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Official Report

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Thursday 27 March 2014

Session 4

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Thursday 27 March 2014

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME	29479
Commonwealth Games Visitors	29479
Discretionary Housing Payments	29479
Public Transport (Renfrewshire).....	29480
Living Wage	29481
Local Planning Decisions (Appeals)	29482
Winter Sports	29484
Waiting Times (NHS Grampian)	29485
Taylor Review	29486
Capital Investment Projects (Scottish Government).....	29486
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	29488
Engagements.....	29488
Prime Minister (Meetings).....	29491
Cabinet (Meetings)	29493
Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.....	29495
BlackRock Investor Warning	29496
Constitutional Convention.....	29498
DUMFRIES CONTROL ROOMS CLOSURE	29500
<i>Motion debated—[Elaine Murray].</i>	
Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)	29500
Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP)	29503
Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab)	29505
Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD).....	29506
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)	29508
Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab)	29509
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)	29511
Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)	29512
The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham)	29513
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY QUESTION TIME	29517
Visitor Searches (Knives)	29517
Parliamentary Proceedings (Accessibility)	29518
Capacity Needs	29519
Open-source Software.....	29520
Electronic Security	29521
Building Security	29522
Documentary Films.....	29522
CHILD POVERTY	29524
<i>Motion moved—[Margaret Burgess].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jackie Baillie].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liz Smith].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liam McArthur].</i>	
The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess).....	29524
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	29529
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	29533
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	29536
Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP).....	29539
Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	29541
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP).....	29543
Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	29545
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	29548
Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab)	29550
Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP).....	29552
Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)	29555
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	29556

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green).....	29558
Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP)	29560
Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)	29562
Liam McArthur	29564
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	29566
Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab).....	29568
The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell).....	29572
DECISION TIME	29577

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 27 March 2014

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 11:40*]

General Question Time

Commonwealth Games Visitors

1. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what preparations it is making to deal with the number of people expected to visit Scotland during the Commonwealth games. (S4O-03070)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): The year 2014 is a momentous one for Scotland and we look forward to welcoming visitors from around the world for the Commonwealth games, the Ryder cup and homecoming.

As well as providing a spectacular sporting and cultural programme, we are working with VisitScotland, transport providers and other partners to ensure that visitors, whether coming from near or further afield, have the best possible experience in Scotland during the Commonwealth games.

George Adam: As the minister may know, Glasgow airport in Paisley will welcome many of the athletes and spectators, in effect making Paisley the gateway to the games. How are the Scottish Government and games organisers working with the airport to ensure a smooth journey for all users of the airport during the games?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government very much recognises that Glasgow airport is one of the key arrival points for the Commonwealth games. For that reason, we have been working closely with Glasgow Airport Ltd and the games organising committee throughout the planning phases of the games. I am happy to write to the member to provide him with more detail.

Discretionary Housing Payments

2. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the reported underspend of discretionary housing payments by some local authorities. (S4O-03071)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): The latest figures available for expenditure on discretionary housing payments were published earlier this month and cover the period 1 April 2013 to 31 January 2014. I have

noted that, on those figures, some local authorities had not yet spent their full allocation.

I encourage anyone who needs assistance with their housing costs to apply for a DHP. In addition, I encourage all local authorities to review their processes to ensure that they are doing all that they can to help those who are struggling financially as a result of welfare reforms.

Jackie Baillie: The minister will recall that when we last debated this, on 13 March, she appeared to suggest that there may be an opportunity to use the DHP underspend to wipe out the debt accrued by tenants struggling to pay the bedroom tax this past year. Would she care to confirm that now?

Margaret Burgess: What I said then was that we were looking at what the total underspend would be for the year, what funding we had made available to 2014-15 and whether that funding could be better targeted at those who need it. We are aware that the DHP allocations do not match the areas of need; therefore the top-up does not match that either. That is why we need to get the cap on DHPs removed. However, we are very clear that any additional funding that the Scottish Government has committed to the financial year 2014-15 will be fully used to mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax and we are looking at ways of doing that.

Public Transport (Renfrewshire)

3. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it plans to take to improve public transport links to and from Renfrewshire. (S4O-03072)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): Following completion of the Glasgow airport strategic transport network study, I have asked Transport Scotland to work with Glasgow airport, Renfrewshire Council and Glasgow City Council in considering further the feasibility of a tram/train link from Glasgow airport to Glasgow Central station.

Public transport links will also be improved by the May 2014 rail timetable, which will enhance the frequency of services towards Paisley, with up to four trains an hour operating between Glasgow and Gourock in both directions during the inter-peak period. That will further enhance connectivity with ferry sailings from Gourock, and between Renfrew and stations on the route between Glasgow and Gourock.

Neil Bibby: I understand that the minister recently met the RailQwest group regarding the Glasgow crossrail project. RailQwest believes that the project would not only benefit Renfrewshire, Ayrshire and Inverclyde but have national benefits by linking those areas to central and east Scotland by train. Will the minister tell us what the Scottish

Government intends to do following that meeting? For example, given the project's potential to have regional and national importance, will he commit to working with RailQwest to carry out a feasibility study so that we can take crossrail forward?

Keith Brown: It was indeed an interesting meeting with RailQwest but the outcome was for me to say to RailQwest that if it wants to take that proposal forward—as it is not one of the priorities currently being pursued by the Scottish Government—it would have to work with the regional transport partnership. That would be the relevant body to take the project through to the next stage, which would perhaps be a Scottish transport appraisal guidance study, and to give any serious consideration to the project.

Of course, in the meantime we are committed to, for example, the nearly £0.75 billion Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme and we will continue to invest in rail services in the west of Scotland.

Living Wage

4. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it promotes the living wage. (S4O-03073)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government takes low pay seriously and we are leading the way by doing all that we can to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from the living wage. Our commitment to support the Scottish living wage for the duration of the parliamentary session is a decisive and long-term commitment to those who are on the lowest incomes.

We continue to ensure that all staff who are covered by the public sector pay policy are paid the Scottish living wage, which will increase to £7.65 per hour for pay settlements in 2014-15 and benefit thousands of public sector employees. We encourage others to follow the example that we have set. That is why we have funded a pilot for the Poverty Alliance to deliver a living wage accreditation scheme, which aims to increase the number of employers that pay the living wage in all sectors in Scotland and to make decent pay the norm in our country.

James Kelly: It has been brought to my attention that some Scottish Government directorates and non-departmental public bodies are subcontracting jobs that used to be supported directly, which is creating a low-pay loophole. We know from a *Daily Record* story last year that the living wage was not being paid for subcontracted Scottish Government cleaning jobs at Atlantic Quay. Given that paying the living wage should be a priority, will the cabinet secretary commit to an

urgent review of all jobs that are subcontracted by the Government's agencies before stage 3 of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill?

John Swinney: The Government takes the issue seriously. Aspects of work that is carried out in the Government's areas of activity are the subject of contracts in which individuals do not become part of the public sector pay policy. Mr Kelly made that distinction in his question.

The Government is actively exploring the nature of pay arrangements in many contracts as part of our general effort to ensure that the living wage is a major part of the approach to paying public sector staff and that low-paid people are given the protection of the living wage.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that raising the statutory minimum wage is the real long-term answer to low pay, rather than a voluntary living wage?

John Swinney: A statutory minimum wage at a higher level is a way of enshrining the principles of the living wage campaign. The Scottish Government made it clear in "Scotland's Future" that our proposed fair work commission will ensure that the minimum wage rises at least in line with inflation. If that had happened in the past five years, that would have boosted the pay of the lowest earners by more than £600.

Local Planning Decisions (Appeals)

5. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the level of local planning decisions overturned on appeal by reporters acting on ministers' behalf. (S4O-03074)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish ministers wish to see the right developments in the right places. Reporters from the directorate for planning and environmental appeals, acting on the Scottish ministers' behalf, are required to make their decisions on the basis of the case's planning merits and in accordance with the area's development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. We are content that reporters are making decisions on planning appeals on that basis.

Iain Gray: Figures that the Scottish Government recently released show that the number of such decisions is rising in my constituency of East Lothian, where anger is also increasing about the decisions that reporters take on ministers' behalf, against local people's wishes. The latest example involves Beveridge Row in Belhaven. In correspondence, the planning minister refused my request for him to meet the local community

council or the public to discuss the issue, because the case was live. However, he also rejected any responsibility for the decision, because it is being taken by a reporter.

Does the cabinet secretary understand that, to my constituents, that looks like having it both ways? Either it is or it is not a decision for ministers. Does he see that the situation undermines any trust that residents might have in the integrity of the planning process? Will he at least agree to ask his planning minister to meet my constituents once the decision has been issued, so that the minister can explain his position directly to them?

John Swinney: I am a bit surprised by Iain Gray's question, given that he served as a minister in the Scottish Government and is familiar with the arrangements around planning legislation. Indeed, the planning legislation under which we operate was fundamentally put in place by the Administration prior to this one, in 2006-07. I am therefore a bit surprised by the tone and nature of Iain Gray's question.

As I explained in my original answer, the planning appeals system and the role of the directorate for planning and environmental appeals are very clearly set out to operate within the framework of the planning merits of individual cases and in a compatible fashion with the development plan. I appreciate that decisions that are taken can often result in significant concern in localities, but I assure members that the reporters take decisions that are consistent with the existing planning legislation that is in place and the frameworks that go with it.

On the specific case of Beveridge Row in Dunbar, I will certainly look at the issues. It is entirely justifiable and appropriate for the planning minister to indicate that it would not be appropriate for him to meet while a planning appeal is being heard. It would be most inappropriate for that to happen, but whether a meeting can take place once the planning appeal has been determined is an entirely different question. I will consider that and reply to the member.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): The word "anger" is an understatement of the emotions that were felt in the Broughton area of my constituency when the reporter this week approved a planning application for a housing development alongside a primary school playground against the wishes of the council. Is it not the case that, over the past seven years, the planning minister has withdrawn from being involved in certain planning appeals that previously the minister would have had a role in deciding?

John Swinney: The same point applies. Existing planning policies and development plans in particular localities drive the planning decisions. Those decisions are taken on an evidence base. They are not taken because of particular priorities of ministers or authorities; they are based on planning policies. I quite understand that local communities can often be concerned by decisions, but they are taken on that basis. Whether they are taken with ministerial involvement or on the stance of reporters, the same considerations and conditions have to be assessed by whoever takes the decision.

Winter Sports

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what additional support it plans to provide for the development of winter sports. (S4O-03075)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): I am sure that all members will be aware that the all-Scottish team GB curlers in the men's, women's and Paralympian teams returned with medals from the winter Olympics in Sochi. In recognition of that fantastic performance, sportscotland and Stirling Council recently announced that they will work in partnership to deliver a multimillion-pound investment in Stirling sports village. That will significantly enhance curling facilities for both performance athletes and community use, and it represents a further boost for the sport in Scotland.

With regard to other winter sports, sportscotland has provided more than £5 million to Scottish ice rinks. In addition to ice facilities, it has invested significant funds in other winter sporting facilities, including a £933,000 award for the Midlothian snowsports centre and a £78,000 grant for Newmilns snow and sports complex.

Liz Smith: I think that we all warmly welcome those commitments. However, given that, as part of the United Kingdom, Scotland currently benefits from access to over £7 billion of sports funding and 1,300 elite athletes currently receive direct financial support, can the minister tell members how much financial support would be available in an independent Scotland to support our Scottish sportsmen and sportswomen?

Shona Robison: The total investment in the winter Olympic and Paralympic performance programmes by Scotland has been in the region of £3.75 million to £4 million. That is over and above the funding that is provided through sportscotland to the sports' governing bodies. Of course, we pay in and contribute to UK Sport and therefore we would be entitled to our share of that resource. In addition, the lottery moneys that currently go to sport through sportscotland would continue. We

have fantastic state-of-the-art sports facilities that are more than adequate to ensure that our athletes continue to perform with the best on the world stage.

Waiting Times (NHS Grampian)

7. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to NHS Grampian to address waiting times for treatment. (S4O-03076)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): I am aware that the board has been experiencing capacity difficulties in delivering the waiting-time guarantee and standards, which is why we have invested £18 million to increase capacity by building new theatres and employing more doctors, nurses and support staff. That additional capacity has just come on stream and should enable a significant reduction in waiting times, with the 12-week legal treatment-time guarantee being delivered during the quarter ending September 2014. My officials continue to work with the board to support the delivery of waiting times.

Richard Baker: Yesterday, we learned that NHS Grampian is not meeting waiting-time targets for cancer treatment. I wrote to the cabinet secretary after 20 consultants in NHS Grampian complained of chronic underfunding of services. Is he giving a guarantee that, because of the resources that he has outlined, waiting times for cancer treatment will definitely be met by the end of this year?

Alex Neil: The issue has not been gross underfunding, as Mr Baker suggests. There is a shortage of particular types of cancer specialist, and the north of Scotland, particularly Grampian, has been affected by that. I am sure that the member is aware of the challenges in attracting people to the Grampian area, given the high cost of housing and other issues.

If the member saw the increases in board budgets for next year that I announced two weeks ago, he will know that Grampian will receive the highest increase, at 4 per cent, which recognises the need to meet the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee—NRAC—target within the next two years or so. There is a substantial real-terms increase in resources to Grampian health board, as there should be, to meet our NRAC requirements and to ensure that the additional capacity is up and running so that Grampian can meet its waiting-time guarantees.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question number 8, in the name of John Lamont, has not been lodged. The member has provided me with a satisfactory explanation.

Taylor Review

9. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish its response to the “Review of Expenses and Funding of Civil Litigation In Scotland”. (S4O-03078)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government is currently working on its response to Sheriff Principal Taylor’s “Review of Expenses and Funding of Civil Litigation in Scotland” and will publish it as soon as possible.

Margaret Mitchell: I do not know whether that moves us much further forward. One of the recommendations of the Taylor review is to look at the regulation of claims management companies, as happens in England and Wales. Is the cabinet secretary minded to accept that recommendation and, if so, will he elaborate on how that would be done?

Kenny MacAskill: I was grateful for Sheriff Principal Taylor’s response on that and I have discussed it with him at a meeting. We have to reflect on that recommendation, but I give the member an assurance that we will publish our response to the review as soon as we can and, clearly, our comments on that issue will be part of that response.

Capital Investment Projects (Scottish Government)

10. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its recently completed and upcoming capital investment projects. (S4O-03079)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): On 17 March, we published a report detailing progress on delivery of our infrastructure investment plan. In 2013, projects worth £625 million were completed. In addition, our published updated project pipeline is a comprehensive overview of all major infrastructure projects that are on-going or under development.

James Dornan: It is clear that the Scottish Government continues to invest in capital projects; that supports employment and makes a huge difference to the lives of people across Scotland. That is despite the cuts that have been imposed by Westminster. Does the cabinet secretary agree that only with the full powers of independence can even more investment be made in Scotland’s infrastructure, which will make a substantial difference to our economy in the short, medium and longer term?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, I agree with the member. The full powers of independence would of course provide us with greater flexibility to manage capital investment and to determine our priorities according to the needs of the Scottish economy. Independence presents us with an opportunity to invest more and, ultimately, to invest in a way that enables us to create a more successful and prosperous Scotland. I would have thought that members across the chamber would support that.

The Presiding Officer: Before we move to the next item of business, members will wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery His Excellency Dr Dominik Furgler, the ambassador of Switzerland. *[Applause.]*

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): As the Parliament agreed yesterday that a member other than Johann Lamont could ask question 1, I call Jackie Baillie to do so.

Engagements

1. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-01992)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

In the light of Johann Lamont's absence, I say on the career and life of Tony Benn that he was not just a substantial parliamentarian, but a great campaigner and writer. He will be much missed by his family, obviously, but also by his many friends across the political spectrum. *[Applause.]*

Jackie Baillie: I thank the First Minister for his generous comments, which sentiments we on this side of the chamber share.

The First Minister and his deputy refused to back Labour's plans for an energy price freeze to help hard-pressed families to cope with rising bills. Indeed, his Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, Fergus Ewing, said that a price freeze would be "completely unworkable" and would lead to blackouts.

Now that SSE has agreed a price freeze and the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets is reviewing how the entire energy industry charges consumers, will the First Minister admit that Labour was right and that he and his ministers were wrong?

The First Minister: Jackie Baillie omitted to mention in her declaration of "We was right" that the Scottish National Party proposed a £70 cut in family energy bills, which is, by definition, rather better than an energy price freeze.

I welcome the monopoly investigation into the energy market. That is a far more sustainable way to look at matters, and to ensure that families are protected than would be the case with the other suggestions that have been made. Such a competition review must look at the entire energy market's production processes and, in particular, at the recently offered nuclear generation contract and its potential impact on household bills over the next 30 years.

Jackie Baillie: The SNP's proposals would save companies money and load the cost on to the taxpayers. Labour's proposals would deliver a

higher saving—a saving for ordinary people—instead of increasing the profits of the big six energy companies. That is the difference between the two proposals.

From the beginning of the debate, the First Minister has been on the side of the energy companies rather than on the side of ordinary Scots who are struggling to pay their bills. He has stood shoulder to shoulder with David Cameron and said, “You can’t freeze prices. The market does not need reform.” [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackie Baillie: SNP members make a lot of noise. The big six energy companies have made an obscene £867 million in profits while families struggle. Those profits would be even higher after a yes vote because of the First Minister’s planned corporation tax cuts.

As SSE announces a price freeze and Ofgem announces plans for market reform, I will give the First Minister another chance to answer the question. Will he admit that he was wrong not to back Labour’s proposals?

The First Minister: Even for Jackie Baillie, that “shoulder to shoulder” remark was something—given that it comes the morning after the night before, as just yesterday, Labour MPs marched through the lobby in the House of Commons “shoulder to shoulder” with the Tories. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I say to Jackie Baillie that, when she is in a better together campaign in which the Labour Party is not just shoulder to shoulder, but hand in glove and umbilically linked to the Conservative Party, it is not the best idea to come to Parliament and accuse others of guilt by association with the Conservative Party. The Labour Party is an extension of the Conservative Party.

To take £70 off household bills might be irrelevant to Jackie Baillie and to the Labour Party, but it will be greatly welcomed by families in Scotland as a substantial proposal.

The review of competition in the electricity market is welcome. It offers the opportunity to fully examine the marketplace. I hope and believe that the Labour Party will see the sense of extending that review to nuclear power and the contract that has been offered to Hinkley Point. I hope that for the very obvious reason that, if it continues to support that contract, which is at double the current wholesale price for electricity, there will be only one direction for electricity bills in the future, and that is upwards. Let us have a review and an examination of competition and the conduct of the big six electricity companies, and of the huge

nuclear subsidy that is threatening to overwhelm electricity bill payers in this country.

Jackie Baillie: That answer has demonstrated that it does not matter who asks the questions—the First Minister still does not answer them.

The First Minister is clearly suffering from amnesia, so I remind him that he is at odds with his deputy and his MPs in that he supports a cap on benefits. At least, he told the *Sunday Post* so.

Of course, the First Minister’s white paper proposes weaker regulation of the energy companies than we have just now. Labour legislated to abolish fuel poverty by 2016, but on his watch, the number of households that are in fuel poverty has reached an all-time high of 900,000. The fuel poverty budget is underspent, and installers are going to the wall. Instead of plans to help those 900,000 households that are struggling to heat their homes, the First Minister plans to make a huge tax cut for the big six companies that are ripping Scottish families off. As ever with the First Minister, big business comes first, and real Scots are at the end of the queue.

For the third time of asking, as SSE freezes prices, and Ofgem announces that it will reform the market, surely even the First Minister has the humility to admit that Labour was right and he was wrong.

The First Minister: It does not matter who is asking the questions because they all read from the same script week after week. We were all waiting with bated breath to see who would be the chosen one; the next leader apparent. There were so many candidates on the back benches. The reason why the Labour Party is in trouble in Scotland is its association with the Conservatives in better together, and its script does not change from week to week.

For the third time, I say that we support the competition review of the electricity industry. It will provide a sustainable way of protecting consumers. We support the £70 reduction in electricity bills that we proposed and which most people would understand is, by definition, rather better than a freeze in electricity prices. We think that that is the right way to proceed.

We also understand that if a couple of companies are offered a contract at Hinkley Point at double the wholesale price of electricity, that means that, under Labour, the direction of electricity bills will be upwards if Labour continues to support nuclear power.

In supporting the monopoly review of the current “big six” structure of the electricity industry, which requires examination, let us reflect on who was the architect of that structure. My goodness me! It was not David Miliband, but Ed Miliband.

Jackie Baillie: We operate in a United Kingdom market. We get one third of the overall UK budget for renewables, despite our population share being one tenth. Independence would remove that. Independence would cost an extra £875 per year for each household to make up the renewables shortfall. That is the price of independence for families that are already struggling to pay their bills.

In all of what he said, I did not hear an apology from the First Minister. When Ed Miliband called for the price freeze six months ago, this Government's energy spokesperson said:

"never has a measure introduced by the leader of a major political party in the UK received such widespread, utter and total condemnation as being completely unworkable."—[*Official Report*, 3 October 2013; c 23271.]

Now that Labour's policy has been adopted by one of our major energy companies, and now that Ofgem is following Labour's lead, will the First Minister finally admit that he was wrong and that he has let down families who are struggling with gas and electricity bills—or is "sorry" simply the First Minister's hardest word?

The First Minister: Everybody—the Conservative Party and SSE—is following Labour's lead, we are told. Unfortunately, what SSE said yesterday about Labour's proposals is that they

"would not significantly reduce energy prices or provide energy investors with the long-term certainty they require to invest in the energy infrastructure consumers depend on."

If Jackie Baillie's interpretation is that SSE is following Labour's lead, she has some considerable explaining to do.

On the question of the umbilical link between Labour and the Conservatives—Jackie Baillie's first point was the "shoulder to shoulder" point—how far does that link go through society? I have here an extract from Argyll & Bute Conservative & Unionist Association's website, which lists an event of the Cowal Conservatives lunch club. It states:

"Venue: Argyll Hotel ... Secretary: Pamela Bellaby ... Lunch with tea or coffee £10 ... Speaker: Jackie Baillie MSP"—[*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I have heard of being shoulder to shoulder, but I say to the Labour Party, if you sup with the Tories, you should do so with a long spoon.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-01987)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): No plans in the near future.

Ruth Davidson: Domestic violence is a huge problem that affects all societies, including Scotland. Last year, a disclosure scheme allowing individuals to contact the police to find out whether their partners have a previous history of abuse was piloted across four areas of England and Wales. It has been called Clare's law, after 36-year-old Clare Wood, who was killed by an ex-partner who had already been jailed twice for violence against women.

In May, the First Minister promised to examine the pilots. In September, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice wrote to police officers saying that he would consider supporting Clare's law in Scotland if the pilots were a success. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of those pilot projects?

The First Minister: As the correspondence from the justice secretary indicated, the matter is indeed under assessment. We will take it seriously—we are taking it seriously.

When we previously discussed this issue, Ruth Davidson was generous enough to indicate her support for the variety of initiatives on tackling domestic violence. We also had an exchange about our disagreement on the general rule of corroboration, which I hope she will reconsider, given the impact that it has on bringing many cases to court—crimes of not just sexual violence but domestic violence are one of the issues in that discussion.

We are considering whether Clare's law can be extended to Scotland. We will do whatever we can to ensure that people in Scotland—women in Scotland—are as safe as they possibly can be in the home environment and outside the home environment.

Ruth Davidson: I appreciate that the First Minister said that assessments by the Scottish Government are still going on, but I think that it is clear from the results that the four pilots have produced that they were a success. In fact, nearly a third of all applications saw relevant information being disclosed.

From this month, Clare's law will be rolled out across the whole of England and Wales. It means that women and men who are fearful that their partners might have a history of domestic violence have the right to access vital information that could save them from abuse. That same right would be of benefit to Scotland.

Our police and criminal justice services do a difficult and sensitive job extremely well in dealing with 60,000 cases of domestic abuse in this country every single year. One in five women in

Scotland will experience domestic abuse at some stage of their lives, and nearly a third of all people convicted of domestic violence in Scotland have at least one previous domestic abuse conviction.

Those people have done it before and they are doing it now, and women have the right to know. A Scottish Clare's law would give them that right; it has worked elsewhere and could work here. Will the First Minister please commit to acting now to give people throughout Scotland the rights and protections that they desperately need?

The First Minister: I could go through the range of initiatives that the Government has taken on domestic violence. I will not do that because they are agreed initiatives—ones that are supported by the entire Parliament. They include a range of support to organisations working in the field, which is deeply appreciated. I could read out a range of quotations from those organisations about the support that they have from the justice secretary, the Government and, indeed, across the Parliament.

I said to Ruth Davidson that we were studying the matter. She will recall that, when a similar disclosure idea on sexual offences was put forward some years ago after pilots elsewhere, we introduced a comparable scheme in Scotland. We are always willing to learn lessons from experience that works.

Therefore, when I say to Ruth Davidson that the matter is under active consideration, it is under active consideration. If it can be justified and will improve the position of women in Scotland, then, just as we have introduced the range of measures that I mentioned, we will look at Clare's law seriously and positively. If it could work and would improve the lot of women, we would introduce it.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-01989)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: When I last asked the First Minister about the extensive use of stop and search, including on children under the age of 10, he told me that he was comfortable and satisfied. He said that crime levels justified the action. What evidence does he have that the record low levels of crime, which we have seen throughout the western world, are down to his stop-and-search policy?

The First Minister: The fact that some 20 per cent of the stop and searches yield a result in terms of the underage carrying of alcohol or

offensive weapons is a strong indication that the policy has merit.

Secondly, I point Willie Rennie to the sharp decline in the carrying of knives in Scotland and the consequential very substantial fall in the injuries—indeed, serious injuries and worse—caused by the use of knives.

There was a debate a year or two ago about whether we should tackle such matters through the penal code or through police enforcement. Our argument was that one of the critical moves that could be made was the use of police enforcement to make people not only safe but feel safe. I say to Willie Rennie that, looking at the figures, that approach seems to be vindicated by the very encouraging reductions in the carrying and use of knives in Scottish society, something that I know will be welcomed across the chamber.

Willie Rennie: I am disappointed with the answer because that is the same kind of casual and complacent response that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice gave this week. I will explain why it is a matter that the First Minister should be concerned about.

Aberdeen city youth council passed a motion on Tuesday to express serious concern about the excessive use of stop and search on young people. The Scottish Human Rights Commission has voiced concerns, and those concerns were echoed by the First Minister's own colleague Sandra White MSP. He has allowed stop and search to increase fourfold on his watch, and he says that he is comfortable and satisfied with that.

I think that the First Minister should be concerned. Protecting people's freedoms is a matter for him. Will he take any responsibility for it?

The First Minister: I do not think that there was anything casual about the reply that I gave to Willie Rennie. I tell him specifically that crimes of handling offensive weapons are down by 60 per cent since 2006-07. There were 4,000 in 2012-13 compared with 10,110 in 2006-07.

On people's freedoms, one thing is hugely important: the freedom from the fear that many young people had when they believed—they were wrong, but they still believed it—that their safety would be enhanced by the carrying of knives.

The figures that I have given Willie Rennie—I tell him this in all seriousness—represent real freedom, which is the freedom from fear of being injured or killed as a result of offensive weapons being carried. I hope that Willie Rennie will treat those statistics with the same seriousness that he has asked me to treat his questions.

Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

4. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister how much money has been seized and reinvested across communities under the proceeds of crime legislation since 2007. (S4F-01996)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): There is no doubt that the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 is having a real impact on how Scotland's prosecutors and police tackle criminality at every level. Since the legislation was introduced 10 years ago, more than £80 million-worth of assets have been seized. We are not yet at the end of this financial year, but the Solicitor General for Scotland will, as in previous years, announce the final figures in April.

Since cashback for communities began, more than £74 million recovered from the proceeds of crime has been invested or committed throughout Scotland, which has funded 1.2 million activities and opportunities for young people across the country.

James Dornan: It is clear that cashback for communities has benefited the people of Scotland greatly and will continue to do so. However, does the First Minister agree that, if the money from fines paid to the Scottish Court Service were to remain in Scotland, it would give the Scottish Government greater access to funds that could be reinvested across local communities throughout Scotland, including in my constituency of Cathcart, instead of being lost in the maw of the Westminster Treasury?

The First Minister: Obviously, it depends on the amount of fines—which itself depends on a range of variables, such as crime rates and the sentencing policy of the courts—but on the basis of income and transfers from 2009 to 2012, as we have set out in the “Scotland's Future” white paper, the retention of the full value of Scotland's fines income would provide approximately £7 million per year in additional income to invest in our communities. That is one of many, many arguments for having control of Scotland's finances.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I know that the First Minister believes, as I do, in the transformational power of sport and the opportunities that it gives us to help divert young people from crime. Will the First Minister therefore consider ensuring that the communities most blighted by crime are given special consideration when cashback moneys are disbursed?

The First Minister: We will certainly look at any proposals that the member comes forward with. However, I have a long list covering every constituency and area represented by members in

the chamber that shows how cashback for communities has benefited many fine projects. I am sure that Patricia Ferguson would not want to argue that any one of the excellent initiatives that have been supported by cashback for communities—I can go through them Labour MSP by Labour MSP and area by area, if they wish—has not been a vital and valuable project. *[Interruption.]*

Therefore, whatever bickering there might be on the Labour back benches, I know that the cashback for communities initiative has the support of every member in this chamber because it is benefiting the lives and livelihoods of young people across Scotland.

BlackRock Investor Warning

5. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government position is on BlackRock's warning to investors of the risks faced by an independent Scotland. (S4F-01993)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): A range of companies—I shall name them, if Iain Gray wishes—has assessed Scotland's prospects. However, serious analysis of Scotland's prospects would conclude, I think, that Scotland is a developed European economy and the 14th most prosperous country in the world in terms of gross domestic product per head, and that it offers a serious investment and development opportunity for companies that are willing and able to share in its future. I think that that is what is happening now with record business confidence, lower unemployment figures than the UK, higher employment figures than the UK and business expansion reaching, as we saw in a survey just this week, a record high. I know that Iain Gray welcomes all those things, although he did not forecast them when he was leader of the Labour Party.

Iain Gray: There was a time when the First Minister acted on warnings about the Scottish economy and Scottish jobs. Back in 2008 when the Scottish banking sector was threatened, he immediately called an emergency summit to see what could be done, and rightly so. I remember that, when we heard warnings that Scottish shipbuilding jobs were under threat, we went together to Whitehall to argue for those jobs, and we won.

However, the First Minister now has no time for the warnings that tell him what he does not want to hear, not only from BlackRock but from BAE Systems, BP, Shell, the Weir Group, Standard Life and Royal Bank of Scotland—I could go on. All those warnings were met with a casual dismissal.

The Presiding Officer: Can we have a question, Mr Gray?

Iain Gray: Is that not because the First Minister is the threat to Scottish jobs that they are all warning about?

The First Minister: All these years away from First Minister's questions, and Iain Gray's script hasnae changed at all. If only he had had the opportunity to ask four questions, we could have had the doom and gloom throughout them all.

I will read Iain Gray one quotation that I know he does not like, because I heard him dismiss it on the radio just a couple of days ago. It is from Standard & Poor's, which stated:

"Even excluding North Sea output and calculating per-capita GDP only by looking at onshore income, Scotland would qualify for our highest economic assessment."

Ratings agencies are not known to be the most optimistic people on the face of the planet; some of them are even more pessimistic than Iain Gray. If Standard & Poor's can bring itself to state that considerable confidence in Scotland's future, why on earth can the Labour Party not share that confidence?

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Does the First Minister agree that the uncertainty that the better together folk crow about could be removed through constructive discussions with Westminster on currency union and many other matters? That would be in everyone's interest, following Professor Leslie Young's description of the UK Government's stance as "entirely a false argument."

The First Minister: I am glad that Christina McKelvie mentioned Professor Young, because he was also dismissed by Iain Gray on the radio for telling a few inconvenient truths in his analysis of the position of the Treasury and better together.

I note from *The Times* newspaper this very morning—a paper that is not known to be thirled to the independence cause in Scotland as of late—that it states that a substantial majority of people in Scotland believe that George Osborne is "bluffing" on the currency issue. The headline says:

"Fresh poll piles pressure on Labour as SNP extends its lead."

What is more interesting is why Labour is in that position of great difficulty. It is not just to do with Labour's unholy alliance shoulder to shoulder with the Conservative Party; it is that people who talk down this country's prospects will be rejected by the Scottish people.

Constitutional Convention

6. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the First Minister what role a constitutional convention would play in developing a written constitution in an independent Scotland. (S4F-02007)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As set out in "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland", the first independent Parliament that is elected in May 2016 would be under a duty to establish a constitutional convention. That convention would prepare a permanent written constitution for an independent Scotland through an open, participative and people-led process.

The constitution would be designed by the people of Scotland for the people of Scotland, and having a written constitution would bring us into line with just about every developed democracy, certainly in the European Union and across the Commonwealth of Nations.

Patrick Harvie: I believe that the referendum has the potential to engage and reconnect with many people who have felt disillusioned with and disconnected from politics. They have not been voting, and we have the chance to bring them back into the political process—indeed, that is already happening.

However, there is surely a need to maintain that momentum and to capture that enthusiasm from day 1 after a referendum in order to achieve what Nicola Sturgeon described as

"an inclusive process involving all the people of Scotland"

in all aspects of the transition, including the interim constitution.

Does the First Minister accept that there is a case for a constitutional convention soon after the referendum, both to capture and retain people's enthusiasm and to allay some of the concerns of others who may not welcome the yes vote that he and I will be glad to welcome?

The First Minister: As Patrick Harvie well knows, we laid out the process that we propose on page 560 of "Scotland's Future". The constitutional platform is a concept that has considerable merit, because it will embrace the European convention on human rights across a range of policy areas that an independent Scotland will have to address, not just the areas that are currently devolved. It looks forward to putting a duty on the first Scottish Parliament to engage in exactly the same process that Patrick Harvie has outlined, and I fundamentally agree on the capacity for such a process to engender a revival in society as well as huge enthusiasm, particularly among people who have felt excluded from society.

Of course, Patrick Harvie and I both know that there are substantial international examples of how that has taken place, and he and I will reflect that we are encouraged by that idea as we see the referendum process taking place and many, many people engaging in the political process who have not previously been part of the political dialogue. That augurs well for the effect that a constitutional convention and a participative process with the people will have not just in establishing an independent Scotland, but in the fundamental revival of a people's democracy.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I am sure that the First Minister would agree that progressive decisions are taken when progressive people make them, rather than simply as a result of things being written down in a constitution.

On the interim constitution, in an answer to a parliamentary question that I asked last year, the Deputy First Minister said that the interim arrangements would be taken forward

"under the auspices of the Scottish Parliament".—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 26 September 2013; S4W-16903.]

Can the First Minister confirm that an interim constitution bill would not be introduced to the Parliament until the people have had their say in September? Will he comment on whether or not it would be appropriate for the Scottish Government simply to use its majority to pass such a bill?

The First Minister: Of course it would not—what we are publishing is a draft for consultation. The answer is contained in "Scotland's Future", on page 560, which I know the member has read avidly and knows every word of. When people ask for detail and then find that the answer to the question is contained in the document, I think that they should pay some attention to it.

I agree with Drew Smith that progressive decisions are made politically, but I do not think that he and I think that the decision that was made last night by his colleagues in the Westminster Parliament was progressive. Indeed, it was a regressive decision, shoulder to shoulder with the Conservative Party.

Dumfries Control Rooms Closure

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I remind guests who are leaving the gallery, including my guests from St Patrick's primary school in Coatbridge, that the Parliament is still in session and they should leave as quickly and quietly as possible. Many thanks.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-08935, in the name of Elaine Murray, on the closure of Dumfries control rooms. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I expect members to focus on Dumfries control rooms, which should be the main thrust of speeches in the debate.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament regrets the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's decision to close the Dumfries Emergency Control Centre; further regrets the decision by the Scottish Police Authority to close the Dumfries police control centre; believes that there is potential for establishing a joint control room that could also include functions provided for other public service agencies such as Dumfries and Galloway Council and NHS Dumfries and Galloway and notes calls for a full exploration of this prior to the closure of either control centre taking place; regrets what it sees as the lack of consultation with staff, the public and public sector agencies in Dumfries and Galloway, and believes that Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have failed in their statutory duty to engage in community planning with regard to the closures of the control rooms.

12:33

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I thank all the MSPs who supported my motion by signing it. I apologise for my voice—I hope that it survives for the next seven minutes.

I lodged my motion for debate at the beginning of February, shortly after the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board finally made the decisions to close the control rooms in Dumfries, which affect 34 police control room staff and 15 fire and emergency control room staff. Decisions to reduce the numbers of police and fire and rescue emergency control rooms did not affect only Dumfries and Galloway, as other parts of Scotland also lost control rooms. MSPs who represent areas such as North East Scotland have also lodged motions expressing similar concerns about local closures in their areas.

People in Dumfries and Galloway do not make a fuss readily, but local people's reaction to the decisions was both swift and angry. Almost 9,000 people joined a Facebook campaign to save the police control room. More than 11,000 signed a paper petition, and more than 600 signed an e-petition, objecting to the closure. Local supermarkets allowed campaigners to collect

signatures outside their doors, and I congratulate the local branch of Unison on the way in which it organised the campaign to involve so many people in the local community. Copies of the petitions were handed to the chair of the SPA in Inverness yesterday.

There are signs that local reaction to the closures has had some effect. When the chair of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board came to the Justice Committee on 11 March, I brought up the concerns of the so-called displaced emergency control room staff. The staff—mainly female—are uniformed personnel, but they do not ride on, and have not ridden on firefighting appliances. The opportunity for local redeployment is therefore more limited and staff have been advised by human resources that they might be considered for other vacancies—in community safety, for example—if suitable posts are available.

When I questioned Pat Watters on the future of those so-called displaced staff, he said that there would be no compulsory redundancies. I pointed out to him that if people had to travel 170 or 200 miles to get to work, they might not be able to accept an offered opportunity. I asked him:

“Can you guarantee that people will be offered appropriate redeployment and retraining by April next year?”

Mr Watters replied:

“Yes.”—[*Official Report, Justice Committee, 11 March 2014; c 4322.*]

There seems to have been some movement on police control staff, too. When Chief Constable Sir Stephen House spoke to a Unison seminar on 13 March, he advised that work is under way to identify positions for staff whose jobs are at risk in the Dumfries area, including positions that could be relocated to Dumfries. To date, however, there has been no indication what those positions might be, how many there might be or when they might be available.

I am advised by police control staff that morale is low. Two thirds have taken the decision to leave the service through taking another job, voluntary redundancy or early retirement. There have been worrying changes in the terms and conditions of the supernumerary pool for police control room staff who opt not to take voluntary redundancy or early retirement straight away. The current policy allows staff to go into the pool and if they are not successful in finding alternative employment they can then apply for VR or ER on the same terms as if they had applied straight away. That policy will cease at the end of this month and will be replaced by a policy whereby the VR and ER packages will be reduced after staff have spent 12 weeks in the supernumerary pool, with staff

members standing to lose the £10,000 pro rata payment and the four compensatory added years. For most staff in Dumfries who have long service, 12 weeks equates to their notice period. The new policy will in effect force staff to opt for VR or ER rather than try to be redeployed. That sounds like compulsory redundancy in all but name.

Staff will be given notice to leave from 1 May and it is thought that the control room will cease to function by the end of May. I have also been told that, initially, calls will be transferred to Pitt Street, with software installed to enable calls from the functioning control rooms to be passed to the Dumfries police desk, which will be staffed by police officers. The chief constable told the Justice Committee last year that he had “no strategy of backfilling”. There may not be a strategy, but backfilling will clearly happen.

Unison Scotland estimates that 2,000 police staff have lost their jobs, so it is small wonder that it is now balloting its members on strike action and urging members to vote in favour, as in Unison’s view trust between it and Police Scotland has broken down.

My motion also refers to the statutory duty on both Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to take part in community planning. Section 46 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 sets out the chief constable’s duty, exercised through the local commander, and Section 41J(2)(b) sets out the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’s responsibilities.

I am astonished that those duties do not seem to have been applicable to the process of closing the control rooms, with the consequent loss of posts in the local community. There was next to no discussion with Dumfries and Galloway Council, nor any meaningful attempt to look at establishing joint control rooms either between the two services or with other services. That raises significant questions about local accountability. Any consultation took place after the decision was taken by the boards—once the horse had bolted.

The Fire Brigades Union Scotland has expressed concerns over the scale of the reduction in emergency control centres, in particular the reduction of cover in the north and north-east of Scotland.

The closure programme has highlighted shortcomings in accountability and governance within Scotland’s single police and fire services. The chief constable is accountable to the Scottish Police Authority and the chief fire officer is accountable to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board but who are the appointed boards accountable to? It does not appear to be Scottish ministers, as whenever MSPs ask questions of the

Cabinet Secretary for Justice on these issues, we are advised that they are operational matters.

I and my Labour colleagues supported the formation of the single Police Service and the single Fire and Rescue Service; we still do. There are significant advantages in both cases, given the ability to streamline services and avoid duplication and, importantly, the access to specialist services across the country, which we have already seen in Dumfries and Galloway.

However, the process of control room closures highlights serious failings in the mechanisms for accountability that the 2012 act set up. Those decisions were taken without prior consultation with staff, local councils, local communities or trade unions. The Justice Sub-Committee on Policing can call in the chief constable and the chair of the SPA to answer questions, but it has no influence over how their decisions are made, nor can it demand that appropriate consultation takes place, and there does not seem to be any form of appeals mechanism.

In the longer term, I believe that lessons need to be learned and changes made. In the short term, I hope that the levels of support shown by the people of Dumfries and Galloway to the control room staff result, preferably, in the closures being halted altogether, or, if it is too late for that, in acceptable retraining and employment opportunities being offered to all those affected.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. The debate is popular, so I ask for speeches of four minutes, please.

12:41

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate as it is an issue of significant importance to the constituents whom I represent across Dumfries and Galloway. I am grateful to Elaine Murray for securing the debate.

As Elaine Murray said, the announcement of the closure of the control rooms in Dumfries—and of the police control room in particular—came as a considerable shock to people across the region; the speed with which Police Scotland and the SPA moved from announcement to decision even more so.

That was one of a number of matters that I raised with Chief Constable Sir Stephen House as a matter of urgency following the announcement of the proposal last month. In his response to me, the chief constable advised that he appreciated my concerns over the timescale but that Police Scotland had to be sure that the Scottish Police Authority was willing to support the proposals

before Police Scotland could begin discussions with stakeholders.

Both decisions by the Police Service and by the Fire and Rescue Service will clearly have a substantial impact on the staff involved. Although steps have been taken to reassure staff that there will be no compulsory redundancies for police support staff, many of them will not be able to take up offers of alternative employment or retraining by either service if those offers are not local to Dumfries and Galloway. Neither commuting nor relocating is a realistic option for most of the staff if the only opportunities available to them are in the central belt.

I recently met police control room staff in Dumfries with my colleague Joan McAlpine. Their distress—both about the announcement and about how events had unfolded—was clear and entirely understandable. Staff there are right to take pride in the service that they provide, and their situation has attracted widespread support right across the region.

To be fair to the chief constable, I know that he has indicated recently that the prospect of relocating some roles to Dumfries is being examined. I welcome that statement and am keen to see the detail behind it. I have therefore sought further information on the chief constable's statement and await his response with interest.

I think that there is at least the possibility of shared facilities being examined. Although shared police and fire control rooms were ruled out of the current proposals, like other members I note from recent reports that the concept is now being examined for the future, so why not start with Dumfries and Galloway?

As the motion suggests, other integrated services could be included in such a facility, although I accept that there would have to be careful consideration of which services could be included and how they would work together. However, local authorities, for example, have duties and powers in relation to emergency planning and in co-ordinating emergency responses. There might well be a greater level of synergy between services than a first glance suggests.

Taking into consideration the plans for the national energy industry liaison unit in Aberdeen, there is also the potential, in my view, for a centre of excellence in rural and wildlife crime—which, of course, officers historically based in Dumfries and Galloway have a great deal of experience in dealing with.

I would not for a minute suggest that change is not necessary. I voted for a single police force and a single fire service, as did many members present who are in other parties, and I remain of

the opinion that such a change is the best way of fulfilling our commitment to keep the public safe in the face of Westminster's massive cuts to Scotland's budget.

Notwithstanding all of that, I hope that Police Scotland, the SPA, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the SFRS board fully understand that people in Dumfries and Galloway are angry and hurt and feel very let down—both by the proposals and, as far as the police control room is concerned, by the way in which the decision was made.

I accept the need for change, but Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have a duty to their staff, who are loyal, experienced and effective. In my view, that duty extends to staff having meaningful employment opportunities in Dumfries and Galloway.

12:45

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate my colleague Elaine Murray on securing this debate on an important issue that affects 34 staff in the Dumfries police control room. As she and Aileen McLeod said, Labour supported the creation of the single police force; indeed, I have supported the concept for more than a decade, along with the idea of a single fire and rescue service.

For seven years or so, there have been discussions about how to introduce such single-service provision. It was in the gift of those in authority to ensure that cross-service provision could have been considered in order that decisions about back-office services, and control rooms in particular, could have been thought about in the round. In the past few years, more than 1,200 staff have been made redundant by the police, and a proportionately equivalent number of fire and rescue staff have also been made redundant. Unison indicates that that number will soon rise to nearly 2,000. The 34 staff in the Dumfries police control room were concerned about their posts in November last year and asked to be informed of circumstances and developments. They were told that no information was available to them but that they would learn about their futures, first and foremost, from Police Scotland. However, the first information that they got came from the newspapers, which was devastating for staff who had shown loyalty over a great number of years.

The key issues that lie behind the matter that we are discussing are not only the manner in which the decision was taken but the absence of any meaningful consultation, either with the staff about the challenges that were to be faced and the notion of cross-service support, or with the local

community about arrangements. The local authority was unable to provide feedback about how emergency service provision could be delivered in the circumstances of a public emergency. Public opinion—the public's views—on whether a public service was being provided in an acceptable manner is another important issue.

As a result, police and fire staff feel abused and Unison is balloting staff members on a strike. I understand that interim arrangements have put in place 10 police officers to operate a public inquiry desk at Dumfries in the absence of a control room facility, which I can describe only as backfilling. Arrangements are in place to enable calls to be transferred from a Glasgow call centre to that inquiry desk so that they can be appropriately managed.

All of that does not look like good planning. It is not sufficient for the Government to say that these are operational matters for the SPA to consider. There seems to be no way in which we in this chamber can have effective oversight of the process, and no way in which local consultation can be delivered in a way that ensures that communities feel supported and considered.

12:49

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I join other members in congratulating Elaine Murray on securing this important debate on an issue that has struck a chord with communities across Dumfries and Galloway. It is good to see people from Wigtown in the public gallery today.

The debate underlines a truly significant change to the way in which our police and fire and rescue services operate their control rooms in Dumfries and Galloway. I cannot agree with the decisions of the two boards to close the police and fire control rooms in Dumfries at a cost of 49 civilian staff.

The closures are not good for policing and fire services across Dumfries and Galloway but, sadly, it is an inevitable symptom of the Government's move to centralise the emergency services—something that the Liberal Democrats, unlike others, have been warning of since as far back as 2010.

No price can be put on community safety. Although no one would want the discussion to descend into panic about crime on the streets spiralling out of control or increased response times, it is a legitimate concern that local knowledge and jobs will be lost as calls are transferred to a centralised call centre in Glasgow. The old Dumfries and Galloway police force was praised by Audit Scotland for its record on tackling crime. On the basis of what local people, including police staff, have told me, I believe that it is unavoidable that the local knowledge that has

been built up over years, through their knowing and working in the area and getting to know its communities and individuals, will disappear. That break in intelligence could have a significant impact on community safety when our emergency services need to respond.

Elaine Murray's motion highlights the lack of consultation with staff. I pay tribute to the staff, who have behaved with dignity and respect throughout the process in the face of such appalling treatment by their employers. Sadly, their voices have been ignored. The Scottish Government's much-trumpeted policy of no compulsory redundancies has not meant much to the employees in Dumfries who may face relocation or a commute to Glasgow. I do not think that either is a feasible option. Elaine Murray is right to say that we have seen 49 civilian fire and police staff face compulsory redundancy "in all but name".

I recognise that efforts are under way to relocate some police staff. However, there remains a great deal of uncertainty for employees and their families. How many people will be transferred to new posts? Will any new jobs be at the same salary, grading and terms and conditions? Given the lack of consultation with staff until now, what guarantees are being offered that proper consultation will now take place with staff? Perhaps a sign of discontent within the civilian ranks is the decision by Unison to ballot its members on strike action—a decision that I am sure it did not take lightly.

The loss of jobs in any region is bad for individuals, families and the wider community, but the impact is much greater in a large rural region such as Dumfries and Galloway, in which communities are dependent on the public sector for employment and every job is vital. When public sector agencies withdraw from our rural areas, we run the risk of taking away prime employment. The decisions to remove control rooms that have been made by the SPA and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board, helped along by the Scottish Government's centralist reforms, create a dangerous precedent in removing much-needed civil service jobs from rural South Scotland.

If the minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice do not believe Opposition MSPs about the effect of the Government's reforms on policing and fire services, I hope that they will listen to the police civilian staff members who are currently being balloted on strike action. I hope that they can give some assurance that the invaluable skills and knowledge of those employees will not be swept up in the centralist tidal wave.

12:53

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Elaine Murray on securing the debate—and on making a fine speech, despite an obviously uncomfortable throat infection.

I highlight the fantastic job that is done by our local police and fire services, particularly in their engagement with their local communities. They have been praised for their work in schools, through which they develop relationships with young people, and support for Victim Support Scotland's referral scheme remains at the same level as in previous years. The local fire service is known for its expertise in animal, water and line rescue as well as for ensuring that the road coverage is kept to a high standard in an area where road collisions are among the worst in Scotland.

As my colleague Aileen McLeod mentioned, we visited the staff whose jobs are threatened at the Dumfries police control room. We saw the control room working and were very impressed by the level of local knowledge and the efficiency that the staff showed. They were all wearing badges that said "Front Line", which had been given to them by their union. They are the front line because they are the public's first point of contact when there is an emergency.

As I said, the local police and fire services do an excellent job. That is not the issue; the issue, which has been highlighted by colleagues throughout the chamber, is the unacceptable lack of public consultation on the proposals. Much of the negative publicity about the closure of the control rooms has centred on that lack of public consultation, and rightly so.

When I was first alerted to the proposed removal of the police control room, I wrote to the Scottish Police Authority and Chief Constable Sir Stephen House, outlining the fact that taking decisions in such a way created the risk that a service that was once perceived as close to the community would be perceived as becoming distant from it. A longer and more transparent engagement with interested parties would have been welcome. I was disappointed in the chief constable's response to my concerns. I had hoped to secure a meeting with him and open up a dialogue about alternative proposals but my request was unsuccessful.

I understand that decisions by Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are operational. As I recall, unlike SNP and Labour MSPs, Conservative MSPs abstained from voting in favour of police and fire reform. One of the Conservatives' fears was that the new police service would not maintain its distance from the political process. Perhaps Sir Stephen's

unwillingness to meet me should reassure them that there is less interference in—or no influence over—policing on the part of politicians.

Jim Hume: The member and the justice secretary have said that there has been no political interference. Is it therefore a complete coincidence that the Police Authority and the Fire and Rescue Service Board met at exactly the same time to make exactly the same decisions?

Joan McAlpine: That would be pure speculation. I am not party to their diaries. As I understand it, those were operational decisions. They were not decisions with which I agreed.

I am very proud that in Scotland we have managed to increase police numbers. For example, compared with figures for the first quarter in 2007, the figures for the first quarter in 2013 showed that police numbers were up 6 per cent in Dumfries and Galloway. That is the trend throughout Scotland.

That brings me to the crux of the issue. As members are aware, under current circumstances, our budget for justice, the police and the fire service is controlled by our grant from Westminster. Over the past few years, there has been a dramatic decline in the justice budget in England and Wales, with a drop in police numbers of 10 per cent. Police and fire reform has allowed us to ensure that the massive cuts to Scotland's budget from Westminster do not result in equivalent cuts in the number of officers. In fact, Scotland has an extra 1,000 police officers, while in England officers are being made redundant.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms McAlpine, you need to close, and perhaps you could close on the issue of control rooms in Dumfries.

Joan McAlpine: Yes.

As I said, I supported a single force, but I do not support a central force. That could be the danger posed by some recent decisions by the commanders of those services. I look for reassurance for my constituents on that point.

12:58

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Elaine Murray on not only securing the debate but campaigning on the issue on behalf of her constituents, in Dumfries and at the Scottish Parliament. As she said, the creation of single services had the potential to see waste and duplication eliminated and resources transferred to the front line. Instead, we have seen a wholesale centralisation of services into the central belt and cuts and closures everywhere else.

Dumfries shows more than any other case just how cynically those closure plans were made. There is no way that the control rooms in Dumfries would be closing quite so soon if the closures had not been planned for quite some time before being sanctioned by their respective boards. As Dr Murray said, the failure of the police and fire boards to consult local councils and communities has been in spite of those boards' statutory obligations on community planning. They have failed in that duty in the case of Dumfries and Galloway and throughout the country.

The shoddy treatment of firefighters employed in control rooms and of civilian staff employed in police control rooms and service centres has had a real and serious impact on industrial relations in our emergency services in Dumfries and elsewhere. On the morning of its meeting, the fire board was presented with a change in the costings of the various options that were before it of more than £1 million—apparently the only way for management to secure a majority at the meeting for its preferred option of closing every control room outwith the central belt.

The Fire Brigades Union is understandably angry about how the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board disregarded its submission. However, moving the goalposts at the fire board's meeting was as nothing in comparison with what transpired at the meeting when the Police Authority decided on police control room closures, including the closure of the Dumfries centre.

At that meeting, there was no vote and no serious questions were asked about the consequences of the proposed closures. Alternative options were not even properly debated. Nobody spoke up for staff or the public in Dumfries or anywhere else. It is as if the decision was minor and insignificant—it has been handed down from on high—rather than a decision to withdraw vital services from large parts of Scotland, with the loss of hundreds of jobs. So angry are police staff that Unison, Unite and other unions are balloting their members on industrial action, which nobody in the emergency services considers doing lightly, as Jim Hume said.

The situation is ministers' responsibility. Their failure to accept any of the many amendments to the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill that were designed to achieve some local accountability makes them ultimately accountable for the decisions that the boards that they appointed have taken.

Now we hear talk of shared control rooms for emergency services—I heard clearly what Aileen McLeod said—at the very time when the boards that ministers appointed are pressing ahead with plans to close control rooms from Dumfries to Aberdeen. Ministers could and should step in now

to order the closure plans to be set aside if they are serious about listening to the proposals on shared-service solutions in the affected cities and towns.

Ministers should recognise that closing a control room in a town or city that is many miles from the nearest alternative workplace is compulsory redundancy. They should acknowledge that current policies and closure decisions have seriously damaged relationships between employers and workers in our emergency services. They should also call a halt to the closure programme until genuine and meaningful consultation has taken place with local staff, councils and communities. In that way, loyal public servants from Dumfries to Aberdeen will feel that they are at least noticed by the Government of the day rather than that they are overlooked and disregarded for daring to live and work outwith the central belt.

13:02

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I commend Elaine Murray for lodging the motion. My comments will reflect the views of my colleague Alex Fergusson, who fully intended to speak in this important debate but cannot do so because of unforeseen circumstances.

With jobs being lost and services withdrawn not just in Dumfries but Scotland-wide, the motion accurately reflects the mood up and down Scotland. To provide some context to the changes that are to happen in Dumfries, it is worth looking at the issue in the round.

A few weeks ago, 61 police station public counters were closed, including those in stations in Kirkcudbright and Dalbeattie, which are close to Dumfries. That leaves only 153 police stations open to the public, in comparison with the 386 stations that were open to the public in 2007, when the Scottish National Party came to power. Those closures have not only resulted in job losses; in Dumfries and Galloway, they represent a withdrawal of front-line local services.

In addition, the Scottish Government last year pushed through the closure of 10 sheriff courts and seven justice of the peace courts—including that in Kirkcudbright—with a result that can be described only as the withdrawal of justice from many rural communities. Most recently, the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board have approved plans to close six police control rooms and five fire control rooms, including those in Dumfries.

The closures are putting considerable strain on our rural communities because they will result in the loss of highly skilled jobs. Worryingly, they also represent a withdrawal of local justice and a

reduction in the quality of the service that is offered in order to save money. The closure of Dumfries police control room clearly illustrates that point. It will affect 34 quality jobs, which is a major blow in a rural community.

We are assured that no compulsory redundancies will be made, but we know that staff are being asked to relocate by considerable distances or to apply for unsuitable and often lower-paid jobs. As many members have said, that is compulsory redundancy in all but name.

When I visited Dumfries in January as part of the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing's scrutiny of local policing, I heard first hand from those who were in a position to know that the closure of control rooms will result in a loss of local knowledge. Police Scotland has repeatedly dismissed that concern, but with emergency calls being diverted from Dumfries, there is absolutely no possibility that call handlers from Glasgow or Motherwell, 65 or 75 miles away, will have the same knowledge that those in the area have.

The truth is that local people have barely been consulted on the move. A token consultation was lodged towards the end of last year, and the decision to close was taken in late January this year. As the chair of Unison police staff Scotland, Stevie Diamond, confirmed, the Scottish Police Authority was not allowed to consider alternatives to closure.

Information technology reforms that could have allowed the existing sites, including in Dumfries, to be retained by allowing them to communicate with others and deploy officers from different legacy forces were dismissed in the SPA policy document and were not even considered by the SPA board, on the basis of costs.

The decisions are bad decisions that are being implemented badly without accountability to the public. The public are entitled to expect accountability.

13:06

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good afternoon, Presiding Officer. I, too, thank Elaine Murray for securing this debate.

I was very sorry to hear that Police Scotland has decided to cut the number of control rooms that are operated by the new national force. I feel sorry for all the civilian staff, as their jobs—34 in Police Scotland and 15 in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service—are disappearing. I understand that there is considerable anger and resentment at the proposal. As a result of the decision, public confidence in Police Scotland in Dumfries and Galloway and possibly around the country will rapidly diminish.

Police Scotland has said:

"The implementation of the proposal will improve the response to 999 ... calls".

I say that it will threaten community safety. Local knowledge is important for a quick response time, and only local people who are based in local stations can provide that service. The closures will put lives in danger and aid the petty criminal. In turn, crime rates will go up.

We are told that IT systems will pinpoint the locations of callers, but can we be sure? Technology can fail and does fail on occasion, and local place names will not be found on mapping systems. In addition, local dialects can mean that callers are difficult to understand, especially if the call handler is in a completely different part of the country. Sometimes we have that problem just within Glasgow.

There needs to be fuller consultation in the closures process to ensure that control rooms are properly considered, and that consultation should take place urgently. I could not believe and cannot begin to understand how shocked the staff members were. Why were they not consulted, or at the very least warned? The people affected are well-trained, experienced and dedicated workers whose local knowledge and professionalism have provided help and reassurance and saved lives on many occasions.

The decision is certainly a strategic one, and Glasgow, Stirling, Glenrothes and Aberdeen will probably be next. I call on the minister to reassure me that that is not the case, that the Government will carry out a proper consultation with the unions and staff in any other place that is to be considered, and that people will be treated with the respect and dignity to which they are entitled.

We do not seem to understand that many of the workers, who deal with difficult calls on occasion, have years of experience. I genuinely believe that that experience will be lost, which will be to the cost of our communities. It is important that we treat people with due care and attention. The Government has the responsibility to do the honourable thing, which is to consult people and ensure that we carry them with us. I hope that the minister will address my fears.

13:10

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): As other members have done, I welcome the opportunity that Elaine Murray has provided for further debate on police and fire control rooms. I congratulate her on getting through her speech despite the obvious difficulties that she was having with her voice.

I listened with interest to the speeches. It is important to set some context for the discussion. The fire and police services have made unequivocal commitments to protecting front-line delivery despite Westminster cuts. They are improving the services that they deliver to communities to make them safer. The aim of creating a safer and stronger Scotland is right at the heart of what both services do. It is what they are about and it is the foundation on which decisions are made.

As Elaine Murray knows, it is not the recent reform that brought rationalisation of control rooms to the fore. Just two weeks ago, Ms Murray and the rest of the Justice Committee heard that discussions on the issue have been under way for years. Piecemeal and unco-ordinated work across Scotland's legacy services sought to identify precious savings to protect an even more precious front-line resource. The Dumfries fire control room was earmarked for closure long before the single services came along. On average, it receives only three or four calls per day, despite having 15 staff. The police control room, with 34 non-uniformed staff, receives on average fewer than 30 calls per day. That is simply unsustainable, particularly when budgets are under significant pressure.

Elaine Murray: Does the minister accept that the staff do an awful lot more than just answering emergency calls? They have a load of other responsibilities, as I am sure the members who visited recently observed when they were there.

Roseanna Cunningham: That might be true, but it is important that we keep in mind that the control-room function operates on the basis of the figures that I have given. That is unsustainable, particularly when budgets are under pressure.

Police Scotland is still involved in statutory consultation with the affected staff, and not all staff have indicated their preference. Aileen McLeod, Joan McAlpine and Elaine Murray will no doubt be pleased to hear that a variety of potential options have been identified, including voluntary redundancy and redeployment or transferring to other jobs in the service in Dumfries and Galloway, which I assume would be welcome. There is also engagement with public sector partners outwith the service. A great deal of discussion is taking place.

As the Fire Brigades Union and Her Majesty's chief inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service recently emphasised, the creation of single services provides the opportunity to take a holistic approach and to develop resilient 21st-century control infrastructures.

Jim Hume made a point about the meetings of the two boards coinciding to take the same decisions on the same day. In fact, he is wrong

about that, and I think that he must know that, because the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had already made a number of decisions in September last year, which included the decision on the Dumfries and Galloway control room and two other control rooms, based on the stark statistic that I mentioned of an average of four emergency calls a day.

Lewis Macdonald: Given that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board took a couple of bites at the issue before coming to a decision, was the minister as surprised as everyone else was that the Scottish Police Authority made such quick decisions on the basis of little prior discussion?

Roseanna Cunningham: As Lewis Macdonald knows well, it is not my job as a minister to put myself in the place of the chief constable and senior officers of Police Scotland and to micromanage their decision-making process for them.

Police and fire services have been bold enough to tackle difficult challenges head on and, as a result, will ensure that resources are more effectively mobilised right across the country, reducing the risk of operational failure. The boundaries of the former services are no more.

Joint police and fire control rooms have categorically not been ruled out, but the issue is one for the future. The risks and costs involved would simply be a step too far at this time. That is the professional opinion of those whom we charge with keeping us safe. With that in mind, surely Elaine Murray and others agree that it would be wholly inappropriate to consider an even more radical, and no doubt more costly and more risky proposal for joint delivery at this stage.

However, that absolutely does not mean that collaboration is off the agenda. Engagement is under way across the blue-light services to consider how, in time, systems can be better integrated and resources shared effectively. Next week, a joint event bringing the police and fire boards together is taking place. I guarantee that exploring options for working together will be up for discussion.

Jim Hume: Will the minister take an intervention?

Roseanna Cunningham: I have taken enough interventions.

I repeat what I said in a similar debate last month: in any change programme decisions will be made that cannot please everyone. Elaine Murray usefully reminded us that Labour supported the move to the single services, but it seems that its idea of single services would have resulted in a dedicated control centre for every community

planning partnership—that is the logic of its argument.

Jim Hume mentioned the huge change that the control-room proposals will bring, but we were here before in the 1970s, when local authority reorganisation took place, including big changes to police and fire services. I do not know whether members in the chamber retrospectively wish that that had not happened; perhaps they should tell us if that is the case.

I note in passing that, while alleging a centralising agenda on the part of ministers, some members urge us to step in and overrule two boards. No doubt such a decision would eventually be held up as an example of political control of police and fire services.

In truth, we need to put our trust and faith in the professionals, under the scrutiny of their boards, when they assure us that front-line services will be improved, everyone across Scotland will have better access to the services that they need, and that will all be mobilised through modern, resilient control-room infrastructures.

That is what the reforms—voted for by the Parliament—were intended to deliver. I firmly believe that that is exactly what those consummate professionals will deliver.

13:18

Meeting suspended

14:30

On resuming—

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

Visitor Searches (Knives)

1. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body how many knives have been removed from visitors to the Parliament in each year since 2011. (S4O-03080)

David Stewart (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): All knives, pen knives and other sharp objects carried by visitors are retained by security. The total number of knives retained by security officers was 1,454 in 2011, 1,383 in 2012, 1,498 in 2013 and 85 so far this year.

Knives that can be carried legally in a public place in Scotland are returned to the visitor on leaving the building. The number of knives surrendered to police was 156 in 2011, 181 in 2012, 219 in 2013 and 10 so far this year.

Graeme Pearson: What implications arise from the level of seizures that David Stewart outlined and what plans does the Parliament have regarding security?

David Stewart: I acknowledge Graeme Pearson's keen interest in this issue, which comes particularly from his background as a senior police officer.

All security officers are supplied with protective vests, which they are required to wear when working in the screening area or at the gatehouse. All new officers receive full induction training, including customer care training, which assists them in dealing politely but confidently with situations such as the surrender of a knife. That is followed by regular refresher training.

In 2011-12 Lothian and Borders Police trained all security officers in techniques for dealing with visitors in such situations, including conflict management. It is our intention to approach Police Scotland to repeat that training for all new officers. We have close relationships with Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. I will ask officials to look carefully at the points that Graeme Pearson made.

To get first-hand knowledge of this area and to gain a better understanding of day-to-day problems, I am going to spend some time with officers working in the screening area.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Given the number of knives that are returned to visitors,

why are those knives confiscated in the first place?

David Stewart: We work closely with the police and the fiscal to get accurate understanding of the legal position. We hope to have good understanding of our visitors.

Some visitors come from foreign parts, where knives are used regularly. We try to use common sense when dealing with our visitors. Further training on the legality of this issue will be looked at with the fiscal service and the police.

Parliamentary Proceedings (Accessibility)

2. Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what plans it has to promote access to parliamentary proceedings for people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment. (S4O-03082)

David Stewart (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The SPCB makes available provision for people who are deaf and hard of hearing to access parliamentary proceedings. It is committed to engaging with all communities in Scotland and removing barriers, to enable everyone to access the proceedings of the Scottish Parliament.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing and who wish to view proceedings in the Parliament can request a British sign language interpreter or any other form of communication support, such as a speech-to-text reporter or note taker, for a debate or committee meeting.

Any information produced by the Scottish Parliament can be translated into BSL on request and many of the Parliament's videos use BSL and subtitles, for example its videos on how to submit a public petition and appear before a committee as a witness.

Cara Hilton: That is very helpful. What provision is being made for the subtitling of televised parliamentary debates, to enable the deaf and hard of hearing in Scotland to follow the democratic process here in the chamber?

David Stewart: The Parliament has recently gone through a three-month pilot to provide subtitles for First Minister's question time. Shortly after the *Official Report* becomes available, a subtitled broadcast of the proceedings can be provided by using YouTube technology to synchronise the *Official Report* with the actual video. Having only recently discovered that technique, we are very pleased to have found a way to offer the service to deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

Following the success of the pilot and positive feedback from deaf and hard-of-hearing groups, we intend to continue to provide the service, with a

view to expanding it to cover other business in the chamber such as question time and perhaps debates of particular interest to the public.

Officials are currently looking at how the service will be delivered and will bring a report and recommendations to the corporate body. I would be happy to report back to Cara Hilton on progress once the corporate body has considered the proposals for the new service.

Capacity Needs

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what consideration it has given to the future capacity needs of the Parliament in the event that it exercises significant additional powers. (S4O-03083)

Liam McArthur (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): It would be for the Parliament to determine its capacity needs before the SPCB could consider this matter in any detail.

As Patrick Harvie will know, the corporate body recently issued a document to all members that summarised the relevant policies on the use of parliamentary resources in the run-up to the referendum. Moreover, our strategic plan recognises the need to prepare for the support of parliamentary services that will require to be delivered post referendum, regardless of the result. We have tasked officials with that work, but we do not expect to receive any briefing until the result and the Parliament's requirements are known.

Patrick Harvie: I acknowledge that, until the range of possibilities is better understood, it would be difficult to make hard-and-fast decisions. However, it seems likely that all political parties will be offering some form of progress, and the bare minimum would be additional requirements to run a wider range of committees, which would not only imply additional research and clerking capacity but have implications for budgets and physical space.

At the other end of the spectrum, we might even need a second chamber. Has the corporate body noticed that, just across the road, there is a large underused building that the Scottish ministers already own and which could entertain a little democratic use in future? I am sure that we could allocate a couple of spare rooms just in case Her Majesty wanted to stay over. I encourage the corporate body to examine this option—after all, it is never too soon to start measuring up for carpets and curtains.

Liam McArthur: I think that I thank Patrick Harvie for his supplementary question. I certainly noted a ripple of republican fervour across the chamber when it was asked.

As the member has rightly acknowledged, it is difficult to make any hard-and-fast decisions. However, he will be aware that, even in recent times, the corporate body has looked at ways of accommodating the change requirements of parliamentary business. For example, additional capacity had to be put in place to support parliamentary scrutiny of the Scottish Independence Referendum Bill and the Welfare Reform Bill against, I have to say, the backdrop of some fairly difficult decisions on overall staffing in the Parliament—and I take this opportunity to put on record the corporate body's gratitude to the staff for the way in which they have handled that situation.

As I have said, officials have been tasked with looking at a range of options. Patrick Harvie is right to point out that the issue is not simply to do with clerking and budgets; there are also potential capacity issues, some of which we have bumped up against in recent months. Nevertheless, any final decisions will have to await greater clarity on outcomes.

As for Mr Harvie's final suggestion, I will throw it into the mix, but I am not necessarily confident that it will find a great deal of support.

Open-source Software

4. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what consideration it has given to making greater use of open-source software. (S4O-03048)

David Stewart (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The corporate body is making use of a number of open-source software products in the information technology network, and we will continue to evaluate products on their merits as new requirements emerge.

Stewart Stevenson: Is the corporate body aware that jurisdictions around the world—including the European Parliament, which uses the Jahia content management system—are using more open-source software? Given the quality benefits of open scrutiny of source code, and the potential for financial savings in adopting open-source programmes, can we consider testing selected software with members with a view to rolling it out more widely if it proves to be satisfactory?

David Stewart: I know that Mr Stevenson has, after 30 years working with IT in banking services, wide experience in this area. He is right to say that open-source approaches are developed in a much more open manner by like-minded people; the programming code can be seen, and the software is generally free to use and—some people argue—more robust. It has also been argued that

there are more minds available to solve any problems that arise.

To date, however, no new contracts have been awarded for open-source products. The corporate body's procurement procedures ensure that the selection criteria are published in advance of any submission and are based on the outcomes and outputs that we need to achieve. As a result, it is open to suppliers to propose how those outcomes and outputs will be achieved, and the solution that they believe would best meet our criteria.

Electronic Security

5. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what measures it is taking to prevent illegal access to the Parliament's website and other data sources, such as members' email accounts. (S4O-03047)

David Stewart (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body is aware of the importance of information security and takes the security of the Parliament network, and our information assets, very seriously.

In order to ensure that the appropriate levels of confidentiality and integrity are maintained, we employ a risk-based approach, and combine that with multiple layers of security technologies to maintain the balance between security and ease of access.

John Wilson: Can David Stewart clarify the nature of those external threats? Are they from individuals or Government agencies, in relation to unauthorised access? Further, can the SPCB assure me that no member's email account has been hacked? Is the SPCB aware of any mobile devices that have been issued to members having been hacked?

David Stewart: Mr Wilson makes some good points. The SPCB takes security seriously and gets regular advice from Police Scotland, and we get general advice from the security services, and we also look to the national technical authority for information assurance.

Threat levels are clearly a big problem for us. The concerns that we have are not so much about geographic areas as individuals within them. For example, there are concerns about hacking by people who are based in China and Russia.

Our officials take external security advice. We have to realise that we are a big target in the public sector, but I am convinced that we have a rigorous approach to security and, as always, we will take advice from the experts in the security services.

Building Security

6. Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, in light of a member of the public recently accessing the Parliament's roof, whether it plans to implement extra security measures. (S4O-03085)

David Stewart (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): We constantly review our security measures and, where appropriate, seek to make adjustments. We do not, however, consider the incident on 20 February to be a breach of Parliament's security. At no point was access gained to the Parliament's interior, and the incident was handled by the police unit as an antisocial behaviour matter.

We are looking at the exterior of the Canongate building, which the individual climbed up, to see whether further practical measures can be added to prevent climbing.

Richard Lyle: Who regularly reviews security in Parliament? Are any meetings held with Police Scotland to review the security of the Parliament?

David Stewart: Yes. A police unit is based in the building and we have close relations with Police Scotland. As I said in my answer to the previous question, we take general advice from the security services. Richard Lyle will know that we currently have extensive electronic security systems in place, including perimeter intruder detectors and closed-circuit television.

Documentary Films

7. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what facilities are available for the showing of documentary films. (S4O-03081)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I ask for short questions and answers, please.

Linda Fabiani (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): There are facilities available for showing documentary films, however the facilities used would be dependent on specific requirements. It is always best to get as much notice as possible, so that those specific requirements can be met.

Christine Grahame: I endeavour to give decent notice, but on two occasions when I have screened documentary films on Lockerbie and the conviction of Abdelbaset Ali al-Megrahi, all I had was a conventional monitor, and it was difficult for the audience to see or hear it clearly. I ask for more suitable screening facilities. If the SPCB accedes to my request, I undertake not to request the provision of a popcorn machine.

Linda Fabiani: I am aware of the issue, and of what happened. However, I understand that the last time Christine Grahame showed a documentary film was right after a committee meeting and there was no time to change the layout of the room, which precluded use of larger screens.

We will take Christine Grahame's comments on board and reflect on what she has said. However, I can say that, courtesy of James Dornan, an excellent documentary film—"Barefoot in Business", which is about women in Uganda—was shown last week in the garden lobby.

We have the appropriate facilities, and we try to provide them when required. Given notice, we do our best.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I apologise to John Mason, but we must move to the next item of business.

Child Poverty

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09482, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on child poverty. I call Margaret Burgess to speak to and move the motion. Minister, you have a maximum of 14 minutes. We are very tight for time in the debate.

14:45

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):

I welcome the opportunity to open the debate on tackling child poverty and inequality in Scotland. As a Government, we are determined to address the root causes of poverty and to help individuals and families to overcome the barriers that prevent them from achieving their potential.

I am sure that we are all aware of people in our constituencies who are experiencing hardship. It is absolutely unacceptable that anyone in a country as prosperous as Scotland is living in poverty. Scotland is a wealthy nation. We are energy rich, our workforce is highly skilled, our reputation for innovation is long established and Scotland's businesses are competing at the highest levels worldwide. Yet, too many people and communities are trapped in poverty. People are struggling to pay housing costs, needing to rely on food banks and finding it almost impossible to make ends meet.

I was struck by the comments of a woman who was participating in a surviving poverty project; they were recorded in last year's annual report for the Government's child poverty strategy. She said:

"Just not being able to do things, my bairns' pals are getting to do this and mine can't, I do try to explain to them sometimes, especially my oldest. I try my best but sometimes it is not possible."

That is someone who is living through poverty, who needs to compromise and make difficult decisions. Yet, those are issues that many of us hardly even think about.

Much has changed since we published the original "Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland" in 2011. The latest published figures show that relative child poverty in Scotland is 15 per cent—a fall from 21 per cent when this Government came to power in 2007. We are proud of the progress that is being made but we should also be concerned that there are still far too many children living in poverty in Scotland, and the numbers are set to rise further as a result of decisions that are being taken at Westminster.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that the child poverty rate in Scotland will increase

by a third by 2020. That means that an additional 50,000 children will be living in poverty as a direct result of the United Kingdom Government's welfare reforms. When housing costs are taken into account, the figure could be as high as 100,000. That will reverse the progress that has been made in recent years in reducing child poverty.

The IFS is not the only organisation to make such a dismal prediction. Scotland's outlook, the campaign by Scottish charities that are fighting poverty, which we debated in the chamber yesterday evening, highlights the hundreds of thousands of people who are being "battered" by welfare reforms and a rising cost of living. Only this month, the Child Poverty Action Group published "Poverty in Scotland 2014: the independence referendum and beyond", which also illustrates rising poverty levels. If we add to that the most recent figures from the Trussell Trust, which indicate that more than 56,000 visits have been made to its food banks since April, we have an extremely worrying picture.

Against that backdrop, on 10 March we published the revised "Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland: Our Approach 2014 – 2017". The strategy outlines our approach to tackling the long-term drivers of poverty and income inequality over the next three years by maintaining a focus on early intervention and prevention. We have worked closely with the ministerial advisory group on child poverty and with stakeholders, and they strongly support our overall approach, which is set out under three main headings: "pockets—maximising household resources"; "prospects—improved life chances of children in poverty"; and "places—children from low income households live in well-designed, sustainable places".

The revised strategy outlines the actions that we are already taking in each of those areas. In order to reduce pressure on household budgets and put more money in people's pockets, we are defending and extending certain core universal services, rights and benefits through the social wage. They include the abolition of tuition fees, the provision of free prescriptions and eye examinations, and the freezing of the council tax. We are paying the living wage to all staff who are covered by the public sector pay policy and are encouraging other employers to follow our lead. In addition, we are increasing the provision of free nursery education for three and four-year-olds and the most vulnerable two-year-olds to 600 hours a year.

The Scottish Government has recently announced that we will extend our childcare offer of 600 hours of provision per year to two-year-olds in workless households from August 2014, and to two-year-olds who would be eligible for free school

meals from August 2015. In addition, as the motion sets out, entitlement to free school lunches will be extended to children in primaries 1 to 3 from January 2015. As well as saving families throughout Scotland around £330 a year per child who takes the meal every day, that will remove any possibility of free school meals being a source of stigma and will encourage healthy eating habits. We hope that it will also result in an increase in the take-up of school meals by children who are already entitled to them.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister use some of her time to respond to the concerns that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has expressed about the degree to which free school meals and the offer of 600 hours of nursery provision have not been funded appropriately?

Margaret Burgess: We are in discussion with COSLA. The Scottish Government, COSLA and all local authorities have the will to make the proposals work. The provision of 600 hours of nursery education is something that we have all agreed to. We know the benefits of it, as we do with free school meals. We are listening to COSLA and are talking to it to ensure that we can work together to resolve any difficulties that it identifies. We are determined that the policy will go ahead, as it will help to reduce poverty in Scotland.

In order to improve the prospects of our children and young people, we are committed to raising attainment for all and to closing the gap between the most and the least advantaged children. For example, our literacy action plan is raising literacy standards for all and breaking the link between deprivation and poor literacy skills. As part of our focus on early intervention and prevention, the early years task force is co-ordinating action across Government and the wider public sector to ensure that early years spending is prioritised.

Through the early years change fund, the Scottish Government, local government, the national health service and others have made a collective investment of more than £270 million to deliver a range of activity on family centres and family support, child and maternal health, play, childcare and early education. In delivering well-designed, sustainable places, we recognise that the changes that require to be made will be achieved only when communities play a part in delivering those changes.

Our commitment to community-led regeneration is illustrated by the Scottish Government's people and communities fund, which aims to help a wide range of community anchor organisations deliver outcomes that meet and respond to the needs and aspirations of their communities. The fund is worth £7.9 million per year over the period 2012-15, and £8.9 million in 2015-16. It supports an asset-based

approach to regeneration, whereby funding can be used to drive change across a broad spectrum. The activities involved include promoting local economic growth, tackling unemployment, supporting vulnerable people, challenging health inequalities, working with young people and—crucially—delivering what local people know will make a difference.

This Government is even more ambitious for Scotland's communities. That is why we are taking forward the community empowerment (Scotland) bill, which will strengthen community planning, simplify the operation of the community right to buy and provide opportunities for communities to be more involved in shaping and delivering better outcomes locally.

I have set out a range of actions that the Government is taking to tackle poverty, and I am pleased that, through the outcomes framework that is set out in the revised child poverty strategy, we will be able to measure progress against the key outcomes in the coming years. However, I am concerned that we are spending significant amounts of money—at least £258 million over the period 2013-14 to 2015-16—to mitigate some of the worst effects of the United Kingdom Government's welfare reforms.

Kezia Dugdale: Before the minister moves on to the Westminster agenda, how would she respond to CPAG, which today said that the Government's child poverty strategy lacks an implementation plan? CPAG also said that it needed more information about how the strategy would be implemented across Government departments and how it would be ensured that the needs of families at particular risk of poverty would be considered in relation to every aspect of the strategy. Does the minister intend to introduce an updated action plan?

Margaret Burgess: As I said, we have the outcomes framework, which is set out in the revised child poverty strategy. It got support from all the groups, including the Child Poverty Action Group, that have been involved in it. We will measure progress against the key outcomes. When it meets again, the ministerial advisory group will look at delivery and at how we get the results and outcomes that we are looking for. The Child Poverty Action Group is part of the ministerial advisory group and we will be informed by it and the other stakeholders.

As I said, I am concerned that we are diverting money from positive and worthwhile activity to mitigating the impact of the welfare reforms. With our local government partners, we have provided more than £40 million to protect the council tax reduction scheme, which is helping more than 500,000 people in Scotland. We are providing more than £7 million for welfare mitigation

measures such as advice and support, and we are investing an additional £9.2 million in the new Scottish welfare fund. On top of that, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth announced further help in the 2014-15 budget of £35 million to provide social landlords with the estimated £50 million that is needed to mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax.

However, mitigation is not enough. In "Scotland's Future", which is the Scottish Government's white paper on independence, we set out our vision and priorities for action as the first Government of an independent Scotland. That includes actions on taxation, welfare and benefits and a transformational extension of childcare, all of which would have a significant impact on child poverty.

For people who are in work and on low incomes, we would ensure that the minimum wage increased by at least the rate of inflation, which would help wages to keep pace with the rising cost of living. If that had happened over the past 10 years, people could be more than £600 a year better off. We have made a commitment that we will keep benefits and the minimum wage rising in line with inflation.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Margaret Burgess: I will take one more intervention.

Jackie Baillie: I will be brief. Will the minister backdate the rise in the national minimum wage?

Margaret Burgess: I have heard some ridiculous questions from members in the chamber—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please—the minister is speaking.

Margaret Burgess: We have made a commitment in the white paper on where we will start, and we will move on from there. We will increase the minimum wage and benefits in line with inflation, which will help to narrow the gap between those who have and those who have not. That is an absolute commitment that we have made. If previous Westminster Governments had done that, perhaps we would not have as many people in poverty.

We have set out immediate priorities for change in welfare arrangements. We are committed to abolishing the bedroom tax within the first year of an independent Scottish Parliament; halting the roll-out of universal credit and the personal independence payment, both of which are a chaotic shambles; ensuring that benefits in Scotland increase in line with inflation, as I said; reviewing the conditionality and sanctions regime, which we know is causing hardship to many of our

citizens; and reviewing the assessment processes for disability-related benefits, to bring back faith in those systems.

Independence would allow the Scottish Parliament to make decisions on welfare and taxation; reverse the most damaging of the welfare changes; and ensure that we have a social security system for the future, rather than one that is being dismantled. Only with the full powers of independence will we in Scotland be able to build a fairer and more prosperous Scotland, where child poverty can be truly eradicated.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's revised Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland, recognising widespread stakeholder support for the continued focus on maximising household resources, improving children's life chances and developing sustainable places; further welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to provide free school meals for all children in P1 to P3 and the increase in early learning and childcare provision to 600 hours a year for three and four-year-olds and the most vulnerable two-year-olds; acknowledges that the gains on child poverty that have been achieved during the lifetime of the Parliament are being reversed by the welfare cuts and reforms of the UK Government, and recognises that it is only when the Parliament has full control over welfare policy and spending that it will be able to properly address child poverty in Scotland.

14:59

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): All my working life, I have been motivated by the values of social justice, fairness and equality. Those are the values that brought me into politics. There is no greater cause than tackling child poverty. Labour's ambition for Scotland is to end child poverty. I want to live in a society where every child is given the best possible start in life and where no one is left behind.

I used to work in some of the poorest areas of the west of Scotland, so I have seen the impact of poverty at first hand—I have seen the children whose life chances are determined before they reach the age of three, the parents who have been in and out of low-paid, temporary jobs and the despondency and lack of hope that are visited on some of our neighbourhoods. However, I have also seen the resilience and determination of people and communities to fight back.

In the decade to 2007-08, when Labour was in office, absolute child poverty fell from 39 to 19 per cent. More than 1 million children across the United Kingdom and more than 200,000 children in Scotland were lifted out of poverty. Since then, the decline has been much slower, and progress has stalled in recent years. The lesson is that the levels of child poverty in Scotland dropped more significantly than they did in any other part of the

UK. By 2007, we had the lowest level of poverty in the UK, despite the starting point being higher. That was not about constitutions or borders; it was about political will and determination to change people's lives for the better. We can and must do that again.

Margaret Burgess: The member says that it is not about constitutions and borders, but does she find it acceptable that the Institute for Fiscal Studies has indicated that up to 100,000 more children could be in poverty because of Westminster policies, which the Labour Party backed up last night in its welfare debate?

Jackie Baillie: Let us be very clear. I absolutely believe what the Institute for Fiscal Studies says and reject the Tories' welfare reform. [Interruption.] Scottish National Party members should stop shouting and listen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Jackie Baillie: If SNP members look at their First Minister's comments in the *Sunday Post* in August last year, they will see that he supported the principle of a benefit cap. [Interruption.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackie Baillie: That is in writing.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: Sit down.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. The member is not taking interventions.

Jackie Baillie: We already have a number of key powers over health, housing, education, childcare and other areas. We need to ensure that the independence debate does not obscure the need for action on child poverty now.

On that basis, I welcome the refresh of the child poverty strategy. It is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. I am flattered, because I recognise the prospects, pockets and places approach. Labour's child poverty challenge paper, which was published over a year ago, talked about aspirations, assets and areas. Whatever we call the approach, I am encouraged that we share a view on the action that is required.

My frustration with the SNP's previous strategy was to do not with the content, but with the lack of implementation. There were no targets, no framework to measure success, and no shared ownership across and at all levels of government. I regret to say that the same appears to be happening again. We see a strategy, but where is the action plan? Where are the resources? Where is the monitoring framework? I have been told that it will not come until perhaps after the referendum.

Who will co-ordinate action across Government? A strategy that gathers dust is no strategy at all.

I say as gently as I can to the minister that recycling funding announcements really lacks ambition. Some £2.5 million going into projects that provide advice to help to tackle poverty is always welcome. The spin suggested that that was something new, but the reality is that that is existing funding for services that are already provided and it amounts to a paltry sum of 15p per week for every child in poverty in Scotland. The reality is that the SNP will spend more on its white paper on independence in one year than on the funding that it announced to coincide with the child poverty strategy. What a lack of ambition. Perhaps that demonstrates where the SNP's priorities lie.

If members need any more evidence of that, they should look at the white paper. In its 177,000 words, there are four mentions of child poverty, nine mentions of flags, 31 mentions of borders, and 1,200 mentions of independence. Even "Strictly Come Dancing" gets just one fewer mention than child poverty.

I am frustrated by that lack of action, because there is much that we can do. Childcare is, of course, devolved. Much of the existing childcare offer is aimed at children over three years old. I welcome the further improvements that have been proposed for childcare, but we need to focus more attention on the zero-to-three age group and working with parents, because we know that that makes a difference to life chances. We need to do that now, not at some point post-2016.

The scale of the challenge that we face is increasing. I absolutely associate myself with the minister's comments on the number of children who are likely to face poverty due to the welfare cuts that the Tories have proposed. However, that is not a failure of the constitution; it is a failure of politics. The Tories will forgive me for saying that. We can vote them out, and that is exactly what we should do.

I turn to in-work poverty, which is rising. We know that in the last five years prices have risen by something like 25 per cent, at the same time as wages have declined in real terms. We are facing a cost-of-living crisis not seen for decades. While I want to see a welfare state that provides adequate levels of support, I also want us to ensure that work pays. It was Labour that introduced the national minimum wage and it is Labour that has led the argument in the Parliament for the living wage.

The SNP says that it shares our ambition—I hope that it does—so let us use the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill as an opportunity to build positive measures such as the living wage, remove zero-hours contracts and have equal pay

audits into the £10 billion that we spend each year on public sector contracts. The cabinet secretary rejected all our amendments at stage 2, but I am an eternal optimist and hope that we might see some progress at stage 3.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I will do so in a minute.

We know that poor employment practices have a disproportionate effect on women. Almost 64 per cent of those paid less than the living wage are women. They are also more likely to be on zero-hours contracts and in part-time work, so the measure could make a huge difference.

I give way to the member and invite her to tell me why we cannot do that.

Annabelle Ewing: The member has again made a point about procurement. Does she now have legal advice that supports her position? We would all like to see it. I think that we have had the old legal advice, which does not support her position. Is there something new?

Jackie Baillie: Yes, we do—and it has been provided to the SNP. If we agree, why can we not work together to make such a key difference?

For the SNP the answer is independence, whatever the question. When Labour was creating the welfare state, the answer for the SNP was independence; when Labour was delivering the national minimum wage, the answer for the SNP was independence; and when Labour, more than a year ago, called for the full mitigation of the bedroom tax, the answer for the SNP was independence. The Scottish Government has failed time and again to use the powers that it already has. When power has been devolved to it, as with the Scottish welfare fund, it has proved singularly incompetent at getting the money out the door.

At a time when need is self-evident and people are queueing for food banks, we have underspends in the Scottish welfare fund. Moreover, it is not just the welfare fund; the fuel poverty budget is also underspent when fuel poverty is hitting 900,000 households. The SNP has stripped more than £1 billion from budgets that have helped to tackle poverty, money for housing has been cut and public services have been decimated.

We hear much from the SNP about the better welfare system that we will have in an independent Scotland, but it does not explain how that will be paid for.

We currently have a deficit of £12 billion a year and it is projected to rise. To close that gap, we will need to cut services by as much as 12 per cent or have tax rises of about 13 per cent. There

is no getting away from that, but there is no explanation by the SNP of how it will do that. Instead, it wants to reduce corporation tax for big business by 3p more than even George Osborne wants. Add to that the SNP's refusal to back Labour's proposal to reinstate the 50 per cent rate of tax for high income earners and it is clear that there is nothing progressive about the SNP.

This is a tax-cutting government, which talks the talk about better welfare but cannot begin to tell us how that would be funded. We cannot have Scandinavian-style welfare on the basis of US-style levels of taxation. The sums just do not add up.

Labour has a proud record. We brought forward the Child Poverty Act 2010 to end the scandal of child poverty. Labour will always frame the debate around our values of social justice, fairness and equality, while the SNP always frames the debate around nationalism. That is the difference. Our ambition is to end child poverty; the SNP's ambition is to end the union.

I move amendment S4M-09482.1, to leave out from "that the gains" to end and insert:

"the need for robust measures to help women back into the workplace as a means of alleviating child poverty; calls on the Scottish Government to put a comprehensive action plan and monitoring framework in place in order to ensure that the strategy is implemented; acknowledges that the significant progress made on reducing child poverty by the previous Labour-led Scottish administration has stalled under the current SNP administration; recognises that the welfare cuts made by the UK Government will result in an increase in child poverty, and calls on the Scottish Government to reaffirm its commitment to both the Child Poverty Act 2010 and to the eradication of child poverty".

15:09

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I do not think that anyone could possibly doubt the very profound effect of child poverty not just on the child but on the family and the country at large. Notwithstanding the fact that child poverty is at its lowest level since the measures were devised in 1994 and the fact that both absolute and relative child poverty across the UK have fallen since 1998, the statistics about the extent of the social, economic and educational predicament in which those in poverty find themselves are stark. They are an embarrassment to us all, whichever party we represent.

The Scottish Government is therefore correct to promote the key points of its revised strategy in its motion. I also take Jackie Baillie's point about the importance of ensuring that the strategy is backed up by action. However, with regard to the rest of the Scottish Government's motion, members will not be surprised to hear that we take a different view.

Having said that, I begin by recognising those aspects of the Scottish Government's policy on which we agree. We said very clearly during the passage of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill that we agreed with the general direction of the early years policy, the effect of which is crucial when it comes to tackling child poverty in its earliest stages. There is no dispute whatsoever about the evidence that proves that point, and it relates directly to the attainment gap, which I will say more about in a minute.

The referendum debate aside, one of the most interesting debates in Scottish politics is about which social and economic policies should be implemented universally and which should not. If we are honest, all political parties are struggling with that debate: which criteria should be used to decide how best to spend very scarce resources? We might like in theory to say that we support universal provision on as wide a policy basis as possible, but we know only too well that the hardest challenge in politics is to decide which policies to prioritise—and it is on that issue that all the parties in the chamber will, to some extent, divide.

What is the context of addressing child poverty as far the Conservatives see their priorities? First, we fully support the moves to extend the number of hours provided in child and nursery care and to improve the quality of that care and the flexibility of its use. However, I ask once again that the Scottish Government has another think about the policy that sees the practice of funding nursery provision from the term after a child turns three. It is painfully obvious that that discriminates against children who are born from September to February. I have yet to hear an acceptable explanation of how that sits with other Scottish Government policies, which, in this area, I compliment.

Let me turn to the basis of deciding the criteria that should underpin a universal approach. For me, the decisions should be partly determined by the strength of the evidence relating to the outcomes: which policies have the best track record in delivering better outcomes for our young people?

One such policy is the provision of health visitors. I know that we have a difference of opinion with the SNP on key aspects of that policy, but it is hard for parties in the chamber to refute the evidence on the benefits of a universal approach to health visitors for children up to the age of five. It is also very hard to disagree with the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Nursing, both of which are calling for more staff because they, too, accept fully the need for a universal approach. Time after time, sociologists

have pointed to the pre-school years as those that are most important in delivering development.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): I agree with much of what the member said about the important role played by health visitors. That is why the named person provision will be located in the health visiting profession—generally, because that was not enshrined in law in the way that I know the member wanted.

The named person—a universal provision—will be with a health visitor for children up to the age of five, which is up to the time that they go to school. I know that the member disagreed with the overall policy; nonetheless, the named person will be a health visitor, and that approach is not a million miles away from the policy that she is describing.

Liz Smith: As I think the minister said, we totally reject the provision of a named person on a universal basis. Since the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill was debated, there has been widespread public support for that view.

I understand well the appeal of also making the school meals policy universal, but when tough choices must be made elsewhere—we must all admit that they need to be made—and given that some local authorities are very clear that the Scottish Government's financial commitment is seriously short of the required levels, I question the wisdom of not adopting a more targeted approach to help those most in need.

The evidence presented to the education committee in a previous session was not conclusive about free school lunches. Indeed, many argued that the better policy might have been to provide breakfast to the most vulnerable children. As we know from 2008, the powers that are available to local authorities to implement the free school meals policy were not widely taken up because of the huge resource implications. We have six local authorities returning with figures for the implementation of free school meals that are far greater than the £13 million that the Government promised.

This is a debate about the best social and economic policies that are designed to help the whole process. For the Conservatives, it is a question of ensuring that people are in work, because work pays—it helps young children of all different backgrounds. Instead of having a constitutional debate about whether Westminster or Holyrood has the correct policy, it should be about a complementary policy that has both Governments working in tandem.

I move amendment S4M-09482.3, to leave out from “; further welcomes” to end and insert:

“but believes that better data is required to track progress toward the strategy's outcomes; notes that child poverty has fallen substantially over the last 15 years; recognises the shared commitment between the UK Government and the Scottish Government on tackling child poverty, and considers that work represents the best route out of poverty and that addressing educational inequalities, especially the ‘attainment gap’, is one of the most effective tools in the fight against child poverty in Scotland”.

15:15

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I start by making clear the Scottish Liberal Democrats' welcome and support for the action plan on child poverty that is required under the UK Child Poverty Act 2010. The key strands of maximising household resources, improving children's wellbeing and life chances, and providing a focus on the importance of place—the physical, social, and economic environment in which our children grow up—are all fair, sensible and appropriate.

It is an approach that I support, although it is disappointing that neither the minister's motion nor much of her speech detailed what it will mean in practice. Instead, we have been treated to the same old arguments about breaking up the UK and how Westminster is the root of all evil. Even those hackneyed arguments, which also blemish sections of the action plan, would carry more weight were it not for the fact that the SNP simply appears to be unwilling to do anything very different. The white paper, which is a manifesto that promises all the answers to all our questions about the consequences of independence, essentially confirms more of the same on welfare.

We are told that welfare would be simpler and fairer and that bold steps would be taken to make sure that those who can work do work, but we have been given none of the detail and are left to conclude that it would be done within the spending limits that have already been established by the coalition Government. Nowhere does the white paper commit to increasing welfare spending by the £2.5 billion necessary to fulfil all the promises that SNP ministers and back benchers have made week in and week out for the past three years.

There is not even space within the weighty tome for an explanation of how the SNP plans to deliver its commitment to increase child benefit for those people who earn more than £60,000 per year, which it made when requiring Parliament to support motion S4M-05521. I recall that debate very well: tears of joy were rolling down the cheeks of Ken Macintosh, who has perhaps suffered more than many from the change to benefits for better-off parents. He is not here this afternoon, but he appeared to be thrilled that day at the prospect of a reprieve in a separate Scotland. However, all that hope has now been dashed by the sin of omission from the white

paper. Breaking the news to Mrs Macintosh will not be easy.

By contrast, my amendment sets out more of the detail that should lie behind any strategy to tackle child poverty as part of efforts to create a stronger economy and a fairer society. It underscores the importance of both Scotland's Governments playing their full role in that task, which is something that John Dickie of CPAG emphasised as crucial to us meeting our ambitions.

Aileen Campbell: Liam McArthur is full of suggestions for the Scottish Government. I wonder what suggestions he has passed to the Westminster Government, which his party is a part of, about the 50,000 children whom it is going to push into poverty through welfare reforms.

Liam McArthur: It is very interesting to hear those criticisms of welfare reform when, as I have just said, there is no indication in the white paper of any additional funding to meet the commitments that the SNP members turn up in this chamber to relentlessly unleash on Parliament.

I accept John Dickie's challenge that increased action is needed at every level of Government and across our public services and labour market, but we need to and can take heart from what is already being done. For example, 130,000 more jobs have been created in Scotland since 2010, and we are seeing signs that the growth in employment and reduction in unemployment is being sustained, with greater business confidence and a welcome, if belated, rise in pay awards.

Likewise, good progress is being made with early years support. I welcome the Scottish Government's steps to follow the UK Government's lead in introducing free school meals for all children in P1 to P3. Similarly, I applaud the ministers' rethink of the compelling case for extending free early learning and childcare to more of our disadvantaged two-year-olds, and I encourage ministers to go further in matching what is in place south of the border.

The early years are vital in shaping outcomes and life chances, particularly for those from poorer and non-traditional backgrounds. The more that we do in that area, the better, and in that context I pay tribute to many of those who are working in the field, including in the third sector.

Those outcomes and life chances are of course all too heavily dependent on place, with wild disparities between different parts of the country. None of us can claim not to have pockets of poverty in our constituency or region, but it is self-evident that some communities are more deeply and widely affected than others.

The action plan is therefore right to emphasise the need to address area-based factors that exacerbate the effects of individual poverty on many families. That would require a wide-ranging approach, but what must be key is a renewed commitment from ministers to deliver on their promises with regard to building more affordable social housing for rent.

As my amendment makes clear, it is not just in the areas of building employment in our recovering economy, delivering early years support or improving place that Government can, should and is helping to tackle factors that have a bearing on poverty. I am delighted that the recent UK budget saw the tax threshold raised to £10,500, delivering an £800 tax cut to low and middle-income families across the UK and lifting 220,000 people in Scotland out of paying income tax altogether. That commitment is not matched in the white paper.

Other recent changes will help in more specific and targeted ways. The child element of child tax credit has been improved—notably for those with disability. Moves to reduce the costs of childcare, through tax-free allowances, will help many families across Scotland with something that is consistently and increasingly cited as an obstacle that prevents parents from returning to work or taking on new roles. A freeze on fuel duty, a reduction in energy bills and low interest rates, which are keeping mortgages affordable, are all steps that are helping people to manage their household budget.

That is not to say that things are easy or that the challenges that we face in tackling poverty do not remain serious. It does illustrate, however, that the relentless assertions by the SNP Government that it has a monopoly on concern or that it is the only one taking action to address poverty are simply untrue. Indeed, as I indicated earlier, until such time as the SNP Government comes clean about whether it is committed to increase welfare spending by £2.5 billion, its protestations and promises will ring rather hollow.

The action plan on child poverty is welcome. The approach that it suggests is right, as is its call for action. However, if like so many other things it gets sucked into the maw of the nationalists' obsession with independence, I fear that there will be too many excuses for inaction.

I move amendment S4M-09482.2, to leave out from first "welcomes" to end and insert:

"supports a stronger economy and a fairer society and believes that a focus on household resources, improving children's life chances and increased opportunities for work are important in tackling child poverty; welcomes the Scottish Government's decision to follow the UK Government and to introduce free school meals for all children in P1 to P3; supports the extension of free childcare to two-year-olds; further supports the action of the

UK Government to tackle high fuel costs; welcomes the £800 cut in income tax paid by people on low and middle incomes; further welcomes the low interest rates for borrowers in the UK; supports an increase in the number of Scottish businesses offering apprenticeships that give more young people the opportunity to have a successful working career; further supports the introduction of the National Insurance allowance from April 2014, which will help smaller businesses recruit new staff; welcomes the 130,000 additional people in work in Scotland since 2010, and notes that the white paper on independence does not take forward either the promises made by the Scottish Government to increase welfare spending by £2.5 billion or motion S4M-05521, which was moved and supported by the Scottish Government, to increase child benefit for people earning over £60,000 per year”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are very short of time. Speeches should be six minutes at the moment, but that might have to reduce.

15:22

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am pleased to be called to speak in this important Scottish Government debate on child poverty. Having listened to the Liberal Democrat representative in the chamber talk about what he referred to as “broken promises”, I think we could respond in four words: “Nick Clegg tuition fees”—end of subject.

There can be no more important issue for a politician than what needs to be done to secure a better future for the children of our country. I am very pleased to welcome the Scottish Government’s revised child poverty strategy for Scotland, which of course builds on the previous work and focuses quite rightly on the outcomes of maximising household resources, improving children’s wellbeing and life chances, particularly in the crucial early years, and improving the living and social environment in which children are brought up.

In preparing for this afternoon’s debate and looking at the helpful briefings that we have all received from third sector and other organisations, I think that it is fair to say that the consensus is that there is a general welcome for the collaborative and inclusive approach that the Scottish Government has adopted in developing the strategy. I cite Barnardo’s submission in that regard. It is also fair to say that the substantive approach that has been adopted by the Scottish Government has also been broadly welcomed. Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People said:

“I fully support the general direction of travel of the new Child Poverty Strategy ... I am particularly supportive of the revised threefold approach to the Strategy.”

With the powers that we have in this Parliament, we have already embarked on a number of actions. The minister went through many of those. We see the £18 million investment from the early

years change fund; universal provision of free school meal entitlement for pupils in primary 1 through to primary 3—Labour was not in favour of that initially, but it might have changed its mind—childcare extended to 600 hours from August of this year; and a raft of welfare reform resilience and mitigation measures. Alongside that is our commitment to the social wage; our top-up to the social fund, which is not happening elsewhere; our measures with respect to the council tax reduction scheme; and other measures, including help to reduce fuel poverty.

Much of that activity crosses departmental portfolios, so it is vital that there is joined-up working across Government. I am sanguine that the strengths that we have seen will continue and will be enhanced. A good example of that is that links are to be made to the child poverty strategy in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill through the statutory guidance, which is very welcome.

On delivery plans, it is clear from my reading of page 16 of the strategy that

“the development of a full measurement framework”

in consultation with stakeholders has been factored into the proposals. That is entirely proper and has been welcomed by Save the Children.

The Scottish Government is carrying out much work but, of course, for as long as control over Scotland’s vast resources and the key levers of power rests with Westminster and not with this Parliament, our battle against child poverty will be intrinsically hampered. We need only look around to see what decade in and decade out of Westminster misrule has achieved, which is poverty levels that are shocking in a country as wealthy as Scotland.

Liam McArthur: Will Annabelle Ewing give way on that point?

Annabelle Ewing: I will not just now, thanks.

If we do not control taxation and welfare, how on earth can we tackle child poverty comprehensively? If we do not control employment law, the minimum wage, energy markets and the 4,000 per cent payday loan interest rates, how can we ease the pressures on households? If we do not control our wealth and ensure that it works for the people of our country, how do we grow our economy, create opportunity, create jobs and promote higher wages?

The no parties are content for those powers to lie at Westminster, but I and an increasing number of people in Scotland are not. It is clear that the only way that we can really start to tackle child poverty is by having the powers that we need to act in the interests of the people of our country, not against them.

Last night at Westminster, we saw the unedifying spectacle of Labour trooping into the Tory ayé lobby to impose an overall cap on welfare spending in spite of the warnings from Save the Children and others about the crude approach of such a cap, which risks pushing hundreds of thousands of children into poverty. The chief executive of Save the Children said:

"Parties voting for the cap should remember that poverty doesn't just hurt childhoods, it can affect the rest of a child's life."

Labour and their friends the Tories are to target the poorest children, families, the vulnerable and the disabled, but the no parties together are quite happy for £100 billion to be spent on nuclear weapons. That is just not right. Let us get the powers that we need to do right by Scotland's children. We will do that only by voting yes on 18 September this year.

15:27

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

The child poverty statistics are deeply concerning, because the figure of one child in five living with the impact of poverty represents not only a number but thousands of children in Scotland in the 21st century whose families have to make choices every day between heating and eating and who struggle to make ends meet not only at the end of the month but at the end of every week and the end of every day. For those families, saving for a rainy day is simply not an option and they are therefore unable to plan ahead to buy the things that families need and those of us who have a regular and sufficient income take for granted.

More than half of those children who are in poverty live in households where at least one adult is working. Sadly, in-work poverty is an increasing phenomenon. It could take up an entire debate itself, but it would be remiss of me to not mention it now, not least because of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill and the attempts that my colleagues and I are making to improve matters for those in work through ensuring that every £1 of public money that is spent in Scotland generates a return for people who find themselves dependent on zero-hours contracts and denied the living wage or trade union recognition.

The causes of child poverty are complex, as are the measures that are needed to tackle the problem. We know that, without constant attention and action, the slide into poverty can begin again for too many children and their families.

To challenge poverty effectively, the Scottish Government needs to take a co-ordinated cross-sectoral, cross-departmental approach. Its motion mentions a number of the commitments in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, which

was passed recently. During stage 2 of that bill, I lodged amendments that addressed an issue that is important to me, the people I represent in Mid Scotland and Fife and a great many people throughout Scotland: making sure that tackling poverty and its damaging consequences for our children is the number 1 Government priority. Those amendments, which I worked on with Barnardo's Scotland, CPAG and the Poverty Alliance, sought to ensure that addressing child poverty was central to the planning and design of all public services that support children and can make a difference to their lives. Disappointingly, the amendments failed to make it past the SNP members of the Education and Culture Committee, who unanimously voted against them.

Now, instead of having the commitment that I sought in the bill, we have a pledge from the Minister for Children and Young People that she will work with relevant organisations to ensure that future guidance on the bill properly addresses child poverty and that the vital links between children's services and child poverty are made. It is vital that that happens and that the guidance that is produced is robust enough to meet the challenge of child poverty in our communities. The task for those in government, councils and health boards is to turn their high-level focus on child poverty and children's services into a reality on the ground. There is little reference to the role of local authorities in the strategy, and Children in Scotland has highlighted the need for a clear delivery plan for it.

Fortunately, there are examples of best practice for us to build on, and I hope that they will be considered carefully by the Scottish Government. I draw the minister's attention to just one of those, which is that in the region that I represent, Barnardo's Scotland is working with schools across Fife to support children affected by parental substance misuse. For example, at a school in Balingry, Barnardo's Scotland delivers an education programme on substance misuse and works with children directly affected by parental substance misuse. All of that is funded in partnership with the Fife alcohol and drug partnership. That work benefits some of the most vulnerable children and families in the area, where some local primary schools have 50 per cent take-up for free school meals, which shows that there is a high level of poverty there.

Throughout all that work there is a recognition from the Barnardo's project workers and from the school staff that children growing up in poverty feel the effects of family substance misuse even more and need to be even more resilient to survive, which means that they need more support from Barnardo's and their school. It is that kind of link that we all need to be making.

The child poverty strategy that we are debating today rightly recognises that some of the provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill will make a difference to child poverty through, for example, increased childcare. However, I was disappointed that the bill did not explicitly make the link between addressing child poverty and the planning of all public services, especially those provided by local authorities and health boards. I said earlier that we need the guidance that will be produced to be robust, and that will be particularly necessary in the case of guidance to community planning partnerships on the implementation of the child poverty strategy.

Equally, I hope that there is an emphasis on making sure that we check and monitor the delivery of everything that is contained in such strategies. As Children in Scotland noted, we must have a clear framework by which we can understand what success looks like and how to make it sustainable. Above all, however, tackling child poverty must be everyone's business. It must be at the centre of the work of all public services; only when that is the case can we hope to break the cycle and eliminate the scourge of child poverty once and for all.

15:33

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I begin by thanking the Government for bringing forward a debate on a subject that I think concerns us all. In that regard, I say to Jackie Baillie that she and her colleagues on the Labour benches do not have a monopoly on social concern. One of the things that drive me to be involved in politics—I think that it drives us all in the SNP—is a wish to eradicate poverty generally and child poverty in particular. We might have come to different conclusions as to how to arrive at that end, but it is certainly an ambition that drives my politics.

We know that too many youngsters in Scotland live in poverty. The figure is 15 per cent by the official measure and 20 per cent when housing costs are taken into account. CPAG informs us in a briefing paper for the debate that in Denmark the figure for child poverty is 10.2 per cent and in Norway it is just 9.4 per cent. Those countries have many similarities to our own country, but their child poverty rates are half ours.

The effects of poverty on childhood are well understood. Annabelle Ewing made that point well in her speech, and CPAG states in its briefing:

“Children from poor households are more likely to experience low birth weight, chronic illness and mental health problems.”

The briefing goes on to make a point that the Minister for Children and Young People has made many times:

“By the age of three, children in poverty lag one full year behind their more affluent peers in terms of cognitive development, social skills and school readiness.”

I know that that fact was a huge motivation for the introduction of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill.

Child poverty impacts on individuals but, as CPAG reminds us, it also impacts on society. If we can tackle child poverty, we can reduce the future costs to the Scottish Government of dealing with the effects of that poverty. CPAG says that the research that it has conducted has found that the additional costs of child poverty amount to approximately £3.5 billion a year in Scotland alone. If we get that right, it will benefit not only individuals but society as a whole.

We understand that there is poverty amidst plenty. As we know, Scotland is a wealthy country that is well endowed with resources, a well-educated population and strong economic sectors. Despite that, however, we are part of a United Kingdom that lags way behind in the equality ratings. The UK ranks 28th of 34 nations in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on a measure of overall inequality. The OECD analysis also shows that, since 1975, income inequality among working-age people has increased faster in the UK than in any other OECD country.

However, we know that progress has been made on tackling child poverty in Scotland. The latest figures show that relative child poverty in Scotland is at 15 per cent. As I have said, that is still too high, but the number has fallen from 21 per cent, which is where it stood when the Scottish Government came to power in 2007.

I must give credit to the previous Administration, which managed to achieve a reduction in the numbers of children in poverty from 280,000 to 250,000 between 2003-04 and 2006-07.

Jackie Baillie: Will Jamie Hepburn agree that the number of children in absolute poverty fell from 39 per cent to 19 per cent under Labour, as 200,000 children were lifted out of poverty, while the number fell only from 19 per cent to 16 per cent under the SNP, as only 30,000 children were lifted out of poverty? Is it not the case that the SNP's ambition has been somewhat lacking in scale?

Jamie Hepburn: I would never accept that the Scottish Government, which has just passed an outstanding Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill that will make a huge impact on the lives of children in this country, is lacking in the scale of its ambition.

I will make the point, if Ms Baillie will let me, that while I welcome—as I did rather generously, I thought—the progress that was made under the previous Administration, progress in tackling relative poverty has gone further under the current Scottish Government.

CPAG points out that much of that progress will now be stymied by the impact of the welfare reform and austerity agenda of the UK Government, and it suggests that by 2020 more than 100,000 more children will be living in poverty. Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People has also highlighted that figure as a point of concern in his briefing to members. That means that, within six years, 100,000 more children are expected to be living in soul-destroying, grinding, abject poverty. It is no wonder that, of the £4.5 billion that is being withdrawn from the Scottish economy under the UK Government's welfare reforms, £1 billion relates directly to children in Scotland.

It was interesting to hear Jackie Baillie claim that £1 billion in funding has been removed from poverty initiatives; she must know that that is not the case. The way in which such initiatives are resourced has changed, and the money is now given directly to local government. The Labour president of COSLA has welcomed the funding that has been given to local government as being better than what is happening elsewhere in these islands.

I had hoped to refer to yesterday's disgraceful vote on the welfare cap, which had Labour's backing, but I do not have time—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, I am afraid that you do not—you must close.

Jamie Hepburn: We are seeing just now a UK Government that is determined to redraw the measures for child poverty rather than tackle it, and we have to get out of that morass.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that I would like speeches of up to six minutes.

15:39

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): As the Barnardo's Scotland briefing states,

"All parties in the Parliament share a commitment to making Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up."

For many children in Scotland, the biggest challenge to that will come from growing up in poverty. The briefing goes on to state:

"With over one in five children in Scotland growing up in poverty, there is still a long way to go to achieve the vision of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up."

Research shows us that families that contain a disabled person are at a higher risk of poverty. That is acknowledged in the child poverty strategy for Scotland, which states that the employment rate for adults with a disability is nearly half that for those who do not have a disability. That has to be addressed, and urgently.

Members will already know my views about the so-called welfare reforms that are being carried out on the most vulnerable members of our society. Nothing that I say today will depart from those views, as I still believe the practice to be abhorrent, but that does not mean that we cannot do more here in Scotland to mitigate the so-called reforms and indeed to prove that there is a better way. We can do that by removing some of the barriers that disabled people face in trying to gain employment.

The child poverty strategy states:

"The Scottish Government's Purpose is to create a more successful country with opportunities for all in Scotland to flourish through sustainable economic growth. To achieve this, we need to break the cycles of poverty, deprivation, unemployment, health inequalities and poor educational attainment which have become deeply embedded in our society, particularly in our disadvantaged communities."

If the Government is to fulfil that, it needs to tackle the inherent disadvantages that are contained in the modern apprenticeship programme. Disabled people take up less than 0.5 per cent of apprenticeship places, yet the Scottish Government has no policy to address this fundamental flaw in the scheme. We have the powers today to change the employment opportunities for disabled people in order to give them and their children the future that they deserve. It would be wrong to hide behind the welfare debate and use it as an excuse to do nothing. That is why I call on the Government to put in place an employment strategy now that will fulfil the statement that I read out.

The Government's strategy also states:

"The availability of employment opportunities remains at the root of tackling child poverty in Scotland."

It is not only disabled people who do not receive the full benefits of the modern apprenticeship scheme. The recent Audit Scotland report on the Scottish Government's modern apprenticeship scheme showed that females account for 43 per cent of apprenticeship starts but only a third of the overall apprenticeship spending—£25.6 million. I have spoken about that in many debates in the chamber and I have also raised the matter in the Equal Opportunities Committee, particularly in our inquiry into women and work.

We cannot address the gender inequalities in our society if Government policy reinforces those same inequalities. I understand that this is an

unintended consequence of the policy, but I reiterate the point that I made regarding opportunities for disabled people.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The member mentioned gender inequalities in modern apprenticeships. I cannot quite get the number right, but the number of female apprentices under this Government has either doubled or quadrupled. I apologise for not knowing whether it has doubled or quadrupled, but does the member not welcome that?

Siobhan McMahon: I am glad that Mr Doris thinks that that is funny. My point is that there is less spending on females than on males, so they are not making it through to levels 3, 4 and 5. It does not matter that we are getting more through the door; the important thing is what is happening to them at levels 3, 4 and 5. If Mr Doris cannot see that, that is a problem for him and not one for me. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Mr Doris, interventions should be made on your feet, please.

Siobhan McMahon: As I said, we need to take a joined-up approach to the problem.

Bob Doris: Will the member take an intervention?

Siobhan McMahon: No. I have addressed the member's points, so he can sit back down and I can carry on.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please sit down now, Mr Doris. Thank you.

Siobhan McMahon: It is all well and good for the Government to talk about flexible childcare, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill and the measures that it will use to tackle child poverty, but if employment opportunities for the mothers of children are limited by Government schemes, we need to address that and fix it now.

One of the three outcomes in the strategy is "improving children's wellbeing and life chances".

Further to that, it states:

"We continue to aspire to a Scotland where no child is disadvantaged by poverty."

I know that the Minister for Children and Young People shares that ambition as it was continually highlighted throughout all stages of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. In fact, it was one of the reasons why she could not accept my amendments on rights for disabled children. Although I did not agree with her, I respect her view.

However, a recent report that was undertaken on behalf of Scotland's Commissioner for Children

and Young People entitled "It Always Comes Down to Money" shows that a major challenge to that line of thinking comes in the shape of public sector finance, and particularly local government funding. Voluntary sector organisations that provide services to families with disabled children were surveyed, and the report shows that almost all of them had experienced cuts to their funding or changes to the way in which it was allocated.

In addition, Children in Scotland states in its briefing for this debate:

"The Scottish Government has itself chosen to freeze the Council Tax at 2008 levels until at least 2016. In acknowledging the attraction of an across the board tax cut, given that services for children and young people are overwhelmingly delivered via local government, this is undoubtedly adding to the pressures on these services, particularly in areas of economic and social deprivation and has exacerbated public sector austerity in Scotland according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation."

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

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

Siobhan McMahon: I echo that by saying that, if the Government is serious about its child poverty strategy, it must be honest and real with the public about finance and about how we will fund measures in the future.

The Government's child poverty strategy should be welcomed. However, we need more than warm words to achieve the outcomes and I urge the Government to develop a coherent and cross-portfolio approach as quickly as possible in order that the strategy aims can be achieved—and achieved quickly.

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People has said that

"child poverty is not inevitable"

and I could not agree more with that statement. As I have tried to demonstrate throughout my speech this afternoon, I welcome many of the statements contained within the Scottish Government's child poverty strategy and I look forward to the measures contained within it being met.

15:45

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I refer to the Child Poverty Act 2010, which contained the Labour Government's laudable aim and commitment, which was endorsed by other parties, to end child poverty by 2020. In 2010 child poverty was at 20 per cent and today it remains at 20 per cent. At best there has been no change, but I suspect that it is on the rise.

Why is it on the rise? Inflation, frozen and low wages, the bedroom tax and cuts in benefits all tell their own stories, and now we have the benefits cap. Those things all contribute to making it nigh on impossible for this Parliament to make much of a dent in the disgrace that is child poverty.

The Labour amendment says that the SNP Government is wholly responsible for the fact that the reduction in child poverty has “stalled”. I would be prepared to acknowledge that Labour might have a point if this Parliament had the full powers of an independent nation, but we do not. We work within a fixed budget, so we rob Peter to pay Paul: we take from justice to put into education, and we take from education to put into housing. There is not a money tree in the garden beside the garden lobby.

I will quote one of my favourite journalists, Iain Macwhirter, on the benefits cap:

“Labour is now on record as accepting the logic of an indefinite limit on welfare, something no party has ever proposed before because it locks in unfairness and penalises those least able to look after themselves. When Labour next attempt to abolish the bedroom tax they will be asked: what else are they going to cut to meet the £400m cost? Disability benefits, sickness, child benefits?”

There is rank hypocrisy in this chamber. We all wish to see an end to child poverty, but members who have been here for 15 years know that we can only mitigate; that is all that we can do. We mitigate in the face of a tide coming from London that makes it harder and harder. Labour members pose as socialists here. I am a socialist. There was hypocrisy in members going into the lobbies with the Conservatives. Michael Moore, Liberal Democrat MP in my constituency, and David Hamilton, Labour MP in my constituency, both supported the Tory benefits cap. How on earth can we say that socialism is alive on the Labour benches? I discount the Liberal Democrats.

Ed Miliband has his eye on the next general election and he has to win the votes of the shires. Going for people who are on benefits is good policy if Labour wants to win the south of England. Going on the side of the rich is good policy if Labour wants to win the south of England. It is out-Torying the Tories, much to my sadness.

I have seen all this before. I voted for Labour, under Wilson, but under the Wilson Government the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. Under Callaghan, the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. Under Blair, the rich got richer—certainly Mr Blair did—and the poor got poorer. Under Brown, the rich were protected from the tsunami of the recession and the poor have borne the brunt of payment of bankers’ bonuses.

Labour says that independence is a matter of the constitution. It is not, however, just to do with the constitution: it is to do with good people on the

Labour and Liberal Democrat benches being able to look at the poor children of Scotland and say, “We have the power here to do something about it.” We can set about making sure that our children and grandchildren grow up in a country where they have opportunities, instead of one where they learn to stand in line at food banks and where there is no job for them after they go to college or university.

Please—I do not want another debate about a strategy about poverty until we have real powers to do something about it.

15:50

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): Given that tackling child poverty is the biggest challenge that we face, I welcome the publication of Scottish Government’s revised child poverty strategy. It is an absolute scandal that in 21st century Scotland our children’s life chances are largely determined by their circumstances at birth. As colleagues have already pointed out, although we are one of the world’s richest countries, we are also one of the most unequal, with one in five of our children living in poverty.

Across the UK, the number of children living in poverty will rise from 2.4 million in 2010 to 3.4 million by 2020, by which time another 100,000 children in Scotland will be in poverty. I highlight the UK figures, because child poverty does not stop at the border and is not just an issue in Scotland. I want an end to child poverty not just in Dunfermline and Dundee, but in Durham and Doncaster.

Every family in the UK is paying the price of austerity. We are all facing a cost of living crisis that is deeper than we could have imagined and, as we all know, it is the poorest families and children who are being hit the hardest. The daily reality for more and more children is going to school with an empty belly, missing out on the school trips that their classmates go on, not having proper school shoes or a warm winter coat, and not having the same opportunities either now or in the future.

That cycle of disadvantage will last their whole lives. By the age of three, children from deprived backgrounds are already nine months behind; by the age of six, lower-achieving children from better-off backgrounds are outperforming higher-achieving children from poorer families; and by primary 7, the gap in attainment between children in poverty and their better-off peers is 22 per cent in reading and 15 per cent in maths. Such differentials persist throughout school and beyond, with one in five school leavers from deprived backgrounds going straight into unemployment compared with one in 10 of their better-off peers.

Behind every one of those statistics is a child whose life chances have been shaped not by their ability to learn, but by the poverty that they have endured.

Most scandalous of all is that the majority of those children in poverty have parents who are working—and who are working harder than ever. Mums who have two or three jobs on short-time and zero-hours contracts are struggling to make ends meet, and dads are working 40, 50 or even 60 hours a week, but are still not earning a living wage. Unable to afford childcare and fighting to keep a roof over their families' heads, many are turning to food banks as the only way to put food on the table. Many more are suffering the health consequences of living in damp or overcrowded housing, and let us not forget the mental impact of stress, anxiety and worry. These families are working harder than ever before, but are also being stretched harder than ever.

During the decade when Labour was in power in the UK, 1 million children were lifted out of poverty. When Labour left office in 2007, Scotland had the lowest—

Christian Allard: Cara Hilton's whole speech is about the UK. Can I remind her that we are in the Scottish Parliament and we are talking about Scotland?

In any case, had the member been at Westminster the other night, how would she have voted? Would she have voted for or against the benefits cap, or would she have abstained?

Cara Hilton: What my constituents in Dunfermline want to know is why, when they are facing a cost of living crisis, SNP MSPs are voting against a living wage and measures to end zero-hours contracts.

Christian Allard: What about the Tories?

Cara Hilton: The next bit of my speech is about the Tories.

We all oppose the Tory-led coalition at Westminster, which is handing out tax cuts to the rich and taking money from our poorest families—

Christian Allard: You support them!

Cara Hilton: I do not. I am in politics to make life better for everyone in this country and across the UK. I believe that we are better off together, and that we have more chance of lifting families out of poverty if we work together and share our resources. In Scotland, everyone across the political divide wants to tackle child poverty, which is why I am disappointed that the strategy does not do more to tackle poverty head-on.

Earlier Jayne Baxter mentioned some of the excellent initiatives in Fife. I certainly think that we need to be a lot more ambitious. I highlight an

excellent initiative that will shortly be launched in my Dunfermline constituency. It involves a free breakfast cafe being provided for children in Lynburn primary school, which is in the Abbeyview area. The area has one of the highest levels of multiple deprivation in Scotland. When I visit schools in my constituency, teachers tell me that the biggest problem is children coming to school hungry. One teacher told me that as many as one in four children in her class turns up hungry, and she has to give them breakfast cereal when they arrive. How is a child supposed to learn when he or she has not even had their breakfast?

If we are effectively to tackle disadvantage and poverty, it is essential that we target our help at the communities where it is needed most and where it will deliver the greatest benefit. I mentioned earlier that low pay is a huge issue that many families in poverty face. As I said in my response to Mr Allard, my constituents in Dunfermline want to know why, while they talk about tackling child poverty, SNP MSPs voted against Labour amendments that would have delivered a living wage for workers in public sector contracts. Ensuring that people have a living wage is essential if we are to tackle child poverty, and it is time that the Scottish Government used the powers that it already has to make that a reality.

The fact is that child poverty is about choices; we will tackle child poverty only if it is our number 1 priority. What we need is a redistribution of power and wealth, not a change to our borders and our constitution.

No child should be born to fail. We all have a responsibility to act to end child poverty. We will do that only if we put children in our communities first and make tackling poverty our top priority and put tackling the cycle of disadvantage at the absolute heart of everything that we do.

15:56

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The first three minutes of Cara Hilton's speech amounted to one of the best expositions of the need for independence for Scotland that I have heard in this chamber. It is unfortunate that the second three minutes was complete denial that there are powers that we would have to take to this place in order to achieve our aims. However, I enjoyed the first three minutes and agreed with much of what she said in that part of her speech.

On gender equality, I misled Parliament during my earlier intervention: the Scottish Government did not double the number of females getting modern apprenticeships; it quadrupled it. I would like to put that on the record as being a significant achievement.

I support the Scottish Government's child poverty strategy, which has three main themes. The first is "pockets": getting more money into people's pockets in tight financial times. The second is "prospects": improving the life chances of young people. The third is "places": making young people's environment and community all the better. Some people on the Opposition benches have said that we have put all that on hold while we wait for independence. That is completely untrue, and I will take a little time to explain how we have supported people and kept money in their pockets in tough financial times.

Only recently, we announced that we are extending free school meals to all pupils in the first three years of primary school. That will mean that families will be, on average, £330 a year better off and will not have to worry about whether their child gets a decent meal at school. That is the right thing to do just now, and we have delivered on it already.

On childcare, a 50 per cent extension in childcare is being delivered for three and four-year-olds and for 27 per cent of two-year-olds, which will save families thousands of pounds in childcare costs each year. Of course, we need to go further, and we will—after independence. I will return to that issue; no one need worry about that.

What about free prescriptions? Until this Government came to power, 600,000 families that were earning under £16,000 a year had to pay for medication when they were ill. That was simply unacceptable, so an SNP Government has addressed it in this Parliament.

I could go on. Nothing has been put "on hold" while we wait for independence; it is just that our aspirations go far beyond that.

On the situation that exists short of independence, I must talk about mitigating the savage UK cuts that have come to Scotland. In a three-year period alone, a quarter of a billion pounds of the Scottish Government's block grant has been directed at mitigating the worst effects of UK welfare reforms—a quarter of a billion pounds, just so that we can stand still and stop our weans getting poorer. That quarter of a billion pounds should be spent on improving the life chances of our children, not just on stopping them getting poorer. That is the aspiration of independence.

Let us look in a bit more detail at childcare. Politics is about choices. The briefing that we have received from Save the Children talks about increasing flexible childcare provision for children in primary schools, in particular. It also states:

"Save the Children's research has shown that, by the time children start school, children living in poverty are twice as likely to have development difficulties as their

peers across all key areas of development, including communication skills, physical health and cognitive ability."

Early-years intervention to ensure good quality early-years learning and childcare is vital if we are to address inequality and tackle child poverty—not just the poverty that someone experiences as a child, but the poverty that they may carry with them as a burden throughout their adult life and into old age because of their poor start in life. That is simply unacceptable. The significant increase in childcare under devolution is, therefore, most welcome.

The white paper talks about a revolutionary extension of childcare. That is vital. It is not going to be an overnight increase but, within two terms of an independent Scottish Parliament, there will be free universal childcare for every child from the age of 1 until they start school. That is 1,140 hours a year—the same number of hours that children spend in primary school. That represents a huge increase that will dramatically improve the quality of life of our children and directly tackle child poverty.

I will tell Parliament why we cannot do that short of independence: it will take money to do it. For the first tranche of the plan, we have earmarked £500 million—money that will come mainly from ditching Trident and UK defence expenditure. That money will instead be put directly into childcare.

However, even that commitment is not enough; we need to get the money that comes back from getting people off benefits and into work to come to this Parliament. When those people spend money in the real economy, the VAT and income tax that result from that must come back to this place. All those things are denied under devolution. When I shout for independence, I do not wave a flag to say, "Team Scotland"; I wave a flag to say that the children of Scotland need a better future and destiny. Westminster simply cannot deliver that—only an independent Scotland can. Short of that, the strategy that we are debating this afternoon will do all that it can with the limited powers that we have.

I will finish my speech with a story that I was not going to tell.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have 20 seconds.

Bob Doris: I will tell it in 18 seconds, Presiding Officer. As a child, I had dinner tickets, but I occasionally sold them and went without a meal because that gave me money. Some years, as a child, I did not know what it was like to have money. I want no other child to be in the situation that I was in from time to time. Only independence can make that happen.

16:02

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. In the words of Nicola Sturgeon, who has not honoured us with her presence today—she is obviously doing more important things—although her photograph is in the child poverty strategy,

“There is no doubt in my mind that tackling child poverty remains of fundamental importance to the success of our country—whether that is in education, employment or indeed to our overall prosperity.”

Who could disagree with that? I certainly will not try to.

The debate gives us the opportunity to recognise that child poverty is an area that we need to tackle. There is a lot of common interest, and there is agreement that we should be tackling it as a priority.

The debate also gives us an opportunity to condemn the decisions that have been made by others in another place—decisions that are having a direct and serious impact on our poor, through welfare reform. It is right that we do that. However, to suspend reality and say that if it was not for them everything would be all right is a cynical lie to the people who are in poverty or who are suffering inequality. We need also to look to our own, and we need also to get our house in order.

We share the ambition to make a difference, but we need to see the issue within the wider policies of the Scottish Government. We need to look at the policies that it is implementing now and evaluate how they are addressing its ambition to tackle poverty and inequality. We need to do that seriously, because that would allow us to judge whether, if the SNP ever gets independence, it could be tested on its record.

Let us look at what the SNP is doing. It has a nice wee slogan—“pockets, prospects and places”. Let us look at the “pockets”. In the lifetime of this Scottish nationalist Government we have seen rents increase. When the SNP came to power, the average registered social landlord rent was £51-odd week. Now, it is £67 a week. Those figures are from the Scottish Housing Regulator. People who live in rented accommodation—the working poor and the poor—are £800 worse off a year as a result of the SNP Government.

If the SNP is prepared to tolerate such policies—*[Interruption.]* I invite the minister to challenge the figures.

Margaret Burgess: I am not challenging Duncan McNeil’s figures. I am simply making the point that the Scottish Government does not set rents.

Duncan McNeil: Okay. The minister can sit down again, now. She cannot challenge the

figures, because they are the Scottish Housing Regulator’s figures. In the years of SNP Government those people are £800 worse off a year than they were when the SNP came to power. That is a simple fact—there is no denying it. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have a little bit of calm, please?

Duncan McNeil: Annabelle Ewing laughed at that. She has never paid rent in her life. She has never paid for her electricity, but do not worry about it.

Annabelle Ewing: Will Duncan McNeil take an intervention?

Duncan McNeil: No, I will not.

Bob Doris *rose—*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. The member is not taking an intervention.

Duncan McNeil: We have looked at the pound in people’s pockets. Now let us look at the “prospects”. We are talking about a Government that has cut college funding and has reduced the number of women at college, which has affected the ability of the mothers of our children to get on and get the skills that they need. The SNP has cut the college budget drastically, which has excluded people from the colleges.

Let us look at the “places”. Inverclyde, the Irvine valley and Clydebank are among the most deprived communities in Scotland. In Inverclyde alone, urban regeneration funding has been cut by £70 million. We judge the Scottish Government not by its words and its rhetoric, but by its actions. There is nothing in its actions or its wider policies to give us an indication that, if ever we were to choose independence, we would have a fairer country under the SNP. The SNP is not interested in that.

Christian Allard *rose—*

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

Duncan McNeil: The SNP was for independence when other Governments were in power; it has been in favour of independence for 80 years. Nothing will change the SNP’s mind. The only thing that SNP members believe in is independence. That, not social justice, is what took them into politics.

16:08

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I welcome the debate, which is extremely important. It is one of those debates in which we always look positively towards the future—even if Duncan McNeil changed that. Although we all have different

opinions, I do not doubt for a minute that every member believes that we must find a way to ensure that we get rid of child poverty across our nation.

However, I believe that the problem is that Westminster has continually failed our children over generations. The Westminster system has failed to provide for us. That is the debate that we should be having. We are talking about transformational change—the type of change that can radically alter things. That will come with independence, which will enable us to have the proper debate that we all want to have. That is our argument; it is about taking responsibility and getting the full powers over all our resources, to ensure that we make Scotland a better country for our young people to live in. For me, that is the most important part of the debate.

Liz Smith: I do not doubt the member's integrity in believing that the constitutional debate is important, but does he acknowledge that the SNP Government currently has the power to make choices about policies that could help to address child poverty?

George Adam: I say to Ms Smith that I referred to making the transformational change to address child poverty. Things have improved under devolution, but we do not have the powers to make the transformational change that will take us to the next level and ensure that we can look after all our young people and give them the beginning in life that they all deserve.

Earlier in the debate, people said that some SNP members do not know what poverty is like. I say to individuals who make those comments that my family are from Ferguslie Park in Paisley. They would never for one minute have believed that their grandson could end up sitting in the Scottish Parliament; in fact, they probably did not think that there would ever be a Scottish Parliament.

I will not listen to members who tell us that we do not understand what poverty is like. Ferguslie Park has been an area of multiple deprivation for the past 30 to 40 years. Whether there is a Labour or Tory Government at Westminster, that makes no difference to my people in my constituency. That is the issue.

Westminster will not help us with the welfare reforms. Families have a problem with disability living allowance and PIP.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

George Adam: I cannot take an intervention, as I have been given only five minutes.

I am the convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on multiple sclerosis. People with MS are going through the process for

PIP, and one of the triggers for MS is being under pressure and strain. For families who are in poverty, benefits may be their only form of income, because some people with MS cannot physically work. Of people with MS, 80 per cent do not work. Do we want the kind of Scotland where we put those people into a life of poverty because of a Westminster Government?

Renfrewshire Council's director of social work, Peter Macleod, says that he is dealing with third-generation drug users in some families in parts of my constituency and throughout Renfrewshire. Is that the type of Scotland that we want to live in? Is that what Westminster has provided for the people of Scotland and the people in my constituency? That is not the future that I want and it is not what we want.

We need full control. The Scottish Parliament needs the full powers, so that we can have the proper debate. As Christine Grahame said, we have to move away from debates in which we blame other people. I am talking about taking responsibility and being able to stand up and say that we can make a difference.

If any member in the chamber is asked why they got involved in politics, they will say that they did so to make a difference in their community and a difference in people's lives. I do not doubt their commitment, although we might argue about how we get there. I believe that only independence will give our people and our nation the opportunity to make the transformational change that we all want. Let us get down to having the proper debates in this chamber.

16:13

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): In this wealthy nation, why are so many children living in poverty? Scotland has enough wealth for all our families to have a chance to prosper in life, yet inequality is increasing. When we think about tackling child poverty, we focus—rightly—on families who are poor. It is important to recognise that those families did not choose to be in poverty. The political scientist Susan George reminds us to look at the bigger picture—the context. She asks us to study the rich, not the poor. She points to the fact that we have neglected to think about poverty in terms of equality and the redistribution of power and money.

We know that the gap between the poor and the rich and between the powerful and the less powerful means that thousands face multiple deprivations. This week, I was in discussion with Government health officials, who are acutely aware that poverty and health inequalities are a wicked problem that takes years to tackle. The child poverty rate has dropped by 10 per cent over

10 years, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation—it has dropped faster than in England, although we started from a higher level—yet child poverty continues to blight the life chances of far too many in this wealthy developed country.

In line with my point about choosing to focus only on those who are in poverty, we should not be deluded into thinking that welfare reform is the sole solution to poverty. However, it is important to recognise that UK cuts will make and are making the situation worse. Save the Children has said that the cap on welfare spending that MPs have approved will push 345,000 children into poverty over the next four years.

Jim McCormick's "A Review of Devolved Approaches to Child Poverty", which was published last year by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, says:

"The single biggest risk to progress"

on addressing poverty

"is common to all: as welfare reform continues, benefit cuts and growing use of ... sanctions will increase demand for hardship support."

The voodoo economics of austerity is having a particular impact on women and children. The Fawcett Society has estimated that a fifth of British women's income comes from benefits. The figure for men is a 10th. Therefore, the loss of benefits and services hits women hardest. Women are also more likely to be employed in public sector jobs that are at risk of austerity cuts, and as state services are withdrawn, it is women who tend to fill the gap as unpaid carers, for example.

The Scottish Government's plan to increase childcare hours and flexibility will directly help to address that issue. Affordable childcare is essential to helping people get back into the labour market and enabling them to take up opportunities for work or training. We need to ensure that those work and training opportunities are available and are of the highest possible quality.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has explored the effect of poverty on children's education. Its research showed that aspirations for our children are high across all socioeconomic groups. Some 97 per cent of mothers in low-income families want their children, when they are born, to attend university in future, but the correlation between educational attainment and household income is well documented and remains a huge challenge.

One set of interventions that relates to attitudes and aspirations currently has a solid evidence base behind it: parental involvement interventions. That is no surprise when we consider that parents are their children's first educators. If those parents

are juggling poorly paid jobs on zero-hours contracts and are reliant on food banks when the hours are indeed zero, they will be stretched to the limit simply getting through the week, never mind helping their children with homework.

The Jimmy Reid Foundation's excellent contribution to the debate in Scotland is entitled "In Place of Anxiety: Social Security for the Common Weal". The authors, Willie Sullivan and Ailsa McKay, have made an incredible contribution to Scotland over the years. They talk about social security for the common weal and a focus on tackling the poverty wages that create in-work poverty. They say:

"There is little link between a growing economy and a better society in Britain today; 61 per cent of children in poverty have at least one parent in full or part-time work".

We know that, for the first time, more than half of people in poverty live in a working family.

Ailsa McKay was also a strong advocate of the citizen's basic income. It has long been my party's policy to replace the incredible complexity of the welfare system with a simple, unconditional monthly payment to everyone. The Jimmy Reid Foundation paper puts forward an illustrative, almost cost-neutral proposal in which every child receives the 2012-13 income support rates.

There is much more that we can do to break from the economics of austerity, inequality, poor jobs and low wages, and those things are essential to tackling child poverty. I welcome the Scottish Government's revised strategy, including the focus on household resources, life chances and creating well-designed and sustainable places to live in. It is absolutely essential that we measure our economic success by how we close the gap between rich and poor and create a fairer society for our children.

16:18

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Let me start by addressing what my colleague George Adam addressed. SNP members are not what the Labour Party is trying to portray us as. We heard Jackie Baillie talk about when she lived in the most deprived area of Glasgow. I lived in such areas in the 1980s when they were under Tory or Thatcher rule. Duncan McNeil, who is not in the chamber now, asked whether we had ever paid rent. I have. I have struggled to pay rent. I had to call my landlord, who was not the Scottish Government, to check whether I could postpone paying my rent.

The Labour Party must understand, please, that we are all in the same place and that, when we talk about child poverty, we are parents and that we all struggle at one point or another in our lives. Anyone can struggle at one point or another in

their life. Labour members do not have a monopoly of wisdom on child poverty, particularly after what happened at Westminster last night.

To repeat a statement that I have made before in the Parliament—some of my colleagues have made the point, too—Scotland is a wealthy country, and it is unacceptable that one in five children lives in poverty. In the debate on welfare a few weeks ago, I spoke about my visit to a food bank in the heart of the oil capital of Europe, Aberdeen. In 2012, volunteers there gave 1,343 food parcels to families but, the following year, that had increased by 127 per cent to 3,051. In that debate, I asked Conservative members what explanation there is for such an increase if it is not the implementation of the welfare cuts from Westminster, but I am still waiting for an answer.

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Christian Allard: Yes—if the member has an answer.

Liz Smith: We fully appreciate that there are difficult choices to be made, but the clear purpose of the welfare changes that have to be implemented is to ensure that work pays. There is general agreement on that across the political spectrum. That is the reason for the changes and it is the reason why we will pursue them, despite some of the opposition about some of the difficulties.

Christian Allard: Liz Smith must have missed my speech a few weeks ago. That food bank is in the city of Aberdeen, where there is full employment but where 16 per cent of children are in poverty. If that is not because of the Westminster cuts, what could the reason be? There is no other answer. The reason for the 127 per cent increase in the number of food parcels from 2012 to 2013 has to be the Westminster cuts. The people who go to the food bank in Aberdeen are all parents, and their children will suffer as a result.

Questions have been asked about the constitutional issue. Under the present constitutional arrangement, it is impossible to eradicate child poverty. We just have to look at the front benches at Westminster to understand that doing that is not on their agenda, and we saw that last night in the welfare debate. The renewal of the nuclear weapon system is on their agenda, however. Three parties—the Liberal Democrats, or what is left of them, the Conservatives and the Labour Party—still do not want to put a cap on Trident, but they want to put a cap on welfare reform, and they voted for that last night.

We have heard from the Labour Party that the agenda of cuts will be deeper and tougher than Margaret Thatcher's cuts in the 1980s, which, as I said, was the decade when I came to this country.

In this Parliament, we take a different direction. I am proud that the Parliament came together to mitigate the effect of the bedroom tax, but what a waste of energy and of public money. The Parliament in London spent public money to impose a policy on Scotland, only for the Parliament in Scotland to waste more public money to mitigate the effects of that policy. Liam McArthur asked why we do not cover the issue in the white paper, but there is no need for that. We will not need to mitigate the welfare cuts in an independent Scotland, because there will be no welfare cuts from the Westminster Government.

I want to live in a country where we have eradicated child poverty. I will vote for the Government motion tonight, and I urge Scotland to vote yes on 18 September.

16:23

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): It would be fair to describe my constituency of Aberdeen Donside as having poverty amidst plenty. We have some very rich communities in my constituency and, in the Bridge of Don council ward, less than 5 per cent of children live in poverty; yet, in Northfield, the figure is 32 per cent. Both those communities sit in the same constituency. I note from the Scottish index of multiple deprivation that, of the 35 Aberdeen data zones that are in the 0 to 5 per cent, 5 to 10 per cent, 10 to 15 per cent and 15 to 20 per cent bands, 14 are in my constituency.

It is worth remembering that poverty of income does not necessarily and should not equate to poverty of love and that, for many children who live with poverty of income, there is no poverty of love. Those who are attacking the incomes of some of the poorest in our society can take away hope and aspiration, but they cannot take away the love that is contained in a family unit.

I have not been here for the entire debate—I had to nip out for an important constituency-related meeting—but, at times, it has seemed a little bit like the Monty Python sketch with the Yorkshire men sitting around and comparing their backgrounds, with one saying, "We used to live in a shoebox down the road" and the other responding, "Shoe box? You were lucky—we lived in a hole in t' road." There has been a little bit too much one-upmanship about who has experienced the most poverty.

Children do not choose the circumstances into which they are born. Some children are very lucky to be born into circumstances in which they do not experience poverty; other children are born into a situation not of their or their parents' choosing or making in which they do experience poverty. However, for those of us who have a duty as

representatives, whether our background is such that we or our families have experienced poverty or not, our ability to care or do something about poverty is not eliminated. With its child poverty strategy, the Government shows that it cares and is willing to do something about poverty. That is reflected in the strong comments on the strategy from organisations committed to dealing with child poverty.

It is also worth remembering that there but for the grace of God go us all. We are all only a lost job or a serious illness away from potentially dropping into poverty. We should never forget that anyone, at any stage of life, can find themselves in a state of destitution, and we must ensure that the safety net that people require is there for us all when we need it, if we need it.

Part of the debate has been dominated by our views on the constitution, and the chamber is divided on that issue. The Labour Party often uses the slogan, "Powers for a purpose"—it is the title of its devolution commission report. The idea that, somehow, those of us on the SNP benches seek powers simply for our own sake, as if they were trinkets or baubles to hang on a Christmas tree and not something that we want to actively use to further our nation, to benefit the communities and to do more for the people and children who find themselves in poverty, and that a monopoly of caring about such things—

Kezia Dugdale: Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: No, I have only five minutes to deliver my speech.

The idea that a monopoly of caring on child poverty exists is deeply unfortunate. I do not doubt that members across the chamber care deeply about the issues that are faced by people who find themselves in the most difficult circumstances. I am, however, really frustrated when we must stop, pause and reflect on our ability to tackle the issues that people face in our communities.

We do not have control over the welfare state to make changes to welfare. I have attended events with Alison Johnstone that have looked at a citizen's basic income. There is a debate to be had about how the welfare state is shaped. It is not in our gift to have that debate in this chamber; that debate must be had elsewhere.

In essence, we have a leaking roof and we must put down buckets to catch the drops but, if we do not have enough buckets, that is just too bad and some parts of the floor will get wet. It cannot be the aspiration of this Parliament that all we do is mitigate; we must have the ability to transform and to change. Independence brings powers for a purpose, which is why I cannot fathom why the Labour Party is so obstinate in its opposition to the

possibility of having those powers for this chamber.

16:28

Liam McArthur: It is difficult to know what to make of the debate. There have been excellent speeches from Alison Johnstone and Jayne Baxter, and Siobhan McMahon gave her usual passionate articulation of the case of those with disabilities. Mark McDonald's speech was measured and passionately argued; Jamie Hepburn's speech was excellent, too. Although we may arrive at different conclusions about how we address the issues, there is no one here who could or should claim a monopoly of concern or of desire to do more to tackle poverty.

Liz Smith started the debate by reminding us of the recent falls in child poverty in Scotland and across the UK, but the figures remain too high, and the IFS report does give us pause for thought and concern.

A number of members highlighted the effects of poverty and what it can mean, particularly for children, for whom the effects can be particularly invidious.

As I said at the outset, I welcome the child poverty action plan. Whether pockets, prospects and places is better alliteration than what Jackie Baillie came up with 12 months ago, I leave others to decide. Nevertheless, I believe that it focuses on the right three strands.

We are seeing an economic recovery and it appears to be taking hold. Despite the fact that we were told that it would never happen and that the SNP has taken credit for it, it has resulted in 130,000 more jobs in Scotland since 2010 and that has a material effect on the pockets of those who are in poverty or on lower incomes.

On prospects, the point has been made about early intervention. In his speech, Bob Doris set out absolutely correctly the rationale behind early intervention and the benefits that can arise from getting that right. I did not support every aspect of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill but it is a progressive step forward. I welcome the advances that were made for those going through the care system, because they were a stand-out achievement of the bill. I also welcome the improvements to free childcare that we made through the bill process. I would like to see the Government going further, but we were initially told that any extension of free childcare and nursery provision for two-year-olds could happen only under independence. I welcome the fact that there was a change of heart about that, but we can and should still do more.

Places have been less of a focus during the debate, although George Adam, Bob Doris, and Cara Hilton all pointed to personal experience of life in areas of multiple deprivation. Mark McDonald might have been slightly unfair in characterising that as being akin to the Monty Python “Four Yorkshiremen” sketch, but he was right to point to the experience of such deprivation in his constituency. He would probably recognise that poverty is not simply an urban phenomenon; it is very much a feature of many rural areas as well.

It strikes me that this has been the latest debate to find itself sucked into the all-consuming maw of the referendum debate. The tone was set by the minister and we were then treated to a series of tirades from SNP members about welfare reform and how everything would be different if Scotland were to leave the UK. Indeed, the Deputy First Minister never tires of telling us that ending child poverty is simply a question of voting yes in the referendum.

With those expectations raised, I imagine how distraught Annabelle Ewing, Christine Grahame, Bob Doris and other members must have been when they received their newly minted copies of the white paper, simply offering a prospectus of no change. It assures us that welfare will be fairer and simpler, but apparently

“Becoming independent will not, in itself, change your entitlement.”

The white paper goes on:

“Where people can work they should work.”

As for the cap on welfare, as Jackie Baillie rightly indicated, we are left wondering what to think given the First Minister’s full-throated support of a cap in an interview in the *Sunday Post* last year. SNP members were rebelling against their leader at Westminster last night, and further confusion reigns with the white paper’s deafening silence on whether there will be any additional funding.

For all that SNP members never tire of condemning cuts to welfare—although we have a budget that, despite the reforms, continues to rise in Scotland, and we should not forget that—there is no evidence that the SNP is proposing anything very different under independence. Indeed, the SNP’s fiscal commission says that the Scottish Government will have to match the UK Government’s trajectory on debt reduction, and John Swinney agrees.

As for Atos, which has been rightly criticised in many respects, let us not forget that it is a company to which the SNP Government has been happy to award lucrative health service contracts.

Christian Allard: Will the member give way?

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

Liam McArthur: No, thank you.

The Government even chipped in with £3 million for a new Atos headquarters in Forres. So let us strip away the constitutional smokescreen that requires that Westminster is always wrong and the SNP is always right and focus on what both of Scotland’s Governments, in collaboration with a great many others in the public, private, and third sectors, can and should be doing.

The action plan on child poverty is welcome and its approach is right, but if we are constantly being distracted by discussions about the powers that we do not have rather than using the powers that we do have, I fear that we will not deliver the aspirations that lie behind it.

I commend the amendment in my name.

16:34

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I first want to thank Duncan McNeil, who reminded me about the passionate debates that Labour, the Lib Dems, the SNP and the Conservatives had on child poverty between 1999 and 2007. Although we all disagreed on the policy approaches to child poverty, we did at least all debate child poverty, unlike today. I thank Duncan McNeil for taking me back to that time.

On all measures, child poverty across the UK has fallen quite considerably over the past 15 years. The number of children in absolute income poverty has fallen by 2 million since 1998-99. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in Scotland, in a United Kingdom, our rates have declined by 9.9 per cent, compared with 5.5 per cent in England. That translates into 60,000 fewer children in relative poverty since 2008-09, with overall levels at their lowest mark since records began in 1994-95. As others have said, although those statistics are welcome, they are of little comfort to those families who are below the breadline.

Although some local authorities, such as Orkney, Shetland and Aberdeenshire, have single-digit rates of child poverty, in Dundee the ratio is one in four and in Glasgow it is one in three. On that point, it beggars belief that the Scottish Government sees fit to turn a debate about child poverty into yet another rammy about independence. Child poverty is a social issue, an economic issue and an educational issue, but it is most definitely not a constitutional issue.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: I also welcome the publication of the Scottish Government's—

Aileen Campbell: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: I will give way to someone who wants to talk about child poverty. I am not giving way to someone who wants to talk about a separate Scotland—and that includes you, minister. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that Mary Scanlon has made it quite clear that she is not giving way.

Mary Scanlon: I welcome the publication of the Scottish Government's child poverty strategy, which is required every three years under an act of the Labour Government in 2010.

As Save the Children has recognised, there is a need to develop local policy responses that recognise the quite wide disparities that exist between and within our councils. In other words, instead of constantly comparing Scotland with England, we in the Scottish Parliament should be focusing on the inequalities within Scotland. Unusually, I want to thank Mark McDonald very much, because he was the only one in this debate who did that. He is absolutely right about the figures, which I have here. The district of Hazlehead has a child poverty rate of below 5 per cent, while in nearby Northfield it is 32 per cent. Those are areas separated by less than 4 miles, but in poverty terms they are worlds apart. I should say that that problem is not specific to Aberdeen; the same can be said for Inverness, Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow and other places. However, it does suggest the need, as Save the Children has highlighted, for concerted action locally.

In its 2012 report, Save the Children found that only 16 per cent of councils in Scotland had developed a child poverty action plan and less than half had identified child poverty as a political priority.

Alison Johnstone: On the cap on welfare reform, Save the Children's director of UK poverty said:

"Parties need to explain how they will work to improve wages and welfare to ensure that work pays."

Will the member comment on how her party will do that at Westminster?

Mary Scanlon: Absolutely at the heart of welfare reform is making work pay. I have no problem with that. I point out that I took an intervention from Alison Johnstone because I thought that she made an excellent speech, which was measured and focused on child poverty, not independence.

It is no coincidence that much of the fall in child poverty relates to improvements in employment

rates. For example, throughout Britain the number of children in workless households has fallen by 274,000 since 2010, reaching its lowest level since records began. The number of people in work has increased by 1.3 million. Work remains the quickest route out of poverty, something that opponents of the UK Government tend to forget. The best way to improve employability is to acquire the necessary skills to compete and thrive in the workplace.

I have not heard the phrase "lifelong learning" in years. In the first eight years of the Parliament, we used to talk about it, but I do not think that I have heard the Government mention it. It is absolutely imperative that adults have opportunities to retrain and develop new skills, but cuts to the college budget prevent that.

According to the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, we now have 75,000 fewer learners aged between 25 and 59 in further education. Audit Scotland highlights that there have been 143,000 fewer part-time students since the SNP came to power.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will the member close, please?

Mary Scanlon: Although I fully recognise the need to tackle youth employment, let us not forget those who are over 19 and 24.

16:41

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I express my gratitude to all the organisations that provided briefings for the debate. I read them with great interest and will refer to three that I found to be particularly challenging to the Government. I hope that, if the Minister for Children and Young People values the work that those organisations do every day, she will give them the courtesy of a response in her closing speech.

Children in Scotland highlighted the impact of the council tax freeze on childcare services—in particular the impact that it has in poorer areas. The organisation notes that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has also made that point, so I would be interested to hear what the Government has to say about that.

Save the Children pointed in its briefing to the significant gap in out-of-school childcare in the child poverty strategy. I would be interested to hear what plans Aileen Campbell has to address that.

CPAG says in its briefing:

"To date there is little evidence of systematic proofing of budget decisions across government for their impact on child poverty and socio-economic inequality."

The briefing goes on to highlight the fact that there is no reference to child poverty in any of the budget lines for housing, health or education. We need a whole-Government approach to child poverty and we have not heard a tremendous amount about that.

I am angry about levels of child poverty in Scotland. There is no doubt that that anger is shared across the parties. I am sure that it is heartfelt and sincere, but it would be more authentic if the Government's record on housing, health and education stood up to scrutiny. The points that Duncan McNeil made on those policy areas, in a blistering decimation of the Government's case, were particularly strong.

Bob Doris: Will Kezia Dugdale give way?

Kezia Dugdale: If Bob Doris will give me a little bit more space, I will come on to some of his points in a second.

I will take one of the issues from the Government's strategy—education—and examine it in detail. I will address the points that Mr Doris made in his speech when I do that. Educational attainment is key to tackling child poverty. The Government has known since 2007 that we have a problem in our schools with young boys in that our school system fails boys from working-class communities, and we have done little to address it.

The Wood commission report is promising. I look forward to seeing the next stage of it on Monday. It looks forward to more vocational education in our school system. I recently visited Helsinki, which already has a two-tier school system, part of which is vocational. It is interesting that, if we ask people in Finland what is wrong with their school system, they say that the one group that they still fail is working-class boys. We can learn much from Finland, but in a way we need to look beyond that to what the solutions might be.

Another example of educational inequality concerns implementation of the curriculum for excellence. Last week, *Holyrood* magazine exposed a massive increase in the number of private tutors in Scotland. There has been a 300 per cent increase in use of them in the past year alone, 95 per cent of which has come from state schools. It is predominantly a case of middle-class parents who are worried about their kids passing their exams buying in help to get them ready for school. Some families are spending £1,900 making sure that their kids get one hour of tuition 38 weeks a year for one course. Across a number of subjects, they could be paying fourfold that £1,900.

The Government is celebrating its progress on education maintenance allowance but, when we dig below the Government statistics that were published today, we find that there are 2,365 fewer

people in our colleges getting education maintenance allowance. That is the equivalent of £2.9 million-worth of support for the poorest students in our colleges, which is another horrific statistic around the Government's agenda when it comes to colleges.

Statistics today from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council about widening access to university are troubling, as they indicate that the number of students at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Stirling from Scottish index of multiple deprivation 20 districts is falling, and that the number of students at Edinburgh, Napier, Stirling, Dundee and Aberdeen universities from SIMD 40 areas is falling. We were told that the whole point of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill was to widen and increase access to education, but under this Government it is falling. Members can look at the statistics for proof of that.

On childcare, I recently launched—along with a number of Labour colleagues—the every step campaign for affordable and flexible childcare. We would like to look beyond the 600 hours debate. We were very proud to support the Government's Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, but we need to get past the retail politics around hours and look at the wider issues around the childcare agenda of quality, affordability and flexibility.

We are in the early days of the every step campaign, but I have met the mum of a three-year-old who has spent £19,000 in the past two years bringing in childcare to look after her child; and I have met a granny in Portobello who flies in from Malaga on a Monday and flies out on a Thursday to look after some kids because doing it is cheaper than paying for childcare. So, money is going to a low-cost airline instead of the mother being able to access the childcare that she should have for her kids.

As Alison Johnstone said earlier, we know that child poverty is linked to educational attainment—in particular, the educational attainment level of the primary carer, who tends to be the mum. She made pertinent points on that, but I say to her that if someone's highest level of qualification is a general standard grade, they have a 50 per cent chance of being employed at the moment; if it is a higher national certificate or a higher national diploma, their chance is 74 per cent; and if it is a degree, their chance is 81 per cent.

If this country wants to get women into work, we must first give them the appropriate skills. However, they cannot get in the doors of the colleges because of decisions that have been made by the Scottish Government. There are now 88,000 fewer women in our colleges than were in them in 2007. Working that out year by year from 2007 to 2012, it means that 242,000 women have

failed to get to college since the Government came to power in 2007.

The minister is shaking her head. I would like her to stand up and reject those statistics, which are from the Scottish funding council. Does she deny them? The Government cannot deny them because the blunt reality is that they are true.

I want to move on to what the white paper "Scotland's Future—Your Guide to an Independent Scotland" says on the childcare agenda. We know that it has not been completed yet and that the Government has not done any modelling around it, which is why I was surprised to hear the First Minister boast on "Politics Scotland" that he had got 60,000 women back into employment in the past year and that the large majority of the jobs were full time. If he could do 60,000 in one year, he could do 104,000 over the next five years. However, those 60,000 women did not return to full-time work, because the vast majority are doing part-time, low-skilled and low-paid work. Last week's labour force statistics tell us that the majority of the women concerned were over 50, so they were not mums accessing the labour market.

Yes, we are lifting people out of poverty, but that is undermining the Government's case in the white paper because the case for its childcare policy is built on income tax receipts. If women return to work part time on a low wage, they do not pay income tax. The white paper's childcare proposal falls down because of that. It is no wonder that the National Day Nurseries Association has described it as "unworkable".

Aileen Campbell: Will Kezia Dugdale take an intervention?

Kezia Dugdale: I am afraid that I am in my final minute.

Bob Doris referred to modern apprenticeships. I say to him that, yes, there has been an increase in the number of women undertaking modern apprenticeships, but when he looks at the details he will see that the vast majority of that increase has come in administration, hospitality and retail modern apprenticeships, which are level 2 qualifications that take about six months. What we are not seeing is an increase in the number of women undertaking traditional apprenticeships, which take three or four years and would massively increase women's ability to access decently paid employment. That is our criticism of the Government's modern apprenticeship framework.

Bob Doris: Will Kezia Dugdale give way?

Kezia Dugdale: I have 30 seconds left. I am sorry about that. I will take an intervention if the

Presiding Officer will give me a minute more to close.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): No.

Kezia Dugdale: I cannot take the intervention.

I will try to end on a positive note, if I can. The child poverty strategy is for 2014 to 2017, so it will outlive the referendum, the next general election and this Parliament. We should remember that. The greatest service that we can do the strategy is to debate it regularly, challenge it and seek to better it. If we seek to work together in that regard, we can all unite behind a shared commitment to eradicate child poverty.

16:49

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): As many members have said in the debate, child poverty represents a waste of human potential, of talents unknown and of futures untapped, which is why it is important for the success of our country that we tackle the issue. Significant progress has been made, but the numbers remain far too high.

An even graver cause for concern is that the regressive UK welfare reforms stand to condemn even more children to poverty. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has predicted—as members have mentioned—that an additional 50,000 children will be living in poverty, and CPAG suggests that the number could be as high as 100,000. Whatever the figures, the uncomfortable truth is that child poverty is an absolute scandal for our country. Our Government's strategy sets out under the three broad headings of pockets, prospects and places approaches that are all key elements in tackling child poverty with the devolved powers that we have.

I am glad that members have generally welcomed our refreshed "Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland" and the context and approach that have been outlined. We have published as part of the revised strategy our outcomes framework, which was informed by an advisory group that included CPAG. This summer, we will publish our monitoring and reporting framework as part of the annual report on the strategy.

Annabelle Ewing was right to say that the approach in our strategy was drawn up using the expertise of our partners in the third, voluntary and statutory sectors. The strategy has been welcomed by those partners. For instance, Mark Ballard of Barnardo's Scotland said that he welcomed

"the renewed commitment by the Scottish Government to eliminating child poverty."

We will continue to work with Barnardo's and other partners in the advisory group and in general civic

life throughout Scotland to ensure that we make progress on what is outlined in our newly published strategy.

Jamie Hepburn, Jayne Baxter, Liz Smith, Bob Doris and Alison Johnstone all mentioned the crucial importance of the early years and the need to ensure that we give children the very best start in life and lay the firm foundations to allow our young people to emerge into adulthood and to contribute positively to our society.

Our strategy recognises the importance of early years in the context of the points that Jamie Hepburn and others raised about how poverty impacts on children's development. That is why the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill is so important. Its hallmark is early intervention, and it increases the hours of high-quality, flexible early learning and childcare. At the start of this year, we expanded that childcare provision further because we got our own money back through consequential, which allowed us to do so.

The bill articulates the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and shifts us from a welfare deficit model to a wellbeing SHANARRI—safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included—model. It is important to remember that the “I” in SHANARRI stands for “included”, and to recognise the impact of poverty on a child's wellbeing and inclusion. The bill embeds the key elements of our unique approach to children's services through getting it right for every child, and ensures that children are not stigmatised and do not go hungry through its free school meals provisions, which was a point that Bob Doris and other members made passionately.

However, we do not have only the bill at hand. Our strategy mentions the early years task force, which administers the £272 million early years change fund, and our groundbreaking multi-agency early years collaborative, which is delivering tangible results for children throughout the country.

Given Liam McArthur's response to my intervention on the impact of UK welfare reforms and the inexcusable lack of understanding of his colleague Alistair Carmichael about what his welfare reforms would do when he was asked at the Health and Sport Committee how many children would be impacted by welfare reforms, I tell him that we should be judged by our actions. We are doing our utmost using the tools that we have, as outlined in our strategy, but our work is being undone by the welfare reforms.

An additional 50,000 to 100,000 children will be forced into poverty. Mary Scanlon needs to realise that her Government—which we did not elect—is undermining our work on tackling poverty here in

Scotland. She should reflect on that, because there is in Scotland the clear focus on child poverty that she demanded of speakers in this afternoon's debate.

Liam McArthur: The minister still has not answered the point that lay behind the criticism that I levelled. It is quite within SNP members' rights to say that all will be very different under independence, but until the SNP can set out a revision to its white paper to explain how it will put £2.5 billion back into the budget to cover additional welfare costs, all those statements ring hollow.

Aileen Campbell: I remind Liam McArthur that he did not answer my question about how much he has lobbied his UK Government on tackling child poverty in this country.

However, it is not just in the early years that we are taking action. We passed the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill to widen access to learning and allow opportunities for more young people—something that Labour voted against. I remind everyone that women still constitute the majority of students and that Michael Russell announced £6.6 million for extra places, including for women returners.

Many members mentioned the living wage. The buff and bluster from those on the Labour benches was astounding. We in this Government are leading by example by ensuring that all staff who are covered by public sector pay policy are paid the living wage. That is a real, tangible, progressive move by this SNP Government. Our proposals, which are set out in the white paper, ensure that we will increase the minimum wage at least in line with inflation.

I pause for a moment to reflect on Alison Johnstone's speech, which was thoughtful and incredibly informative. She asked why, in this incredibly rich nation of ours, we have such inequality. I was interested in her remarks about the gendered nature of poverty, which is something that we need to tackle well and properly.

Susan George's research into the redistribution of power links with Mark McDonald's comments about our party seeking power to make a positive and progressive difference to our country. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world in which to grow up. We are doing a great deal with the powers that we have, but in my view the most likely route to making that ambition a reality is through possession of all the powers of a modern, successful, socially just country that cares for its most vulnerable and provides opportunities for each and every child who lives there.

The undeniable truth is that, while Westminster remains in control of taxation and welfare, we will always be mitigating the worst impacts of

decisions taken elsewhere that are not designed to suit our nation's needs or values. Christine Grahame pointed that out. An example is the bedroom tax: that destructive measure that punishes the poorest in our society was imposed on Scotland despite 90 per cent of Scottish MPs voting against it.

What do our choices mean if we choose to vote yes in September? What are the options available to us? Margaret Burgess, Bob Doris and Christine Grahame outlined the white paper's plans on taxation, welfare and the minimum wage and our aspirations to build a fairer country, but also to focus on the early years. The evidence that links early intervention and investment in the crucial early years with the achievement of positive outcomes in later life is absolutely clear. That is why our vision for early learning and childcare is to match the very best in Europe, with high-quality childcare and a system that can remove a significant barrier to work or training for parents, particularly women. If we emulate Swedish levels of female participation in the workplace, we can generate £700 million to reinvest back into funding childcare.

Our ambitions for childcare are the hallmark of our approach to social and economic policy. We promote the measures that we promote because they advance both our economy and our society. Academic Bruce Perry of the Child Trauma Academy told me that he believes that small developed nations such as Scotland have a great opportunity to be at the forefront of progressive social policy. To be progressive, become fairer and make a positive difference for children and families, we need independence.

I do not agree that people in Scotland are not genetically programmed to make political decisions, and I certainly do not agree with Jackie Baillie, who said that Scotland should not develop its own welfare system. It seems that Labour believes that we in Scotland are uniquely incapable of making political or social decisions and that we are better letting the big boys down in London control the economic levers that would enable Scotland to manage its welfare. That is quite bizarre, given that her colleagues walked arm in arm through the lobby at Westminster last night. I suppose that they did at least vote, unlike when they had the chance to stymie the bedroom tax last year and the chance to vote against scrapping the 50p rate in 2012.

Labour's position is incoherent, and its propping up of a Westminster system that has created one of the most unequal countries in the developed world is heartbreaking, because the consequences of that system are more and more children facing poverty on a scale that children's charities have described as a humanitarian crisis.

It does not have to be like this. Another Scotland is possible. We have the wealth and the talent to make our country fairer. A new constitution from day 1 of independence could embed social and economic rights for each and every one of our citizens, if we dare to imagine.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): One moment, minister. Will members keep the noise down a wee bit?

Aileen Campbell: With independence, we can create a country that will be the best place for children to grow up in. I say that from the heart. I joined the independence movement not because I wanted to change flags but because I wanted to change our society. As a politician, I am not content to persevere with child poverty being a scar on our national conscience.

I believe that, with independence, we can open up the choices that are presented to our country. The alternative is to continue mitigating and softening the blows of regressive decisions that are taken elsewhere by a Parliament with different priorities and a Government that is pursuing harsh welfare reforms that will cut £2.5 billion from Scottish households and undo all the work that we are doing to support children and families.

I am not genetically programmed to allow that unfairness to continue. This Government is not genetically programmed to stand by and accept that inequality, which should not be allowed to persist. A yes vote in September will show the people of Scotland that we are capable—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Minister, your time is up.

Aileen Campbell: —and able to create a fairer country. That is the Scotland that I want for our children.

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 amendment S4M-09482.1, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09482, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on child poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)

Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 81, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-09482.3, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09482,

in the name of Margaret Burgess, on child poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-09482.2, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09482, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on child poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)

Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)

McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 5, Against 94, Abstentions 11.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09482, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on child poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-

shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 16, Abstentions 29.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's revised *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland*, recognising widespread stakeholder support for the continued focus on maximising household resources, improving children's life chances and developing sustainable places; further welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to provide free school meals for all children in P1 to P3 and the increase in early learning and childcare provision to 600 hours a year for three and four-year-olds and the most vulnerable two-year-olds; acknowledges that the gains on child poverty that have been achieved during the lifetime of the Parliament are being reversed by the welfare cuts and reforms of the UK Government, and recognises that it is only when the Parliament has full control over welfare policy and spending that it will be able to properly address child poverty in Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:05.

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