluntary services. What will tie all the commissioner's work together is how effective that proves to be, which is why I will ask for regular reports from the commissioner. Those reports should lead to action and, crucially, better services and support for our veterans. We are nearly at the end of the appointment process and expect to make an announcement shortly.

Often, in our roles, we learn of the problems faced by those who come out of the military or who returned to civilian life some time ago. Before any examination of perceived problems, I make it clear that there are more than 400,000 veterans in Scotland and the overwhelming majority of them,

including the 2,000 or so who return to live in Scotland each year, do so without any real difficulty. They return to civilian life with skills, experience and a sense of civic responsibility that is entirely admirable. They are assets to their local communities and we are the richer for having them as neighbours. I discussed the need to convey positive messages about veterans with Lord Ashcroft, and he agreed that that is the centrepiece and the main theme of the report on his veterans transition review, which was published in February.

It is important to nail some myths and to portray an accurate picture of veterans. For example, the Scottish prison population is not and never has been dominated by veterans. The latest Scottish Prison Service bulletin says that only 200 of the prison population—just under 3 per cent—self-identify as being veterans. That stands against an average total of more than 8,000 prisoners in custody in Scotland. Even if other recent surveys are taken into account, the number rises—if it rises at all—to only 600 at most. That position is consistent with various studies on the prison population in England and Wales. Crucially, the numbers are far lower than some occasionally lurid headlines would have us believe.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I agree with the minister that people can overegg the issue, but does he acknowledge that the number of veterans in prison last year in Scotland rose by 40 per cent, and that we should not be complacent about that figure?

Keith Brown: I take the point. I refer to the figures that I have just mentioned and also to the fact that the veterans first point service is doing some important work on the issue just now. That should give us some more detail, which would be welcome all round.

Not all veterans are homeless, and not all homeless people are veterans. Most veterans live in their own homes, with parents, spouses, partners and children. I welcome initiatives such as Dumfries and Galloway Council's policy of giving veterans extra points on the allocation scale, something that was made possible by legislation that we introduced.

Making use of its capacity-building contract of £200,000 over three years, which it received from the Scottish Government, Veterans Scotland is undertaking a mapping study of approaches to housing allocations and is investigating ways in which its own common housing register for ex-service charities might be adopted more widely. I will look to Veterans Scotland and the commissioner to work together to come up with innovative ideas, proposals and, of course, possible solutions.

Addressing the needs of veterans who experience mental health problems is also a priority. There is a wide variation in the reported prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder by the media and others, and such reporting is often not based on evidence. A 2010 study by the King's centre for military health research in London on the consequences of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan for the mental health of the armed forces reported prevalence of PTSD at around 4 per cent. However, I do not underestimate the impact of PTSD, and I do not trivialise the difficulties that are faced by those who live with it. Of course, PTSD rarely presents in isolation, and veterans will experience mental health problems similar to those that are experienced by the general population—most commonly depression, stress and anxiety.

Responding to those needs is just as important, and we are taking action through the delivery of a range of commitments in our national mental health strategy. We also continue to contribute £1.2 million a year to fund a commissioned service in partnership with the national health service and Combat Stress for the provision of specialist mental health services, including an intensive PTSD programme. We continue to fund the Combat Stress community outreach services across Scotland, to the tune of £200,000 a year, and are providing the veterans first point service with £200,000 this year for its one-stop shop that offers help and assistance to veterans and their families.

The ranks of the unemployed, which are too high by any measure, are also not disproportionately filled with veterans. When service personnel leave the military, the vast majority go on to other successful careers. However, our ex-servicemen and women can also face a number of barriers that affect their successful transition back into civilian life. Of course, as it can with anyone else, unemployment can have a detrimental effect on a number of aspects of the lives of veterans. Disability, a lack of transferable skills, poverty and housing problems can all be linked to difficulties with accessing employment, which is why we need to address and support this area. The lack of awareness of some veterans of the transferability of some of their skills is another issue that we must address.

It is widely agreed that early intervention is key to a successful transition, with potential barriers identified and targeted. Remploi has concerns that veterans are not utilising the help and specialist support that are available, or recognising the areas in which they need that help. We are considering how to address that problem and target those who are most in need, so that we can help them to get back to work.

Employment support is available for the most vulnerable ex-servicemen and women through the new service, employ-able, which has been created by Poppyscotland and the Scottish Association for Mental Health. All 32 local authorities are working together to develop local support services that link into the armed forces covenant, while working with key service providers. Successful transition and integration into employment rely on easy access to services and on relevant help being available.

The Scottish Government has also been making progress elsewhere. On health, we implemented the recommendations of the Murrison report, "A Better Deal for Military Amputees", providing £2 million for a new national specialist prosthetics service. On housing, through grants we have facilitated large housing construction projects for veterans at Cranhill in Glasgow and in Carnoustie. On community justice, we have worked with Police Scotland on the appointment of an armed forces and veterans champion who has hit the ground running. Everyone who now enters a police station will be asked whether they are a serving armed forces member or a veteran and those figures will be shared with the Scottish Government.

Veterans organisations, many of which are represented in the gallery today, are an invaluable asset in the work that the Scottish Government undertakes. They are at the coalface of support to veterans. They provide a wide variety of services and support, which I have witnessed across the country and which never fails, alongside their inventiveness and tenacity, to amaze me. That is why the Scottish Government supports veterans organisations. The Scottish veterans fund has distributed around £600,000 to more than 70 projects to date, and I have increased the annual amount available by 50 per cent, to £120,000. I have provided Veterans Scotland with capacity-building funding of £200,000 over three years, and I look forward to continued joint working with Martin Gibson and his team, who are now better resourced than ever to take forward the work that matches their ambitions.

Our approach to improving outcomes for veterans must be based above all on working in partnership with those organisations. A concern raised about the commissioner's appointment was about the need to ensure that the position in no way supplants or undermines the work of our veterans organisations. It absolutely should not do that, and the veterans organisations are aware of that, as the new commissioner will be. I will look to the veterans commissioner to take forward an approach of partnership working with the veterans organisations as he or she goes about his or her work, and the Government seeks to pursue that approach, too.

Our armed forces personnel and veterans have earned our respect and support and, most definitely, their place in our communities. I have said this before, and I hope that it becomes a cliché, because it is certainly very true: when somebody joins the armed forces, they make an extraordinary commitment. They commit themselves to undertaking things that other people would not be asked to do. Given the extraordinary nature of that commitment, they are entitled to expect an extraordinary commitment from us, through the state and its various bodies. They put themselves in danger's way and we must recognise that. They are not looking for advantage; they are looking for the removal of any disadvantages that they may have as a result of the service that they have undertaken, and we wish to do that.

On that note, I am happy to move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the debt of gratitude that it owes to the armed forces, past and present; recognises the valuable skills, experience and sense of civic responsibility that ex-service personnel bring to society on returning to civilian life and welcomes wide involvement, including of the Scottish Government, in commemorative events marking the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings and the Scottish Government's ongoing support for Armed Forces Day, and notes progress with the appointment of a new Scottish Veterans' Commissioner and the aim of encouraging new working relationships between the commissioner and ex-service charities that help the armed forces community, including veterans, access the highest level of services and support available.

15:02

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I very much welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate on the subject of armed forces veterans and the vital support services and charities that operate in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom. I would like to acknowledge, as the Government motion does, the debt of gratitude that Scotland owes to those who have served in the defence of freedom and to put on record the continued support that we, on this side of the chamber, give to our armed forces personnel and the 400,000 veterans in Scotland. I also echo and support the minister's comments on the support that there was on the ground for the veterans who returned to celebrate 70 years on from D day.

We are committed to continuing to work on a cross-party basis to ensure that our veterans and their families receive the support that they need and deserve. In particular, we recognise that our service personnel often need help with the transition to civilian life—particularly in finding housing and employment—and we recognise that those who leave the service can bear physical and psychological scars for many years after their service ends.

Being a member of the armed forces, particularly during times of conflict, is immensely stressful—stressful beyond anything that we can imagine. However, that stressful situation creates a level of commitment and an intense bond among service personnel that is unique to our armed forces.

I could only listen and try to take it on board when I heard from a soldier who had served in Afghanistan what it was like to come under fire, and what the impact on their battalion or regiment was when it lost a member of its own, who was as close as any family member.

I can only imagine how isolated someone must feel if they are discharged from the armed forces into society alone, with no family support, having had such a close bond with the comrades they fought with and possibly lost in combat—going from living in such close quarters with people they considered family, and eating, sleeping, working and socialising with the same close group, to being discharged into a community of strangers who tend not to understand military life and the bond between people that it creates.

As the minister said, the majority of servicemen and women make a successful transition to civilian life. The veterans we have in Scotland are not a problem; they are an asset to communities. The minister was quite right to flag up that a lot of veterans have transferable skills that they do not realise they have, which become assets to companies and communities.

For the reasons that I mentioned earlier, it really is not hard to see why some veterans struggle to adapt and reintegrate, which can put a massive strain on family life as well as on those without family.

It is vital that the advice and support services are in place for former service personnel to adjust to living in mainstream society. We must support plans to co-ordinate and deliver support and advice services from the public, private and voluntary sectors for ex-service personnel, their partners and their children.

There are too many fantastic organisations providing support and advice to ex-service personnel and their families to mention and do justice to them all, but I want to mention some. The first is Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employers, which I have spoken about before, which gives people experience of what being an armed forces reservist involves. SaBRE gives advice and information on the extra skills that a reservist can bring to an organisation or company, to try to boost the likelihood of companies employing reservists. It provides weekend training courses for employers so that they can see exactly what skills a reservist picks up in their training and

what they can bring back to their organisations. There is an open invitation from SaBRE to any MSP who would like to go on any of those training weekends. I would be happy to pass on the details.

We must continue to support organisations that do tremendous work in the community for former service personnel across Scotland, including the Royal British Legion. The legion provides practical care, advice and support to armed forces personnel, ex-servicemen and women of all ages and their families. It runs the poppy appeal annually. Recent appeals have emphasised the increasing need to help the men and women who are serving today, as well as ex-service people and their dependents. The legion also assists any serviceman or woman to pursue their entitlement to a war disablement pension. Every year, up to 200 ex-service people in Scotland are represented at war pensions tribunals.

Just across the road from the Parliament we have Scottish Veterans Residences, which provides residential accommodation to more than 300 ex-service people and their partners and has helped more than 60,000 veterans throughout Scotland since it was established.

The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association Forces Help, whose Lanarkshire branch covers my region of Central Scotland, offers financial, practical and much-needed emotional support to current and previous members of the armed forces and their families through services such as forcesline—a support service independent from the chain of command, which serving members of the armed forces can go to in confidence that they will receive the support and advice that they need. It also runs a forces additional needs disability support group and organises children's holidays run by volunteers that offer experiences and activities to which some of the children would not normally have access.

Erskine is the leading provider of care for veterans in the country. I am happy to be wearing my Erskine tie for today's debate. Helpfully, it came through to the office about a week ago. Erskine provides fantastic services within the community.

There are things that individual members of the Scottish Parliament can do to assist armed forces veterans and their families. We could take up that offer to go on one of SaBRE's training weekends. On Friday, with the support of the Royal British Legion, Citizens Advice Scotland, Erskine, North Lanarkshire Council and Lanarkshire armed forces associations, I am holding a veterans surgery in Cumbernauld to mark armed forces day and to bring those groups together to give advice and support to any veterans in the Lanarkshire area.

Keith Brown: I note the point about support that the member has just made, and his earlier reference to training weekends. I am to meet Anna Soubry, a UK defence minister, next week and I will ask her whether she will allow the armed forces programme that Westminster runs for its members to be extended to the devolved Administrations to give their members more experience of the armed forces. Is that something that the member supports?

Mark Griffin: I would certainly be happy to come together with the minister to see whether we can add cross-party support for the extension of that scheme.

I know that the interviews for the new veterans commissioner were held recently and I hope that whoever is appointed will be able to build on the tremendous work that is already being done by the Government in our veterans community.

I will close as I opened by acknowledging the debt of gratitude that Scotland owes to those who have served in our armed forces in defence of freedom. We will support the Government's motion at decision time. As always, we are happy to work on a cross-party basis to support veterans in Scotland.

15:12

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Yesterday I attended, as did many colleagues, the flag-raising ceremony in my nearest town to mark the start of armed forces week. There was not a huge turnout, but it was impossible not to be moved by the pride, the passion and the camaraderie that were still so clearly evident in the group of veterans who were in attendance as they drew themselves smartly to attention as the flag was raised. The passion, pride and camaraderie are surely totally justified because it is almost entirely thanks to their selflessness, courage and commitment that we all now enjoy a comparatively safe existence in today's world, as the minister acknowledged in his opening speech.

It is therefore absolutely right that the motion begins by acknowledging the debt of gratitude that we owe our armed forces—past and present. That the minister himself is numbered among them simply adds to the quality of the depth of understanding of, and interest in, armed forces and veterans issues that Parliament has shown since its earliest days.

As I said in the debate on 14 January, that interest has been continued in a largely exemplary fashion by this Government, and in a way that has been welcomed by the armed forces and veterans community. I hope that that level of support and interest will be continued by Parliament and

Governments, of whatever political colour, for many years to come.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Further to the minister's intervention on Mark Griffin, does Alex Fergusson share my interest in having an armed forces scheme in the Scottish Parliament, and does he share my support for looking at the idea on a cross-party basis? I participated in the scheme in the House of Commons and it was excellent.

Alex Fergusson: I hope that such issues, above all, are ones on which we can share interest across the parties. I endorse David Stewart's feeling.

Those who in the past put their lives on the line for our security, and those who are doing so currently, deserve no less than our full support. I am quite sure that we all agree on that; everything that the minister said in his opening comments suggests that, for the time being, that will be the case.

I acknowledge the fact that the majority of ex-servicemen make a seamless transition back into civilian life. However, many need, and will continue to need, our support and interest. One of the remarkable outcomes of recent conflicts has been the incredible response of the public. I have no doubt that that response has been prompted and, in some ways, promoted by the fact that the media can now bring the stark reality of modern-day warfare virtually into our homes in a graphic and previously unimaginable way. Indeed, the sight of returning forces and, worse, the funeral cortèges of those who have paid the ultimate price has undoubtedly awoken the conscience of the public in a remarkable fashion.

Literally hundreds of charities have been established in recent years. Although that is for the very best of reasons, many of them to a degree overlap in what they seek to achieve. The result of that is growing duplication of effort that leads inevitably to competition between some charities in attracting public willingness to donate to veterans-related causes.

That point about willingness to donate highlights a further potential concern. There is little doubt that, as our involvement in overseas theatres of war reduces and the accompanying media exposure declines, the attention and interest of the general public will inevitably decline with it. That gives us a potential problem because—as I have learned all too clearly through the work of the cross-party group on armed forces veterans that I convene—often the problems and issues from which our veterans suffer do not manifest themselves until several years after those veterans are discharged. We could face declining public empathy and financial contributions,

alongside a growing requirement for help and support, as many of the issues that will come to light for today's serving personnel become evident over the next 10 to 20 years.

Many of the larger charities already recognise that. I was pleased to host a seminar in Parliament just a few weeks ago at which the Royal British Legion Scotland—now known as Legion Scotland—brought together several of the main players in the voluntary and charitable sectors to discuss its plans to restructure and work with others in partnership to provide support in the future. Others are, no doubt, doing the same.

That brings me to the role of the veterans commissioner. As the minister mentioned, I had a few reservations about that role, but I am happy to admit that many of them have dissipated somewhat as I have thought about the role more carefully. I hope that he or she will be able to take steps to ensure that the huge number of armed forces and veterans-related charities do not duplicate their efforts. If the generosity of the public is to be used to maximum effect, it is essential that any duplication of effort be addressed.

My colleague Alex Johnstone will speak later of the need for Government, local authorities, health boards and others to work together to ensure maximum effectiveness. I suggest that the commissioner might well have a role to play in that process. Although all our local authorities and health boards have dedicated armed forces champions, there is a clear need for a more joined-up approach across the public sector, as there is in the third sector, if we are to maximise support for our armed forces veterans. Some of what is needed is pretty basic; for example, many local council switchboards do not even know who the veterans champion is—if someone rings up to get him, they cannot. It is not rocket science.

The armed forces themselves still have a lot to do in ensuring that their serving personnel are fully prepared for discharge and for the intense dose of reality that often accompanies the return to civvy street. A lot has been done in recent years within the armed forces to improve that facet of service, but a lot more could and should be done. If everyone—the Ministry of Defence, the UK and Scottish Governments, our local councils, health boards and the voluntary sector—meets the coming challenges successfully, we will be able to be as proud of the lifelong support that we offer as we are of our armed forces personnel and veterans to whom we offer it. That must surely be our goal.

I am pleased to support the motion.

15:18

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): The run-up to armed forces day is a poignant time to have the debate. Commemorations will take place in communities throughout the country to mark anniversaries that are specific to our Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force and the exceptional sacrifices that were made in the first and second world wars. We should support our servicemen and servicewomen, past and present, full-time and reservists, which is why I am pleased to support the minister's motion.

I particularly note progress with the appointment of a new Scottish veterans commissioner to ensure

"the highest level of services and support available"

for our armed forces community. I understand that that ambassador will work with services charities, local authorities and health boards to identify any areas and public services that could provide greater support to veterans, and help to shape future policy developments and opportunities.

Progress in that regard has been made across our public services. On health, the Scottish Government has put in place a raft of measures to remove disadvantages that members of the armed forces community face in accessing the national health service. There is priority NHS treatment for veterans and serving and retired reservists who have service-related conditions and—this is important—the Government has ensured that veterans can receive state-of-the-art prosthetic limbs, which are equivalent in standard to those that the defence medical services provide.

The minister mentioned specialist mental health services. Services have been enhanced by the introduction of a six-week intensive post-traumatic stress disorder treatment programme, through a partnership between NHS Scotland and Combat Stress. That is important, because although the effects of PTSD can be felt immediately after the trauma, the condition can manifest itself a long way down the line, so it is important that it is being recognised.

It is also important to have an armed forces champion in every NHS board in Scotland. We have such champions in local authorities, but I recognise what Alex Fergusson said about it not always being apparent that specialists are there to help to co-ordinate services. I hope that when the veterans champion or commissioner is appointed, the issue will be given much greater recognition.

On housing, guidance for landlords has been revised to highlight issues that former services personnel face, and to give landlords flexibility. I remember a fairly long meeting some time ago with an organisation that deals with such things

that was concerned that allocation policies across the west of Scotland were patchy. I hope that the veterans ambassador or champion—I keep forgetting the title—

Keith Brown: Veterans commissioner.

Linda Fabiani: That is the one. I hope that when he or she is in place they can pull together that kind of thing.

On education, the Government has recognised the additional challenges that children from services families face due to the nature of their parents' postings. I am pleased that last year £180,000 was given for outreach projects that Army cadets associations offer.

On transport, the Scottish Government extended the concessionary travel scheme to include HM forces veterans who have mobility problems.

On justice, I remember that Angela Constance, before she was a minister and then a cabinet secretary, talked a lot about her experience as a prison social worker and how former services personnel in prison who were suffering from PTSD and other mental health issues were not getting attention. The presence of a veterans in custody support officer in each prison in Scotland is an excellent initiative, which will be supplemented by the work of the Scottish veterans prison in-reach group.

The support does not all go in one direction. The motion refers to the

"valuable skills, experience and sense of civic responsibility that ex-service personnel bring to society on returning to civilian life".

That is true. The organisations that do excellent work to support our armed forces personnel are generally headed by ex-service people, as are the Army, RAF and sea cadets organisations in many of our constituencies—we have strong cadets organisations in East Kilbride—which offer excellent opportunities for young people.

Many other voluntary organisations are headed by people who have military connections. Global charities are often manned by people who use the skills and international experience that they gained in the services to help other people all round the world. I have unlimited respect for Mission Aviation Fellowship, which was founded by a former military pilot and involves many ex-service personnel, who work on the ground and fly to difficult parts of the world to help other organisations to take support and succour to people in need.

I recognise that our services personnel have valuable skills, and I acknowledge the debt of gratitude that we owe them. I support the motion.

15:24

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): If I am a little slower than usual in rising to speak this afternoon, it is because I had the pleasure—if one may call it that—of leading out the Scottish Parliament's football team against the RAF on Friday in a game to mark armed forces day.

Members may be interested to know that following last year's parliamentary triumph, the RAF this year reasserted its hold on the trophy. I hope that the minister and my front-bench colleague Mark Griffin feel suitably guilty at the gaps in our defence that were highlighted by their absence.

That annual fixture has, in addition to allowing us as parliamentarians to show our own support, highlighted the support—and indeed the affection—for our armed forces that exists among the wider community, and the footballing community in particular. Football clubs that have supported the fixture in the past include Kilmarnock, Hearts and Alloa Athletic. The latter club, as the minister will know, pursues a policy of granting serving military personnel free entry to home matches.

This year, we were grateful to Raith Rovers for hosting us at Stark's park in Kirkcaldy. As some colleagues may know, Raith Rovers have marked 2014, as the centenary of the great war, by launching a new away strip. It is emblazoned simply with the word, "Remember", and rather than displaying the traditional team colours, it is designed in the green and black of the hunting Stewart tartan that was worn by Sir George McCrae's battalion.

Hearts fans will be well aware of the service and sacrifice of their players who signed up for the original sportsmen's battalion in late 1914. Hibs, Falkirk and Dunfermline players joined players from Hearts, as did seven players from Raith Rovers, three of whom were subsequently killed at Passchendaele and elsewhere on the western front. Ten other players from Raith Rovers also enlisted between 1914 and 1918. When one sees those numbers, one thinks about whole teams of our fittest, strongest and most talented young men signing up in defence of our country. It is difficult to do justice to the courage and sense of duty and service that those men displayed.

I am struck by the desire among those of us who still to this day enjoy the freedoms for which those soldiers fought and died to do what we can to recognise the sacrifice that was made in the past and to support the armed services personnel who are currently serving.

This weekend, all three services, accompanied by the cadets and by veterans organisations including Legion Scotland, paraded in Rouken

Glen park in East Renfrewshire, and local families turned out in their hundreds to watch the flag-raising ceremony and the march past. Every member who has spoken so far in today's debate has described in similar terms the events in their own communities, which reveals the strength and depth of that support.

As well as the act of remembering, what can we do to show support? I will give just one example. I am hosting a reception in committee room 1 tomorrow evening—I was going to say that it would be after decision time, but that has been postponed, so it will take place during decision time—for a new scheme that has been set up to support and provide legal support to serving and retired soldiers. The scheme was the brainchild of Wing Commander Allan Steele, who is a constituent of mine. With the strenuous efforts of his wife Linzie, he set up a scheme called AFLA, which stands for armed forces legal action. The scheme has brought together a network of solicitors to provide discounts and advice for soldiers, both serving and retired, and has as its motto, "For Services Rendered", which is a fitting summary for this debate. That is one simple and straightforward—but, I hope, very practical—example of what we can do.

Retired soldiers sometimes need considerable support to function in civilian life, but that support, whether it is for mental health or for finding employment, is not always available. I believe that both the UK Government and the Scottish Government can do more in that regard. For example, Poppyscotland recently found out that, of the 189,000 working-age veterans in Scotland, some 28,000 are out of work. That is twice the unemployment rate among the general population. As members have mentioned, it can be extremely difficult to account for the important and useful skills and experience that soldiers accumulate while serving, which makes finding civilian employment that much more difficult.

My colleague Jim Murphy, when he was shadow secretary of state for defence, launched a very beneficial scheme to encourage businesses to sign up to a veterans interview programme. The scheme recognised that the skills that are gained in the armed forces are transferable, but often come across better in an interview than in a standard application form. Many businesses, including John Lewis, O2, Celtic, Greggs and Centrica, signed up to the scheme and offered the first step on the ladder for many ex-soldiers. Such schemes are inexpensive to run but make a big difference. I invite the Scottish Government to see whether we can do more in that area.

SAMH and Poppyscotland highlighted a similar situation in the recent launch of the Employ-Able service, which provides local support, training and

practical advice to assist veterans in their search for work. The service involves one-to-one and group sessions covering topics including interview techniques, and offers targeted support where necessary.

We have talked about the wider issue of the health and wellbeing of former soldiers. The minister mentioned the Prime Minister's special representative on veterans affairs, Lord Ashcroft. What I found most interesting from Lord Ashcroft's recent research was that nine out of every ten people thought it common for former soldiers to have severe mental health problems and for them to commit suicide. That misconception has a negative impact on the likelihood of former services personnel being hired for jobs or functioning normally in society.

The ideas that soldiers have no skills, that they are all mentally unwell and that they are unfit for certain jobs need to be challenged. By challenging the stereotypes, we can provide the correct support that those men and women need. Our communities expect us to do that, parliamentarians want us to do that and our armed forces need us to do that.

15:31

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I join members in paying tribute to those who have served their country, many of whom have made the ultimate sacrifice in order to bring peace to the United Kingdom. The fact that the peace here has been so enduring is the ultimate tribute to their sacrifice. The peace that we enjoy on these shores, which we have perhaps taken for granted, is a recognition of the armed forces' professionalism in the second world war and previous wars.

Over the years, as the armed forces have reduced in size, our personal contact, awareness and understanding of them have reduced, too. In the past, it was often the case that a person would not just read about soldiers' deaths in the papers or hear about them on the news; rather, it would be their family member who had passed away while serving their country. These days, we are a little bit more remote from that.

In addition, because of the conflict in Northern Ireland, serving soldiers, airmen and sailors were reluctant to wear their uniforms. That also made the armed forces a little bit more remote from our daily lives. We created armed forces day to bring them back into our lives and to make them part and parcel of what we do—not only so that we can show our appreciation for them and what they do for us, but so that they can see how much we value them. There is great value in armed forces

day. I, too, will be at Stirling on Saturday to recognise the contribution that they make.

Keith Brown: On making more people aware of the armed forces generally, does Willie Rennie agree with Mark Griffin, David Stewart and Alex Fergusson that the armed forces parliamentary scheme—Willie Rennie will be aware of the scheme from his time at Westminster—could be usefully extended to this Parliament and other devolved Administrations, so that we can, on an individual level, get that familiarity with the work of the armed forces?

Willie Rennie: The minister can count on my support for that. I did not join the armed forces parliamentary scheme; I was distracted by other matters. I was part of the Liberal defence team and a member of the House of Commons Defence Committee. Perhaps I will get a second chance to take part in the scheme this time—if they will have me, which is probably the more important question.

We were a bit reluctant about supporting the creation of the Scottish veterans commissioner mainly because we were concerned that it would just be another appointment in the absence of real change. We are looking for significant change from this Parliament and that change is needed in a number of different areas. First, we want change on veterans. Many members have referred to that this afternoon. We also want changes on serving personnel, whether for full-time personnel or the increasing number of reservists that there will be in the coming years, which poses significant challenges of which the Scottish Government is, I am sure, fully aware.

I will run through a number of the issues on veterans. This year, Combat Stress has reported a 57 per cent increase in the number of referrals. That could be a good thing—it could indicate that former servicemen and servicewomen are overcoming stigma and are, because they recognise that service-related stress is not something to be embarrassed about, more forthcoming about getting the support that they need. However, it could also indicate that there is a greater problem and that a greater number of people out there need our support. We need to dig down into the numbers and the motivation of people to find out why that is happening, but it is clear that there is still an issue. That significant increase in referrals to Combat Stress will need to be recognised in the form of support.

I have been to see Veterans First Point, which has an office at the far end of Princes Street—if the office is still there. It does excellent work. It is a one-stop shop that signposts people to other services. It is not badged as a mental health service, but it helps people who need mental health support or any other support. It is a good

service, and the Government deserves credit for introducing it.

I would like the minister to provide more information on how effective the priority treatment scheme for former servicemen and servicewomen who sustained injuries while they were serving has been, and what extra support they will get. Is that just a service that is available, but which no one takes up? Have people benefited from it? I would like to hear more.

I will join Ken Macintosh at the AFLA reception tomorrow night. I think that the AFLA scheme, which provides legal services support for veterans, is great.

Perhaps the minister could also give us an update on employability. It is quite clear that not all veterans are victims, but it would be possible to think that that is the case from reading the newspapers. It is not. I know many veterans who have gone on to get well-paid jobs and who have contributed greatly to society and to employment. The charity Sorted! is a collaboration of different organisations that have come together to provide an employability scheme. I would like to find out what the Scottish Government is doing to work with it.

The fact that servicemen and servicewomen are forced to move around the country on different deployments creates a real problem for them in getting proper general practitioner support and dental services, and in being able to get their children into the right schools at the right time, when their children are uprooted. Does the Government know whether that is a significant problem? If it is, how is the minister addressing it?

I must give credit to the Scottish Government, which I think is working well with the UK Government on the issue. It was a sticky situation at the beginning, but good work is now being done, and I pay tribute to the minister for that.

15:37

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Like a number of colleagues across the chamber, I participated in two armed forces events in Hamilton on Saturday. One of them—the flag-raising ceremony—was organised by the local council. The other, which was a coming together of all the organisations across Lanarkshire that support one another, was organised by Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire. Talking to some of the veterans who were there and hearing their stories made me think how hard fought for our freedoms are. On the march past, I always seem to be more taken by an RAF uniform—I think that that is because my father was in the RAF—but perhaps the minister would prefer

me to say that a Royal Marines uniform is much nicer.

I want to talk about some of the organisations that were involved in the event. It was an awareness-raising event in the centre of Hamilton. Lots of people were there, and the fire service was there as well as members of the armed forces. Among the organisations in attendance were Help for Heroes, Women's Aid, SAMH, the citizens advice bureau and the armed services advice project, which is a specialist project that is supported by Poppyscotland.

Members will be aware that I spoke about the armed services advice project—which is normally known as ASAP—in a previous debate, when the pilot ran in Hamilton. It delivers an information service, gives advice and supports members of the armed forces community and their families. It has a presence throughout Scotland. As well as having a helpline, it does face-to-face casework and covers nine regions: Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire; Edinburgh and Lothians; Falkirk; Fife; Inverness, Moray and Nairn; Lanarkshire; Renfrewshire; Stirlingshire and Clackmannanshire; and Tayside. I urge any MSP to go and see the work that ASAP does in their area. It does signposting and many of the things that have been called for in the debate. If that can be continued, it will only be to the benefit of armed forces service personnel and their families.

The ASAP service started on 1 July 2010 and has had a total of 4,745 individual clients, which is a huge number. The clients' financial gain from the service ensuring that they get the benefits and payouts that they are entitled to now sits at £3,241,000, which is a return of £3 for every £1 of funding that the project has received over the period. The people who come to the project have complex support needs and are seen on multiple occasions. Some of them have issues around debt and addiction, and the advice staff work on many complicated situations. Approximate figures for the issues that the project has dealt with over its four years show that 39 per cent were about benefits, 19 per cent were about debt, 8 per cent were about housing, 10 per cent were about financial issues, including grant applications, and 7 per cent were about employment. Members can see from that the work that the project does and the wraparound care that it provides to ensure that people get the right support.

Interestingly, the figures on referrals to the project have changed slightly. The total figure for self-referral and word-of-mouth referral is now 40 per cent, which is where we would want it to be because that is sometimes the best type of referral. Referrals from CABx are now at 11 per cent and those from SSAFA are at 8 per cent. The referral figures from the Veterans Welfare Service,

the Royal British Legion Scotland, Poppyscotland and the armed forces welfare service are around 2 or 3 per cent. The 40 per cent self-referral figure probably comes from men and women veterans who are transitioning out of the armed forces talking to each other, which can only be a good thing.

I lodged a motion in Parliament a few weeks ago about the new ASAP service—I hope that all members have taken the opportunity to sign the motion—that involves working with Police Scotland. Alex Fergusson mentioned that 40 per cent of veterans land in prison. I hope that the new service will prevent some of that.

Alex Fergusson: Will the member take an intervention?

Christina McKelvie: Sorry. Have I got that figure wrong?

Alex Fergusson: Just a little bit. If I may, I will correct what the member said. I drew attention to my understanding that the figures show that there was a 40 per cent increase last year in the number of veterans going to prison.

Christina McKelvie: I thank the member for that clarification; I must have picked him up wrongly when I was taking my notes. I apologise for that. However, the new service will address the people whom Alex Fergusson spoke about.

ASAP is working with a wide range of organisations, including Police Scotland, which will now help people to access the ASAP helpline. Police Scotland deals with people in a wide range of situations, but the biggest issue is keeping people safe. Some veterans come to the attention of the police because of issues in their community, but it can become apparent that they have mental health issues or suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. The police can now refer such people directly to the ASAP service, which can only be a good thing. Early indications are that the service is working extremely well.

In this year of the 100th anniversary of the start of the first world war, I finish by quoting from a statement to the House of Commons on the declaration of war. Prime Minister Herbert Asquith said:

“If I am asked what we are fighting for I reply in two sentences. In the first place, to fulfil a solemn international obligation ... an obligation ... of honour, which no self-respecting man could possibly have repudiated ... secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle ... that small nationalities are not to be crushed, in defiance of international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering Power.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 6 August 1914; vol 65, c 2079.]

I think that the armed forces commissioner will uphold all those standards and support and respect all our service personnel.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I call Annabelle Ewing, to be followed by Richard Baker. We are very tight for time, so speeches should be up to six minutes, please.

15:43

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I, too, am very pleased to be called to speak in the debate. Like Alex Fergusson, I speak as a member of the cross-party group on armed forces veterans, where I have taken a particular interest in the welfare of our armed forces veterans since my election to this Parliament, just as I did when I was a member of the Westminster Parliament. I was involved there in a number of defence-related issues, including the widely supported but, sadly, subsequently unsuccessful campaign to save the Black Watch and the other Scottish regiments. Sadly, that campaign fell on deaf ears with the UK Government of the day.

It is fitting that we are having this debate today, in advance of armed forces day being held in Stirling on Saturday, and in this year when we remember in particular those who fell in the first world war in the fields of Flanders and beyond. What a terrible price was paid by so many millions of young men, and what a terrible impact the war had on communities the length and breadth of Scotland and of every country across the European continent and the wider world.

As the minister said, we also look back this year, on the 70th anniversary of the D day landings, to the bravery of those who came ashore on the beaches of France to liberate a continent. There really are no words properly to describe those heroic actions and the sacrifice involved. Each of us can ensure, however, that those who have served their country are treated with the utmost respect and dignity when they leave the armed forces. Here in Scotland, it is a matter of some pride that we have a dedicated minister for veterans to ensure that, as far as we can, with the limited powers that this Parliament has, we support the 400,000 or so veterans in Scotland. As we have heard, the Scottish Government has made significant contributions to Veterans Scotland and, through it, to a number of important ex-service charities to support their excellent work.

The 2012 “Our Commitments” report—to give it its full title, “Our Commitments: Scottish Government Support for the Armed Forces Community in Scotland”—provides, inter alia, for a co-ordinated approach across Government to planning for and delivering devolved services for our armed forces community. As Christina McKelvie said, it is important that we include within that the families of members of our armed forces and of veterans, as they, too, play a very significant role, albeit not on the front line. There is

provision in the report for regular meetings with Veterans Scotland, and there is assistance to NHS boards and other public sector providers.

There are recurrent themes in the work of the cross-party group, one of which concerns health matters. It is very welcome that there is provision for priority NHS treatment for veterans and both serving and retired reservists with what is defined as a service-related condition. At recent cross-party group meetings, there has been discussion about the parameters of "service-related condition", in particular where mental health issues present; they might present not immediately, but some time down the line. Perhaps the veterans minister could look at that area in conjunction with his ministerial colleagues in the health portfolio to see what can be done to ensure that the implementation of the policy is as clear cut as it can be for all concerned.

Reference has been made to other excellent provision for veterans in the health field, including specialist mental health services, in conjunction with the NHS and Combat Stress, and the NHS armed forces champion in each NHS board. A leaflet has been provided to raise understanding among GPs about what it means to be a veteran and the issues that may present.

In addition to the important area of health, housing is another key area that is frequently raised at the cross-party group. I am pleased to note that a number of initiatives have been promoted by the Scottish Government, including the introduction of proposed legislation on homelessness to ensure that employment and residence connected to the armed forces constitute a local connection for the purposes of the legislation, and that there is priority access to the Scottish Government's low-cost initiative for first-time buyers and the shared equity scheme. The minister referred to the 50-home unit in Glasgow and, I believe, to developments in Carnoustie. Those are very much to be welcomed, and they will include social and transitional housing.

Welfare issues have also been raised at the cross-party group. Sadly, although veterans face many considerable challenges to do with welfare, the Parliament can do very little about that at present, as we simply do not have welfare powers, which reside with Westminster—but, hopefully, not for much longer, further to what I hope is a yes vote on 18 September.

We have heard about the veterans champions in local authorities. It might be timely to consider that again, to see what further awareness could be raised about, and access facilitated to, those champions. They do a power of work, but their role could be further enhanced and explained to the veterans community that they are there to serve.

I wish well the Scottish veterans commissioner, whoever they may be, in the new post that the Scottish Government has created to bring a greater focus to all the areas that we have discussed this afternoon. That acts as a significant marker of the Scottish Government's absolute commitment to doing right by veterans in Scotland and ensuring that they receive the help that they need. The people of Scotland would expect nothing less.

15:50

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, welcome the opportunity to recognise the contribution that our armed forces have made to our lives in Scotland and Britain today. The recent events to commemorate the first world war and the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings bring back to all of us the huge debt of gratitude that we owe to all who have served in our armed forces and what they have achieved together.

We are approaching armed forces day, which the minister mentioned. That will be an important opportunity to celebrate the crucial role that our armed forces perform today in protecting our nation as well as to recognise all that they have achieved in the past.

It is good that we can agree across the chamber on the sentiments in the Scottish Government's motion. I join others who have welcomed the progress towards appointing a new Scottish veterans commissioner. That role will be important to building new relationships between all those who work for our veterans and it will ensure that the Scottish Government can play its role in contributing to that important work.

Each year, we in the Parliament are all reminded of the vital role that is played by charities that work with veterans, through the work of Poppyscotland and the chance that we have on remembrance day to commemorate our armed forces' contribution. However, it is important that we are aware throughout the year of the work that is done by our armed forces and for our veterans.

I am sure that all of us have met veterans for whom the transition to civilian life has not been easy, for a host of reasons. For some, experiences of combat have left mental and physical scars. That underlines the importance of the support that they receive from organisations and charities that work with veterans and the need for our public services to provide the right support for veterans. I am sure that the veterans commissioner will have an important role to play on that issue.

We recognise the challenges that many veterans face, which the minister outlined, but it is also important to recognise the great contribution

to our communities that many veterans make. It is right to emphasise that. As Ken Macintosh said, stereotypes need to be challenged. A number of other members have also made that important point.

As I represent North East Scotland, members would expect me to talk about the vital role played in our community by the Gordon Highlanders. Gordon Highlanders veterans make a great contribution to our area and our communities. The majority of the regiment's ranks were made up of men from Aberdeen and the north-east, who fought on battlefields across the world. In August 1949, the regiment was given the freedom of the city of Aberdeen. Sir Winston Churchill said:

"There is no doubt they are the finest regiment in the world".

In October 2011, I was privileged to attend the unveiling in Aberdeen's Castlegate of a commemorative statue to the Gordon Highlanders regiment, which Aberdeen City Council commissioned. The sculpture of two soldiers is magnificent. It was unveiled by Prince Charles, who served as colonel-in-chief of the Gordon Highlanders and is a patron of the Gordon Highlanders museum.

The museum plays an important role in the city and a tremendous amount of work has been invested in making it the excellent resource that it is, not only as a place to visit and to learn about the Gordon Highlanders but as a centre for learning and research. It focuses on the contribution that soldiers made and it reminds us of the contribution that we must make to veterans' lives today.

I pay particular tribute to the tremendous work that has been done by Lieutenant General Sir Peter Graham, formerly commanding officer of the first battalion of the Gordon Highlanders and subsequently general officer commanding Scotland, who has been instrumental in making the museum the great success that it is. He also has a personal mission to help our veterans in today's community.

The museum is important to celebrating the history of the Gordon Highlanders, but it also offers activities for families and children and learning experiences for pupils, who can find out more about what life was like for soldiers in the Gordon Highlanders. That outreach work is important for our younger generations, as it is for all of us who have lived in times of relative peace and who have—fortunately—not had the experiences that our grandparents had, because it ensures that we understand better how that peace was secured and empathise more with the crucial role that our armed forces play today.

The work of the Gordon Highlanders museum receives fantastic support from our local community in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. It is therefore right that, on a broader level, the work of Poppyscotland, Erskine and other charities that work with veterans across Scotland receives support from the Parliament and the Scottish Government. I am pleased that the minister outlined exactly that kind of approach in his speech and that it is certainly outlined in the motion.

It is good that the Scottish Government is taking a strategic approach to that work and that we can look to progress with the appointment of the Scottish veterans commissioner so that, as a society, we ensure that our veterans have not only the gratitude that they so richly deserve from us but, crucially, the support that many of them need from our communities and public services.

15:55

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): The fairness and decency of a society can be measured in a variety of ways, not least by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens and, of course, those to whom it owes the most. Veterans are one group that absolutely comes under the latter heading. If we are honest, I am not sure that we can as a society say that, historically, we have done all that we might have done for veterans, but that has been changing in Scotland over recent years.

As we all know, Scotland has a long and proud military history, which has been shaped by the efforts of those who have served in our armed forces in the past and those who serve in them in the present. Like Christina McKelvie, I should perhaps declare an interest. Three successive generations on my mother's side served in the military, including my grandfather, who won the military cross while serving with the Gordon Highlanders during the second world war.

We owe a tremendous amount to the men and women of our navy, army and air force, and it is essential that we do all that we can to help and support them when they look to return to civilian life, whether that is at the conclusion of an extended period of service or as a result of an injury that was sustained in the line of duty. We may not always agree with the conflicts in which our armed forces were ordered to participate, but that is frankly irrelevant in respect of our duty of care to them. Having placed those individuals in harm's way and all too often subjected them to witnessing events and experiencing traumas that can leave a lasting legacy—as Alex Fergusson mentioned, that can all too often take time to fully manifest itself—we must as a society be prepared

to provide the appropriate support to them as they seek to reintegrate into everyday society.

As we have heard, there are approximately 400,000 veterans in Scotland, which is proportionately a larger amount than other areas of the UK have. That, of course, presents a challenge to national and local government. With 2,000 personnel leaving the armed forces annually and seeking to return to or move to Scotland, the challenge will become even greater, albeit that, as the minister pointed out, the vast majority of veterans integrate back into civilian life without significant difficulty.

I do not think that there is any doubting the integrity of the Scottish Government's response. Since 2008, £600,000 has gone to ex-service charities from the Scottish veterans fund, a further £200,000 has gone to Veterans Scotland to improve support for veterans over the next two years, £2 million has been dedicated to the new national specialist prosthetics service, and £1.2 million has gone on the provision of specialist mental health services. There has been a £2.3 million grant to the Scottish Veterans Housing Association to provide 50 homes in Glasgow, the concessionary travel scheme has been extended to include forces veterans with mobility problems, and, of course, there is the pending appointment of a Scottish veterans commissioner. The Government has therefore very much backed its words of support for veterans with firm action.

I am pleased to say that, at the local authority level in my Angus South constituency, Angus Council is also leading by example, particularly in housing. As the minister noted, Angus Council is building a number of wheelchair-accessible properties to be allocated to veterans in Carnoustie. The demolition of the old Camus house care home, which the minister got behind the controls of a JCB to at least symbolically commence some months ago, has paved the way for the location of 11 council properties that are to be made available to the general populace and, in conjunction with the Houses for Heroes Scotland charity, five for use by injured veterans. Angus Council has provided a third of the funding and Houses for Heroes Scotland has provided the rest. I can tell the minister that the project has progressed to the stage at which the foundations for the houses are now being laid.

That really is a project to be commended, as it integrates housing provision for our veterans within the community. The grouping of veterans' housing can offer an obvious peer-support mechanism, but it is also important that we do not in any way ghettoise that. The message that is sent out must be that those who locate to such facilities are very much part of the wider community and should be welcomed into it.

I share the opinion of the chairman of Houses for Heroes Scotland, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Callander, that the partnership that was established with Angus Council is an example to other areas of Scotland. The council has, of course, gone beyond that with the appointment of a veterans champion in the shape of the former Black Watch major Councillor Ronnie Proctor and the establishment of Veterans First, which provides contacts and advice for veterans on topics that range from housing to health, finding new employment and expanding their skill set.

In case anyone thinks that I am praising Angus Council because it is SNP led, I point out that Councillor Proctor is a Conservative and, if I recall correctly, his predecessor was a Lib Dem. That reflects the cross-party support for the veterans' cause that exists in Angus and, judging by today's speeches, in this chamber.

Angus is doing its bit, as is the Scottish Government. The unusual degree of consensus in the debate has made crystal clear the Parliament's commitment to supporting our veterans community. As the minister noted earlier this year, we cannot rest on our laurels—more can be done and will need to be done in future. However, the message that I think goes out from the debate is that the Scottish Parliament is fully aware of its responsibilities to veterans and fully committed to meeting them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):
We come to the closing speeches.

16:00

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):
This important debate falls at an appropriate time, with armed forces day only a few days away and with memories of the D day commemorations still in our minds.

I of course support the motion in the name of the minister. I add my weight to his comments in fully praising those who have served this country over generations. It is important that we do not forget the debt of gratitude that we owe to the many men and women who have served this country in military roles. We must take that responsibility seriously.

Members have spoken about the disadvantages that some people have on discharge, but we must emphasise that most veterans fit in very easily when they come out of the armed forces. In fact, many of those who choose to serve their country are the brightest and best and naturally acquire skills that they can take into the community. I know of companies that serve the oil and gas industry in the north-east that are willing to recruit at the drop of a hat anyone who leaves an engineer or signal

regiment, because they are so qualified and able to do the jobs.

I welcome the fact that the minister has committed the Government to further support for the cadet forces. My memories of Stonehaven in the late 1970s are that, at 9 o'clock on a Friday evening, there were no teenagers out of uniform. People from the air training corps, the sea cadets and the army cadet force all mixed in the square as they made their way home from the meetings on that night. I believe that the cadet forces play an important role and can play a more important role in encouraging young people to take a responsible and positive attitude towards their role in society. Only good can come of that.

The Scottish Parliament has a good record in placing a greater emphasis on veterans issues. I remain greatly encouraged by the work of successive Scottish Governments and the work of the cross-party group on armed forces veterans, which has done an excellent job of engaging with veterans organisations. In particular, I pay tribute to Alex Fergusson for his work.

In 2012, I was delighted to sponsor a reception for veterans housing charities. They are a group of organisations that have achieved so much, yet they need to learn to work more closely together. Graeme Dey mentioned that Angus Council has been heavily involved in putting together projects to provide homes for veterans. The project in Carnoustie that he mentioned exemplifies the holistic approach, which includes engaging with veterans charities and the Scottish Government. I pay tribute to Councillor Jim Miller, another Conservative, who was the convener of the neighbourhood services committee, which drove through that project in its early stages.

That leads me on to a point that relates to the important issue of co-operation between organisations. I mentioned the proliferation of veterans housing charities. The proliferation of responsibilities in providing assistance for veterans when they need it can in fact work as a negative rather than a positive.

I would like to see greater co-operation and partnership working not only between the Scottish Government and local government, but involving the NHS and the third sector, so that we can bring those activities together in a co-ordinated way. It is a safety net that we need to provide, and sometimes that safety net allows people to fall through. It should be possible, with the level of activity and support that we already have, to avoid that problem in the future. A little work could go a long way in achieving that objective.

It is vital that we do not allow our veterans to go under the radar. We must ensure that there is an understanding of what needs to be done on their

behalf. Our understanding of the issues that veterans face increases all the time, and we must do everything possible to make sure that legislation and assistance keep pace with the changing needs of our veteran population. They have done so much for us; we must do everything that we can for them.

The appointment of a veterans commissioner will prove to have been an appropriate action. When the announcement of the minister's post was made, I said that I hoped that having a minister for veterans who had such recent military experience would lead to improvements and a strengthening of our performance in that area. If the veterans commissioner is the right person in the right place, many of the problems that have been identified can be brought together and solved.

The final problem is one that I have mentioned previously—the pressure that our veterans services are going to experience in the next few years. It is a challenge of our times that, with the military withdrawal from the middle east and the removal of troops from Germany to be stationed back here, coupled with the downsizing of our military forces in some cases, the demands on veterans' support mechanisms will be at their height for the next few years. It is important that we ensure that support is made available when necessary and is tailored to deal with that bump in demand.

16:07

Mark Griffin: I close the debate as I opened it, by stating our continued support for our armed forces personnel and veterans.

It is no surprise that there is such strong support in Scotland for our armed forces personnel and veterans. That came over loud and clear in the speeches that we heard from Christina McKelvie and Graeme Dey, who spoke about their families' military background, as have other members in previous debates. I do not think that that is the exception, as almost everyone in Scotland can point to some military experience or history in their family.

That is the foundation of the support that we give to our armed forces personnel and veterans. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and we will be able to mark some of the key events from world war one over the next few years. I met Norman Drummond, the chair of the Scottish commemorations panel, who was able to outline the key dates and events to commemorate the ones with a strongly Scottish dimension, and I look forward to attending as many of those events as possible over the next few years.

Those who serve in our armed forces are asked to make massive personal sacrifices in their human rights and, ultimately, to give up their right to life in the service of the nation. It is only right that, in return, Governments and we as a nation value, respect and support our armed forces. That culminates in the annual commemoration of armistice day, when we stop to remember those who gave their lives in action so that we can enjoy the freedom that we experience today.

Members will know that I spent some time in the Territorial Army, and I have not had the same experience in any other situation in life. However, although I went through all the training that a reservist can, I did not deploy because of other commitments. I cannot begin to imagine the level of intensity and commitment to their fellow soldiers that those on the front line will have experienced.

It is hard to listen to people who have served in front-line action when they speak about some of their experiences but, having done so, it is easier to understand the sort of conditions that people often come home with. We can only imagine how isolated someone must feel when they are discharged from the armed forces after being in such stressful situations. It must be difficult for them to find themselves alone, perhaps without family, and they will miss the close bond that they had with the people they fought beside.

It is of vital importance that the advice and support services are in place for former service personnel, so that they can adjust to living in mainstream society, and that Governments continue to plan, co-ordinate and deliver support and advice services from the private, public and voluntary sectors for ex-service personnel and their families. I hope that the appointment of the veterans commissioner will achieve that and will pull together the work of Government and those voluntary organisations and charities across Scotland.

I welcome the appointment of veterans champions by local authorities. That approach is starting to deliver positive changes, as in North Lanarkshire, which has amended its housing policy to recognise the priority needs of homeless ex-service personnel and their families when they have just been discharged. I take the point that Alex Fergusson made that there is no point in having a champion if no one is able to access them, if the role is not publicised and if veterans or members of the armed forces community do not know who it is or find it difficult to make contact with them.

We should continue to support the work that is done by many charities and organisations across Scotland. We have heard many examples of that work today.

We are committed to working on a cross-party basis to ensure that our veterans and their families receive the support that they need and deserve. In particular, we recognise that our service personnel often need support with the transition to civilian life, particularly with regard to the need to find housing and employment, and that there must be a recognition of the impact that their tour of duty can sometimes have.

Another important issue that was raised repeatedly concerns the skills that ex-service personnel can bring to communities. Alex Johnstone pointed out the skills that are in demand by companies, and Linda Fabiani pointed out the contribution that ex-RAF personnel are able to make with regard to international development and aid after their tour of duty. That is not to be forgotten.

I have spoken about what MSPs can do with regard to supporting the organisations and charities that operate in our areas. I hold a veterans surgery. Kenneth Macintosh flagged up the Parliament football team's match against the RAF. I know that the trophy is no longer in the Scottish Parliament. I do not really think that that is because the minister and I were not there. I think that it is because also absent were a couple of members of Kilsyth Amateur Football Club, who would have shored up the leaky defence on the Parliament side.

This has been another good, consensual debate on the need to support our armed forces and veteran community in Scotland. I will close as I opened, by acknowledging the debt of gratitude that Scotland owes to those who have served in our armed forces in defence of freedom. We will support the Government motion at decision time. We are willing, as always, to work with the Government on a cross-party basis to support veterans in Scotland.

16:14

Keith Brown: It is fairly clear from today's speeches that there is unanimous admiration for our armed forces community, which does not surprise me. As I have said in previous debates, members should be aware of how much that level of consensus and unanimity is appreciated by the armed forces community.

As others have said, our armed forces are at the ready every day, trained and equipped to do what is necessary. They are based in our communities, they contribute to our economies and they live as our neighbours and our friends. They are an integral part of our society.

Rather than make the remarks I was going to make, I will try to respond to as many of the points made as possible. I apologise to members if I do

not respond to their points, but they should be assured that we will take them up.

I say to Mark Griffin, David Stewart, Alex Fergusson and Willie Rennie that we are very pleased about the consensus on the need to extend the armed forces parliamentary scheme to the devolved Administrations. That needs to happen for the reasons that Willie Rennie gave: we can become more familiar with the armed forces' work by experiencing it. If those members I mentioned are happy for me to do this, I will put round the letter that I will take to Anna Soubry when I make that case next week. If members are able to sign it, that would be great.

David Stewart: I strongly support the minister's view on the armed forces parliamentary scheme. As I said earlier, I had the great privilege of spending two terms with the RAF during my time at Westminster. Does the minister have any plans to meet Sir Neil Thorne, who chairs the armed forces parliamentary scheme? If not, I suggest that he meets him to talk about the costs and practicalities of extending the scheme to the Scottish Parliament.

Keith Brown: That is a very worthwhile suggestion and I undertake to look into it. Our previous representations have been made at ministerial and MOD level, but we will take that suggestion forward.

I pay tribute to Alex Fergusson and Annabelle Ewing for their work in the cross-party group on armed forces veterans. I was a founder member of the equivalent group in the last parliamentary session, and I think that it does very good work.

Alex Fergusson made a very important point about duplication among the charities. However, his concern with the appointment of the commissioner was that it should not usurp or undermine the charities' role. I take on board his point about duplication, which I know very well—there are 500-plus charities and we need to ensure that there is not duplication—but that will have to be for the charities. Rather than the Government or commissioner imposing anything, the charities can best look at what they are doing and maximise and focus their work.

Alex Fergusson: I understand absolutely what the minister says. However, might the commissioner not have a role in guiding people towards coming together to address that problem? In other words, might there not be a need for a central focus on what those very disparate and diverse charities need to do?

Keith Brown: The charities are governed by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator as much as anybody else. Alex Fergusson makes his point well, but it is down to Veterans Scotland, which is the organisation that would bring the charities

together, to take on that role. I am happy to see that happen.

Ken Macintosh mentioned the hunting Stewart tartan. He will know that our near neighbours, across at the palace, have the ancient hunting Stewart as their tartan—a very fine tartan it is.

Christina McKelvie said how attractive the air force uniform is. It is indeed very smart, but I have to say that there is nothing to compare to the Lovats and green berets of Royal Marines commandos—but I may be prejudiced in that regard.

If people want the chance to see what D day was actually like, I commend the "Band of Brothers" series, which is currently on TV. Although it is fiction, it is underpinned by the real-life experiences and testimony of people who experienced D day. It gives a very good idea of what the sacrifice that was made in 1944 was all about.

A number of members mentioned the private sector and the help that it has given. I should also mention the Malcolm Group; First Group in Aberdeen; and ViNE—veterans into new enterprises—which I visited with Angus MacDonald in Grangemouth yesterday. It is an entrepreneurial initiative by the Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce to make sure that veterans can get fulfilling careers after they leave the service. Those organisations are all worth while and they do great work for veterans in a way that is fairly understated.

Alex Johnstone said that the oil and gas industry uses veterans—including signallers—in the North Sea. I wish that I had known that as an ex-signaller in 1983—my experience is not that recent, as members can imagine. If only I had known that, the Parliament could have been spared my contributions, because I could have gone off to a career in that industry.

The North Sea sector is very important. I know from my experience in the 45 commando that the sector is often the first choice of people who leave the forces. They look for training support, diving support and things that will help them to move into that area, and we have been trying to help them with that.

Willie Rennie raised the important point about the priority treatment scheme. We do not gather those statistics, as that would be quite an administrative burden on the boards concerned. However, I will ask the NHS chief executives to look at that further, to see what we can find out.

With the appointment of the commissioner very shortly we will have a central focus for undertaking that kind of work. The underlying point is that, when we take forward these initiatives, we should

make sure that they actually work and that they are being taken up. I understand the point that is being made.

There was a very good contribution from Graeme Dey, who mentioned his grandfather's time in the Gordon Highlanders when he won the military cross. It is worth saying that none of us should underestimate what it takes to win a military cross. That exemplifies the point made by Richard Baker about the fantastic record that the Gordon Highlanders have.

I welcome the support of all parties for the initiatives that we have taken forward and the emerging consensus about the commissioner. Although these debates are fairly consensual in nature, it is absolutely right that they throw up challenges. I was happy to hear the challenges to the points about the commissioner and the concerns that it might usurp some of the role of Veterans Scotland. I have tried to allay those fears and I hope that I have done so satisfactorily. It is encouraging to see the level of consensus that has emerged, because those in the veterans community appreciate it when they see it from their elected representatives.

I have mentioned one or two organisations. One that I did not mention, although somebody else did, is Scottish Veterans Residences, which is just across the road from here and which is represented in the public gallery today. Scottish Veterans Residences and the other veterans housing providers deliver very high-quality accommodation and all manner of support that makes a tremendous difference to the lives of so many veterans.

On the proliferation of mental health issues, housing issues, unemployment or even representation within the judicial system, it is extremely important to be accurate. We can overstate the problems sometimes. If we do that, we are not doing right by our veterans. We have to be accurate about the fact that the vast majority take up viable employment and have a very successful career upon leaving the forces. It is very important to realise that. However, neither should we underestimate problems, because if we do so, there is the danger of our not providing the services that are required.

Alex Fergusson gave the figure of a 40 per cent increase in the number of veterans in prisons. That came from a freedom of information inquiry by the *Daily Record*, which has done a tremendous job in highlighting some of the issues that our veterans face. It highlighted a monthly, self-reported figure in the Scottish Prison Service statistical bulletin, which was up from around 150 veterans in 2011-12 to 200 in 2012-13. The SPS advises that it is too early to say whether any trend is underpinned by that data, as it has been

collected only since 2011 and the figures are self-reported, so it cannot yet say whether they reflect a real increase. It is an important issue and we have to continue to monitor it. The work that Veterans First Point is undertaking in this regard will add to our understanding of it.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with the military, the ex-service charities and service providers. That work is easier to undertake with the level of consensus and unanimity that we have in the chamber. I look forward to the ideas and the new thinking of the veterans commissioner. I believe that that appointment will be very well received when it is announced.

We are all working in partnership and pulling in the same direction. As we have all said, we owe our armed forces community our best efforts, our best endeavours and our best wishes. If we continue to work together, we will get to the point where Scotland becomes the best country in the world in which to be a veteran. If we can aim for that very high standard, we will do well by our veterans.

Scottish Fiscal Commission (Appointments)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-10430, in the name of John Swinney, on appointments to the Scottish fiscal commission.

16:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I am pleased to seek Parliament's endorsement of the Scottish Government's plans to establish an independent Scottish fiscal commission, as well as Parliament's approval of my nominations for appointment to the commission.

In doing so, I thank the Finance Committee for the very thorough inquiry that it held into proposals for the creation of a Scottish fiscal commission after I announced my intention to establish such a body in evidence to the committee in May 2013. The committee's report has informed the Scottish Government's thinking on the issue. I record my thanks to the committee for the role that it has played in scrutinising my nominations for appointment to the commission.

The creation of the commission is another important milestone in the journey to enhance Scotland's fiscal powers. There is widespread international recognition that independent fiscal commissions play a vital role in ensuring the robustness and credibility of a country's fiscal framework. I believe that there is similarly wide consensus across the Parliament that the Scottish fiscal commission will be a significant and welcome addition to Scotland's fiscal framework.

The commission will play the key role in providing independent scrutiny of Scottish Government forecasts of receipts from land and buildings transaction tax and Scottish landfill tax, and in further assessing the economic determinants that underpin forecasts of non-domestic rates income in Scotland. That will provide Parliament and the public with assurance about the reasonableness and integrity of the Scottish Government's tax forecasts, which will underpin a proportion of the expenditure that is to be set out in our draft budget for the first time this autumn.

The commission's remit provides a proportionate response to the relatively modest devolution of fiscal powers under the Scotland Act 2012. We will keep the remit under review, and I intend to review the commission's role in relation to the Scottish rate of income tax prior to its planned introduction in April 2016. It is my

intention that the commission's scope will expand in line with Parliament's tax-raising and borrowing powers.

I intend to propose legislation within the present parliamentary session to give the commission a basis in statute, but it will initially operate on a non-statutory basis.

I am strongly of the view that it is critical to the commission's effectiveness that it is independent of the Scottish Government, and that it is seen and understood to be so. I have taken actions to secure the independence of individual members and the structural and operational independence of the commission while it operates on a non-statutory basis.

On the independence of individual members, I willingly accepted the Finance Committee's recommendation that Parliament should have a role in scrutinising my nominations for appointment to the commission. I will also make appointments for single fixed terms. The purpose of that is to ensure that at no stage will the chair or members of the commission feel in any way restricted in the commentary that they can apply to the Government's forecasts, because they will not have to consider in any way their eligibility for reappointment for a further term in office. The fact that individuals will serve only one fixed term is a significant foundation for the fiscal commission's independence.

As I explained to the Finance Committee last week, the chair and members of the Scottish fiscal commission will be subject to a code of conduct based on the "Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies", which was approved by Parliament in December 2013. That will ensure that commission members are subject to the highest standards of conduct expected by Parliament, including procedures for registering and declaring any potential conflicts of interest.

The commission will also be structurally and operationally independent of the Scottish Government. It will provide reports to Parliament and to the public on the reasonableness of tax revenue forecasts that have been prepared by the Scottish Government. It will decide what analytical and secretariat support it requires and from where it will obtain that support. Crucially, Scottish Government analysts will not be seconded to work for the commission. The University of Glasgow will provide an independent base for the commission, and I am grateful to the principal of the university for his support in that regard. I will ensure that the commission is appropriately resourced to fulfil its functions by providing a modest budget that it can deploy to support its work. As I indicated to the Finance Committee last week, if the commission comes to me to indicate that it believes that it requires resources beyond my initial estimate of

an annual budget of £20,000, I will consider that sympathetically to ensure that the commission has at its disposal the resources to properly exercise the functions that it has been allocated.

The commission will have three part-time members, one of whom will serve as chair. I have nominated three highly respected, skilled and authoritative individuals to serve on the commission and I invite Parliament to approve those appointments on the recommendation of the Finance Committee.

I have nominated Susan Rice to serve as chair of the commission. She is a distinguished member of Scotland's business community and will bring a wealth of commercial experience to the commission. She is a chartered banker and the managing director of Lloyds Banking Group Scotland; crucially, she is also a member of the court of the Bank of England, chairing the bank's audit and risk committee, which demonstrates her ability to operate at a senior level in the private sector. Through her wide interests, she will be able to bring to the work of the commission an accomplished record of private, public and third sector service into the bargain.

I have also nominated two renowned academic economists, Professor Andrew Hughes Hallett and Professor Campbell Leith, to serve as members of the commission. Both have been instrumental in much of the thinking across the world on the establishment of fiscal commissions, which has been relevant in supporting the work of individual Governments as they have established such bodies.

Professor Hughes Hallett is jointly professor of economics and public policy at George Mason University and professor of economics at the University of St Andrews. Professor Campbell Leith is professor of macroeconomics at the University of Glasgow and, along with Professor Hughes Hallett, is an academic authority on fiscal commissions and fiscal rules.

In considering my nominations for appointment to the commission, I gave full consideration to the potential for conflicts of interest to arise or be reasonably perceived to arise between membership of the commission and other offices or roles held by the nominees. Particular attention has been drawn to Susan Rice and Professor Hughes Hallett's membership of the Council of Economic Advisers.

It is important to recall that the individuals whom I have nominated to serve on the fiscal commission are individuals with formidable and broad expertise who have been involved in multiple functions in a number of areas. They have built up those reputations and records of service based on the integrity of their actions at all times. I

have been at pains to demonstrate to the Finance Committee the very clear separation of role and function between the commission and the Council of Economic Advisers. In relation to the responsibilities of the Scottish fiscal commission, the Council of Economic Advisers will have no role or locus in scrutinising, at any stage, the Scottish Government's fiscal forecasts.

There can be no doubt that those three individuals will, together, form a strong and independent Scottish fiscal commission that can be relied on to hold the Scottish Government to account for the tax forecasts that we publish in our budget documents.

I move,

That the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's plans to establish a Scottish Fiscal Commission to provide independent scrutiny and reports on tax forecasts prepared by the Scottish Government and supports the recommendation of the Finance Committee that the Scottish Government nominations to the commission be approved.

16:32

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Members on the Conservative benches welcome the setting up of the Scottish fiscal commission. An expert body that scrutinises and challenges Government forecasts can only be a good thing. Sometimes, Governments of any stripe have a natural optimism bias. It is helpful for that optimism to be scrutinised, which allows it to be challenged carefully.

All three of the nominees put forward by the Scottish Government are more than qualified for the roles for which they have been nominated. They have the knowledge, the relevant experience and the skill set required to do the job. That is not in doubt—it was never in doubt—and I agree with the cabinet secretary's comments about the nominees.

On this side of the chamber, the issue is that the independent Scottish fiscal commission will have only three part-time commissioners, yet two out of the three nominees also currently serve on the First Minister's Council of Economic Advisers. In our view, there is a potential conflict, and certainly a perception of conflict, between an advisory role on the one hand and a scrutiny role on the other. Two of the three nominees would be simultaneously—that word is important—advising the Scottish Government on economic levers via the Council of Economic Advisers and challenging and scrutinising the Scottish Government on the application of at least some of those economic levers via the commission.

It is worth looking at the work of the existing Council of Economic Advisers. It is a fairly small

body with only nine members, and its meetings are attended in every case by the First Minister and in almost every case by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth. I have looked at the minutes, and it is clear that there is regular engagement outside those formal meetings between members of the Council of Economic Advisers and the Scottish Government and, in particular, the office of the Scottish Government's chief economist. How regular the engagement is, we do not know; we just know from the minutes that it is regular.

Some of the items on the Council of Economic Advisers' agenda come extremely close to the work that the fiscal commission might do. For example, according to the minutes of the meeting of September 2012, the cabinet secretary talked about a progress report on the 2013-14 draft budget, and

"The proposed approach was discussed."

That happened two weeks before the draft budget was presented to the Parliament. It is highly likely that the Council of Economic Advisers, when presented with a draft budget, would want to consider items of expenditure and revenue. In future, it will no doubt want to consider non-domestic rates, the Scottish landfill tax and the land and buildings transaction tax.

"Economic levers" is a standing item on the Council of Economic Advisers' agenda. It is one of only three core areas of work for the council.

The council is a powerful body, which clearly has influence. The minutes of another of its meetings say:

"The Chair ... noted the welcome progress by the government in responding to its input"

on matters that included the setting up of a Scottish fiscal commission.

The new body, which will have a challenge function, needs to be, and needs to be seen to be, completely independent of Government. In his speech, the cabinet secretary himself said that the commission needs to be "seen and understood" to be independent. In our view, that will be difficult to achieve when two of its three members are holding advisory roles with the Government.

The equivalent body in London, the Office for Budget Responsibility, has faced criticism about its independence, specifically from the Scottish Government, and, even more specifically, from the cabinet secretary, who said on the record to the Finance Committee:

"given that that arrangement operates on the basis of secondment from the Treasury to the OBR, there is a justifiable degree of scepticism about how far from Government the office is."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 8 January 2014; c 3515.]

That is what the cabinet secretary said when a back-office function was shared between the Treasury and the OBR. What we are talking about is the decision makers and heads of the Scottish fiscal commission holding at the same time advisory roles with the Scottish Government.

Of course the Scottish Government can use its majority to force its proposed approach through the Parliament, but it has made an error in suggesting that there is no perception of a conflict. There is a perception of a conflict if someone is advising on Monday and scrutinising on Tuesday, especially when two out of the three members of the commission would find themselves in that dual role.

I invite the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government to reflect carefully on the amendment and on the arguments that we have made.

I move amendment S4M-10430.2, to leave out from "supports" to end and insert:

"considers that all three of the Scottish Government nominations to the commission are of a very high standard; believes however that appointments to the Council of Economic Advisers and the Scottish Fiscal Commission should not be held simultaneously; supports the nomination of Professor Leith, and further supports the nominations of Lady Rice and Professor Hughes-Hallett, subject to their standing down from the Council of Economic Advisers."

16:38

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Finance Committee in this debate on the establishment of a Scottish fiscal commission and the appointment of Lady Susan Rice, Professor Andrew Hughes Hallett and Professor Campbell Leith to serve on the body.

The establishment of a Scottish fiscal commission was put to the committee by the cabinet secretary in May last year, and in November and December the committee undertook an inquiry into the options for the establishment of such a body. We heard evidence from a range of economists and individuals who have experience of fiscal bodies. The committee's consideration benefited greatly from the experience and expertise of those witnesses, and I place on record our appreciation of their contribution.

One issue that we addressed was the requirement that formal safeguards be put in place to protect the commission's independence. Among those safeguards is the way in which appointments to the commission are made. As members know, we have an established process for public appointments in Scotland, which is regulated under legislation and overseen by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life

in Scotland. The cabinet secretary agreed with the committee's recommendation that appointments be regulated in that way when the commission is established as a statutory body.

In addition, given the nature of the body, the view of the committee and of the Government is that the Parliament's consent to those appointments is required. The Parliament should, in giving that consent, have regard to the Finance Committee's recommendations.

The committee's report takes account of oral and written evidence from the nominees and the cabinet secretary. The purpose of taking evidence was to provide Parliament with an opportunity to consider the professional experience and competence of the individuals who have been nominated for appointment. As they are the first appointments to the commission, the evidence assisted the committee to understand more about the issues that commission members will need to consider before commencing their work, including the specific remit of the commission, which they will be required to fulfil, and staffing and analytical resources.

The committee's report highlights the importance of transparency in the commission's commentary on the Scottish Government's forecasts. The committee takes the view that any provisional forecast on which the commission comments should be provided alongside the final forecast along with an explanation of any differences between the two. That will be important in ensuring that members of Parliament and interested observers are able to understand the interaction between the commission and the Government. Crucially, it will show how the Government's forecasting may be revised in light of, or be informed by, the commission's commentary. It would be helpful if the cabinet secretary could respond to that recommendation when he sums up.

I turn to the evidence that the committee took from the nominees. The range of issues that we explored included the individuals' previous experience; what they view as the immediate priorities for the commission; and how the commission should operate, particularly with regard to demonstrating its independence.

The nominees each brought an individual perspective to those questions, which is of course expected, as a collective view cannot be reached until the commission has been established. The development of the commission's remit and agreement on a memorandum of understanding are still to take place. The committee looks forward to continuing its scrutiny of those matters and contributing on them; the Government recognises the committee's role in that regard.

The nominees were asked about any other roles or connections that they have that may give rise, or may be perceived to give rise, to potential conflicts of interest. None of the nominees identified any such conflicts. However, some members of the committee expressed concern about members of the commission also being members of the Council of Economic Advisers. Gavin Brown has raised those issues in his amendment and in his speech today, and other members may explain to the chamber any concerns that they have. However, I emphasise the committee's shared view that all three nominees have the relevant professional expertise and competence to enable the commission to fulfil its role.

The committee's recommendation, as set out in the report that we published last week, is that the nominees should be appointed. All members of the committee supported the appointment of Professor Leith, and the appointments of Lady Rice and Professor Hughes Hallett were supported by a majority of the committee's members.

Members will have picked up from my remarks that there is still work to be done—including on important issues—in establishing the Scottish fiscal commission and in building the credibility of its role. The committee looks forward to engaging with the commission and the Government as the process continues.

16:42

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I welcome the creation of the Scottish fiscal commission, and I am very pleased that the Finance Committee and the Parliament will have a role in deciding who should sit on it. That approach is different from the process for the Council of Economic Advisers, which the First Minister appoints, and emphasises the degree of hard and formal independence that is required of the fiscal commission.

The Finance Committee emphasised the importance of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's principles of independence, non-partisanship and transparency, and stressed that the commission must be seen to observe those principles as, without that aspect, the public would have no confidence in the commission's research or its findings.

In view of all that, the Government should surely be alarmed at the number of people, including distinguished economists, who are unhappy about people sitting on both the fiscal commission and the Council of Economic Advisers, irrespective of the merits of the individuals involved. Bill

Jamieson, in an article that has been widely read, said:

“Does it not smack a little of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds?”

Many people, including members on the Labour side of the chamber, have come to the conclusion that the fiscal commission should be independent not just of Government, but of the Council of Economic Advisers.

The central mystery of the debate is why the cabinet secretary thought that it was necessary to appoint two people from the Council of Economic Advisers, thereby miring the fiscal commission in controversy from the very start. He has admitted that there are dozens of eligible and distinguished people who could have served: Professor Bell, Professor Ashcroft and Professor Jeremy Peat all spring to mind. There is suspicion—I will not put it more strongly than that—that the Government is more comfortable with economists who perhaps have a closer relationship with its position.

The fiscal commission will provide independent scrutiny of revenue projections and it will assess the economic forces underlying receipts, as the cabinet secretary reminded us. That initial role will expand. Now, and in the near future, it will be impossible to have the hard separation that the cabinet secretary suggests between its work and the work of the Council of Economic Advisers.

The cabinet secretary said in committee that there were no occasions on which the Council of Economic Advisers had offered advice on taxes. I do not know whether that is true, but it is quite a surprising statement because one would think that advice on fiscal levers and policies, as well as the consequences of certain taxation decisions, would be bound to come up in the Council of Economic Advisers. If such issues have not yet come up, they will do so soon. In committee, the cabinet secretary offered to exclude certain areas from the council's remit, which is a tacit admission that overlaps could emerge.

Today, the cabinet secretary said that the nominated individuals have a multiplicity of different functions, but only two that relate directly to Scottish economic and financial policy. There we have the conflict between the advisory and the scrutiny roles that Gavin Brown emphasised. Although the cabinet secretary seems to be oblivious of that potential conflict, Susan Rice, to her credit, is not. In committee, she said that she was aware of the possibility, that she would deal with it and that her role on the fiscal commission would take primacy. She has made clear her willingness to choose and that she would choose the fiscal commission role. Andrew Hughes Hallett should also be asked to make a choice between

the commission and the Council of Economic Advisers.

If Gavin Brown's amendment is rejected, the fiscal commission will get off to the worst possible start: mired in controversy and without the standing and credibility with the public that are central to the concept of an independent fiscal commission.

16:47

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Many Scottish National Party members care about the perception of conflict of interest in politics and in Governments. Indeed, from 1999 to 2007, the SNP rightly held the Government to account on exactly that issue. Mr Swinney often led the charge; he often had a point.

Gavin Brown's sensible amendment identified the core problem in the Government's approach to the appointments. I admire Susan Rice. I would appoint her, too, were I in the cabinet secretary's position. However, in passing, I say that such appointments are entirely devolved, so the Government could have sought to appoint two women and a man, or even three eminent female financial experts. Had it chosen to do so, then the balance of women versus men appointed to public positions would have improved. Sadly, that will not be the case.

I do not know the other nominees but, from what I read, I share the assessment of Gavin Brown and Malcolm Chisholm that they are eminently qualified. However, that is surely not the point. Members of the commission should not be advising the Government on economic policy on the one hand and scrutinising Government forecasts on the other hand. That, by any realistic interpretation, creates a perception of a conflict of interest.

I am disappointed by not just that issue, but the commission's remit and resources. Scotland has a highly centralised financial state. I have argued for a tartan office for budget responsibility for that reason. The UK Government got it right: it divorced economic and financial forecasting, which can be manipulated by politicians from central Government. It established the OBR. The OBR is not a friend of any UK chancellor; it is not meant to be. The OBR provides an independent assessment of the nation's books for not only the Government, but all representatives and policy makers, and you and me, Presiding Officer. No such emphatic independent assessment is made of the Scottish Government's financial performance.

Scotland needs that approach. We need to judge how best to spend taxpayers' money. Consider free personal care for the elderly. Some

of those who have studied the finances say that it is not affordable in its current form, while the Scottish Government says that that is not the case. Instead of such rhetoric, should decision making by ministers and the Parliament not be based on fact? A tartan OBR would provide fact unadorned by political spin and manipulation.

When Scotland gets past the autumn referendum, I would rather that the Parliament looked again at not just the appointments, but the limited, narrow and restrictive remit of the commission. I welcome Mr Swinney's earlier remarks that he will review the remit.

By any standards, the boss of the OBR, Robert Chote, is an informative commentator. We should want the same or, indeed, better for Scotland. The finance secretary says that he does not want the commission to step on anyone's toes, but many people outside the Parliament suspect that he is thinking about only his own feet.

I also struggle with the Government's argument that the commission will have such a limited role that it can be lightly staffed, through a university, and can have a negligible budget. Revenue Scotland is being set up with all the panoply of the law and with resources and civil servants, even though it will administer a small number of taxes. The contrast appears to be striking.

This Parliament has not got the financial scrutiny of any Government right, not just in the past seven years, but since 1999. It is an area that is ripe for reform. The Government had a real opportunity to create a body that would deliver scrutiny and accountability across the nation's finances. A future Scottish Government could do so much better. It could believe in healthy, robust and independent checks and balances. I would be pleased to support such an approach.

I urge the finance secretary to reconsider, to beef up his proposals and to make his appointments ones that we could all support, on a cross-party basis, because no potential for a conflict of interest would arise.

16:50

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Last week, we debated the changes to the written agreement between the Finance Committee and the Scottish Government on the budget process, which were made necessary by the devolution of two taxes. The land and buildings transaction tax and the Scottish landfill tax will be important considerations in budget setting and budget scrutiny. The Scottish Government will publish its forecasts for the revenue that will be raised by those newly devolved taxes, so it is vital that we have a body that can scrutinise those

forecasts. That will be the role of the fiscal commission, which we are debating today.

The fiscal commission will only fulfil its role as well as its personnel allow it to. In that regard, I want to endorse the cabinet secretary's three nominees. Susan Rice, the prospective chair of the commission, has worked in a range of senior roles in the banking sector since 1986. Before that, she worked in academic management in America, and she is currently a non-executive director on the court of the Bank of England, as well as undertaking a range of other work. In the evidence that she gave to the Finance Committee, I was struck by the depth of her commitment to the concept of public service, which too many people overlook or are quick to dismiss in an increasingly cynical age. I believe that she is committed to the commission for the best of reasons, and I believe that she will be an effective and engaging chairperson.

Andrew Hughes Hallett and Campbell Leith are two eminent economists with different but complementary backgrounds, and both will be excellent appointments to work with Susan Rice on the commission.

It is unfortunate that some members believe that two of the nominees face a conflict of interests by virtue of their role on the Council of Economic Advisers, but I do not consider that to be the case. First, I observe that the Finance Committee took considerable time to prepare a report on the establishment of a Scottish fiscal commission and that nowhere in that report did we make a recommendation that restrictions should be imposed on who could be appointed to the commission on the basis of their membership of another entity.

Secondly, I believe that, in the evidence that they gave to the committee, all three nominees not only gave an undertaking that they would act independently; they demanded that their independence be respected. I think that we should take that in good faith.

Thirdly, we should recognise that, by virtue of their expertise, all three nominees are bound to be in demand to sit on other bodies. The perception of a conflict of interest might always be there, but that does not mean that there is one.

We should also recognise that the fiscal commission will have a very different role from that of the Council of Economic Advisers. I thought that Malcolm Chisholm slightly misinterpreted the cabinet secretary—who I am sure will speak for himself when he closes the debate—when he suggested that the cabinet secretary had offered to restrict the role of the fiscal commission. I think that the point that he was making was that he has already done that by following the

recommendations of the Finance Committee's report. Again, I do not believe that there is a conflict of interest between membership of the two bodies.

In addition, all the nominees will serve for a single term, so they will not be beholden to the cabinet secretary to be reappointed. That further emphasises the fact that they will operate independently.

We should recognise that the cabinet secretary has taken on board some of the concerns that some members of the Finance Committee expressed about a perceived conflict of interest. He says that members of the fiscal commission will be subject to a code of conduct that will deal with the registration of interests and conflicts of interest as they arise.

For those reasons, I do not believe that there is a conflict of interests. Given the excellent nature of the nominees before us, I believe that we should back the creation of the fiscal commission and the nominees to it.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I call John Swinney. Cabinet secretary, I would be obliged if you could finish by 5 o'clock.

16:54

John Swinney: Right, Presiding Officer.

I am delighted to conclude this afternoon's helpful debate. Mr Brown has done us a service by lodging an amendment that addresses and communicates the nub of his concerns. Amendments are often used as cover for other comments, but Mr Brown has lodged an amendment that fairly sums up the issues that he has marshalled. He has set out fairly in the amendment the credibility of the candidates I have suggested for nomination, has remarked on the strength of those candidates and has focused on his concerns about the perception of a conflict of interest with membership of the Council of Economic Advisers. That is helpful, because it crystallises the debate so that there can be no doubt about the issues.

I will make four points to the Parliament that capture why the Parliament should be assured that the correct thing to do is to support the motion at decision time. First, the Government has put forward—I have nominated—three candidates of eminent capability with a breadth of experience and a demonstrable reputation of integrity and challenge in all the work that they have undertaken. I do not think that any of that is disputed by anybody in the Parliament. Indeed, Mr Brown made that point very clear in his comments today and Mr McMahon made it very clear in his comments to the Finance Committee last week.

We have candidates of undisputed capability and strength of reputation for office in the Scottish fiscal commission.

Malcolm Chisholm: I certainly do not disagree with what the cabinet secretary has just said, but I am still genuinely puzzled, with all due respect to those individuals and their great abilities, because there are, as I think Mr Swinney admitted, dozens—certainly a large number—of equally eminent economists. I am genuinely puzzled as to why they were overlooked and this controversy was created.

John Swinney: Without naming individuals, I say to Mr Chisholm that I do not think that anybody comes along as a potential candidate for the role without complicated connections to other areas of work that they might be involved in. However, all such people protect their integrity and reputation for independence by the way in which they conduct themselves in exercising their responsibilities. That is the strength of the three candidates that I have put forward.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: If Mr Harvie will allow me to make some progress, I will try to let him in in a moment.

My second point is really a point of disagreement with Tavish Scott. I decided that the Scottish fiscal commission should have a very focused remit, looking to challenge only the fiscal forecast that we made in relation to the taxes concerned. I said that a different view could be taken of a much broader role. I was very clear about that with the Finance Committee and, if I have read its report correctly, I am in tune with the Finance Committee on this point because it wants the body that I suggest and, with respect, not the one that Mr Scott suggests, however valuable that might be. The focused remit is crucial and the fiscal commission will have an exclusive responsibility to challenge the fiscal forecasts of the Government. There will be no opportunity for the Council of Economic Advisers to intervene in that process at any stage.

My third point is about the location of the fiscal commission in the University of Glasgow with independent support and away from the Government. I have been quite clear—again, this addresses Mr Scott's point—that if there are resourcing issues, I will address them to the satisfaction of the commission.

Fourthly, the individuals are being appointed for one single term only. They will be free to say what they like about my fiscal forecasts and will be able to challenge them in any way that they would like, without fears about reappointment.

Patrick Harvie: The existence of the Council of Economic Advisers implies that the Government will, from time to time, accept their economic advice. Can the cabinet secretary tell us how he would bring real objectivity to the task of scrutinising the impact and the potential consequences of economic policies that were at least partly the result of his own advice? How can that be done objectively?

John Swinney: That is what the Parliament is here to do: to challenge the view and decisions that I take in relation to the economy. I am crystal clear that the Scottish fiscal commission alone will have the power, opportunity and resources to challenge the fiscal forecasts that I make in relation to the budget, and to do so in the interests of good public scrutiny.

The Government has put forward three candidates of eminent capability. Their appointment has been endorsed by the Finance Committee. I invite the Parliament to support those nominations and to ensure that we have a fiscal commission that can properly, fully and effectively hold the Government's forecasts to account, ensuring that the public debate in Scotland on that aspect of our budget process is enhanced as a consequence.

Regional Chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Membership)

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-10356, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on membership of the regional chamber of the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's proposal to nominate, as a representative of the Parliament, Jayne Baxter MSP as an alternate member on the UK delegation to the regional chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe for the remainder of the current parliamentary session to 2016.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S4M-10427, in the name of Keith Brown, on support for armed forces and veteran communities in Scotland, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the debt of gratitude that it owes to the armed forces, past and present; recognises the valuable skills, experience and sense of civic responsibility that ex-service personnel bring to society on returning to civilian life and welcomes wide involvement, including of the Scottish Government, in commemorative events marking the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings and the Scottish Government's ongoing support for Armed Forces Day, and notes progress with the appointment of a new Scottish Veterans' Commissioner and the aim of encouraging new working relationships between the commissioner and ex-service charities that help the armed forces community, including veterans, access the highest level of services and support available.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-10430.2, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10430, in the name of John Swinney, on appointments to the Scottish fiscal commission, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)

McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 52, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-10430, in the name of John Swinney, on appointments to the Scottish fiscal commission, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (East Kilbride) (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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 50, Abstentions 2.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's plans to establish a Scottish Fiscal Commission to provide independent scrutiny and reports on tax forecasts prepared by the Scottish Government and supports the recommendation of the Finance Committee that the Scottish Government nominations to the commission be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-10356, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on membership of the regional chamber of the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's proposal to nominate, as a representative of the Parliament, Jayne Baxter MSP as an alternate member on the UK delegation to the regional chamber of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe for the remainder of the current parliamentary session to 2016.

Royston (Regeneration)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-10109, in the name of Bob Doris, on the regeneration of Royston. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the creation of the Royston Strategy Group, which consists of several community groups, including Blochairn Housing Association, Copperworks Housing Cooperative, Rosemount Development Trust, Royston Corridor Homes, Royston Youth Action and Spire View Housing Association, collaborating on the completion of the regeneration of the Royston area; understands that this group consists of community groups that are having an influential impact on the community by developing an attractive business environment, reducing unemployment rates, improving available housing and boosting the way-of-life for local people; recognises that these groups, along with other community organisations, have assembled another team, inspireROYSTON, under the direction of the Rosemount Development Trust, to host five community festivals, in celebration of 25 years of voluntary effort by residents of Royston, and in recognition of the Commonwealth Games coming to Glasgow; understands that this community festival programme, known as "inspireROYSTON 2014", was launched on 25 April by the Soaring above Royston Kite Festival, which consisted of over 500 schoolchildren recording "Why I love Royston" on the tail of their kites and then flying them in Glenconner Park; commends each of the aforementioned groups, along with their peers, on their successful efforts in regenerating Royston and fostering community union; considers this a great time for the local groups to double their efforts and notes calls for Glasgow City Council to give serious consideration to implementing any Royston Strategy Group suggestions, and believes that a deliverable blueprint for coordinated local regeneration would be a fitting legacy for Royston, its residents and the various community groups that have devoted so much effort to enhance the lives of residents over the years.

17:04

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to debate the regeneration of Royston and I welcome to the public gallery a number of representatives from the Royston community. I hope that my fellow members and people who have come through from Royston can join me in committee room 6 after the debate for refreshments; everyone would be most welcome.

I wanted the motion to be debated for two main reasons. First, I wanted the good work of the people and organisations in Royston to be recognised in what is a special year for many of them, as we will hear. Secondly, I wanted to draw to the Scottish Parliament's attention the newly formed Royston strategy group, which is a community-led forum that wishes to see meaningful regeneration in an area where poverty has endured for too long. The Royston strategy group includes the Rosemount Development Trust, Royston Youth Action and local housing

associations, to name but a few of its members, who also include me and my fellow MSP Patricia Ferguson.

I will briefly place regeneration in its historical context. Many still call Royston the Garngad. The area was renamed “Royston” in the 1940s; that was a marketing ploy as part of the Glasgow Corporation’s plans for housing action, which rolled out over subsequent decades and led to many in the 1950s moving away from Garngad to the new estates of the day.

In 1953, Mick McLaughlin wrote the poem “Farewell to Garngad”, in which he said:

“Oh Father dear and did you hear, new houses they have built
Some of them in Easterhouse and some in Castlemilk
Balornock and Barmulloch too, they’re building them like mad
And now they’re taking our friends away
From the dear old Garngad.”

That is a poetic description of some of the problems that have been faced over the years.

More recently, the situation has been much more positive. In the past few decades, hundreds of rented homes and owner-occupied houses have been renovated or built anew in the area. Although there is still work to do, housing in Royston has improved dramatically in recent years. The development plans of the likes of Blochairn Housing Association, Spire View Housing Association and Copperworks Housing Co-operative must take much of the credit for that.

Local housing directors such as Michael Carberry and Fiona Murphy have not only spearheaded several development projects but have been the face of housing and regeneration in the area. Tenant representatives such as Joan Reuston and Charlie Lunn certainly ensure that regeneration is directly community led.

Improving housing is vital, but housing associations and others recognise that housing alone does not improve life chances. Because of concern about poverty and high unemployment rates, Royston residents created the Rosemount Development Trust in 1989. By 1993, the local Millburn centre had been refurbished and was ready for tenants to use. The goal was to reduce unemployment rates and aid the fight against poverty. Just six years later, the trust completed new premises at Rosemount workspace, which provided more jobs and opportunities.

Maureen Flynn represents what ambition and a desire to serve can do. She was raised in Royston and has been involved with Rosemount for 24 years. She directly benefited by finding employment via the organisation and she has supported many others to do likewise. She is now the organisation’s director and is doing a

marvellous job of advancing its reach and accomplishing its worthwhile goals.

A variety of other excellent organisations are contributing significantly to regenerative efforts. I will list just a few—they include Royston Youth Action, Toonspeak Young People’s Theatre, Rosemount Lifelong Learning, the Flexicentre and local churches and schools.

I very much hope that I have painted a vibrant picture of Royston, which is a vibrant place, as I am increasingly finding out. However, there is also a much more challenging story. An estimated 26 per cent of the Royston population receives or depends completely on benefits. An estimated 24 per cent of the working-age population there are unemployed. Four of the five data zones that cover Royston are in the bottom 10 per cent in Scotland for educational attainment. Gaining skills and further educational achievements is critical.

The organisations that I have mentioned are aware of the scale of the problem and are busy putting into action approaches to deal with the challenges. I am sure that others will talk about this year’s inspireROYSTON programme, which is just one example of engagement with all in Royston to celebrate their community and their heritage and—more important—to look to the future.

What can the Royston strategy group, which I mentioned at the start, achieve? The first thing that it can do is listen to the community and find out what its priorities are. It is doing that. Some of the work is already under way with a community consultation that is being led by Community Links Scotland. It has spoken to many families about what they perceive to be local needs. The potential need for a new community facility for older people in the area is beginning to emerge. Some have mentioned the lack of shopping opportunities, particularly for fresh fruit and vegetables and particularly around the Roystonhill area. As that area’s name suggests, it is particularly difficult for older residents to get around it. The quality of transport links has also been raised.

We can do much to address those issues. The Royston strategy group has the good will of Glasgow City Council, and much can be achieved when Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government want to take action. There is a joint responsibility there. That is why I said that, whenever the Royston strategy group comes forward with proposals and recommendations, I hope that the local authority will consider them, back them and take action to achieve them. The Scottish Government must also do so, where there are opportunities to support that action.

There are good examples of that. For example, there was joint work to get more than £1 million for Maryhill burgh halls; there was joint action between the council and the Government to get more than £1 million for a new community centre in Cadder; and there was more than £1 million for a new watersports centre at Port Dundas. All those areas are in north Glasgow and all have issues that are similar to Royston's issues. All the work involved partnership work between the city council and the Scottish Government.

The regeneration fund is one type of funding. That possible pot of cash is a £25 million Scottish Government fund across Scotland, and that is where Cadder Housing Association got its money from. Local authorities are asked to prioritise their bids in order of importance when bids go in. I would like to think that, in future years, when Glasgow City Council decides where it wishes the Scottish Government to prioritise, Royston will feature with the highest priority.

Any regeneration activity must be completely community led. It must be led not by the priorities of politicians but by the priorities of the local community. That is what the Royston strategy group hopes to achieve. The legacy from this special year can be deep and meaningful and can stretch for years to come.

If Mick McLaughlin had written his poem in the next few years rather than in 1953, I would have hoped that he might have called it "The Flourishing of Garngad" as opposed to "Farewell to Garngad". A community that is strengthened by investment that is led by its own priorities will deliver, despite challenges. I have no illusions about that. Royston, or Garngad, is a vibrant community that needs help and assistance. I am sure that, with partnership working, we can all deliver.

17:13

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I thank Bob Doris for securing this debate, which is about an important initiative in the Royston area of my Maryhill and Springburn constituency, and for highlighting many of the other good things that are happening in my constituency.

The next two years are exciting ones for Royston, with the area's three housing associations—Spire View Housing Association, Copperworks Housing Co-operative and Blochairn Housing Association—and Rosemount Development Trust all celebrating 25 years of making a difference in their community. The famous Royston spire, which is the area's most obvious landmark, will celebrate its 150th birthday next year and will not be forgotten in all the discussions about the area's future.

Each of the housing associations that I mentioned has contributed to the regeneration of the area by building not just houses but warm, affordable and attractive homes. Many of the local residents and volunteers who began the process of regeneration around 25 years ago are, to their great credit, still involved. We owe them and the staff who support them a real debt of gratitude.

Similarly, Rosemount Development Trust has worked hard to preserve some notable buildings in the area and to provide premises to encourage businesses into Royston and employment opportunities for local people. Royston Youth Action provides support and activity for the young and not so young alike. Many other organisations operate in the area, of course, including Glasgow Housing Association and Toonspeak Young People's Theatre, of which I am a patron. Therefore, I have an interest.

The fact that many of those organisations have significant anniversaries in the next few years has been the catalyst for co-ordinated community celebration, as the motion describes, and has spurred the organisations to think about what should happen next—what is needed to continue the regeneration of the area and how that should be taken forward.

As we have heard, a strategy group has been formed to discuss the changes that the community would like and to drive forward the required development. Spire View Housing Association has already commissioned a consultation exercise on community facilities. That work will influence the strategy group, which will no doubt want to carry out wider consultation before proceeding. However, it is fair to say that some ideas and themes are already beginning to emerge. Bob Doris rightly referred to the need for more shops in the area, and there is general support for the idea of better community facilities. That on-going discussion will be informed by the consultation that Spire View has already set in train.

Ironically for a community that is surrounded by a motorway, Royston can feel a little isolated. Better bus services and the reinstatement of the train line that once served the area have been suggested and are areas in which the Scottish Government might use its power and influence to bring about change and to help to link Royston to neighbouring communities.

Mention has been made of the need to ensure the involvement of Glasgow City Council. I very much agree with that—so much so that I wrote to the council leader, Councillor Matheson, to ask him for the council's co-operation. I am pleased to tell the Parliament that he responded positively, saying:

"I have instructed council officers to work with the Strategy Group to help deliver these aims. I understand that there has already been dialogue between the Strategy Group and senior officers and I hope that this will serve as a foundation upon which a suitable action plan can be constructed."

I am sure that Councillor Matheson's assurance of the council's support will be very welcome.

As my time is limited, I will draw to a close, but first I will make two brief points. The first is that, in 2022, Royston can, if it chooses, commemorate the 80th anniversary of the controversial decision in 1942 to change the area's name from the Garngad to Royston. Incidentally, that was ironically an initiative of the local headmaster and was opposed by local councillors. To people of my parents' and grandparents' generation, it always remained and will always be the Garngad. Would it not be appropriate to commemorate that change in the area's name with meaningful physical change, building on the excellent work of the many community organisations that work so hard for the area?

My second point is that, as the surrounding multistorey flats are demolished at Forge Street and Rosemount Street and at Sighthill and Red Road, the skyline of the north of the city is beginning to change. Soon, Royston will once again enjoy the prominent position in the cityscape that it had for most of its 500-year history. In so many ways, this is the perfect time to look to continue the regeneration of Royston and, by working together, to help to retain the sense of community that has always made Royston such a vibrant place in which to live and work.

17:18

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I congratulate Bob Doris on bringing the debate to the chamber. He rightly recognised the work of committed local activists to make their area better. In this case, that is the area of Royston, but I am sure that the people in the public gallery will excuse me if I concentrate on the importance of regeneration in my constituency, although I recognise the importance of regeneration in areas such as Royston and across the city of Glasgow.

Too often, the unsung heroes of the local community are those who dedicate much of their spare time to making their community better. The aim of regeneration is to enable communities that have suffered from economic, social and environmental decline to rebuild their community. Like Mr Doris, I have lots of examples from the area that I represent of community groups, housing associations and social enterprises that work together to make their local areas better. I have talked at length in the chamber about the great work that housing associations such as

Cassiltoun and Ardenglen do in their local communities.

Cassiltoun focuses its activities on five areas—employability, early intervention, health, social enterprise and community engagement. Those threads can be seen in its current regeneration projects, which include the Cassiltoun Stables Nursery, which provides childcare and employment in the area, and the craft cafe, a brilliant social enterprise that aims to tackle social isolation among older people. The money that is made—£8 is made for every £1 that is invested—is reinvested in the local community, to assist Cassiltoun help more people. That is the sort of model that every member in the chamber can surely get behind.

Ardenglen also has a large body of regeneration projects, including its current, highly ambitious plan—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Mr Dornan, but the motion is specifically about Royston.

James Dornan: I am quite happy to stop—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not asking for a conversation, Mr Dornan. The people in the public gallery may indulge you in hearing about your constituency, but I am afraid that I cannot. If you want to confine your remarks to Royston, I am happy to hear them. Otherwise, you might want to leave your constituency matters to another day.

James Dornan: I am happy to leave it at that, Presiding Officer. I was trying to sell the benefits of regeneration, which affects the people of Royston as much as it affects the people of my constituency.

Bob Doris: One of the reasons why I wanted other Glasgow MSPs to speak in the debate is that I am looking for best practice in community regeneration to be shared across the city and beyond. Before Mr Dornan closes, will he draw on one example from his constituency that he would recommend to the people of Royston for use in the regeneration of the Garngad?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Given Mr Doris's plea, I am happy to indulge you in that regard, Mr Dornan. However, I ask you to confine your remarks to Royston, please.

James Dornan: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

A good idea for the people of Royston would be for those who are involved in the regeneration of the area to train the regeneration staff on the social return on investment evaluation model, which is used to assess the impact of regeneration work on the local community. The model measures social, environmental and economic changes and uses equivalent monetary values to

represent them. Using that model would allow staff to determine the monetary worth of regeneration as well as the social worth that would come from the testimony of locals involved in projects. That would be a useful barometer when people look for additional funding to continue the projects. I am sure that, like the people in my constituency, the people of Royston would benefit from staff receiving such training.

17:22

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): I offer my congratulations to Bob Doris on bringing the debate to the Scottish Parliament. Regeneration is a hot topic at present, and the Local Government and Regeneration Committee has heard a great deal of evidence on where regeneration has not had the desired effect. However, as I said in a recent committee debate on the subject, there are places, such as Royston, where regeneration has had a lasting effect. It is right that we draw attention to those successes, celebrate them and, when necessary, share the valuable lessons that have been learned.

I was particularly pleased to see the emphasis in Bob Doris's motion on the importance of local businesses, whose exclusion has been a recurring theme in some areas. It is sad that, so often, regeneration projects have failed because they have focused on attracting new businesses without having proper regard to and consideration for the local businesses that already operate in the area and without offering them the support or facilities required to help them grow. I understand that the loss of local businesses from the Royston area was one of the issues that motivated Royston's residents to take the lead and work with local groups to reverse that trend.

The other important element to Royston's strategy is that it is very much being led by local groups and the community. The importance of community engagement has cropped up again and again, so it is encouraging that the Royston community is at the centre of the regeneration strategy. That is also why the inspireROYSTON initiative and the community festivals are such positive developments. We could all learn from that approach.

Living in an area and being part of a community are two very separate things. For community councils throughout Scotland, the real challenge is often to encourage people in the area to become involved, have their say and get involved with the decisions that will affect them first and foremost. I think that we are getting better at that. I recently attended a community council meeting in Morningside, in Edinburgh, at which there was a discussion about holding a coffee morning in a local community cafe, the sole purpose of which

was to let the community know who their community council is and what it can do for them. Like Royston's festivals, such proactive steps will make the difference, bring people together and get them involved locally—particularly those who might otherwise be excluded and find it difficult to interact with and meet their neighbours. It is great to see that Royston is starting that for people at a young age, with initiatives such as the Toonspeak Young People's Theatre.

With all regeneration projects, there needs to be a tangible sign of success. We must always be sure that they are achieving value for money, and there are indications that the regeneration of Royston will have a lasting and positive impact, not least through the apprenticeships that it has created. Moreover, those apprentices are going to find employment. It is important that such projects leave youngsters with a lasting skill that will open doors for them and increase their employability.

Patricia Ferguson: I was reflecting on the member's comments about the need to include business in such discussions. However, I am also conscious of the fact that, often, regeneration has to happen because business has departed, sometimes leaving devastation in its wake—or, worse, contamination, which then has to be cleared up by others. Does the member have any comments on that aspect?

Cameron Buchanan: It is important to support old businesses, not just new ones. We should not just start new businesses, because the old ones then fail. Regeneration partly concerns restoring old businesses—restoring premises, raising morale and getting apprenticeships going. That is what I was trying to emphasise.

Regeneration is often connected with images of large-scale infrastructure projects and a huge amount of investment. However, such projects often fail, due to a lack of community involvement. Time and again we see that regeneration is at its most effective when it involves a collection of small projects, each addressing a specific need or an area where there is a weakness. Bit by bit, such projects succeed in halting decline and begin to reverse it. That action is not always taken on behalf of the community but is, instead, very much led by the community itself. That would seem to be what is happening in Royston, which is why I am delighted that we can celebrate its success in the chamber and that we can take this opportunity to learn from it.

17:26

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Like James Dornan, I will cut out half my speech.

I thank Bob Doris for lodging this motion, which welcomes the creation of the Royston strategy

group, which includes several community groups, Blochairn Housing Association, Copperworks Housing Co-operative, Rosemount Development Trust, Royston corridor homes, Royston Youth Action and Spire View Housing Association, which will all collaborate on the completion of the regeneration of the Royston area.

Although I am not a Glasgow MSP, I know the Royston area well as I worked there for a number of years. I am sure that further local improvement will be welcomed by the exceptionally good people of Royston, some of whom are in the gallery today—I welcome them to their Parliament this afternoon. This Parliament should, indeed, recognise the good work that is being carried out in the Royston area by the local community groups and associations to regenerate their local area. As Cameron Buchanan said, community groups can do something for their area by coming together. I have previous experience of that in my area, but I will not talk about that because you have ruled on that, Presiding Officer.

The work that is being done needs to be recognised. It can help to inspire other areas and show them what can be done when a community is united in improving its area by creating an environment that is attractive to business. On the point that Patricia Ferguson made earlier, vibrant businesses have to be encouraged to stay or to return to the area. This afternoon, I had a meeting with the Scottish Grocers Federation and it was pointed out that little shops and local businesses are the heart of the community. We do not need all these other shops—most of the time, they are bookmakers. There has to be a plan that people can get behind, that is attractive and which can help business to grow and can help to continue to reduce the unemployment rate in Royston.

In a previous life, I was involved in a regeneration area. Basically, all the community groups got together and promoted what they did to the council and the MP. The work that such people do is amazing. They do it for no pay. They do it for their area—for their people and for their children. We should be getting behind them and helping them to do that. That is why I think that today's motion is one that we can support. We have to work with local people—local councillors and local politicians. I take the point that Patricia Ferguson made about the backing that the leader of Glasgow City Council has given. The council should listen to local people and MSPs to get the situation correct.

The character of the area must be maintained. We must use all the tools at our disposal to make sure that that is done to the benefit of all, while listening to the local community—that is the main thing—and adapting the regeneration policy to its needs and requirements.

What is being done and going to be done in Royston is commendable and should be supported by all politicians, of whatever political party or persuasion. I complement Bob Doris on bringing the debate and on his work—and the work of Patricia Ferguson, whose area Royston is in, too—to ensure that all the organisations involved are given the opportunity to do what they can to improve the area.

I am pleased that this debate has been held, so that individuals who have given up their valuable time—people sitting up in the gallery—for the benefit of others can be recognised, and rightly so. I hope that the debate will lend credence to the call for Glasgow City Council to implement the suggestions of the Royston strategy group to deliver a fitting lasting legacy for Royston—Patricia Ferguson said that the council leader has given a commitment to do that. I wish all involved success in their venture.

17:31

Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): With great pleasure I will confine my remarks to the motion in Bob Doris's name, which I support. I can make your job much easier, Presiding Officer, by saying that I am the former MSP for Glasgow Springburn, which included Royston. Indeed, I was elected as a councillor for Royston on 16 December 1993. I was delighted to be Royston's local representative during those years.

I can amplify many of the points that Bob Doris and Patricia Ferguson made about the good work of local activists in Royston. I can speak in particular of Charlie Lunn, Tilly McIlroy and Jackie Kerr. The three of them led the regeneration process to ensure that local people got access to good-quality housing. We have seen success in Royston and people speak volumes about that because the individuals I referred to ensured that the process was genuinely community led. I say very respectfully that they ensured that the community had its say during those years, particularly from the mid-1990s to 2005 and 2006, when we saw a number of investments that made a significant difference to the area that I would refer to as the Garngad. I was conditioned during my years as an elected representative of the area to call it the Garngad, and I welcome what Patricia Ferguson said about taking forward the issue of its name in 2022.

The challenge that the Rosemount Development Trust faced was the challenge that Bob Doris referred to: the unacceptable employment statistic that we faced. At that stage, 23 per cent of the local population were unemployed. The Rosemount Development Trust wanted to ensure local opportunities for development and opportunities for unemployed people. Challenging

that unemployment statistic was a priority for the trust, which is why we developed the Rosemount workspace. As we speak, more than 300 people are employed on that site. That investment is welcome.

As other members have said, it is important that we continue to develop the process and challenge the unacceptable health statistics, but the other challenge that we face in the Garngad—or Royston, as it is referred to in the motion—is educational attainment. I was delighted to be one of the people who led the campaign to ensure that St Roch's secondary and primary schools were retained in the Garngad. Ensuring that local youngsters have genuine opportunities to improve their educational attainment is absolutely crucial in the Garngad area. Anything that we can do in this Parliament to ensure that action is taken in that respect is extremely important.

This is a good example of local activists ensuring, with the professional support that they have received from the officers involved in the local area, that they genuinely make a difference. We should learn from those lessons. As Patricia Ferguson said, we need to learn from the negative examples of the multistoreys that we are demolishing—looking not that far away—and the positive examples that have been set out in the Garngad area of Glasgow.

17:35

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Like others, I am grateful to Bob Doris for highlighting the creation of the Royston strategy group and the positive work that local groups have undertaken for the benefit of the people living in the Royston area of Glasgow. It is right that Parliament takes every opportunity to commend local initiatives that aim to make a real difference to people living and working in their local community.

Tackling poverty is a key priority of this Government. Bob Doris and Paul Martin talked about poverty in the Royston area. Our focus continues to be on maintaining and improving wellbeing for everyone living in Scotland. A community-led approach ensures that we tackle that at grass-roots level.

The Scottish Government's regeneration strategy, "Achieving a Sustainable Future", makes clear our continued commitment to community-led regeneration. We recognise the role that community organisations and the people within them can play in bringing about sustainable change. That is why the community-led approach is so important.

The creation of the Royston strategy group brings together passionate and active members of

the local community. All members in the debate have commended it for that. Members of the group have come together with the aim of improving the lives of everyone who lives in their community. That is a fitting example of our regeneration vision.

Although a community-led approach is key, an asset-based mindset is also important. Although understanding where additional support needs exist, it is important that our collective focus is on the assets that communities such as Royston have, rather than the deficits of an area. To support communities to be sustainable, we must identify those assets—economic, physical and social—and use them to deliver sustainable positive change. With that in mind, we should always ask, "What makes this place good, where do the opportunities lie and what expertise and skills do local people have?" rather than labelling particular areas or groups of people.

The members of the Royston strategy group are locally based community anchor organisations that value the people who live in the Royston area. Those organisations are already working together to look at, for example, improving housing, employment opportunities and social cohesion. Royston strategy group's purpose is to look at ways to enhance further the Royston community. All parties and partners involved are enthusiastic about the feasibility study that is under way to look at potential demand for a new community facility.

Through the inspireROYSTON group, the local community has also decided that it is fitting to celebrate 25 years of three of the most well-established organisations in the area: Royston Youth Action, Spire View Housing Association and Rosemount Development Trust. The celebrations began in April, with one of a number of community events, and they will continue until September this year. Events such as those further highlight the valuable impact of the work of volunteers. There is no better example of an asset to a community than the people themselves. It is encouraging to hear that the turnout for the events so far has been fantastic. The local community are fully involved in, and supportive of, all that is being achieved in their area.

The Scottish Government's Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill will support communities such as Royston to achieve their own goals and aspirations by taking independent action and by having their voices heard in the decisions that affect their area.

Similarly, the Scottish Government's people and communities fund supports more than 150 projects across Scotland. It is encouraging that Spire View Housing Association and Royston Youth Action—two members of the new Royston strategy group—are already benefiting from the fund as

they continue to deliver regeneration projects in their local communities.

The Scottish Government will continue to support community-led regeneration. I am delighted to say that we have committed a further two years of funding for the people and communities fund for 2015-16, and we will shortly announce a date for the reopening of the fund. That will ensure that community-led projects can continue to be supported to 2016.

The newly created Royston strategy group also consists of a number of community-based housing associations including Blochairn Housing Association, Copperworks Housing Co-operative, Royston Corridor Homes and Spire View Housing Association. It is clear that we recognise the value of community-controlled housing associations. They know about the issues and needs of their communities. Meaningful regeneration is more than just bricks and mortar. Good-quality affordable housing is important to regenerate communities, but we must also tackle the social and economic issues that prevent communities from growing and flourishing. James Dornan and other members spoke about how it is right that we exchange information across different areas of Glasgow. We can all learn and benefit from sharing good practice. When something good is happening in one area, we can all learn from it and spread that practice. That is something that I would certainly like to see happening.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting Royston Youth Action, when I met the local volunteers and beneficiaries of the service. I was impressed with their commitment and pride in their community, and in what they had achieved for it. That is what struck me most. I had a pleasant time in Royston seeing the garden and talking to young people who had been involved with their community for a long time and continue to be involved. I also visited the Rainbow hall for the start of one of the celebrations. It looked terrific and I could see that the atmosphere was building up to what I am sure was a superb afternoon.

It was clear to me that Royston has a cohesive community with many organisations that have worked together for many years. I hope that they continue to do that because I was very impressed with Royston Youth Action group. As a member has already said, a variety of ages are involved in the group and it was good to see that there are no demarcation lines. Everyone can be part of the group and that is what community-led regeneration is all about.

I congratulate the new Royston strategy group and the inspireROYSTON programme because they are fitting examples of community-led regeneration. I congratulate the group on its work and planning and the work that has already been

undertaken on behalf of the local community. I wish the group every success in the future.

Meeting closed at 17:43.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78457-731-5

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78457-746-9