



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 14 January 2014

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Trishna Singh, who is director of the Sikh Sanjog and the Punjabi Junction social enterprise project in Leith.

Trishna Singh (Sikh Sanjog and Punjabi Junction Social Enterprise Project): Presiding Officer, I thank you for inviting me to address Parliament.

Today I am representing the Scottish Sikh community in my capacity as founder and director of Sikh Sanjog, which is Scotland's only organisation that works with Sikh women and their families. Since 1989, we have been empowering and inspiring women of all ages and races to rise above the internal and external discrimination that hinders their progress.

We have developed and established a range of methods of connecting with women, and of encouraging them in their learning and creating practical opportunities for them to develop their skills and knowledge. Our aim is to close the equalities gap, especially in terms of disadvantage and exclusion relating to education, skills, training and employment.

Our ethos is based on the teachings of Sikhism. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, taught us that there is, in addition to the spiritual dimension, an important social dimension to the Sikh religion that focuses on social equality, rejection of caste discrimination and centrality of community service. The most revolutionary declaration of Sikhism in the 15th century was equality asserted to women. Essentially, Guru Nanak created an equal seat for everyone at the table and an opportunity for dialogue where none had existed. Guru Nanak embraced the entire human race. He said:

"Recognise the divine light of god in each individual, treat all equally without prejudice of race, caste, religion, gender or social position."

As Sikh Sanjog goes forward to celebrate its 25th anniversary this year, we continue to improve communication between professions and political parties on the needs of the Sikh and other black and minority ethnic women. The needs of Sikh women have changed over the past 25 years but, sadly, they have not gone away and, as within

many disadvantaged groups, the women are further marginalised. Today, the voices of women from within BME communities are still unheard. There is still discrimination in terms of opportunity, and barriers still hold them back from making an effective contribution to Scottish society.

As Guru Nanak inspires every Sikh to respect every individual, I see that reflected in the Scottish Parliament. Social justice is a natural consequence of civic responsibility and reminds us that we cannot be insular.

Many Sikhs, including my parents, made this their home over 70 years ago and have added to the rich cultural heritage of this country. We are proud to be known as Scottish Sikhs. What happens in Scotland matters to all of us, irrespective of where we have come from.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Bedroom Tax (Mitigation)

1. Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to mitigate the effects of the so-called bedroom tax. (S4T-00561)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): The Scottish Government has provided Scottish councils with £20 million this year and up to £20 million next year for discretionary housing payments to mitigate the impacts of the United Kingdom Government's bedroom tax. That is the maximum that is permitted under the legal limit set by the UK Government.

We have also provided funding of £7.9 million to help front-line advice services to support people who are dealing with the bedroom tax, with £2.5 million being ring fenced for social landlords.

We will continue to make the case to the UK Government that concessions should be granted, for example an increase in the Scottish share of discretionary housing payments. However, there is only one solution: the Scottish Parliament should have control over welfare benefits. We could then scrap the bedroom tax altogether.

Fiona McLeod: The minister said that the Government is mitigating the bedroom tax by up to—as it is legally allowed to—a maximum of £20 million. I am sure that she will be aware of the comments of the Scotland Office minister, David Mundell, that the Scottish Government is able to exempt everyone in Scotland who is affected by the bedroom tax. Therefore, the coalition Government is no longer just content with inflicting the bedroom tax on struggling families; it is now demanding that the Scottish Government clear up the coalition Government's mess. I therefore agree with the minister; it would be useful were she to elaborate on the fact that only with independence can we do away with that dreaded tax.

Margaret Burgess: I absolutely agree. I was absolutely shocked to read David Mundell's comments. He is a member of the UK party that is in Government in Westminster and which is imposing the bedroom tax on the people of Scotland. He still supports that tax even when he discovers—as he should have a long time ago—the impact that it is having on our poorest people. He then suggests that we should make up for Westminster's failings from our budget, which it has already cut. However, he does not tell us where that money will come from. One thing that is clear is that any money that we use in mitigation

must come out of the devolved settlement, which is for housing, the police and the health service. He shows bare-faced gall. The Scottish Parliament does not have the powers to control welfare spending at the moment; the only way we can do that is to have control of the powers ourselves. That can, as I said, be achieved by voting yes in the referendum.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): The minister will be aware that there is strong feeling across the Parliament against the bedroom tax. Given that the Government wants to do its part, and that Jackie Baillie has the requisite support for her member's bill, will the minister intimate her Government's support for that bill?

Margaret Burgess: I have said on more than one occasion that we are mitigating the impact of the bedroom tax to the extent that we can; we have topped up discretionary housing payments to the legal limit. We have made it very clear what our views are on evictions and of separating out a specific group for eviction. However, that is only part of the issue. We now have the suggestion that housing benefit for the under-25s could be removed. It will just not be possible also to mitigate that. The only solution will be to vote yes in the referendum and to get rid of the bedroom tax entirely.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): How much would it cost to mitigate additional welfare cuts if the Westminster Government extends the bedroom tax to include pensioners, as has been suggested by Julian Brazier MP? Beyond that, how much would it cost if his Government goes ahead with scrapping housing benefit for under-25s? Would not it be better to give this Parliament all the levers of power, so that all those inhumane policies could be scrapped?

Margaret Burgess: I absolutely agree that the policies are inhumane. Removal of housing benefits from under-25s in Scotland could impact on 20,000 children. It would put more children into poverty, which I am sure none of us here wants. Removal of those benefits from the under-25s would cost £133 million a year. The Scottish Government does not have the money to mitigate the impacts to that extent. The cost of extending the policy also to pensioners would be unthinkable and mitigation would simply not be possible. I absolutely agree that we must deal with the matter head on and bring control over welfare to the Scottish Parliament, where we would stop any further cuts to the benefit system and repeal the bedroom tax altogether.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): David Mundell is the second member of the UK Parliament who has said that it is possible for the Scottish Government to find the means and mechanism to mitigate the impact of the bedroom

tax. Does he know something that the minister does not? Has she instructed her officials to do a full audit to consider whether there is a mechanism that could mitigate the impact now, rather than waiting for a vote in September?

Margaret Burgess: The position is very clear. We know that Jenny Marra's party is working with the Tories and that they want to pass the buck to the Scottish Government in order for it to deal with the matter out of the Scottish budget. However, I do not think that David Mundell understands that the Scotland Act 1998 expressly reserves welfare spending related to individuals' housing costs.

It was a Labour Government that put the cap on discretionary housing payments; we have topped up payments as far as we can. I do not think that what Jenny Marra said will go anywhere, because we are doing what we can, within our powers. Neither Jenny Marra nor David Mundell nor anyone else has suggested from where in the Scottish budget the money would come—even if they were to come up with a mechanism that would provide more money. No one has come up with that.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): The minister has, once again, in response to her back benchers, made specific commitments about what a Scottish Government could do in an independent Scotland. Will she give a commitment that those policies will be fully costed prior to the referendum in September?

Margaret Burgess: All the policies of this Scottish Government are fully costed, and we have costed what we are doing with discretionary housing payments. We will take no lessons from Alex Johnstone and the Tories on budgets and costings.

Dementia (Specialist Care)

2. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to ensure more specialist care for care home residents with dementia. (S4T-00564)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Care homes increasingly provide specialist care for people with dementia. Last year, the Scottish Government set up a national task force on the future of residential care in Scotland, to examine the purpose and structure of residential care services that will meet the care needs of future generations and the increasing proportion of residents with dementia. The task force will shortly produce a report with recommendations, which will go out for consultation.

As part of the national dementia strategy, we continue to implement the promoting excellence dementia skills framework, to help services in all

care settings meet the standards of care for dementia. That includes the training of more than 300 dementia ambassadors from the social services sector, many of whom have key roles in a range of activities to support dementia workforce development and training in care homes.

We know that there are people in care homes with moderate to advanced stages of dementia but who do not have a diagnosis. We are doing more to ensure that those people are identified and that those diagnosed on or after 1 April 2013 receive the benefits of the national post-diagnostic support commitment in a way that is meaningful to them given their particular care setting and stage of the illness.

Jim Hume: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the recent figures from Scotland's Care Inspectorate, which revealed that although 90 per cent of care home residents either have dementia or show signs of the illness, less than 12 per cent of Scotland's care homes for older people are specialists in dementia care—that is despite the fact that the number of people with dementia in Scotland is expected to double in the 20 years between 2011 and 2031. If staff and facilities are better equipped to deal with the challenges of dementia sufferers, the task of caring for sufferers will be made easier. What is crucial is that the care that patients experience should be far more streamlined and dignified—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): It is crucial that we get a question.

Jim Hume: Does the cabinet secretary share my concern about the care imbalance for dementia sufferers? Will he say what further action he will take to close the care gap?

Alex Neil: I think that the member is getting slightly mixed up in his interpretation of the Care Inspectorate's figures. It is true that more than 900 care homes in Scotland specialise in services for older people, 106 of which provide only specialist dementia services. However, many of the other 800 homes provide services for dementia patients.

I accept that we need to estimate and evaluate the impact of dementia on the care sector and to ensure that services are provided—qualitatively and quantitatively—to meet the increasing need. As I said, the task force has been designed to do exactly that.

Jim Hume: The cabinet secretary said that the task force's report will be published "shortly". The report was supposed to have been published in autumn 2013, and a strategy was to have been drawn up and consulted on over the winter, but that has not happened. He talked a good game last year, and now that he is under pressure from the press and Opposition MSPs he announces the delayed strategy. People who are suffering from

dementia cannot delay the progression of their condition. Why has there been such a lengthy delay in the publication of the report?

Alex Neil: I have never felt under pressure from Jim Hume or indeed any Liberal Democrat anywhere in the United Kingdom, on any subject whatever.

It is far better to take a bit longer to get the report right than to rush it out. A lot of research has been required, but the report will be published soon. We already have a dementia strategy that includes people in care homes and, as I said, we are already implementing a whole range of initiatives, including the 300 dementia ambassadors, to try to ensure that the skill levels that are required in the care sector are there.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): What progress has been made on implementing a national commitment on the prescribing of psychoactive medications in care homes for residents with dementia?

Alex Neil: We asked the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the faculty of the psychiatry of old age of the Royal College of Psychiatrists to lead an expert group in developing a national commitment on reducing the inappropriate prescribing of psychoactive medications, excluding cognitive enhancers, in all care settings, including care homes. The final recommendation will be made to the Scottish Government in the first quarter of 2014. We expect that it will include action on key areas, such as the initiation and review of medication, and on ensuring that all psychoactive medication is administered in accordance with the law.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary agree that, although one of the key aims in "Scotland's National Dementia Strategy 2013-2016" is to ensure that people with dementia who want to remain in their own home do so rather than staying in hospital or living in a care home, people who by necessity have to enter a care home should receive the same level of care that is afforded to others? Specifically, can he tell us what progress is being made on providing post-diagnostic support in the form of a named link worker for individuals in Scotland's care homes and their families, so that individuals in those situations are equally cared for?

Alex Neil: There are clearly changes in the profile of dementia patients, the stage at which they go into care homes, and how long they are in care homes for. The average length of stay in a care home used to be five, six, seven or eight years; now, a dementia patient is typically in a care home for the last two or three years of their life at most. Therefore, care is given at home for

much longer than previously. I believe that there is scope to go further in trying to ensure that care at home remains the norm for as long as possible for dementia patients.

On the specialist services and support in care homes to which Nanette Milne referred, we intend that they should eventually be available in the right setting in all care homes for dementia patients, but that obviously requires a level of investment by both the Scottish Government and care home providers.

Veterans

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):

Before we come to the debate on veterans, I want to say that I am deeply disappointed that a major policy announcement that was to be made as part of the debate found its way into the media before being announced to Parliament. That is particularly unfortunate, because party business managers have worked closely together to ensure that Parliament can come together on the wider issue of veterans.

As the Government sought the Parliament's consent to have a debate on veterans, it is not unreasonable to expect that any announcements that relate to that debate be made first in the chamber. Ultimately, the Government remains responsible for management of information concerning announcements that fall to be made in Parliament. My expectation is that the Government will reflect on how this particular announcement has been handled, and that it will take steps to ensure that such a situation does not recur.

We now move to the debate on motion S4M-08747, in the name of Keith Brown, on veterans.

14:19

The Minister for Transport and Veterans

(Keith Brown): Presiding Officer, I note your comments about the release of information. We tried hard to ensure that it did not happen, but it has happened. As you have suggested, we will reflect on how we can avoid its happening in the future. Once the information had appeared in the public sphere, I sent out a briefing note to Opposition members to ensure that they were aware of as much of the information as possible. Nevertheless, I regret the release of the information.

As Scotland prepares to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice during the great war, we should pause also to remember those who returned from that war injured and, in many cases, broken in other ways. They believed that they would return home to a land fit for heroes. Instead they came back, by and large, to poor housing, the prospect of unemployment and very little in the way of welfare support. Ours is a different society, and although we always strive to do more, those who leave the armed forces today have access to a wide range of support and services. In one vital respect, however, it can be argued that that earlier generation had one factor in their favour: the many people from this country who served in that conflict had a common experience and its horrors were shared on a much larger scale than is the case for those who serve today and return to join civic society.

Experience of active service is shared by far fewer people today, which reflects our success in avoiding wars on the scale of those that we had in the early part of the previous century. That also provides a strong reason why we must continue to provide particular support to veterans, many of whom have experienced conflict of one sort or another and have served with honour and pride, and have given up many of the individual freedoms that we take for granted. Not just for that reason, but for others, too, we owe them a debt of gratitude. By and large, our veterans are innovative, hard-working, entrepreneurial and civic-minded people, and they generally play a full part in making Scotland successful.

Veterans Scotland estimates that there are about 400,000 veterans in Scotland, which is almost 8 per cent of the population, and about 2,000 service leavers return to civilian life annually. Many make the transition relatively seamlessly, but a small number face particular difficulties and require our support. In some cases, we must ensure that they get special treatment in recognition of the special circumstances that they have had to endure, and I make no apology for taking that action.

In 2012, the excellent armed services advice project—ASAP—reported that although veterans often have similar support needs to the wider population, the experience of serving can also result in multiple and complex needs. Those needs can relate to welfare, access to benefits, getting back into employment, health issues or financial and debt issues, and their causes can often be traced back to the veteran's initial transition to civilian life. The ASAP report notes that in spite of the support and advice that is available, too many veterans in Scotland slip through the net. Some continue for many years after leaving to experience problems resulting from that unsuccessful transition. That is why it is so important that we get it right at the point of transition, but it is clear that the current transition process is failing some of our veterans. That is particularly the case for early service leavers, who are not eligible for the full Ministry of Defence resettlement package, which is offered to veterans who have more than four years' service.

In my previous role, I served in an education capacity; I remember the issues and discussions that we had then about the transition from primary school to secondary school. I am not saying that that transition is completely analogous to the transition that people make from military life to civilian life, but a fairly substantial change takes place and some of the issues are similar. It is really important that we get the transition right. Early service leavers account for half of all those who make the transition to civilian life in any given year, and some find themselves ill equipped to

cope. The transition mapping study that was produced by the Forces in Mind Trust last August projected that the cost of poor transition across the United Kingdom would rise to £122 million in 2013.

Much of the responsibility for meeting the needs of service leavers in Scotland falls to the Scottish Government and to devolved public services. It is a responsibility that we take seriously, and we are committed to ensuring that they receive the full range of support. Had we the full range of powers, we would design an holistic framework of support running seamlessly from enlistment to transition.

However, transition is currently the responsibility of the UK Government. I saw how the process could be managed when I talked to people in Canada who are involved in the transition process. They, too, take a holistic approach to people serving and moving into civilian life. I have told many UK ministers over a number of years that, on the very day when somebody joins the services, we should start a plan for their return to employment and for their housing provision when they eventually leave the service.

I look forward to seeing the outcome of the UK Government's veterans transition review, which we expect to report in February. I have made known to Lord Ashcroft my views on the failings of the current system of transition, and we have shared some suggestions for concrete improvements.

Working within our devolved powers, our priority remains the removal of any disadvantage that our veterans face in accessing public services in a way that suits their unique circumstances. Lord Ashcroft's team said that the support that is provided in Scotland to services personnel who enter civilian life is a model to be recommended.

In September 2012, we published "Our Commitments: Scottish Government Support for the Armed Forces Community in Scotland", which details the support that we provide to members of the armed forces and veterans. That support covers health, education, housing, justice and sport. The paper was widely welcomed by veterans organisations, as well as by the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces. They told us that it lays the foundations of an on-going productive relationship with them. It reaffirmed our clear and unequivocal message that the armed forces, their families and veterans remain at the centre of our policy thinking, as well as of our development and delivery of policies.

We have made considerable progress, which has been underpinned by significant funding commitments. We have committed more than £3.5 million to projects across Scotland that provide housing and support services for veterans and disabled ex-service personnel. We have

implemented the recommendations of both Murrison reports by providing £2 million for a new national state-of-the-art prosthetics service, and more than £1.2 million of funding per year for specialist mental health services. We have also improved access to national health service services, which has included provision of access to priority treatment through new general practitioner forms, the roll-out of community health index numbers to serving personnel, and provision of a veterans' health zone on the www.nhsinform.co.uk website.

Those successes have been made possible through working with our strategic partners, the NHS, local authorities and wider public bodies. I pay particular tribute to the ex-services sector: Veterans Scotland and others play a vital role as champions and advocates, as disseminators of good practice and in representing the interests of veterans across Scotland. That is why in November I announced that the Scottish Government would provide Veterans Scotland with capacity-building funding of £220,000 over the next two financial years. Along with a significant increase to the Scottish veterans fund, that is further evidence of our whole-hearted support for those who have served.

However, we must seek to do more and, in particular, to help veterans who slip through the net. I believe that the time is right for us to step up our commitment and to shape a response that addresses the distinct needs of veterans, and which supports public services to meet expectations for them.

Having reflected on the models that I have seen in Canada and elsewhere, I am pleased to announce the creation of a new commissioner dedicated to veterans. The Scottish veterans commissioner will have a broad remit, which will involve taking an overview of support services across Scotland. Through thematic inquiries, the commissioner will identify the need for, and will help to drive, changes that will enable those services to support veterans better.

We must ask why some veterans are still struggling to access the help that they deserve, where the gaps are and what more we can do to meet our obligations to those who have served. As I have said, we must ensure that at the first point at which a veteran tries to access public services—whether it is the council, the Government or the health service—they get the right response at the right time, because if they do not, many will not come back to seek that support, as we have found in the past.

Working with partners, the commissioner will bring renewed focus and momentum to our ambition to develop leading-edge support for veterans across our devolved responsibilities. The

commissioner's recommendations will help to build leadership and direction on veterans policy in partnership—crucially, that will be done with the strong ex-services sector. The unique role of veterans organisations in Scotland will be pivotal, and the expertise and evidence of the Royal British Legion Scotland, Poppyscotland and others will be drawn on to capture the experience of veterans. The veteran's perspective will be fundamental to the work of the commissioner and will inform investigations and recommendations for improvement.

However, the commissioner will not be a complaints arbitration service; we will ensure that the commissioner's remit does not duplicate the functions of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and others. We will take the time to listen to and take on board the views of key partners—especially Veterans Scotland—in order to help to shape the commissioner's remit and work programme before the post is advertised.

I have set out what we have done to support our veterans to date and how we now propose to do more, through the development of a Scottish veterans commissioner. We will continue to work with veterans charities and public sector providers to ensure that we meet the aspirations and expectations of Scotland's veterans.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the debt of gratitude that Scotland owes to those who have served in defence of freedom; notes that, since the publication of *Our Commitments: Scottish Government Support for the Armed Forces Community in Scotland* in September 2012, the Scottish Government has continued to provide support to the armed forces and veterans' communities in Scotland that has been widely welcomed by the military and the ex-service community; commends the partnership working with stakeholders, which has led to improved support, including capacity-building funding for Veterans Scotland, and further notes the Scottish Government's intention to ensure that the response to the UK Government's Veterans' Transition Review addresses the distinct needs of Scottish veterans and supports public services to meet their expectations; recognises the excellent work of veterans' organisations in supporting veterans; welcomes the number of Veterans' Champions across Scotland, and endorses the aim of ensuring that local services are better integrated to support Scotland's veterans.

14:29

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I very much welcome the opportunity to speak about armed forces veterans and the vital support services and charities that operate in Scotland and throughout the UK.

From the outset I acknowledge, as the Government's motion does, the debt of gratitude that Scotland owes to those who have served in defence of freedom and I put on the record that we on this side of the chamber continue to support

our armed forces personnel and veterans. We will therefore support the Government's motion at decision time and we welcome the announcement of a veterans' commissioner. I note the minister's comments on the early release of that announcement, but if it had been included in the motion that all parties agree on, we would all have been able to support the announcement not just on the record through the *Official Report* but at decision time tonight. I note, too, the Presiding Officer's comments on the announcement.

Being a member of the armed forces, particularly during times of conflict, is immensely stressful and beyond anything that we can imagine. However, such stressful situations create a level of commitment and an intense bond among service personnel that is unique to our armed forces in this country. I could only listen and try to work it out in my head when I heard from a soldier who had served in Afghanistan what it was like to come under fire and about that pressure and losing a fellow soldier who was as close to him as a member of his own family.

I can only imagine how isolated someone must feel when they are discharged from the armed forces alone into society, perhaps with no family, after having such a close bond with the comrades with whom they fought. They return to the UK and perhaps live at much larger distances from one another. They go from living in close quarters with people whom they considered to be family—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 that it creates between people. That is particularly the case because, as the minister pointed out, the number of people experiencing military life has fallen from that in the early part of the previous century.

The majority of servicemen and women make a successful transition to civilian life, but it really is not hard to imagine why some of our veterans struggle to adapt. It can put a massive strain on family life, and for those without family civilian life must feel like the loneliest place in the world. For those reasons, it is vital that advice and support services be put in place for former service personnel to help them to adjust to living in mainstream society, and that we support plans to co-ordinate and deliver support and advice services from the private, public and voluntary sectors for ex-service personnel and their families.

There are too many fantastic organisations providing support and advice to ex-service personnel and their families to mention, or for me to do justice to all the work that they do in a speech in Parliament today, but I want to mention some, the first of which could give us experience of what being an armed forces reservist involves. I

have mentioned previously the organisation called SaBRE—supporting Britain’s reservists and employers—which has area committees up and down Scotland. That organisation gives advice and information on the extra skills that a reservist can bring to an organisation and it encourages employers to look more favourably on employing reservists. The organisation can give employers first-hand experience of the sort of training that a reservist will get and it regularly holds employer weekends that members here could go to to experience the sort of training that our reservists get. I would be happy to give local contact details for area committees to anyone who is interested.

We have to continue to support the organisations that do tremendous work for former service personnel across Scotland, including the Royal British Legion, which I visit regularly. The legion provides practical care, advice and support to armed forces personnel, ex-servicemen and women of all ages, and their families. It also runs the poppy appeal annually, and 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 dependants. The legion also assists any serviceman or servicewoman to pursue his or her entitlement to a war disablement pension; every year up to 200 ex-service personnel in Scotland are represented at war pensions tribunals. We also have the Scottish Veterans Residences just across the road from the Parliament, which provides residential accommodation to over 300 ex-service personnel and their partners, and has helped tens of thousands of veterans throughout Scotland since it was established in 1911.

We have the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association, whose Lanark branch covers the Central Scotland region, which 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, which is a telephone service that is entirely independent of the military chain of command, and which provides supportive listening and advice and a specialist “absent without leave” advice line. The association also runs a forces additional needs and disability support group and organises children’s holidays that are run by volunteers and which concentrate on offering children who have additional support needs experiences and activities to which they would not usually have access.

The last organisation that I will touch on is Erskine, which is the country’s leading provider of care for veterans. It provides a wide range of care, from respite and short breaks to residential and nursing care, dementia care, palliative care, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and rehabilitation care, all of which are vital services

for ex-servicemen and servicewomen and their families.

I hope that the newly announced veterans commissioner will build on the tremendous work that is already taking place in our veterans community and that it will support the many organisations that provide essential services for people to whom we owe such a large debt. I also hope that the commissioner will bring together the wide array of services that operate in pockets of communities and ensure that veterans across Scotland get access to those fantastic services.

14:36

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I start by thanking the BBC for advance sight of the minister’s statement. Although I say that in a fairly light-hearted way, there is a serious issue here. However, we must not allow that to get in the way of the unanimity that exists in the chamber. It is with that in mind that I rise to support the minister’s motion.

As other members are, I am delighted to welcome the management team of Scottish Veterans Residences to Parliament today—they are in the public gallery. Scottish Veterans Residences is one of several veterans housing charities that operate in Scotland. It offers veterans a range of housing options and is currently driving forward an innovative and much-needed development in Glasgow.

As members may be aware, I have an army veteran in my office, so I have had no alternative but to keep a keen interest in veterans issues over a number of years now. In 2012, I was delighted to sponsor a reception on the issue, which the minister kindly attended along with many other MSPs.

For most service personnel, the move from military to civilian life is a smooth one, although many veterans have told me that it can be more of a culture shock than they envisaged. For some, however, their military service or even underlying health issues that were previously undetected will mean that they face greater challenges in adjusting to their situation. Although veterans housing charities often specialise in different needs, the fact that they operate under one umbrella and have a single application process demonstrates partnership working and a desire to deliver effective services to those who need them.

To secure a home is a fundamental need for anyone, but veterans often require more than that. It is estimated that more than 70,000 members of the British armed forces have served in Afghanistan since 2001 and more than 100,000 served in Iraq between 2003 and 2009, so I am sure that we all agree that specialist services for

veterans will become increasingly important. Poppyscotland found that, compared with their English and Welsh counterparts, veterans who live in Scotland are 10 per cent more likely to become homeless, 8 per cent more likely to suffer from mental health problems, 5 per cent more likely to have financial problems, 5 per cent more likely to have a criminal record and 3 per cent more likely to suffer from alcohol problems.

One person in five in the Scottish population is a member of the veterans community through being an ex-services person or being the spouse or dependant of such a person. Research shows that some 350,000 members of the veterans community have potential welfare needs, and I feel that it is important to highlight that.

Yes, the support that is given to serving personnel who are making the transition from military to civilian life has improved considerably over the years, but too often a need for specialist support manifests itself only years after discharge. That is why I am glad to see the growing recognition that our veterans may need our help well beyond the initial phase of their civilian life.

The issues that have been raised in the debate are important and varied. However, the minister's proposal for a veterans commissioner draws considerable interest and I wish to address it directly. In his opening remarks, the minister made it clear—I quite agree with the principle that he set out—that in the past many veterans believed that they were properly represented because there were so many veterans in our elected parliaments and other bodies. That is no longer the case.

However, my concern over the appointment of a commissioner—not my opposition, members will understand—is that we have been too quick to appoint commissioners in the past. We are in a particularly lucky position in having here in our Parliament a minister who has been appointed to represent veterans' interests who is a man who has done considerable military service. The concept of a commissioner has worked many times for other purposes, but the cluttered environment of commissioners and ombudsmen has required thinning in recent years, so the appointment of another commissioner, if it is to be done, must be done with key objectives in mind.

There is already an extremely complex—some would say cluttered—landscape for veterans in Scotland. The ability to bring together specialist support is already achieved by that complex landscape of charities and veterans representatives, including veterans champions, across all our communities. For that reason, I am somewhat concerned about the appointment of a commissioner, and I am also concerned about how it may be funded. I would like the minister to explain the funding arrangements. If it is to be

funded by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, we must consider whether that money could be better spent on other priorities.

The Government has to justify its call for a commissioner to deal with veterans' issues. The minister must explain to us exactly what a commissioner would achieve that is not being achieved by those who already work extremely hard in the sector, and exactly what we can expect to see over the longer term. If, as has been the case with some in the past, the appointment will gradually be subsumed into another responsibility and watered down, it may actually make things more complicated rather than more simple.

With my qualified support, I look forward to hearing more answers from the minister and to having in place a system that will deliver, whether we have a commissioner or not.

14:43

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): The armed forces class a veteran as anyone who has given one day of what is called reckonable service. That may be because once someone has made the decision to sign up and serve in the military, they have made a profound and lasting commitment that goes beyond days, months and years and is much like joining a new family.

The transition that a person undergoes when they leave that family for a future on civvy street can prove to be hard at times, as Mark Griffin and Alex Johnstone touched on in their contributions. Many former servicemen and servicewomen describe the difficulty of finding their place in society without the shared sense of purpose and close bonds of friendship that they previously relied on.

The transition can be more difficult for those who bear the physical or emotional scars of war—especially those who lose a limb and face a lifelong struggle towards rehabilitation. The military covenant recognises that society has a moral obligation to members of the armed forces for their service. By giving up their civil liberties and placing their lives in danger, our veterans make themselves worthy of the utmost respect and the highest possible standards of treatment and care.

That is why I am pleased to use the debate to draw attention to the efforts of the people who work to rehabilitate military amputees—in particular, the pioneering work of the southeast mobility and rehabilitation technology centre, which is based in the grounds of the Astley Ainslie hospital in my constituency. The SMART centre employs more than 70 professionals and is responsible for the on-going care, rehabilitation and support of a quarter of all of Scotland's military amputees. Thanks to Scottish Government

investment and the leadership that a dedicated veterans minister can provide, the facility will become the centrepiece of a new national approach to amputee care and will provide, which has never happened before, a fully comprehensive rehabilitation service. The centre will have the capacity to fit and repair the next generation of high-technology prosthetic limbs and will offer training and support to patients on how to live with their disabilities. The head of the service, Mr David Gow, has described that advance as a step change in the delivery of amputee care.

In April 2012, I lodged a motion in Parliament congratulating the *Daily Record* on its investigation that revealed that as many as one in 10 British Army soldiers is currently battling mental health issues. Many who have returned to civilian life have to cope with the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder. That is why I am pleased that military amputees at SMART will have access to extensive peer-based support with specialist psychological input from trained professionals. Work is now under way to establish that service; it is hoped that it will be fully up and running by April this year.

Presiding Officer, just as it is my honour to highlight the terrific work of such organisations, I also highlight the efforts of one particular veteran who continues to raise funds and awareness, and contributes to a number of worthwhile causes, including Edinburgh's Royal hospital for sick children, for which he has raised more than £100,000, and for the Prestonfield and district neighbourhood workers project, which provides a range of day care services for older people in my constituency. At the age of 93, my constituent Tom Gilzean is a shining example. He can be seen with his trademark tartan trews on the High Street of our capital city, raising funds for those good causes. He is a shining example of the best virtues that any veteran could hope to display. A decorated war hero, his tireless commitment to charity and selfless dedication to helping others is an inspiration to us all, and is worthy of the highest recognition. In raising so much money for good causes, he has touched the lives of so many people. He is an example to us all and a credit to himself and the veterans community. A campaign is under way to have him awarded the freedom of the city of Edinburgh. I can think of no person more deserving of such an honour.

14:47

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank the Government for today's debate and for allowing Parliament to recognise the contribution that veterans have made and continue to make to our country. As the minister highlighted, the UK's involvement in armed conflict remains a highly

contentious issue but, by contrast, it is pleasing to note that public support for serving and former members of our armed forces seems, if anything, to be increasing.

As we move further away from the world wars that so shaped the history of the previous century, we have the opportunity to develop a new and hopefully healthier relationship with the military and with our military veterans. I want to highlight two points this afternoon: the need for us to encourage successive generations to remember the sacrifice made by so many in defence of our freedoms and our way of life; and the practical help and support that we can and should offer those who continue to serve.

In this anniversary year, when we look back at the momentous events which marked the outbreak of the first world war, it is easy to be swamped by the sheer scale of the devastation that was wrought and the millions of people who died in that conflict. However, it is sometimes the individual stories that can most make us stop to think.

That was certainly my reaction when I saw the work of the Mearns history group in my own constituency, which has recently undertaken a project to research the background of all those from the local area who died in the great war. For more than 10 years, on every second Sunday in November I have read the names on the memorial at Mearns Cross many times over and have wondered who those men were, what lives they led, and who they left behind. The local history group has done a wonderful job of finding out just a little of the story behind each name and the grief that their loss must have caused.

The names on the memorial include Andrew Hamilton, private, 1st garrison battalion of the Gordon Highlanders, who was a joiner who lived with his wife Elizabeth and their six children at 35 Main Street, Newton Mearns, and who died of nephritis in Rawalpindi aged 39. Corporal Robert Close of the 2nd battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, son of Robert and Sarah Close, was killed on the Somme on 16 July 1916, aged 25. I want to thank all the volunteers in the local community who have taken the time to unearth these simple facts, which allow us, even now, to make the connection to our war dead.

However, it is not enough simply to remember the fallen; we should use this moment and this year's commemorations in particular to help those who are still serving. I draw to the minister's attention a worthwhile new initiative. Armed forces legal action, or AFLA, is a nationwide scheme to provide discounted legal services for current armed forces personnel and those who have recently left the armed forces. Lawyers up and down the country are being asked to offer a reduction of one third off their fees and to extend

that support to wounded veterans and bereaved partners. To date, 117 law firms up and down the country have expressed an interest in registering for it.

The scheme, which was the brainchild of a Scottish serviceman, will be launched officially on armed forces day later this year. I am pleased to be hosting a reception on the scheme here in the Parliament to which all members will of course be invited. If the minister is interested in finding out more, I point him in the direction of the website of the Law Society of Scotland. I am sure that he will recognise the advantages of such a straightforward, practical and supportive scheme, and I would be delighted if he could offer it his or the Government's endorsement.

I will end on a slightly lighter note. I took advantage of a previous debate to enlist the support of the minister's colleague the Minister for External Affairs and International Development for a fair trade football match. The Scottish Parliament team is, once more, up against a team of Royal Air Force veterans in our annual fixture to mark armed forces day. Before anyone gets the wrong idea, the team might be veterans, but they are fit, skilful and, unsurprisingly, very well disciplined. I know that I can count on Labour's shadow spokesperson, Mr Griffin, to shore up the back line. I also know from experience that the minister is a very useful player. We are counting on his support, so I hope that he can find a date in his diary for the match in June.

I support the Government motion.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Macintosh. Methinks we are going to miss John Park for the football.

14:52

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): We all know the quote:

"There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."

In this case, it is for one's nation, but do we really know the sacrifice that we ask of our armed service personnel when we ask them to pay the ultimate price for our freedom and democracy? Do we truly understand the impact on any human being who has witnessed the horror of war? Do we take account of the impact on the families left behind to face an uncertain future, either without their loved one or with the duty to look after a damaged or injured loved one?

Do we really understand that, for some, the battlefield becomes civvy street? Citizens Advice Scotland has published a report called "Civvy Street: The New Frontline", which states:

"The recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have led to an increased focus on the support needs of veterans and those still serving. In turn, this has led to better advice and training for those leaving the Armed Forces and better support for those who experience problems after doing so."

However, as the minister said, there remain some who slip through that net. Many veterans continue to experience real difficulty, especially in that transition period, and some experience it for decades. My involvement in the firm base forum in Lanarkshire has shown me clearly how problems can arise years later.

One of the things that I support is the armed services advice project, which was established in 2010 following a very successful pilot in my constituency of Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse. It provides advice and support for all members of the armed forces community, whether serving personnel, veterans or their families. ASAP is delivered by the Scottish citizens advice bureaux service—a highly trusted network with decades of experience of delivering free, independent, confidential and impartial advice and information to the general public.

In its first two years, ASAP was extremely successful. It assisted nearly 1,800 clients with over 6,000 issues, 84 per cent of whom were either veterans or their dependants. Some of them were still serving and needed support with the transition out of the forces, which they were finding very difficult. ASAP was able to deliver that support, too.

I was honoured to have a debate on the project a number of months ago. We saw from case studies that armed forces veterans have similar issues to everybody else but that things for them seem to be 10 times more difficult. If they have a mental health problem or an on-going injury—sometimes issues are not diagnosed until years later—they can find it extremely difficult to go and ask for help.

ASAP provides that help. It gives it on an informal basis and supports people in the measures that they want at the pace that they want. However, to truly accept the responsibility and duty of care that we have for our armed services personnel, we must ensure that they have the best of care and that when they come to the end of the service that they have given—irrespective of the reasons for going to war and whether we agree with them—they should get the highest standard of care.

That is why I welcome the minister's announcement today. In my opinion, a commissioner can make the difference between standard local authority care and high-quality, consistent healthcare. As an active member of the firm base forum, I have seen a lot of the issue and I have seen how needs are addressed.

The minister will remember visiting with me Remploy's veterans employment project in Hamilton last year, when we heard at first hand about the challenges faced by veterans in gaining support and, in some cases, the challenge of actually admitting that they need support. He will remember that consistency of service was one of the biggest challenges faced, and I believe that the commissioner will take steps to address any inconsistencies.

I believe that, like the other good partnerships and collaborations that the Scottish Government has with veterans organisations in Scotland, the new veterans commissioner—a first in the United Kingdom—will add to the successful approach taken by our minister in Scotland. Our commitments paper demonstrates clearly that the SNP Government understands the sacrifice that veterans have made and that we will do all that we can to provide the highest quality of care and support.

14:56

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome the debate, and I am pleased to be able to offer a few brief remarks.

As the motion rightly acknowledges, we owe a considerable debt to veterans, but the motion is also right to highlight the excellent work carried out by veterans organisations and others, many of whom are represented in the public gallery this afternoon, who support veterans and their families in a myriad of different ways.

I draw on my experience from Orkney, an area with proud military traditions. The Royal British Legion there has more than 2,000 members in Kirkwall and a further 500 in Stromness, representing not just 8 per cent but a full 12 per cent of the population all told. It is a very active branch and club, providing a focal point for bringing the local community together, both members and non-members.

Last year, I was fortunate enough to attend an event hosted by Veterans Scotland in Orkney. Understandably, it was well attended, but it was a real eye-opener for the likes of myself about the sort of issues faced by veterans transitioning out of the services. We have heard already from members about housing, joblessness and addiction issues, but it struck me that many of the issues were practical and were based on the extent to which some of those exiting the armed forces can find themselves institutionalised and unable to cope with some of the things that we find mundane and straightforward.

There are obviously issues around physical disabilities but, as Jim Eadie pointed out, there are also mental health issues. They can have a stigma

attached to them and can be difficult for anybody to deal with, but they are particularly difficult for those with a services background.

For all those reasons, the way in which services are delivered, both locally and nationally, is important. It is not necessarily the case that forces veterans can access those services in the same way as those without that background, and a lot of good work is being done in that regard. Christina McKelvie has referenced the work of the citizens advice bureaux, which I am familiar with, and I echo her comments. There is growing evidence that the system is not working as well as it could or should, but I simply question whether a commissioner is the right approach.

I found myself agreeing with some of what Alex Johnstone was saying in that regard. Leaving aside the issues around the way in which the news was broken and the lack of discussion with business managers in the preparation of the motion—those are process issues—there is a more substantive risk that creating a commissioner and the staff to support that role will divert resources away from direct help to veterans. Why not use some of the additional £250,000 to build capacity in Veterans Scotland, in citizens advice bureaux and in other such organisations? From conversations that I have had locally in Orkney, I know that there is a plethora of organisations all doing excellent work, but there is already confusion and, as Alex Johnstone said, there is a risk that all we do over time is to exacerbate that.

The minister is right to highlight the continued problem with enabling veterans to access services and support, particularly at transitions. He might even be right that we require some means of bringing together the various organisations and agencies that are tasked with providing that support. However, I do not think that Parliament has been provided with evidence to suggest that the plan for a commissioner is the answer. We need reassurances that the office and role will not divert much-needed funds away from building capacity in organisations that already undertake valuable front-line work with veterans and their families.

So that we are clear about what we are voting on this afternoon, we also need an explanation as to why, as Mark Griffin said, if it is such a good idea, it was not good enough to get into the motion that was discussed with business managers. As the Presiding Officer made clear, in the Parliament, debates about and consideration of issues relating to veterans have been characterised by a genuine consensual and cross-party approach. I recognise the specific and direct insight that the minister has in the area and I agree with most of what he had to say, but I am

concerned that his proposal for a commissioner needs more detailed scrutiny to ensure that we make best use of the resources that are available to assist those to whom we owe so much.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I offer my assurance to Captain Macintosh that I will again be on duty in the service of this Parliament in our attempt to defeat our Royal Air Force comrades on the football field later this year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): On this occasion, I will allow nicknames.

15:01

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I welcome the announcement of a commissioner, which I think is a step in the right direction. The minister suggests that the commissioner would oversee the provisions for veterans and explore where the gaps are and why they are there. That is an extremely good idea, despite the fact that we seem to have an extremely joined-up landscape at the moment. The minister suggested that he will consult on the commissioner's remit, which is extraordinarily sensible, because it means that some of the questions that have reasonably been asked about what the commissioner will do can be dealt with in the remit that he or she is given when the time comes.

Clearly, some people find the transition out of the armed forces extraordinarily difficult. We can understand why that might be the case and we should see that beforehand. Every time someone moves into a new job, it should be obvious that at some point they will move out of it. I find it extraordinary that the armed forces did not work out a long time ago that they need to find ways of transitioning their members into civilian life. The Government's commitments document, which was published fairly recently, has a threefold approach that involves providing support for servicemen, engaging with the community and providing personal services.

In passing, I note that the independence white paper makes a few observations about what we would do if we were in charge of absolutely everything. There is the idea that there should be no compulsory redundancies. The idea of someone getting their P45 on the battlefield does not appeal to me, and I do not think that it appeals to any member. There is also the idea that we might review pensions, in recognition that, for one reason or another, Scots do not seem to live quite as long as others. That undoubtedly applies to those who have been in the armed services, so we could reasonably look at that issue.

Another important issue is access to housing, which has been mentioned only briefly. I want to highlight an opportunity in Carnoustie in Angus. I

have with me not so much a dodgy dossier as a dodgy picture of the minister, who appears to be in charge of an extremely large piece of equipment, which I think had just demolished some houses—I hope that he was not about to demolish them. Those houses are to be replaced by new housing, some of which is specifically for veterans. Appropriate accommodation is absolutely essential and is undoubtedly an extremely good idea for those who have been injured.

Rushing swiftly on, I want to pick up on the issue of mental health, which some members have mentioned. I am grateful to Mark Griffin for a new phrase. He mentioned that members of the armed forces come out into a "community of strangers". That is a new phrase to me and one that I will remember. Christina McKelvie asked whether we understand, and the answer to that very obvious question is no. We also need to understand the "Just get on with it" attitude in the military. We know where it comes from, but it means that those who leave perhaps think that they just need to get on with the difficulties in life when, actually, they should not need to.

I have some quite alarming MOD statistics from the Falklands war. I am conscious that the minister had some involvement in that war. There were just under 26,000 UK armed forces personnel there. Some 237 sadly died during the campaign and, at the time of the report, 1,335 had died since 1982. More importantly for my point, 95 of those deaths were attributable to suicide or were open verdicts.

That is the sharp end of the health issues, and the issue will not go away. Many charities, including Combat Stress, are already working on it, and I suspect that we are still seeing only the tip of an iceberg. A great number of the cases will come later in life as other traumatic events affect those veterans. That is, perhaps, an issue to which we will have to return.

15:06

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I am honoured to speak in the debate. Veterans and veteran issues are close to my heart, as I am an ex-Territorial Army soldier myself, having served in the 71st Royal Engineer regiment reserves and sponsored units.

The first paragraph of the armed forces covenant acknowledges that our armed forces and their families make huge sacrifices for our country. In return, we have a duty to give them and their families our respect and support. When veterans sign up for the ultimate sacrifice for our country, that is the least we can do.

Veteran issues are separate from our thoughts on war. We can strongly object to and oppose a war but, once our troops are there, it is our duty to

support them through whatever problems and difficulties they experience during their time there and on their return home.

We are failing our veterans. They are often left to rely on charity hand-outs, which, in the current financial climate, can no longer be guaranteed. Therefore, the announcement of a commissioner is welcome. However, I would like him or her to have the powers to ensure that actual support is given to the veterans who he or she will be appointed to help.

Last month, I helped to organise a curry night in the Mosque Kitchen restaurant in Edinburgh for ABF the Soldiers' Charity, which is a fantastic organisation. In 2013, it helped 170 veterans in Glasgow, spending £80,000 for their wellbeing. Worryingly, it has seen its case load rise over the past three years. It is particularly important to note that the charities that currently support our veterans face huge pressures and challenges.

Therefore, I am happy to support the motion, which mentioned support for veterans. I hope that we go on and ensure that we have a strategy in place that supports our veterans throughout the services that they normally look for.

I look forward to the commissioner making sure that our veterans' needs are looked after better than they currently are. Many of our veterans go through a lot of hardship and their families suffer with them. That needs to change. Although I welcome the announcement of the commissioner and the resources to fund the post, I do not yet see the commissioner being given the strength and power to ensure that he or she will be able to carry out the job effectively, ensuring real support for our veterans. I hope that I will see that in the near future.

15:09

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I, too, welcome the announcement of the creation of a new post of veterans commissioner.

I have a personal interest in the military, as my daughter's boyfriend of around two-and-a-half years passed out as a Royal Marine just before Christmas. I congratulate him on achieving that esteemed position and on following in the footsteps of the minister, who is a former marine.

In 1915, the Scottish War Blinded charity was set up in Edinburgh to take those from the front line who had been blinded by mustard gas. That charity has gone from strength to strength and continues to support and rehabilitate not only veterans from recent wars such as those in Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland but veterans who have lost their sight due to age or infirmity. The charity has changed with the times, and the

minister is sending a message that we must change with the times, too. There is a recognition that our veterans require additional support, which, for example, might take the form of their being placed at the top of the list for appropriate housing when they leave the forces, of general practitioner support being there when they need it or of hospital treatment being provided if it is needed.

I believe that the commissioner will be able to take up those issues and co-ordinate the many organisations that already exist and aid the partnership working that they do. As Liam McArthur said, there is a plethora of organisations in this area, which can in itself lead to confusion. I hope that the commissioner will be able to take some of that confusion away and provide co-ordination.

I believe that it was Churchill who said that there is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man. In my constituency, there is a charity called HorseBack UK, which uses horses to rehabilitate and enable personnel who have come back from a conflict, many of whom have lost limbs and have gone through the arduous and sometimes painful process of getting prosthetic limbs. However, the issue is not just one of being able to use the limbs correctly, but one of coming to terms with the amputation and the psychological aspects of having lost a limb and why.

The minister has visited HorseBack UK, and there is an open invitation for him to return when the weather is slightly better so that he can enjoy getting into the saddle along with some of the veterans and experience some of the work that the charity does.

HorseBack UK is an integral part of the community in Aboyne and west Aberdeenshire. It tries to give something back to the community. It talks about its work being about repaying and embracing its community. Most of its work is done outdoors, and it has school visits. It also provides team-building training for oil and gas companies. It provides professional strands of training through the disciplines that have been learnt through the military. It has given to many veterans who have struggled and continue to struggle with mental health issues a real sense of purpose in the community. I commend Jock Hutchison for the work that he continues to do.

I had hoped that Alex Johnstone and Liam McArthur would welcome the announcement regarding the commissioner and ask the minister a few questions about the purpose of the commissioner and what the role would look like.

I finish with the words of Martin Gibson of Veterans Scotland, who personally thanked the

minister for the overall support for the wellbeing of veterans. I echo those words.

15:15

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am delighted to conclude the debate on behalf of my party and, as the convener of the cross-party group on armed forces veterans, declare something of an interest. In both those capacities, I welcome the debate, just as I welcome the interest that the Parliament has, since its earliest days, shown in veterans and the issues that they face.

That interest has been continued in a largely exemplary fashion by this Scottish Government. As Dennis Robertson highlighted, that has been welcomed by the armed forces and the veterans community. I sincerely trust that that level of Government support and interest will continue long into the future, no matter what party or combination of parties form our future Governments. The debt of gratitude that we owe to our serving and former servicemen and women, be they in their later years or their teens, demands no less. The motion before us is right to highlight that debt at the outset.

The motion is also right to highlight the truly phenomenal role played by veterans organisations and local authorities veterans champions in helping to focus attention on the many and varied issues and challenges that our veterans face. A quick glance at the agendas of the past few meetings of the cross-party group quite easily highlights those challenges.

We have looked at and discussed the armed forces charter and the Scottish Government's "Our Commitments" paper. We have looked at the impact of the welfare reform programme on Scotland's veterans; health and wellbeing issues; housing; and the all-important transition from military to civilian life. We have looked at issues relating to veterans in custody and, in the rest of our programme this year, we will revisit housing, mental health and wellbeing, and the "Our Commitments" paper.

The cross-party group is well attended and greatly valued by veterans organisations, but I would dearly love to see more colleagues at the quarterly meetings. For those in the chamber who have a diary with them, I give notice that the next meeting is on 5 February. I look forward to seeing them there.

The one sector that seems to have been slightly omitted from the motion, though certainly not in many members' contributions, is the voluntary and charitable sector, whose efforts to help and support veterans is quite immense and, in monetary terms, invaluable. The charities range in

size from well-known national organisations such as Poppyscotland, to small charities run by individuals, such as Southwest Scotland RnR in my constituency, which organises courses of what I would call competitive recreation for young physically and often mentally damaged soldiers returning from war zones. That charity simply aims at—and nearly always succeeds in—putting a smile back on the faces of those young people after the traumatic experiences that they have faced on tour—experiences that were vividly highlighted by Mark Griffin in his opening speech.

I share some of the reservations about the commissioner's role that were expressed by Alex Johnstone and Liam McArthur. If I have one particular reservation it is that he or she may be tempted to tinker with and overformalise the work of the voluntary sector and the smaller charities. I hope that that will not be the case, but I suspect that there will be a temptation to do so, which should be firmly resisted.

I am sorry to conclude on a slightly negative note. I very much welcome the Presiding Officer's opening statement and register my own disappointment that the announcement of the commissioner was leaked to the media before today's debate. That blatant bypassing of parliamentary procedure is something of a slap in the face for those who worked to ensure that we had a consensual motion before us this afternoon. I do not believe that it reflects on the personal efforts of the minister and I do not hold him responsible. However, it somewhat diminishes the respect with which his Government is viewed by the rest of the chamber and has cast something of a cloud over an otherwise worthwhile and consensual debate, which has included excellent contributions from all sides of the chamber.

15:19

Mark Griffin: I close the debate on behalf of the Labour Party as I opened it, by restating the continued support that we give our armed forces personnel and veterans. It is telling that, as was pointed out by Ken Macintosh and Hanzala Malik, public support for our armed forces continues to rise despite what some would consider contentious conflicts that not all members of the public support.

We owe a debt of gratitude to members of the armed forces and veterans, and we will be able to mark some of the key events from world war one over the next few years. I have met Norman Drummond, chair of the Scottish commemorations panel, who outlined the key dates and events that will commemorate some of the events that have a particularly strong Scottish dimension. I look forward to attending as many of those events as possible over the next few years.

As well as work at a national level to commemorate events, local projects are on-going. As Ken Macintosh said, the Mearns history group has collated the records of the commitment of local people from the community who fought in world war one. The Croy Historical Society has compiled records in my region, to which I made a small contribution, with my great uncle's "Soldier's Bible" from the first world war, which was passed on to me—the Bibles were awarded to him and members of his regiment by the lord provost of Rutherglen before they went on service.

Those serving in our armed forces are asked to make massive personal human rights sacrifices and, ultimately, to give up their right to life in service of the nation. Christina McKelvie and Hanzala Malik mentioned that in their speeches, continuing on from the excellent debate secured by Christina McKelvie on the ASAP report, which was welcomed right across the chamber. It is only right that Governments and we as a nation value, respect and support our armed forces, culminating in the annual commemoration of armistice day, when we stop to remember those who have given their lives in action so that we can enjoy the freedom that we experience today. Members of the armed forces have fallen back on that military covenant, when Governments in Scotland and across the UK and the wider public are able to show their support for them.

Members might know that I spent some time in the Territorial Army, in relation to which I have not had a similar experience in any other part of my life. Although I went through all the training that a reservist can, I did not deploy to any military conflict zone because of university and work commitments, so I cannot even start to imagine the level of intensity and commitment to fellow soldiers that go with a front-line experience.

Having had that front-line experience, soldiers who return to society often enter that community of strangers that Nigel Don flagged up from my opening speech. That is what makes the Royal British Legion and other community focal points so important. For example, as Liam McArthur mentioned, the legion in Orkney operates with a large degree of community support, given that it has 12 per cent of the population as members. With that focus on reintegrating members of the armed forces into the community, such organisations break down that community of strangers barrier and allow people who have the same experiences to interact. If people from the wider public are brought in, they can talk through a lot of their experiences in active service with them, spreading much more widely throughout the community an understanding of the role and the pressure that they are under. The support and advice that such community organisations and others provide are vital.

A number of members used the word "plethora" when talking about the number of veterans organisations, which can be confusing for armed forces veterans. I hope that the veterans commissioner's first action will be to address that point and make his or her door the first port of call for a veteran who is looking to be pointed towards the support services that they need.

I hope, too, that the commissioner will build on the work of veterans champions in local authorities. In North Lanarkshire Council, for example, the work of the veterans champion has led to housing policy being amended to recognise the priority needs of homeless ex-service personnel—and their families—before they are discharged from the forces, so that appropriate housing can be identified and prepared before veterans rejoin the community.

I support the motion in the minister's name and I support the establishment of a veterans commissioner. I look forward to the consultation on the commissioner's role and responsibilities.

15:25

Keith Brown: I am grateful to all members who have spoken. We heard some good speeches, which contained knowledge, insight, suggestions and indeed criticisms. I will try to address members' points, particularly their constructive criticisms.

It is unfortunate that there is contention, but any Government proposal must be open to comment and criticism. However, on the two substantive criticisms, which I think were made by Alex Johnstone and Liam McArthur and were to do with remit and resources, I said in my opening speech that we are not only applying new resources to the post, which have been found from the Scottish Government, although not from the veterans budget, but putting additional money—about £100,000, I think—into capacity building. Liam McArthur suggested that money should be used in that way. I therefore thought that we had covered the issue and allowed for unanimous support for the post.

On remit, I said that we intend to consult further, not least with Veterans Scotland. If members have suggestions, I will be more than willing to listen to them. On Alex Fergusson's point, it is certainly not my view that the commissioner should have oversight of the charities that comprise Veterans Scotland. I have made that point to Veterans Scotland, and I am sure that it will not be suggested that such oversight form part of the commissioner's remit.

I think that the proposal is positive and is of a piece with the Government's approach, which has been pretty innovative. The first minister to have

responsibility for veterans—Stewart Maxwell, who is in the chamber—was appointed back in 2007. He established the Scottish veterans fund, which was the first such fund in Scotland. The paper, “Our Commitments: Scottish Government Support for the Armed Forces Community in Scotland”, represented a new departure and set out expectations on how Government and others should meet veterans’ needs.

As Alex Fergusson said, there is also the cross-party group on armed forces veterans. I was involved in the establishment of the group, which is a great addition to the Parliament. Whether we are talking about the Government or the Parliament, we have upped our game on veterans over the past few years.

It is not the case that whenever there is a debate on veterans we should all naturally fall into consensus mode. I have never thought that. However, it would be useful to have a consensus about the role that we expect the commissioner to undertake. Given the assurance that resources will not come from other veterans-related activities—in fact, additional money is going into such activities—and the assurance about consultation on the commissioner’s remit, I hope that we will be able to reach unanimity.

Mark Griffin mentioned support for Britain’s reservists and employers. I am involved with SaBRE, although I have to say that I have attended my local organisation fairly infrequently. The organisation is important and looks after the interests of reservists and other parts of the armed forces.

Many organisations have been mentioned and it is perhaps invidious of me to mention only two or three, but given that a number of members mentioned Scottish Veterans Residences, I take the opportunity to thank very much Lieutenant Colonel Ian Ballantyne, who recently retired from the post of chief executive of the organisation. He happens to have been my company commander when I served in the Falklands and has had a fantastic career since then. He is succeeded in his post by Phil Cox, who I am sure will continue the good work that the organisation does.

As we set out in “Scotland’s Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland”, irrespective of the outcome of the referendum—I go back to a point that Alex Fergusson made—there has been a fairly substantial consensus on and a very progressive approach to veterans affairs by the Parliament and the parties in it. I hope that that will continue, regardless of either constitutional or political change in the future, and I believe that it will, not least because of the point that Ken Macintosh, I think, made. Over the past few years, there seems to have been an increasing appreciation of the role of the armed services, and

people seem to be able to divorce that appreciation from any views that they may have on the conflict in which the armed services are serving. That is a very welcome development, and we hope that it will continue.

I will not go into all the stuff about constitutional change, but Nigel Don made one or two points, one of which in particular bears repeating. It related to the idea of no compulsory redundancies. It could be said that that is really a matter for the Government to take on if the result of the independence vote is yes, but it is important in this context because compulsory redundancies make people veterans by force and make their becoming veterans much more traumatic, not least if they have been serving on the front line and are suddenly presented with a P45 and told that they are no longer required. That is why it was important to mention that issue. We are committed to delivering better outcomes for those who have, in many cases, sacrificed a great deal to defend our freedoms, and to ensuring that that better deal is felt across all our devolved responsibilities.

The creation of the post of veterans commissioner is an attempt to take that forward. As I have said, we are still willing to listen to what others have to say, but my view is that the very good things that are currently being done can be pulled up to a higher level. Mark Griffin made a point about what has been done in respect of housing in North Lanarkshire. I hope that the commissioner will be able to see, in looking at that, that it is an excellent development and that they will ask why it cannot happen elsewhere, why there is not uniformity, if that is required, and whether it would be easier for veterans who may have joined up in one location and have perhaps become a veteran in a different location to have a better and more uniform approach to the services that they require. Such uniformity may not be needed, but the commissioner could usefully take up such issues. As I mentioned at the start of the debate, thematic inquiries could be undertaken into some of the current provision.

The commissioner is therefore of a piece with a fairly progressive approach that the Government has taken. It is the first such post in the UK. We and the UK Government have looked at the issue of an ombudsman. I refute the idea that things were done in a hurry; the idea has been developed over many months and there have been a number of discussions, not least to find out what has been done in Canada. We have not followed the same model. The comments that were made about the plethora of ombudsman-type positions are true. However, as I said in my opening speech, we are not saying that the person should be responsible for taking up individual cases, although they can listen to individual veterans.

To respond to another point, the post will not be paid for by the Parliament; it will be paid for by the Scottish Government as part of the veterans activities that we undertake.

Members have a real opportunity to agree on the commissioner's role and to see whether the commissioner can start to make the difference that the ombudsman's role in Canada has made, although the roles will not be the same. The role in Canada has made a great difference to veterans there. From what I have heard from around the world, I believe that it very much depends on the individual who is selected to do the work. The important thing is not the statutory underpinning of the post. The appointment will not be a statutory appointment in the way that Alex Johnstone described; it will be made by the Scottish Government. What is really important is the person's standing in the veterans community and whether they are credible and understand the issues that are at stake.

I would like the commissioner not only to address the needs of veterans who are particularly disadvantaged, but to develop a wider focus on unlocking the potential of veterans so that their skills and experience can be brought to bear for the benefit of all Scotland. Most members present must have heard a veteran who was looking for a job on leaving the service say to them, "Well, I'm not really qualified to do anything." They are completely unaware of the skills that they have developed over a number of years in the services. It is incumbent on all of us, and it will be incumbent on the commissioner, to ensure that people realise their potential when they rejoin civilian life.

Members have commented on the first world war and the commemoration of it. I was asked to do a foreword for a study on the war memorial in Dunblane, which went through every individual on the memorial. The first people to lay a wreath at that war memorial—in 1921, I think—were a mother and father who had lost three of their four sons in the conflict. To go back to a point that was made earlier, it was really interesting to go through the individual stories of each of the people involved, as they are often forgotten. We see the names, but it is very important to remember that those people were part of a family and a community and to find out what their role was.

On other kinds of service, Ken Macintosh mentioned football. I once played against a services outfit. He said that I was "useful", but I think that I was just too slow to get out of the way and nearly severely injured one of the very fast service personnel who was playing against us. I was also happy to play against a Hearts legends team—it is never a hard task to play against a Hearts team, admittedly—although they beat us, I

think, 13-2. Hearts have a proud tradition of working with Erskine and all that goes with the history of Hearts. I am not sure that I will be present when the fixture comes up next time, but I will certainly be there in spirit.

I close by again recording my thanks to the vast and diverse array of veterans charities. Some people have suggested that there could be a role for the commissioner in bringing them together or putting them in order, but it is not about that—it is about something else entirely. We are just trying to ensure that the services are right. The charities do a considerable amount of work on behalf of veterans, providing advice, assistance and support as well as signposting to services elsewhere. They also represent veterans at local and national levels and inform our policy thinking and development, which is an invaluable role. I congratulate them on all their fantastic work. They support the estimated 400,000 veterans in Scotland, for which they have our gratitude.

Draft Climate Change Adaptation Programme

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08732, in the name of Rob Gibson, on the Scottish Government's consultation on its draft climate change adaptation programme. I call Rob Gibson to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Mr Gibson, you have 10 minutes.

15:36

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I crave your indulgence as I try to get all the detail in.

Change and adaptation are rarely easy. How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? None—the light bulb has to be willing to change itself. Of course, it should now be an energy-saving light bulb. Change and adaptation are central to meeting the challenges of our changing climate.

The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee recently scrutinised the Scottish Government's draft Scottish climate change adaptation programme. We heard evidence from stakeholders and from the minister, and we wrote to the minister setting out our views and recommendations to inform the final adaptation programme. The committee thanks the minister for his prompt and detailed response, which enables us all to consider that in this afternoon's debate. The committee fully agrees with the minister that the long-term sustainability of Scotland in a changing climate is the responsibility of each and every one of us. As Morag Watson reminded us in a behaviour change session last September,

"when people are given the time and space to talk through certain things all sorts of issues come to the fore."

Culture change is possible.

The extreme weather that we have experienced over the last few weeks also reminds us of the urgency of a change of outlook. Can the minister confirm that planning for a changing climate is being comprehensively embedded into Scottish Government policies? The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's work programme will focus our scrutiny of the forthcoming draft third national planning framework on how it will help to deliver Scotland's climate change adaptation programme. The committee is pleased to hear that the minister is soon to write to the adaptation sub-committee of the Committee on Climate Change to formally

request that it carry out the first independent assessment of the programme in Scotland, and we look forward to seeing that report.

Further clarity is needed across all three adaptation programme themes with regard to project timescales, budgets and responsibility for development and implementation. Stakeholders want clarity on whether project finance is secure or is still required, on which is the lead organisation of implementation and, when a project is set to extend beyond the five-year lifespan of the programme, on how its progress will be monitored. The committee strongly agrees that a longer-term view would significantly aid the building of Scotland's resilience. Will the minister consider how that can best be achieved in the final strategy?

The committee reiterates our appreciation of the vital work of our emergency and volunteer services in responding to extreme weather events. We would be interested to hear from the minister what lessons have been learned to inform the final programme. Evidence mounts on the risks that our infrastructure and built environment face from flooding, landslips and high winds. Also, our transport networks and energy, information and communication technology are situated in strategic corridors and can be vulnerable. Compromises on the speed and effectiveness of emergency responses could impact on the continuity of businesses, health boards and local authorities; indeed, they could affect the fundamental resilience of local communities.

We recommended that the final programme be strengthened to set out how the planning process could be used to embed climate change adaptation—for example, on the siting of new developments and infrastructure, particularly in housing, renewable energy and rural broadband roll-outs. The RACCE committee will inquire into how the planning process takes climate change issues into account in its forthcoming scrutiny of NPF3.

The importance of Scotland's key economic sectors—food, drink, tourism and energy—and their value to our economy are well known. All are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, not only here in Scotland but at an international level, which affect supply chains. Our final programme must line up with the adaptation plans of other countries to protect supply chains for our businesses, including airports and telecoms. That will require international negotiation and discussion of the sort that our minister engaged in at the Doha round and later on the Kyoto protocols et cetera. It is essential that we make contact with other countries in which parts of our supply chains lie.

We welcome the minister's assurance on how the travel information and flood and weather alerts that are provided by traffic Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, local authorities and the emergency services are being shared through the internet, social media and radio. That must continue to be improved and developed to serve our communities.

Especially in agriculture and seafood, smaller local businesses with shorter supply chains are of profound importance to Scotland. We agree that more attention should be focused on supporting smaller businesses to adapt to changes in the climate. We were pleased to note that the minister recognises that, and we welcome his confirmation that the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill will help small and medium-sized businesses to meet some of those changes.

The committee shares the strong concerns of stakeholders in the agriculture sector, for whom the negative impacts of climate change are very real. Growing seasons have changed, and farmers have already had to adapt what they grow. Farmers seem willing to make the changes, but there is a lack of knowledge transfer and they say that practical guidance and financial incentives are needed. I question whether those will be available. Forestry faces the biggest challenges through the loss of confidence in making resilient decisions, which is a result of the uncertain long-term effects of climate change and the invasive diseases that have been brought to our country.

The committee recommended that financial incentives, such as those in the new Scotland rural development programme and the common agricultural policy, be made user friendly and adaptable and that, wherever possible, they should have multiple benefits that help to deliver climate change adaptation and to improve biodiversity. The final programme should support people who are involved in making longer-term decisions. We are pleased that the minister has ensured that policies on land use that provide multiple benefits for our natural environment will be reflected in the final programme.

The committee was concerned to hear that 18 per cent of our coastline is highly susceptible to erosion. From that, coupled with the continuing rise in sea levels, it is clear that our coastal communities face significant risk. Regarding their protection, we need the minister to tell us whether the recent events have highlighted the need to accelerate that work. The statement that he made last week was helpful in letting us know that many people share our concerns on the matter. The committee heard about the new flood warning scheme that SEPA is operating. Can the minister tell us how effective that has been over the past few weeks?

In its letter to the minister, the committee sought an update on how the Scottish Government would prioritise investment in flood risk management. The minister confirmed in his response that the process would take place over the course of 2014 and that an update would be available towards the end of the year. Is the minister able to say whether the Scottish Government is still working to the same timetable or whether the events of the past few weeks have shown that the work requires to be accelerated? Many of my colleagues may wish to speak in the debate on some of the flooding issues.

We are pleased that the minister believes that more targeted support may be required for the most vulnerable in society, because equalities issues must be considered in the matter of climate change. People can be very vulnerable indeed because of climate change, not just in very shallow islands in the Pacific but right here in the heart of our cities. We must provide guidance to help them. Can the minister tell us more about how that will be taken forward, because we consider that social justice is part of climate change?

I hope that today's debate will help to inform the final programme.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's response to the Scottish Government's draft climate change adaptation programme.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who wish to speak in the debate that they should press their request-to-speak buttons. I call Paul Wheelhouse. Minister, you have seven minutes.

15:45

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I thank the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee for its efforts in scrutinising the draft Scottish climate change adaptation programme. I welcome this debate and the opportunity to discuss how we can respond collectively to the threats and opportunities that Scotland is facing from a changing climate and increasingly unpredictable weather. The latest evidence from the intergovernmental panel on climate change sends a stronger than ever warning that human activity is changing the global climate. The events of the past few weeks are a stark reminder of the importance of action both in preparing for our increasingly unpredictable weather and in moving towards low-carbon living.

Rob Gibson was absolutely right to pick up on those issues.

In November, I attended the United Nations climate summit in Warsaw, which took place against the background of the devastating Philippines typhoon. At Warsaw, the international community agreed what is now a very tight timetable towards a new climate treaty to limit global warming to 2° Celsius to be signed in Paris in December 2015. However, despite the global commitment to reduce emissions, climate change is already presenting challenges for Scotland's distinctive biodiversity and habitats, our built environment and infrastructure, and our remote and, indeed, coastal communities, as Rob Gibson identified. The inertia of the climate system means that some degree of further climate change is inevitable over the coming decades.

The UK's first climate change risk assessment, published in 2012, shows the risks to and opportunities for Scotland from a changing climate. We must prepare for those changes to minimise the impact and take advantage of the opportunities, although I suspect that in some cases the opportunities will be smaller than the negative impact of climate change. Our Scottish climate change adaptation programme provides the framework that will build Scotland's resilience to the changing climate.

I am aware that the committee heard evidence from stakeholders representing a wide range of interests; to name but a few, they were the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Transport Scotland, SEPA, NFU Scotland, Scottish Environment LINK, Scottish Natural Heritage, the sustainable Scotland network and the Scotch Whisky Association. That emphasises the wide-ranging nature of the challenge, which presents both threats and opportunities for Scotland's economy, environment and people. That is why we are committed to consulting on our first statutory Scottish climate change adaptation programme.

No one organisation can address that in isolation. There are complex interactions between and within sectors. Success will depend on organisations, businesses and communities across Scotland accepting responsibility and working in partnership if we are to create a Scotland that is increasingly recognised as an attractive, environmentally conscious and climate-resilient place in which to live, work and invest. In doing so, we will be helping to create a more successful country for all and supporting the foundations for long-term economic prosperity. Our adaptation programme provides a framework for everyone in Scotland to contribute towards the delivery of the objectives within their own organisation, business or community.

The programme reflects the cross-cutting nature of the climate change challenge in the Scottish Government. It draws on action across ministerial portfolios, and my ministerial colleagues were involved in its preparation. I meet regularly with my ministerial colleagues to discuss climate change, and that engagement will continue.

A number of issues were raised by the committee and respondents to the consultation, not all of which can be covered in the context of this short debate. I have provided a written response to issues that were raised by the committee, and the analysis of the consultation responses was published on the Scottish Government website on 10 January. I will respond now to some of the issues that were raised by the convener in his opening speech. I also intend to pick up on some of the issues that were raised by the committee in my closing speech. In particular, I will clarify in my closing speech the monitoring and reporting arrangements for the programme as well as key issues around flooding, ecosystems and our natural environment. I would welcome members' views on those issues during the debate.

The recent festive period illustrated the pressures that severe weather can create. In general terms, the events, which we considered a number of times in the chamber last week, are examples of the adaptation programme in practice, as they involved dealing with issues such as flooding and disruption to transport and energy networks. The Parliament recognised the excellent work of responders, who were informed of and prepared for potential flood risks through the excellent SEPA and Met Office Scottish flood forecasting service. With the help of such systems, they were able to work together effectively to reduce and manage the impacts of the flooding on the affected communities. In addition, the public were directly warned and informed through the floodline direct warning service. I have asked SEPA to consider what more could be done to bring forward the published flood warning strategy.

Tomorrow, at a pre-planned flooding summit with local authorities, I will help to launch SEPA's new flood risk and hazard maps. They are an essential tool in supporting the development of flood risk strategies across Scotland, with actions that will help to target efforts to plan and invest in reducing potential impacts in vulnerable areas. This is a long-term programme of work that involves people collectively taking an innovative, joined-up, multi-agency, strategic response to the longer-term challenges that climate change provides.

In addition, the Resilience Advisory Board for Scotland, which is the national forum that brings together Scotland's statutory and voluntary

emergency responder organisations to discuss cross-sector working, will meet on 22 January. Members will discuss lessons learned from the experience of activations in response to recent weather events.

The important role of the preparations that are made by individuals and communities is recognised, and the Scottish Government has published guidance for communities on community emergency planning on the ready Scotland website. An example of community emergency planning in action during the recent period of severe weather is the great work of members of the Eyemouth resilient communities group in the Scottish Borders. I am sure that Claudia Beamish is familiar with its work. When the community was threatened by flooding in December, the group took part in a multi-agency meeting with statutory emergency responders and it subsequently played an active role, in partnership with Scottish Borders Council, in checking on residents in the harbour area of the town. Through our adaptation programme, we will continue to develop and promote resources that support such capacity building in communities, and through our support for adaptation Scotland we will continue to ensure that there is wider engagement with communities on the objectives of the programme.

The convener picked up on social justice. Through the adaptation programme, we will continue to support measures to understand the effects of climate change on people, homes and communities and to build communities' resilience against climate change impacts, and particularly impacts on vulnerable people. We will reflect progress in future adaptation programmes and in our annual reports to the Parliament.

Wider engagement will be key to delivering our adaptation objectives. Local authorities and other public bodies, businesses, voluntary organisations and communities will be central in helping Scotland to build resilience against the impacts of climate change. Our support for adaptation Scotland is a key mechanism through which we are building partnerships and support to deliver our objectives. We are also forging partnerships across the public sector. I chair the public sector climate leaders forum, which includes leaders from across the public and third sectors. Councillor Stephen Hagan is vice-chair of the forum, as well as representing the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Working together, the members of the forum aim to provide strong and visible leadership across the public sector and beyond, and to ensure that climate change action is driven more consistently across the sector as a whole.

We are also building partnerships to improve our understanding of the impacts of climate change. ClimateXChange exemplifies the

partnership approach as it builds on the strengths of each of its partners, ensuring that our response to climate change is based on the best possible scientific evidence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, will you draw to a close, please?

Paul Wheelhouse: I will, Presiding Officer.

I hope to pick up on some additional points in my closing speech. Suffice it to say that Scotland is well placed to respond to climate change through its rich natural resources, and we are already achieving a great deal.

15:53

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):

This committee debate is extremely important and timely as it comes in the immediate aftermath of the recent severe weather and flooding. They focused all our minds on emergency arrangements and resilience, and, equally important, on the longer-term climate change adaptation process.

The overarching aim of the draft programme is:

"To increase the resilience of Scotland's people, environment, and economy to the impacts of a changing climate."

Scottish Labour is solidly behind the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's motion, and I thank the convener and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change for their opening speeches in what I hope will be a positive debate.

Our committee took a wide range of evidence, as has already been said. The evidence was broad and deep in its range. We wrote to the minister and we received a detailed response, which has been helpful.

There has also been a Scottish Government public consultation, the result of which was out recently. That scrutiny has helped to hone the draft programme into a more focused way forward. We now have the opportunity to engage with one another and the minister and take into account everything in the final programme.

In his foreword to the draft programme, the minister states:

"Our climate affects people's health, our road and rail services, water supplies, energy demands, tourism – the list is ... endless."

It is indeed endless. I was very relieved to hear the minister reassure us today about speaking with different departments: that on-going dialogue is essential to tackle climate change.

It is impossible for any single speaker to touch on all the issues, but between us we have a

chance to get it right. We should acknowledge that, importantly,

“The Programme ... sets out the arrangements for wider engagement in meeting those objectives.”

As the minister just said, it is a collective endeavour. Governance arrangements are at the heart of the way forward. In this rapidly changing world, it is essential that the climate change delivery board is a robust and effective body as it oversees delivery.

In the draft programme we see that the board will have a new reporting role for the programme, which relates to the meeting of annual emissions targets, which we all know have been missed in successive years. We have future challenges on that.

I turn to monitoring and assessment of the programme. The minister stated in his response to the committee:

“It is important for the evaluation of the Programme to be an on-going process to ensure the right measures are in place to address the effects of climate change. We are currently considering options for monitoring and reporting ... and the views of the Committee and stakeholders will be taken into account”.

I note that perhaps the minister will explain in his closing speech more about how that will work in practice, which would be helpful.

In its briefing for the committee, Scottish Environment LINK recommends that

“All wider policies which will make Scotland resilient and adaptable to a changing climate in the long-term”

should be addressed not just in terms of

“addressing risks in the next 5 years”,

but beyond. I hope that the minister will take that into account.

In our letter to the minister, the committee said:

“The Committee will also consider climate change issues as part of its own scrutiny of the National Performance Framework 3,”

or NPF3. We will also consider climate change issues in relation to the national planning framework 3, which has the same acronym. The national planning framework has a fundamental role to play in this context. It had a fundamental role for the previous Administration and will have a role beyond this Administration, into the future. I hope that the minister agrees with me on that.

The responses to the Scottish Government consultation show the range and depth of understanding of and commitment to climate adaptation across Scotland. Although there was

“broad support for the Programme’s overarching framework, and its objectives, policies and proposals ... it was common for respondents to request more detail about

certain aspects of the Programme and to suggest that there should be a greater emphasis on ‘taking action’.”

That is important for the final draft.

Significantly,

“there were requests for clarification about how”

the programme

“would be delivered, who was responsible / accountable for delivery, priorities and timescales, funding, and arrangements for reporting and monitoring.”

The committee’s view is that a lot of that is in the draft programme, but there are ways in which perhaps it could be sharpened.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Can you draw to a close, please?

Claudia Beamish: That chimes with some of the committee’s recommendations. I ask the minister to take forward those fundamental governance issues in the final adaptation programme.

15:59

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am not a great fan of the phrase “adopting a holistic approach”, but one thing is for sure: if climate change adaptation is to be successfully mainstreamed across not just Government departments but also organisations, businesses, the public sector, communities and individuals, a holistic approach is exactly what must be adopted.

During the past year, each and every one of us has experienced the stark impact of our changing climate, whether it be through the damaging snows of last spring, the delights of a searingly hot summer, or the sodden aftermath of the excessive rainfall of the past few weeks. If ever there was a year that highlighted the fact that climate change impacts on us all individually and collectively, surely 2013 was it.

We therefore very much welcome the Government’s preparation of a climate change adaptation programme, and its recognition that a much wider approach is necessary if it is to be successful. To that end, it is difficult not to sympathise with those stakeholders who drew the committee’s attention to their disappointment that the programme looks at only a five-year timescale when most believe that a much longer-term approach is necessary. I fully understand and sympathise with the point that this is not an easy thing to achieve, but I whole-heartedly endorse the committee’s recommendation that the final programme should take a longer-term view and, when possible, assist stakeholders to develop longer-term approaches.

I also endorse the committee's recommendation, as agreed by stakeholders, that the final programme should include a stronger focus on targets and set out a robust monitoring and evaluation system. That has already been referred to several times. Such a system is important if the programme is to be successful. Again, I understand the difficulties of setting targets in this policy area, but without them, evaluation and effective monitoring will be all but impossible. We would all agree that effective monitoring and evaluation are essential if the programme is to have a meaningful outcome, and I look forward to hearing what the minister will say about that in his closing comments.

I was pleased that the committee heard specifically from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on how it is already adapting to climate change. Such change was evidenced vividly during new year in my own constituency, where there was extensive flooding in the river valleys and an intense battering of the coastal defences from the sea, all of which required the emergency services to step up to the mark. They were certainly not found wanting in that regard.

It is also right that the importance of partnership working with local voluntary services, often individuals, is duly recognised. For example, farmers are increasingly playing a major part in post-snowstorm relief activities, and those partnerships are to be greatly welcomed and encouraged.

As the committee heard, extreme weather is everyone's problem, and a collective approach is required if, as we all suspect, today's challenges are to continue, possibly to an even greater degree in future. I for one would like to see the final programme be somewhat more explicit on the support that will be available to help to develop partnerships between emergency and voluntary services.

Time does not allow me to cover every aspect of the committee's response to the consultation, so I will conclude with a brief comment on the impact of climate change on agriculture and forestry. As Rob Gibson mentioned during his opening comments, the committee heard that farmers, who I think are among the most adaptable individuals on earth, are struggling to keep pace with the need to adapt to climate change. In itself, that should be a pretty stark warning to us all. The fact is that agriculture has a major and positive role to play in tackling climate change, but it will need financial and practical support if it is to carry out that role effectively.

Similarly, we are all aware of the role that forestry has to play in combating climate change. Although I welcome the research that is being done on agroforestry, the fact is that the

Government's target of planting 100,000 hectares of new forest by 2020 is looking to be increasingly in question. Although this is not a recommendation from the committee, if it does not sound too high-handed, I recommend that the minister takes a long, hard look at the Government's forestry policy to ensure that the sector does play its full part in combating climate change, while maintaining the critical mass of commercial timber production that the milling industry needs if it is to continue investing in the sector.

I welcome the debate and look forward to hearing further contributions. If I may, I will comment on the Government's response when I wind up.

16:03

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I say at the outset that I am pleased to contribute to the debate. It is an important issue that requires the attention of all parliamentarians and all committees in the Parliament, not just the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. I am pleased to hear the minister confirm that he meets other ministers regularly specifically to discuss climate change.

We have seen at first hand, in all our constituencies, the evidence that Scotland's climate is changing. Just last month, for example, we saw the wettest December in Scotland since records began in 1910, and the average winter precipitation in the 1990s and 2000s was approximately 23 per cent higher than the 1961 to 1990 baseline; in the 1960s, it was approximately 9 per cent lower.

As we have heard, the main aim of the climate change adaptation programme is to increase the resilience of Scotland's people, environment and economy to the impacts of the changing climate. As the Scottish Government is leading by example, it is also incumbent on this Parliament, us as parliamentarians and local authorities to lead by example and to give this enormously important issue the attention that it deserves.

It is clear that preparing for unavoidable climate change and reducing emissions are both essential actions if we are to ensure economic growth in Scotland and protect our much valued natural environment. We must use every opportunity to get the message over that climate is changing and that key challenges lie ahead for our people, communities and the most vulnerable in society.

While the long-term framework for building Scotland's resilience to climate change is being led by the Scottish Government, it is imperative that partnership working is encouraged and facilitated through the formation of new partnerships and collaborations.

There are good examples of that happening. I am looking forward to seeing at first hand the work of ClimateXChange—Scotland's centre of expertise on climate change here in Edinburgh—which is a partnership that shares ideas of good practice across areas of common interest to help to increase the resilience of Scotland's people, environment and communities, when our committee visits it in just over a week's time. We will also have the opportunity to see at first hand the new Edinburgh centre for carbon innovation building.

Another good example of best practice is the fact that flexible adaptation is being built into long-term investment decisions. For example, the 2014 Commonwealth games village has built-in green-blue networks and sustainable urban drainage systems. The 2020 climate group is creating alliances across the public and private sectors by sharing knowledge and developing business awareness in tackling risk.

I was therefore pleased to see the minister's response to the committee's concerns regarding the potential vulnerabilities of small and medium-sized businesses, in which he pledged to continue to provide targeted support to SMEs,

"ensuring that businesses have a good understanding of the range of risks they may face from the impacts of climate change".

However, it is worth reiterating that the committee heard concerns from stakeholders about the potential vulnerability of SMEs to climate change and extreme weather events. While the work of the 2020 group is positive and welcome, stakeholders were of the view that more attention needs to be given to smaller businesses. As the convener said, we welcomed the minister's positive response on that issue.

Our committee report also raised the issue of climate justice and social justice and called on the Scottish Government to ensure that social justice aspects of the adaptation programme are given more weight in the final programme.

The poor and the vulnerable are the first to be affected by climate change and will suffer the worst through no fault of their own, having done little or nothing to cause the problem in the first place. The committee therefore welcomed the commitment from the minister to take a lead in ensuring that the vulnerability of communities and the social justice dimension of climate change impacts are addressed. We look forward to further responses.

Before I close, I want to touch on the need for more effective monitoring and assessment. In particular, the committee stressed that the final programme should include a stronger focus on targets and set out a robust monitoring and

evaluation framework, as Alex Fergusson alluded to.

It is clear that climate change adaptation has to be tackled in an incremental way, with strong partnership working, knowledge transfer and the development of methods to support adaptation by communities themselves. Not all impacts require immediate responses. However, I am sure that if we all work together, we are going to get there.

16:08

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the committee and witnesses for their work in getting us to this debate today.

I want to focus on the processes and principles of adaptation in relation to planning decisions and the importance of flooding as a key test of the adaptation programme. As others have said, we can be in no doubt that our planning system should be able to ensure that decisions are taken that avoid increasing the risk of flooding. That is important in both human and economic terms.

The report highlights that climate change will increase the incidence of flooding and the risk that it entails of injury, impact on people's mental health and even death. If nothing else, that should prompt us to act.

Over the years, colleagues across the chamber have related the catastrophic impact of flooding on their constituencies. The strategy is an opportunity both to learn from past problems and to set out the solutions that are needed. I believe that the review of Scottish Planning Policy and NPF3 provide us with the opportunity to incorporate flood management techniques routinely in every single planning decision, to contribute to the Scottish Government's adaptation strategy.

However, adaptation measures in relation to flooding need greater priority and urgency than exist now. Sustainable urban drainage systems are now more than a decade old, so I would be keen to hear from the minister what is being done to evaluate the impact of early schemes and to measure whether the principles are being consistently applied in development proposals. I would also like to know what work is being done with developers to increase their knowledge and share best practice, and to inform householders of their responsibilities and of the practical measures that they can take.

SEPA's analysis highlights the geographical areas that are vulnerable to flooding, and the role of local authorities in planning investment is crucial, because they are partners in the research that the Scottish Government carries out on best practice, but they also need support to build capacity in areas such as the project management

of major flood prevention works. The same issue arises in transport and development projects generally; we need that capacity.

There is also the issue of local authorities' capacity to implement the sustainable flood management duties that are in the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003. Again, I would be keen to hear what research the Scottish Government has carried out since the implementation of that act.

One of my first acts as a relatively new MSP—and the Minister for Transport and the Environment—was to deal with constituents and businesses in relation to the impact of flooding on my constituency in 2000. Even then, people were concerned about not just the immediate support that they needed, but looking at longer-term planning for flood investment. The delays associated with the planning and construction of flood management systems would be an excellent case study for students, professionals and, indeed, ourselves of what can go wrong even with the best of intentions.

Although it is no consolation to my constituents, phase 1 has been completed, although it was delayed for the best part of a decade and costs escalated, but we are stuck and unable to get phase 2 going, and phase 3 is not even on the drawing table yet. Therefore, I am grateful for the opportunity to talk to the minister about the financial gap, because we must work our way beyond the practical delays that occur when we have solutions ready, because they are not acceptable in flood risk management.

I started talking about the human dimension that the adaptation report highlights. Before Christmas, I met local community council members, who were exasperated that we—by which I mean politicians across the spectrum—had not collectively fixed that problem for them. When I returned after Christmas, I got incredibly moving correspondence from constituents relaying to me their anxiety about heavy rainfall. That happens every time we have heavy rainfall, and I am sure that I am not alone.

This is not a theoretical problem. It matters to our constituents, our businesses and our habitats. Although we cannot control or fix everything, we have to push climate change adaptation up the political agenda, to ensure that we get the right research, the right lessons learned, the right skills and experience and, crucially, the investment to make it happen. That is why today's debate is vital and why the final climate adaptation strategy needs to be better. It needs to better reflect the role of local authorities in this agenda and it needs clearer targets, a greater sense of urgency and a greater political commitment from the Scottish

Government. I hope that that is what the debate will deliver.

16:13

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I hardly need to point out in the early part of 2014 that climate change is with us. We have clearly reached the point where it does not matter why it is happening; individuals' views on global warning are now irrelevant.

The difficulty that we now have is thinking ahead. If we are going to tell members of our society that they must think ahead, we must ensure that we do it ourselves, and we must be careful that we think as far ahead as we possibly can. That does not necessarily mean that we have a written plan that goes as far as some people would like, but we must recognise that whatever we are doing now must be developed as it goes along and must be longer sighted as we go along, because this is a long-term problem.

If I heard the minister right, I am absolutely delighted to pick up on the news that the flood risk maps are coming out tomorrow. Is that right?

Paul Wheelhouse *indicated agreement.*

Nigel Don: Yes; that is long overdue. We cannot do things with land without maps, so I am delighted to hear that we have got that far.

I must take issue with what has been said—if not with what has been meant—about targets and measurement, because it seems to me that we need to distinguish between them.

If you will forgive me, Presiding Officer, I am going to go on a journey. As most of us will know, getting around our constituency means that we have to drive a car. There is no alternative in practice for most of us. I have never had a very modern car, but if one has a relatively modern car, it has at the front a miles per gallon display showing the current miles per gallon—which does not tell us very much, apart from the obvious—and the average miles per gallon for the trip. If that is anything like accurate and reproducible, that is an extraordinarily useful number. I shall put on my factory engineer's hat and tell the chamber once more that what gets measured gets done.

People have in front of them a number that tells them on average the fuel efficiency of their driving. Remarkably, it is still in miles per gallon, which I do not think are metric units, but never mind. If I knew what best practice was for a specific journey, I could set a target, but no target is any use if it is not relevant to what I am currently trying to do. If I am doing something for the first time, a target is totally meaningless. However, that measurement is crucial because, no matter what figure we start from, every single one of us instinctively will look

at the miles per gallon figure and think about what we can do to get it to be bigger. We need to be careful not to come up with arbitrary targets, which are not helpful, and we need to be sure that what we measure and reproduce is accurate, because then targets will set themselves.

I am conscious of time, so I will move quickly on. Last year, the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on construction had a presentation from Retrofit Scotland, which is an ad hoc organisation of professionals who are trying to put together case studies and examples of how we in Scotland should adapt our buildings for the future. That has climate change very much in mind, because we have to get fuel efficiency up for all the reasons that we now understand. I tell the minister that the group would very much welcome Government support and interest. It is a professional group of bodies that have come together entirely off their own bat and at their own expense. It would be very much appreciated if the Government would interact with that group.

Finally, I will mention flooding, because I just have to. I thank the minister for signing off the scheme in my home city of Brechin. As I understand it, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities now has to come up with the money, so we will twist as many arms as we possibly can. I also thank Aberdeenshire Council for coming up with a scheme in Stonehaven, which I know the minister supports. I encourage the minister to proceed with that as fast as is conceivably possible for the good of my constituents.

16:17

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): Like many other members, I was proud to put through the Parliament the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill back in 2009. Although at the time there were differences on how quickly Scotland should have to act, we came up with a world-leading piece of legislation. Under the act, there is a responsibility to ensure that we are as prepared as we can be for climate change effects. Basically, that involves a risk assessment.

Not many people do not think that there is a change in the world's climate. Recently in Scotland, we have again seen amazing wind speeds, coupled in some parts with flooding. All of that is seemingly related to the extremes in temperature across the pond in America, where Arctic air has plunged parts of the USA into a deep freeze, with even the iconic Niagara Falls freezing.

The consultation on Scotland's adaptation programme highlighted that the Parliament and the Government are aware of the work that is being done to make us better prepared in future. That is also the case for many public bodies, as is

borne out in the list of respondents, more than half of which were public bodies that have defined duties under the act. Of the 67 responses, only three were from individuals rather than organisations and only four were from private sector organisations. It is disappointing that there were only 67 responses from the 600 or so individuals and organisations that were invited to respond.

To me, that highlights the duty that falls on us all to make climate change more relevant. We cannot deliver climate change targets and adapt to the changes that are happening without buy-in from everyone. My view is echoed by the respondents to the consultation who thought that the Government needs to make arrangements for better public engagement. In answer to question 5b, which asked whether arrangements for public engagement are sufficient, 58 per cent of respondents ticked no.

Having been a land user, I focused on who engaged with the consultation. Bearing in mind that land users are vital to help to deliver climate change mitigation and adaptation, I was alarmed that the National Farmers Union of Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, Confor and the like did not submit a response, although some gave evidence to our committee. That is not a criticism of those organisations, which all have limited resources; it is a criticism of us all and of our ability to make climate change relevant to those who can help the most. I am therefore interested in hearing the minister's view on how the issue can best be addressed.

Respondents also emphasised the importance of capacity building, which further highlights the need for much better engagement with the public and private sectors.

I further note that respondents noted that there was a heavy emphasis on flooding, which, of course, is a highly visual and damaging effect of climate change. However, an adapted Scotland will need community partnerships—such as the Eyemouth example that the minister mentioned—for emergency responses, care for the vulnerable and the use of existing equipment, perhaps private equipment, when there are snowstorms or there is damage from winds. Organisation will have to be in place prior to any event.

A good example of that is the memorandum of understanding between Scottish Borders Council and RAYNET—volunteers from the amateur radio enthusiast world. They and their like helped in the Lockerbie disaster, the Indian Ocean tsunami and hurricane Katrina.

I welcome the progress of the draft Scottish climate change adaptation programme and the

consultation. I thank all who found the time to respond. There is much in the consultation responses that I and the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee will examine further.

I look forward to the minister addressing my points.

16:21

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I welcome the debate, and I thank the committee for bringing it to the chamber and for the work that it has done in assessing the draft climate change adaptation programme. If I picked the convener up rightly, he said that that work will continue, which I welcome.

In the Parliament, we often hear members talk about the pride that they have in the legislation that we have passed to try to tackle climate change. It is clear why we need such legislation. Over the past few decades, our country has become warmer and wetter, with an increase in the amount of rainfall, especially in winter, and the occurrence of heavy downpours. That has very much been the case in recent weeks, which have given a vivid demonstration of climate change. Human activity obviously contributes to that, so it is clear that we must respond to the challenge. We can be proud of our legislation, but only if it is going to be effective in so far as it leads to any positive change.

Scottish Environment LINK, which provided a briefing for the debate and welcomed the draft programme, made the point:

“Scotland needs to plan now for the consequences and impacts of our changing climate. ... Scotland must reduce”

greenhouse gas

“emissions but also adapt how we run our economy, our society and how we look after our environment.”

However, it is clear that the legislation that we passed with targets that we have to achieve is working to some extent. Scotland’s adjusted emissions have fallen by 25.7 per cent from 1990, so we are on track to meet the ambitious 2020 target.

Any climate change adaptation programme must complement and build on other efforts and make a positive contribution. The programme is, of course, a requirement in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, so I am confident that it will meet the test of complementing wider efforts to tackle climate change.

I will speak about a couple of areas in the draft programme and focus on some of the areas that the committee picked up on. Before I do that, I say that I am positive about the programme. Jim Hume

was a little critical of the consultation, but I welcome the wide consultation that there has been. There have been efforts to engage with public, private and third sector organisations that work across a range of different areas, such as planning, energy and transport. That seems to me to be a pretty diverse group of respondents.

The first area that I will focus on is the effort to build resilience in responding to emergency situations, which is topical given the problems that we have witnessed recently. I note that

“The Committee considers local partnerships are vitally important in helping build the resilience of local communities.”

The Government responded to that, setting out some of the work that it has done, such as guidance on building community resilience, support for a number of mechanisms that enable groups to share good practice and the ready Scotland website, which the minister mentioned. It is clear that work is going on to build community resilience. I ask the minister to set out in his closing speech how those tools are used in practice in responding to emergency situations.

The other issue that I want to focus on concerns the idea of embedding in Government departments and society in general the wider approach to tackling climate change. The minister spoke about the dialogue with his colleagues, and I know that the committee made a recommendation about trying to deliver that approach. I ask the minister to update us on that, as it is an important issue. It would be good if he could set out how the Government is working to that end.

I close by re-emphasising that I am extremely positive about the adaptation programme. I look forward to this chamber returning to this subject matter in future.

16:25

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): We have robust evidence for global warming, as colleagues have already said, but there are still many unknowns and variables involved in predicting exactly how our climate will change as a result.

There is always a temptation to hope for the best when developing policy, but that must be coupled with planning and preparation for all possible climate change scenarios. From dealing with long-term changes in agriculture and energy to building sustainability into our economy and coping with the changing nature and frequency of extreme weather events, our policies for climate change adaptation must be capable of addressing all the challenges that we face.

For example, our assumptions about sea level rises might need to be reassessed following recent work by the University of Glasgow. Previously, it was thought that much of Scotland's land was rising faster than the sea around it. Recent studies suggest that that effect is now fading, which means that our coastal areas will be more exposed to the consequences of climate change than we thought.

The most attractive adaptations are often those that deliver other benefits for households and businesses—mainly financial, to be fair. Although those might have long-term value, even without climate change, sometimes the benefits can take many years to outstrip costs, which is a big barrier to their adoption.

The Scottish Government and public bodies need to do a lot more to encourage and facilitate such changes. As a result of Labour amendments to the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, they have a public duty to do that and more. One route for promoting better adaptation is through procurement. Public bodies should be doing a lot more to include climate change considerations in their procurement policies and ensure that the climate change consequences of public sector contracts are fully assessed with respect to the activities of not only public bodies but their contractors.

There are also great ways of combining adaptation with health initiatives. Food that is sourced directly from local production not only is fresher but travels fewer miles, which is good news for emissions reductions. Now in its seventh year, the Fife diet project is an excellent example of the important role that local food systems can play. The project has adopted a collaborative approach to the development of community food, in terms of its potential for improving health, affordability and sustainability. It is a fantastic project that is making a real difference, and we need more like it across Scotland.

Big business also needs to buy in to localised distribution to a far greater extent. How often does locally produced food travel hundreds of miles on a round trip in order to find its way back to local stores? It is also vital that the private sector's role is developed alongside the role of the public and third sectors. As Angus MacDonald said, small and medium-sized enterprises have a crucial role to play in that regard. They are often locally based, serving local markets, and there is much more that they could be doing to reduce carbon footprints and to contribute to adaptation. However, they lack resources, and we need to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and the incentives to incorporate climate change action into their activities.

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed with great fanfare—rightly so, as it was globally ground-breaking legislation. Unfortunately, however, we have struggled to match its ambition with action. It is especially disappointing that Scotland has failed to meet our emissions targets in each of the past two years. I would welcome the minister's comments on how we are going to address that.

The document that we are discussing contains many worthwhile proposals but, as ever, good intentions will not be sufficient. It is absolutely essential that Scotland has an effective adaptation programme. We have a moral responsibility to take every action possible to mitigate the impact of climate change in Scotland and across the world. We have a duty to our children, to their children and to their children's children.

Climate change is the most important and most challenging issue that we will ever face. The bottom line is that we must not only promise radical action but also commit the time, money and resources that are needed to achieve that action.

The minister's letter responding to the committee's points was encouraging, and I therefore hope that the Scottish Government will strongly consider the committee's recommendations on how the draft programme can be strengthened and will include our recommendations in the final programme.

16:29

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It is probably fair to say that climate change adaptation often plays second fiddle to the mitigation agenda and the urgent need to reduce our emissions. That is true in relation to public perception, media coverage, political debate and institutional knowledge. To be fair, it is even true in relation to the environment movement and the issues that people campaign on.

Although I am sure that all the contributors to the debate understand the difference between climate and weather, when we see—either at first hand or on our television screens—images depicting the impact of extreme weather events, flooding, wind and rain, drought and heat wave, and when we experience those things in our lives, it is an opportunity to consider both sides of the coin: adaptation and mitigation.

There is some overlap between the two. Changing land use patterns are raised by both agendas. There is overlap in issues of infrastructure and a just transition. That particularly applies to Scotland, where, as the minister said, a great deal of our economy is reliant on issues to do with land use, whether that is agriculture for

domestic consumption or export, tourism or other uses.

I would echo some of the points that have been made, such as Sarah Boyack's argument on the need to consider flood management in every single planning decision that is made, or Alex Fergusson's argument that a longer-term approach needs to be taken to these issues rather than just a five-year cycle. I think that the latter point was echoed in Scottish Environment LINK's briefing to members.

The area that I want to focus on is one in which I feel that more work needs to be done. It was not until page 53 of the draft programme that we started to hear about the impact that climate change will have on the wider world and Scotland's need to adapt to that. Scotland adapting to climate change is not just about adapting to the extreme weather impacts that climate change will bring in Scotland; it is about adapting to a wider world.

On page 53, the draft programme says:

"The Scottish economy may be affected by the impacts of climate change overseas. These effects may be considerable, and possibly larger than the immediate impacts of climate change in Scotland."

It does not unpack that argument and the range of scenarios that we may encounter in any great detail. I can see very little in the list of actions that relate to that. The programme goes on to say:

"At a global scale, the impacts of climate change could also lead to restrictions on food supply—leading to higher prices and lower availability in Scotland. This would exacerbate food-related health and social inequalities in Scotland."

That is true, but it is only really the beginning of an attempt to engage with that argument.

In continuing to develop the strategy, and as it moves from a draft into a final document, I would strongly encourage the Government to do more work on that aspect. We are living in such a globalised world that there is no one in this room who cannot immediately lay their hands on products that arrived on these shores in a shipping container. If the projections about sea level rise that we are hearing come true, every piece of port infrastructure in this globalised world is at risk.

What happens when that infrastructure starts to fail? What happens to crops in a globalised world? We have seen in the recent meat crisis just how complex and convoluted our food supply chains are. What happens when crops fail in developing countries? What happens when Governments fail and when conflict arises over access to land and water? What happens when populations migrate? I urge the Government to give greater consideration not just to the adaptation that Scotland needs to make to changing weather

patterns at home but to our adaptation to a changing global climate, economically as well as in absolute climate change terms.

16:34

Alex Fergusson: The debate has seen a fair amount of consensus throughout the chamber, which is very much as it should be in a debate of this nature. Climate change presents a very real challenge—possibly even a very real threat—to us all. While we might differ occasionally on the minutiae of how best to tackle it, the need for every sector of our society to adapt to meet that challenge is one on which we can all agree. I welcome the consensus that has been shown this afternoon.

The debate has also shown the value of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's scrutiny of the Government's draft programme. There is no doubt that the committee sessions with stakeholders have served to highlight a number of concerns about the programme while emphasising the compelling need for it.

We all support the aim of increasing the resilience of Scotland's people, environment and economy to the impacts of a changing climate, and I think that we all share the minister's vision as stated in his response to the committee:

"My vision is that the overarching framework set out in the Programme provides the basis for everyone in Scotland to contribute towards the delivery of the objectives within their own organisation, business or community."

I could not possibly disagree with that vision.

An aspect that has not had much of an airing in the debate is the impact of climate change on the marine environment, which nowadays includes the aquaculture sector. That sector faces a number of challenges—some from invasive alien sources but others as well, such as sea lice, amoebic gill disease and algal blooms. All those are influenced by climate change, and I acknowledge and welcome the fact that the ministerial group on sustainable aquaculture will keep those issues under consideration. I hope that the minister will update the Parliament regularly as those issues are progressed.

On sea fisheries, we have seen the example of mackerel and herring stocks moving north, following their food sources, which has resulted in international problems with Iceland and the Faroes overfishing in an unacceptable and irresponsible manner. Regulatory and trade agreements must be kept flexible in order to support our fishermen as they seek to cope with changes in the stocks of existing species or the potential movement of new species into our waters.

It came as quite a shock to me when taking evidence in committee to learn that almost 20 per cent of Scotland's coastline is highly susceptible to erosion. I have no doubt that much of it was further eroded on 30 and 31 December. We therefore welcome the fact that the Government will make further assessments of the risks of coastal erosion, so that some of our most vulnerable communities can be properly protected. Some of those were very close to not being protected at all in the recent storms.

No one can doubt that we live in precarious times as far as the impact of climate change is concerned. However, there is only so much that any Government can do and, at the end of the day, it will fall to each and every one of us as individuals to ensure that any climate change adaptation programme is successful. The Government has made a good start in its draft programme; it will be up to all of us to help to deliver it.

16:38

Claudia Beamish: I stress that a thread running through the adaptation programme is the value of interconnections and partnerships, showing the need for clear paths of communication. Making the programme mechanisms clearer will surely help to make that thread stronger.

Multiple benefits are also a win-win. In the agriculture and forestry section of our letter to the minister we state:

"The Committee recommends that the Minister undertakes an evaluation of the extent to which the SRDP has delivered multiple benefits, for example for biodiversity and for climate change adaptation."

Alex Fergusson stressed that evidence showed that farmers are struggling to keep pace. In his letter to the committee, in relation to farming for a better climate and future proofing Scotland's farming, the minister states:

"One of the key objectives of these programmes is to raise awareness".

I argue that it is important to raise awareness across all the sectors with regard to climate adaptation.

The committee heard interesting evidence on agroforestry, and I am pleased that the minister acknowledges in his letter that that will play a part in the future of SRDP.

I was very pleased to hear both Rob Gibson and Alex Fergusson mention marine issues. Indeed, the committee welcomed

"clarification from the Minister that the assessment of the risk of coastal erosion is an area that is actively being considered by the Scottish Government".

It would be helpful to hear more about that as soon as possible.

A lot of research into marine climate change issues is at its early stages, as has been emphasised on other occasions at our committee. It is essential in relation to the rapidly developing aquaculture industry and sustainable fisheries that climate change research is well funded for Marine Scotland, which works with other partners such as the marine alliance for science and technology for Scotland. Research funding will be essential in and across all sectors, building on new partnerships, if we are to use science-based evidence in our approach to climate change adaptation.

Angus MacDonald emphasised the need for leadership. The public sector climate leaders forum, on which I serve for the committee, will be essential in that regard, but we are all leaders, in the Scottish Parliament and in our communities.

Sarah Boyack explored the importance of local government engagement and the implications for the planning system. According to the analysis of the consultation responses,

"Local authorities ... thought that their role in the delivery of the Programme was missing or understated."

Will the minister look again at the issue?

Cara Hilton drew our attention to the necessity of businesses adopting the programme and considered food issues. The committee heard from Nourish Scotland about the need for shorter and regionally integrated food supply chains. Will the minister say today how work in that regard might be taken forward on a Scotland-wide basis?

Many of the recommendations highlight how essential the localisation of resilience is. Communities are at the heart of the way forward, although Patrick Harvie was right to say that further analysis of global changes is essential and is missing from the programme.

We need robust structures, and perhaps most important is the social justice dimension, which Rob Gibson mentioned. The committee heard stark evidence about the concerns of vulnerable island communities, challenged urban communities and households on low incomes.

Jim Hume asked about relevance: how relevant can the issues be to people who are struggling from day to day? How will the Scottish ministers ensure that the adaptation Scotland and climate challenge funds—and other bodies—engage with the communities that are most in need of support, in the context of flooding emergencies and longer-term resilience?

Our committee welcomes the minister's comment in his letter that the Government is

considering how it can better understand the equalities impact of climate change, but we are keen for him to give information on equalities issues in his closing speech.

16:42

Paul Wheelhouse: I thank members. I agree with Alex Fergusson that the debate has been consensual. It has been rightly so, because we are talking about a matter that cuts across party-political boundaries.

In my opening speech I promised to talk about monitoring and reporting, so I should focus on that, because time is tighter than I anticipated it would be. I appreciate that a number of members said that the issue is significant. The reporting requirements for the programme are set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Progress will be reflected in annual reports to the Scottish Parliament, and an independent assessment will be provided to the Scottish Parliament within two years of the programme's having been published, in order to give feedback on how we are doing in respect of achieving our objectives.

We are currently considering arrangements for the independent assessment. We are talking to the adaptation sub-committee of the UK Committee on Climate Change in that regard, and I will provide further detail in due course.

Alex Fergusson: Do targets have a role to play in monitoring and evaluation?

Paul Wheelhouse: I think that they do. Nigel Don made valid points about that. It is important to have a focus that drives effort, and the maxim about what is measured being what gets done is probably fair. We need to look at the matter. Where we can build in measures that provide some spine for what we are trying to achieve, it will be helpful to do so.

I want to pick up briefly on as many as possible of the points that committee members made. I take on board what Claudia Beamish said about the national performance framework and the other NPF, which is the national planning framework 3. Those are important; we need to consider how the planning system can help to reinforce our intention to make Scotland as resilient as possible.

Claudia Beamish and Alex Fergusson touched on issues that relate to the farming for a better climate programme. I have written to the committee about that extremely important programme. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment wants our efforts in that regard to be enhanced, which will not only help with mitigation but make our farming sector resilient to events such as those to which Alex Fergusson referred. He was right to say that it is

about not just flooding—on which we have been focusing recently—but heat and, in some areas, severe snow, as my constituents and those of Alex Fergusson and Claudia Beamish know well from their experience last year.

On the SUDS issue that Sarah Boyack raised, we feel that we have a reasonably good track record on those issues in Scotland at least, but we are not complacent. I plan to meet key stakeholders to consider what more can be done on sustainable drainage systems. I have taken the point on board.

Patrick Harvie referred to the international dimension. He is absolutely right that this is not just about a domestic agenda. Much of our economy would be vulnerable to impacts on the food supply chain. As consumers, we must all take that on board. The next climate change risk assessment that will be undertaken at UK level will focus more on the international dimension; that will feed through to the Scottish Government's planning. We will get the evidence on that. I have had some interaction with the Met Office on impacts that might be felt in our key international development partner countries, including Malawi, in order to understand what impacts they face. Those impacts will be severe on the current trajectory on which we are as a planet.

Angus MacDonald made important points about partnership working. He was absolutely right. In respect of equalities, in the climate justice agenda at home and abroad, we know that often lower-income communities are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. They are usually in lower-quality housing, which is sometimes built on flood plains, so they are at risk. We must take into account equalities issues in reaching conclusions on what strategy we should use, and we must prioritise and target our help at those who are least able to help themselves.

Jamie Hepburn asked how we are using data in our resilience programme. Ready Scotland's, traffic Scotland's and SEPA's floodline services are absolutely vital in informing the public about the actions that they can take, such as avoiding journeys where possible, taking alternative routes to work or to meet relatives, or preparing their property for the imminent risk of flooding. Those services are crucial, so we will do as much as we can to ensure that take-up is enhanced. If there was a silver lining to the cloud that came over the festive period, it was the increased take-up of the floodline service, which I was delighted to see. Up to 18,200 people are now registered with the service; that compares to up to 125,000 properties that are known to be at risk from flooding. We are getting there slowly but surely, so I encourage all members to make as many of their constituents as possible aware of the services and to get them to sign up to them where possible.

I am conscious of the time, so I will close.

We know that Scotland has to become a more resilient society; that is a key priority for the Government. We are working closely in partnership with local authorities, SEPA, Scottish Water, power companies and the emergency services to ensure that we are doing all that we can to target our efforts and to reduce the risks to our society from changing climate.

Our adaptation programme will continue to support activities such as SEPA's flood risk awareness-raising activities, including floodline. Our natural environment is vulnerable to changes in climate—it is not just about people—and we know that many species are threatened by climate change. Some impacts may be irreversible, but we will do what we can as a society to address them. We estimate that Scotland's natural environment is worth up to £23 billion per year to the country. That puts in perspective the importance of protecting our environment from the impacts of climate change.

A number of members mentioned land use. We have a lot of work going on on the regional land use framework pilots; I hope to report back to Parliament on that in due course. We have a solid evidence base, which will continue to develop, for understanding the impacts of climate change on our society. We are already working with the UK Government and other devolved Administrations to develop a further climate change risk assessment, as I mentioned in relation to Mr Harvie's point, and we are working with ClimateXChange, which Angus MacDonald mentioned, and the adaptation sub-committee of the Committee on Climate Change to take forward our strategy.

Obviously, we are aware that the issue of climate change will become more and more significant for our country, and we are developing our adaptive capacity. I thank organisations, including Adaptation Scotland, that play an important part in shaping some of that work and which will continue to support our activity.

The consultation responses and the committee's work are very valuable to the Government, and we have taken on board many of the messages. We will work on finalising our adaptation programme in the near future; I will seek to show the committee and members that we have listened to the points that have been raised and that we will do what we can to ensure that we have a strategy that makes Scotland the most resilient country we can make it; that helps us to adapt to the effects of climate change; that helps us to protect Scotland's much-loved natural environment; and which—of course—makes us a more resilient country to live and work in.

16:50

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): My preparing for the debate prompted me to re-read in detail the evidence on the draft programme that was given during two stakeholder meetings that were held on 30 October last year. I remember at the time sitting in committee and feeling quite invigorated by what I had heard. Going over the *Official Report* ahead of this afternoon's debate had a similar effect. The evidence that we received was as constructive and detailed as it was wide ranging, so on behalf of the committee members I record our appreciation of the contribution that witnesses and stakeholders made to our deliberations. I also concur with the minister who, in his letter responding to the committee's report, said that the process had

“provided valuable insights and raised useful questions”.

Across the panels, there was absolute unanimity on the fact that the impacts of climate change are being felt right across society. Professor Des Thompson of Scottish Natural Heritage told us:

“We are now seeing in our seas and mountains and on the coast rapid changes such as have never been witnessed before in a similar timeframe.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 30 October 2013; c 2822-23.]

Andrew Bauer of NFU Scotland told us:

“From a farming point of view, the impacts are already here ... The growing seasons have changed, and farmers are already adapting what they are growing because extreme weather events are making potentially higher-profit crops more risky to plant.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 30 October 2013; c 2823.]

Jim Densham of RSPB Scotland revealed that, across various RSPB sites including some of Scotland's “most special places”,

“every day issues and impacts”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 30 October 2013; c 2824.]

are being seen that cannot be disentangled from climate change.

David Goodhew of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service admitted that the past decade had seen recognition that the impacts of climate change are more variable and wide reaching than was previously anticipated. He explained that the Fire and Rescue Service is now having to purchase more four-by-four vehicles with differential locks on rear axles and exhaust pipes set higher than 18 inches in order to meet the challenging range of circumstances in which the service must operate.

It is widely recognised that we have significant challenges to which to respond. Although the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs secretary of state, Owen Paterson, has sought to portray the consequences of climate

change as offering an opportunity for agriculture, Andrew Bauer revealed that the sector in Scotland does not entirely share that viewpoint. He told us:

“we can foresee the benefits. However, the uncertainty could wipe them all out; you might be okay one year in five, but for the other four years you ... could suffer significant problems. ... I am not betting my house ... on the benefits outweighing the negatives that we have to deal with.”—*[Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, 30 October 2013; c 2837.]*

One specific downside that he predicted was that, in the future, we will see a decline in areas that are fit for production in some of our farming heartlands.

What is going on out there as we react to the impacts of climate change? What are we as a society doing well, and what do we need to do better? Let me deal first specifically with the adaptation policy. We were told that the Government had made good strides in implementing and developing the existing framework. The move away from a sectoral approach towards an integrated package was welcomed—albeit that there was a call for that to be built on. Jim Densham rightly made the point—as Alex Fergusson and Patrick Harvie have—that we need to think beyond five-year programmes of objectives, proposals and policies, which give us a short-term look at, and control over, what needs to happen, but do not consider the longer term. As Mr Densham said, we need to be clear about where we are going and how we will deliver a resilient and adaptable Scotland. That is something that he feels does not quite come across in the draft programme.

Paul Wheelhouse: I thank the deputy convener for taking an intervention and I apologise for interrupting. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 specified a five-year time horizon and that is the predominant driver for our approach. However, we will take on board the points that members have made about the need to consider the longer term as well.

Graeme Dey: I thank the minister for that input. We are aware that they are five-year programmes, but there is a general point that we must look as far beyond that timeframe as we can.

I turn to areas in which the Government and other public sector bodies, the utilities and the private sector are already responding. We heard from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service how experience has taught it to work closely with partner agencies in response to flooding predictions and to forward deploy equipment and personnel. We were told that amalgamation of the police forces and fire brigades into national forces has “invigorated” the process of ensuring that assets are aligned to risks, and that the right resources are in the right place at the right time.

We were advised that, building on publication of the national flood risk assessment, SEPA has moved on to the new flood risk and hazard maps, which are to be launched tomorrow, as the minister revealed. Next year will see the development of risk management strategies, which will look at the biggest risks in each local authority area. Gordon McGregor of Scottish Power revealed that the power companies are working daily to monitor weather and its impact on power assets, which is making those assets more resilient, especially in areas that are subject to frequent storms. They are also building stress testing into the process of designing future infrastructure.

Some areas were highlighted as needing to be improved or addressed. We were told that there could be better joined-up working between agriculture and local authorities, with farmers planting low-value crops in fields that could be utilised for flood-plain storage rather than planting high-value crops that would have to be written off, out of necessity for the greater good. It was also suggested that, in pursuing woodland expansion, we should not see large-scale reversion from farming to forestry but should actively pursue the establishment of pockets of forestry and agroforestry systems.

We were told of upcoming problems with drought in the likes of Angus and Fife, with their short coastal rivers and areas of intensive agriculture. Indeed, the committee was advised that, in some parts of the country last year, we came within a week of restrictions being placed on irrigation. It was suggested that offline and winter storage in reservoirs should be encouraged.

The committee also heard of the need to support the research community. Professor Thompson summed up the situation when he said that

“rapid, risky things are now being thrown at our environment, and unless we have the science and innovative techniques in place to try to combat them, we will simply be folding our arms as those changes happen.”—*[Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, 30 October 2013; c 2842.]*

Anna Beswick of Climate Ready Clyde suggested that we need a national heatwave plan, which I think is mentioned in the draft—England already has one—hard though it might be to imagine Scotland requiring to implement such a plan.

Transport Scotland is currently recruiting chartered engineers who must have an MSc, and it was suggested by Stephen Thomson of that organisation that introducing the concept of adaptation in MSc courses—whether for engineers or anyone else—would have benefits.

What came over loud and clear in evidence was that the various sectors generally realise—as they must—that they must play their part in adapting and becoming more resilient to the impacts of climate change. I thought that David Goodhew of Scottish Fire and Rescue best summed up the way forward when he told the committee that

“Extreme weather is not anybody’s problem; it is everybody’s problem. If we do not take a unified approach with real joined-up working ... we will fail ... it is a question of partnership, partnership and partnership.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 30 October 2013; c 2858-9.]

We need widespread engagement on responding to the challenges that we face, and we need leadership—not just from Government. Therefore, the formation of the public sector climate leaders forum is welcome, as is Claudia Beamish’s involvement in it, given that Scotland’s 2020 climate group focuses mainly on business.

There can be no doubt that, as the minister highlighted in his letter to the RACCE Committee, we need exemplar bodies from the private and public sectors. There are good examples. I visited the Kingsway campus of the new Dundee and Angus College last Friday and was delighted to learn how that building has been made to rise to the challenge of tackling climate change. Worcester Bosch has sponsored the installation of a ground-source heat pump, which is used for training that company’s technicians. A solar power room provides a training facility for students, as well as meeting the building’s energy needs, and rainwater is being harvested for toilet flushing in the catering block. Through strategically positioned monitors in the building, the college is advising students and staff of the performance of measures such as the solar power unit, with the aim of creating a culture of awareness of the need to save energy and to promote renewable energy use.

Sarah Boyack: Graeme Dey has made an extremely useful point about the capacity of institutions to provide practical examples of what we can all do. Institutions such as colleges that have significant land can make a significant impact in minimising flooding by putting in a surface of grass or one that uses plants and trees instead of concrete. That point is worth bearing in mind in relation to householders and businesses.

Graeme Dey: Sarah Boyack has made a very good point. I do not think that there is anything that I can add to that.

There is so much more that can be done, as Sarah Boyack indicated, especially by local authorities. I am not convinced—from experience or from the evidence that the committee received—that councils are, in the first instance, making full use of existing drainage infrastructure

to cope with increased instances of excessive rainfall, because they are failing to clean gullies as often as they should.

The debate has been an excellent one that has reflected the justified importance that Parliament, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, the Government and stakeholders attach to the subject. The adaptation programme is a work in progress. On behalf of the members of the committee, I say that we look forward to participating further in its development. I am sure that colleagues would welcome, in particular, an opportunity to consider further at some future date how Scotland is adapting to climate change, once the strategy has been progressed and if parliamentary time allows. In the meantime, I ask members to support the motion at decision time.

Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-08673, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. I call on Kenny MacAskill to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 9 May 2013, relating to restrictions on the possession of firearms by persons who have received suspended sentences from courts in England and Wales, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—*[Kenny MacAskill.]*

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

Care Bill

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-08674, in the name of Alex Neil, on the Care Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. I call on Michael Matheson to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Care Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 9 May 2013, relating to cross border provision for healthcare and for the establishment of the Health Research Authority, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—*[Michael Matheson.]*

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-08747, in the name of Keith Brown, on veterans, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the debt of gratitude that Scotland owes to those who have served in defence of freedom; notes that, since the publication of Our Commitments: Scottish Government Support for the Armed Forces Community in Scotland in September 2012, the Scottish Government has continued to provide support to the armed forces and veterans' communities in Scotland that has been widely welcomed by the military and the ex-service community; commends the partnership working with stakeholders, which has led to improved support, including capacity-building funding for Veterans Scotland, and further notes the Scottish Government's intention to ensure that the response to the UK Government's Veterans' Transition Review addresses the distinct needs of Scottish veterans and supports public services to meet their expectations; recognises the excellent work of veterans' organisations in supporting veterans; welcomes the number of Veterans' Champions across Scotland, and endorses the aim of ensuring that local services are better integrated to support Scotland's veterans.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08732, in the name of Rob Gibson, on the Scottish Government's consultation on its draft climate change adaptation programme, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's response to the Scottish Government's draft climate change adaptation programme.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08673, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 9 May 2013, relating to restrictions on the possession of firearms by persons who have received suspended sentences from courts in England and Wales, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08674, in the name of Alex Neil, on the Care Bill, which is UK legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of

the Care Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 9 May 2013, relating to cross border provision for healthcare and for the establishment of the Health Research Authority, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The CEDAR Network

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-08651, in the name of James Dornan, on the CEDAR—children experiencing domestic abuse recovery—network. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. Since James Dornan cannot be with us for the debate, for very understandable reasons, I call on Sandra White to open the debate.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commends the work of the Cedar Network and other third sector organisations in assisting women and young people who are affected by domestic abuse; notes that a branch of the Cedar Network has been established in Glasgow, which adds to the rest of its network across Scotland; considers its work, which it carries out through group work and support, to be hugely important in aiding recovery from domestic abuse; notes what it sees as the Cedar Network's close working relationship with a number of third sector and statutory organisations, such as the Castlemilk Domestic Abuse Project; considers that the inclusion of trained facilitators from a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies helps to foster a multiagency support network that is crucial to the success of the project; highlights research conducted by Nancy Lombard, who is a lecturer in social policy at Glasgow Caledonian University, on young people's attitudes toward violence, which suggests that engaging them in discussions on the subject will help challenge gendered perceptions of this, and considers education on violence and support for women and children to be key in helping to break cycles of domestic abuse.

17:02

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

First, I commend my colleague James Dornan for securing this debate. Unfortunately, due to a family bereavement, he cannot be here this evening. Our sympathies are with him and his family.

I point out that the motion highlights the work of the Domestic Abuse Project and the CEDAR project in Castlemilk. Back in November I had the privilege of leading a members' business debate to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Glasgow Women's Aid and the work that it does in supporting those suffering from domestic abuse. In that debate we also had the opportunity to acknowledge the CEDAR programme, which many of us know is a therapeutic group-work programme that aims to help both women and children to come to terms with the domestic abuse that they have experienced or witnessed.

Typically, the group work for children and that for mothers takes place at the same time and, importantly, the groups mirror their aims, such as to express the emotions surrounding abuse. That allows the children and their mother together to

continue to explore, understand and come to terms with what they have suffered and experienced. It is a powerful model that helps to promote empathy and empowerment among those attending. It may seem to many that such an approach is a commonsense one, but it is quite innovative in its delivery. It involves a multi-agency approach, bringing together professionals from a large range of agencies across the public and voluntary sectors.

That type of model is also important not only for the way that it can transform people's lives but, sadly, for a more pragmatic reason: at a time when finances are being squeezed there is more need for that type of multi-agency approach. I believe that the CEDAR model offers a great opportunity to make a real difference to people's lives and to tackle the thorny issue of how we continue to support some of the most vulnerable people in our society in these times.

The CEDAR pilot's evaluation report noted that CEDAR is contributing to a range of Scottish Government policies and that it represents an opportunity to focus resources in many services.

In the previous debate that I mentioned, I noted that CEDAR Glasgow had another two years of funding from the Big Lottery Fund and I said that I hoped that the Scottish Government would look to and learn from the CEDAR model in its approach to other forms of intervention. In response, the minister said that a strategy for Scotland to tackle violence against women was being taken forward, that it would be the first such document in Scotland and that it would shape the way in which we tackle violence against women in the future. I hope that debates such as this one will help to inform the strategy and that programmes such as CEDAR will be very much part of it. I understand that the Government will consult on the strategy in early 2014. Perhaps we could tease out some more details of it from the minister in her closing speech.

I will take a moment to commend those who make this work possible for their hard work and dedication. Some of them are in the public gallery and I met many of them earlier during a drop-in session in the Parliament. I was very impressed by the way in which all the groups work together, including Scottish Women's Aid, from which I spoke to Janice, Catherine and Mariam; the CEDAR project, from which I spoke to Kirsty and Isla; and the WAVES group, and in particular Bessie Anderson, who chairs that group.

I know that James Dornan takes a keen interest in the WAVES group, which helps women to move on from violent environments at their own pace. It was explained to me that, rather than being told to go into certain areas, women take it at their own pace, which helps them to feel much more

comfortable if they wish to move on. Women gain confidence from that and benefit from personal development, and they go on to voluntary work and some to colleges. I was very impressed by the contributions of the people at the drop-in session. I apologise to the people I met who I have not been able to name. I am sure that they know who they are. Once again, I thank them for all the hard work that they do on behalf of people.

When I spoke to my colleague James Dornan, he particularly praised the Domestic Abuse Project in Castlemilk, through which he learned more about the CEDAR project in his constituency. In the past three years alone, it has helped about 100 people each year and, incredibly, 90 per cent of its clients have gained volunteering positions and employment, which I mentioned earlier. That helps them to regain control of their lives. Special thanks must go to all those who help with that.

James Dornan also learned of the work of Dr Lombard in his research for a debate on the origins of addiction that was brought to the chamber by Kenneth Gibson, who I believe will speak in tonight's debate. As a result of Dr Lombard's work on how children perceive violence, she noted the need for discussions with schoolchildren to help them to understand what is meant by a healthy, respectful relationship in order to break down gender stereotypes that may, unfortunately, lead to violence in future. Her work is a fantastic read. I am not sure whether the publication is available in the Parliament, but I certainly have a copy of it and I am happy to pass it on to others.

In our debate on the anniversary of Glasgow Women's Aid, I mentioned the outreach programme in schools that aims to tackle the issues that Dr Lombard identified in her publication. I hope that her valuable work, alongside the outreach work that is being done in schools, will also inform the Scottish Government's future approach to domestic violence. As the minister said in her concluding remarks in that debate, the issue is not only about ending domestic abuse and violence against women. It is also about achieving equality, not just for women but between men and women in our society.

I look forward to hearing the other speeches and the minister's summing-up speech. Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the open debate. I ask for speeches of four minutes.

17:09

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, congratulate James Dornan on securing the debate and I join Sandra White in expressing our sympathies to him and his family on their

bereavement. I am sure that he is grateful to Sandra White, as we all are, for leading the debate in his absence. It is good that the debate can continue in the circumstances.

I, too, pay tribute to the CEDAR network for its work. It works in partnership with children and their mothers and helps mothers to support their children through the issues of domestic abuse, using peer support as well. We do not always understand the damage that domestic abuse can cause not only to the relationships between the abuser and their children but to the relationships among those who are abused, who may try to protect one another, which prevents them from working with one another as they could. The CEDAR network seeks to redress that and empower the people in those families to support one another and work their way through the issues.

In the debate, we recognise the often overlooked impact of domestic abuse on children and young people. We very often see that women are abused—in some cases men are abused, but in the majority of cases it is women who are abused—and we understand how that happens, but we seldom see the impact on young people, such as isolation, anger and fear, and the effect on their self-esteem and resilience. Domestic abuse influences their educational opportunities and life chances and impacts on their future relationships. The damage that domestic abuse does to children cannot be overestimated, and the CEDAR network and others recognise that.

A violent partner can also threaten children and young people, who can feel that they might face violence too—if they do not face it already. People who are violent to a partner can also be violent to children. That can take place in a bullying relationship: violence can be used against people who are seen to be less able to stand up to it.

Glasgow Women's Aid has been instrumental in setting up the Glasgow branch of the CEDAR network with the advice, support, safety and information services together—ASSIST—project and Children 1st. Scottish Women's Aid has long recognised the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people. For a long time it has employed children's workers, who work with young people of all different ages. They use play, social occasions and counselling to help young people, and they provide a service that children can access in their own right. There is no need for parental permission; young people can contact Scottish Women's Aid and get support and help for themselves. Sometimes their mothers are still in denial about the abuse in the relationship. As we all know, those who suffer domestic abuse can be the main people who cover up that abuse. Often, children see that and have to live with it, so

the ability of children and young people to access support in their own right is hugely important. Scottish Women's Aid offers that service and we need to keep supporting it.

We cannot prevent the impact on children and young people of domestic abuse, but we can try to deal with the consequences. We can combat the negative implications for young people by giving them coping techniques, helping them maintain their education by representing them to teachers and the like, and supporting them through their experience.

The bottom line is empowerment. If we empower mothers to support their children, and indeed empower children and young people to find a way through the issues themselves, children and young people will have a much better outlook on life. I commend the work of the organisations that assist with that. *[Applause.]*

17:13

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I join others in congratulating James on securing the debate and Sandra for stepping in to ensure that it got off to a good start.

The focus of tonight's debate is the CEDAR network's branch in Glasgow, but the motion refers to the fact that we are talking about a branch of a wider network. I have met some of the partners of the CEDAR network in Glasgow, such as Glasgow Women's Aid and Children 1st, which works right across Scotland. It is important that the CEDAR network and others have the opportunity to create links with other organisations that can help.

I represent a part of the Moray region, in which the CEDAR network has been active for some time, and there are important parallels between what is happening in Glasgow and what is happening across the rest of Scotland, particularly in Moray. I will start with some general remarks.

We need to think about the sources of violence that affect children, and there are a few that we might focus on in particular. Mental ill-health in adults who are close to children can be a source of violence, as can addictions, particularly to drink and severe, mind-distorting drugs such as crack cocaine. Relationships can come under stress, particularly through what I might describe as gratuitous promiscuity on the part of one partner, which can lead to violence that involves the children. Some sociopathic conditions mean that some parents are not naturally fitted to the role in which they find themselves, and those parents need support as much as their children do.

I am one of the fortunate majority who has not been exposed to such things. That said, I

remember at some indeterminate point listening from some distance to the only argument that I remember between my parents. I have no idea what it was about. There were no raised voices; it was quite quiet, but it was sufficiently impressive that I remember it to this day. When we are talking about parents and adults making much more severe interventions on children, I can see through that very tiny example in my own life that the effects on youngsters might last a lifetime.

The work of the CEDAR network is very important in tackling the effects of domestic abuse on children. In Moray, the CEDAR network has funding from the Big Lottery to work with Children 1st, and is a partner agency of the Moray domestic abuse partnership. It also does excellent work through a 12-week therapeutic group work programme for children and young people who have been exposed to domestic abuse. Mothers also have the opportunity to attend a group to support their children. Whatever we might think generally, the remedy often lies at the mother's door. I hope that more men will step up to the mark in relation to their parental responsibilities, but the reality is that we deliver a lot if we support the mothers.

The group work model is adapted from work that came from Canada. I hope that, in her summing up, the minister will acknowledge that it is well worth pursuing. We think that perhaps as many as 100,000 children in Scotland live under the shadow of domestic abuse. That tells us how important tonight's debate is and, more fundamentally, how significantly the Parliament should take tent of the issue and the work of the CEDAR network in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we move on, I remind members to use full names. I also point out that parliamentary rules do not allow gallery guests to applaud, so I must ask our visitors not to do so.

17:17

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I commend James Dornan, who lodged the motion for debate, and Sandra White, who, in his absence, opened the debate by explaining what the CEDAR network does and highlighting its excellent work.

As Stewart Stevenson said, it is indeed a sobering thought that no fewer than 100,000 children in Scotland are living with domestic abuse. The negative impact of that on young people's attitudes towards violence and on their own safety and self-esteem must not be underestimated.

Research carried out by Dr Nancy Lombard confirms that those attitudes exist and goes on to challenge the distorted and grotesque view that somehow male violence towards women is acceptable. Dr Lombard also advocates early intervention for children as young as pre-five to prevent those attitudes from being perpetuated.

What is not in doubt is that children are the innocent victims who are caught up in and have to live with domestic abuse, and we all seek to eradicate that situation. Currently, the concentration on outcomes for offenders tends to overshadow efforts to provide help for those who are directly and indirectly affected by domestic abuse. In carrying out essential work to support those victims in an informal and safe setting, the CEDAR network addresses that imbalance.

The project began in Fife, Edinburgh and Forth Valley and now extends into South Lanarkshire and other parts of Scotland. In South Lanarkshire, the CEDAR project—or, to give it its full title, the children experiencing domestic abuse recovery project—is run by Women's Aid and builds on existing CEDAR work in the area. This involves mothers and children assessing pre, parallel and post-support programmes. It will benefit 216 children and young people and 120 mothers in South Lanarkshire over a three-year period.

Violence generally, and this kind in particular, can and does ruin lives, which is why tackling it must be made a priority. That makes sense on a number of levels. As well as there being an obvious emotional impact of violence in the home, a study conducted by the United Kingdom Government shows that there is a financial cost, which is estimated to be a staggering £4 billion a year. In addition, Police Scotland is estimated to spend an average of six hours on a domestic abuse incident. For a number of reasons, Police Scotland has focused on domestic violence and has identified tackling it as a priority. That is certainly to be welcomed, not least because domestic abuse cannot be dismissed as merely a row but must be treated as the serious crime that it is known to be.

This is a short debate, but important issues have been raised. The last issue that I want to raise is the necessity to ensure that, when effective interventions are identified, funding is available for them in the longer term. Ideally, a three-year funding period should become the norm, to make sure that interventions are available.

17:21

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank James Dornan for securing this valuable debating time and Sandra White for

stepping up to the plate following his understandable absence.

I am pleased to discuss this important topic of domestic abuse and the vital work carried out by the CEDAR network in helping those affected to rebuild their lives.

While domestic abuse is without doubt perpetrated on some men by some women, there is no ignoring the fact that the vast majority of cases involve men abusing their female partners. This violence in the home—the place where they expect to feel safe and secure—can have a hugely traumatic effect on children and lead to a host of problems for them in later life. As Stewart Stevenson and Margaret Mitchell have already said, it is estimated that 100,000 children in Scotland live with domestic abuse. Sadly, there will be many who we do not yet know about who live with the trauma of such experiences past and present.

While the Scottish Government continues to tackle violence against women and assist survivors who are recovering from the experience, the work of the CEDAR project and others is invaluable in developing best practice and support and care for those in need. The CEDAR evaluation report and the feedback received from those involved in CEDAR projects certainly show that the approach that has been taken has been highly effective, delivering impressive outcomes and engaging with children and mothers in a way that puts them in control and helps them to gain a greater understanding of the domestic abuse that they have suffered.

Indeed, previously many children and mothers felt that domestic abuse was somehow their fault and often children blamed themselves for not doing something to stop it. The CEDAR network, through discussions with peers and group activities, allows both children and mothers to realise that they are not the ones in the wrong and helps to rebuild their self-esteem.

The evaluation report also makes the financial case for CEDAR's approach. Its approach to multi-agency working, which draws on the expertise and resources of both the public sector and the third sector, has proven to be highly effective.

CEDAR's focus on early intervention also ensures that the impact on services, including the education system, the criminal justice system, social work departments, the police and the national health service, is reduced as children affected by domestic abuse are less likely to place pressure on them in the long run.

I was pleased to note that the CEDAR project is now active in my constituency, following its launch in North Ayrshire Council's headquarters in May last year. The launch was attended by

representatives from a raft of organisations involved with children and families in the area. They attended the event to find out more about the project and were given information on how to refer families to it. Attendees were also shown a film presentation, in which they heard directly from children who have already taken part in the project talking about how important and helpful it has been to them. I have no doubt that such a presentation would have proven more effective than a briefing or a pamphlet.

Locally, the CEDAR project is being driven by North Ayrshire's violence against women partnership and delivered by North Ayrshire Women's Aid, with the project being funded by the Big Lottery Fund for three years. From discussions with my local authority colleagues, it is clear that the CEDAR project is now integral to North Ayrshire Council's early intervention and prevention strategy, which aims to improve the life chances of children and young people in North Ayrshire. The council is delighted to be working alongside those local organisations towards a common goal.

I understand that rural areas—North Ayrshire has a number of those—have experienced unique challenges, including lack of childcare provision, transport issues and low referrals, to name but a few. However, I am aware that CEDAR, in partnership with Dr Sarah Skerratt, director of the rural policy unit at Scotland's Rural College, recently hosted an event to discuss those challenges with representatives from all the CEDAR projects that operate in areas defined as rural, in order to explore what needs to change to make the project more effective in a rural context. I also understand that CEDAR has been invited to attend the cross-party group on rural policy to discuss those matters further.

It is clear from members' contributions this evening that the innovative approach that CEDAR is taking and the support that it offers to mothers and children recovering from their experience of domestic abuse are invaluable. I am sure that all members and the Scottish Government will continue to offer CEDAR the support that it needs to continue providing its vital services.

17:26

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): I thank James Dornan for securing this afternoon's debate, and Sandra White for taking the debate forward. It is an important topic, because it allows us to reflect on some of the wider issues surrounding domestic abuse.

We know of the damaging effects on women who experience domestic abuse. Today, we

recognise that children and young people in families where there is domestic abuse are victims too. That is the case whether those children hear the loudest of fights or the quietest of threats, whether they see physical violence inflicted upon their mothers or the aftermath of violence in the form of bruises and broken bones. Indeed, they may not witness physical violence at all, but psychological abuse of women can be just as damaging for children and can leave scars just as deep. Even when concerted efforts are made to shield children from witnessing or being aware of abuse, it must be incredibly difficult to protect them from the emotional consequences of abuse taking place within their home and being perpetrated and experienced by the most significant adults in their lives.

That is why I am particularly pleased to have an opportunity to commend the work of the CEDAR network, and I add my own thanks to those already expressed in the chamber this afternoon to all of those involved in the network. I would also like to recognise the role of Scottish Women's Aid, who brought the CEDAR model from Canada to Scotland and who managed the three pilot projects in Edinburgh, Falkirk and Fife.

Of particular merit is the way in which CEDAR ensures that its programmes of recovery for mothers and children are complementary and work in parallel. That very much reflects CEDAR's belief that mothers themselves are the best people to support children to come to terms with their experiences and to help them move forward into what we hope will be a life free from domestic abuse. Another commendable aspect of the CEDAR model is the way in which it embraces partnership working, which is true of the violence against women sector in Scotland across the board.

I am also pleased that we have had an opportunity this afternoon to explore young people's attitudes towards violence, particularly the way in which violence is seen by young people through the lens of gender. We know that violence against women is rooted in gender inequality and in the imbalance of power between men and women in our society. Dr Nancy Lombard, who has written extensively on men's violence against women and on young people's attitudes to violence, was mentioned earlier, particularly by Sandra White.

Dr Lombard's study examining the views of Scottish 11 and 12-year-olds documents some truly worrying views that demonstrate how perceptions about gender and violence remain deeply entrenched in our society—perceptions that being a man legitimises the use of violence, that women and girls are the possessions of men, and that it is a man's right and entitlement to

control and regulate his partner's behaviour. Of course, that is not how the children themselves expressed the issues, but comments such as, "Because they're a couple, she should do what he says," or, "Well, she's been cheating on him so she deserves it," highlight that those perceptions are very much alive in our society and begin at a very young age.

We must help young people growing up in Scotland today to challenge those perceptions and play their part in changing attitudes. However, let us not be under any illusions—that is not easy for a young person, or for an adult either. Any action that a person takes that defies and distances them from their peers and perhaps even their friends takes tremendous courage.

That is why I am pleased that the Scottish Government is supporting the violence reduction unit to deliver the mentors in violence prevention—MVP—programme in a number of Scottish high schools. MVP Scotland focuses on empowering young people to identify, safely challenge and speak out against unacceptable behaviour. I and other members have spoken about MVP previously, so I will not go into the detail, but suffice it to say that I think that it is a fantastic programme, and I am delighted that the Scottish Government is funding and supporting the roll-out of MVP Scotland to all state schools in Edinburgh and Inverclyde.

Sandra White asked what progress is being made on the strategy to tackle violence against women. I reassure her that it is of course progressing well and that the consultation is progressing. It is important to reassure members that many of the wider issues that have been raised in the debate, such as those of gender inequality and the imbalance of power that underlies domestic abuse, are part of the work that will be taken forward through the strategy. It is important that we do that.

The Scottish Government is doing a lot of work to tackle domestic abuse. Police Scotland has made tackling domestic abuse one of its top three priorities, which sends out a strong signal. In recent years, the criminal law has been strengthened in a number of ways. The Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill will improve the support that is available to victims and witnesses throughout the justice system and will put victims' interests at the heart of on-going improvements, which in itself is important. Of course, there is the proposal in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill to remove the requirement for corroboration, which has had the support of Scottish Women's Aid and a number of other organisations that support women.

A lot of work is being done although, obviously, a lot more is still to be done. The strategy to tackle

violence against women gives us the opportunity to step up all of that work so that we can try to eradicate the scourge of domestic abuse from our society.

I absolutely believe that, across Scotland, we all have a part to play in making our country one that is viewed around the world as an exemplar because of not only our determination to tackle violence against women but what a nation can achieve by putting the pursuit of equality at its heart. I join my fellow members in congratulating the CEDAR project on its wonderful work, which I believe plays a valuable part in helping us towards that goal.

Meeting closed at 17:33.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78392-491-2

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78392-508-7

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
