



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 26 February 2014

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 26 February 2014

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

Portfolio Question Time

Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions. I have a huge number of prenotified supplementary question requests, so in order to get in as many members as possible, I would prefer succinct questions, with answers to match, please.

Glasgow City Council (Meetings)

1. Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of Glasgow City Council. (S4O-02927)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): The Scottish Government regularly meets representatives of Scotland's councils, including Glasgow City Council, to discuss a range of issues.

Paul Martin: Will the minister enlighten me on whether, in his discussions with Glasgow City Council or any other council, he has said whether the Government still intends to introduce its flagship policy of implementing a local income tax?

Derek Mackay: Paul Martin will welcome the Scottish Government's delivery of the council tax freeze for a number of previous years and again in this financial year. We will produce in this parliamentary session a consultation on replacement of the unfair council tax, in line with what is in the manifesto on which the Scottish National Party was elected to government.

Independence (Currency)

2. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what economic risks an independent Scotland would face if it was to use sterling without being in a formal currency union with the rest of the United Kingdom. (S4O-02928)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The fiscal commission working group set out a number of viable currency options for a country of Scotland's size and economic strength. It concluded that retaining sterling as part of a

formal monetary union with the rest of the United Kingdom would be the best option for an independent Scotland and for the rest of the UK. The Scottish Government is clear that an independent Scotland will retain sterling, and we have set out our currency proposals on pages 109 to 117 of "Scotland's Future".

Elaine Murray: It was reported in this morning's press that Alistair Cotton, the head of corporate dealing at Currencies Direct, has said that using a currency without a formal union would leave an independent Scotland

"without the economic levers to support its ... financial sector"

fully. Owen Kelly of Scottish Financial Enterprise believes that using the pound without a formal currency union could threaten Scotland's membership of the European Union. Is continuing to use the pound, irrespective of currency union, a viable plan B?

John Swinney: As I said to Dr Murray in my original answer, the fiscal commission working group looked at a number of viable options and it assessed and considered the contents of the different propositions. The Scottish Government is clear that we support and endorse the fiscal commission working group's preferred option, which is to retain sterling as part of a formal monetary union with the rest of the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government will continue to set out that proposition to the people of our country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very briefly, Marco Biagi.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): Alistair Darling has been noted as saying that a currency union is "logical" and "desirable", but added to that now is Jackson Carlaw's endorsement of such a union as being "rational and sensible". Does the finance secretary agree that, on a currency union, George Osborne now and George Osborne the day after a yes vote will be very different, not least because it will be in the overwhelming interests of Scotland and the rest of the UK to conclude the deal and to do so swiftly?

John Swinney: Mr Biagi makes a fair and strong point. The Scottish Government has clearly made the point that businesses south of the border will save on transaction costs as a consequence of a formal currency union. We estimate that those costs would amount to £500 million, which would be significant for businesses in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Another aspect is that, if George Osborne sustained the line of argument that he advanced in his speech in Edinburgh a week past Thursday, he would be arguing for the rest of the UK to assume

the entire national debt of the UK. I do not imagine that taxpayers south of the border will want to wrestle with that obligation, which would be greater than what would exist if a formal currency union were to be established between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

The cabinet secretary and his colleagues are fond of quoting Nobel prize winning economists. I wonder whether he read the piece in *The New York Times* on Monday by the Nobel prize winning economist Paul Krugman, who, in relation to what the independence campaign has said about currency, said:

“what it has said on that crucial subject seems deeply muddle-headed ... sharing a common currency without having a shared federal government is very dangerous.”

Is that not a damning verdict on Mr Swinney's policy?

John Swinney: No.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

John Swinney: What is worthy of analysis is the comparison between the fiscal commission working group's report and the speech that was delivered in Edinburgh by the governor of the Bank of England. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

John Swinney: If Murdo Fraser was to go off and do some homework and look at the contents of the fiscal commission working group's report—the issues it raises and the solutions it offers to some of the issues relating to a currency zone—and compare that with the analysis that was put forward fairly, reasonably and dispassionately by the governor of the Bank of England, he would find that there is a clear and robust relationship between the thinking of what is in the fiscal commission working group's report and what is in the governor of the Bank of England's statement to the people whom he addressed in Edinburgh.

That analysis must have struck Alistair Darling as making the case for a currency zone “logical” and “desirable”. I am absolutely delighted that Jackson Carlaw has added his significant influence to that, as part of the discussion that we are having.

Scotland Act 2012 (Tax Avoidance)

3. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will tackle avoidance of the taxes devolved under the Scotland Act 2012. (S4O-02929)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I have made clear this Government's determination to act decisively on avoidance of devolved taxes. The Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Bill, which is currently before Parliament, contains powers that will enable revenue Scotland to take robust action to counteract tax avoidance, and we have included anti-avoidance measures in both the devolved taxes acts that this Parliament has already passed.

Stewart Stevenson: Is the cabinet secretary aware that the latest HM Revenue and Customs figures report that the United Kingdom Government is failing to collect £35 billion in taxes through avoidance schemes, illegal tax dodging and mistaken underpayments? Given that Scotland's share of the amount that is being lost to the UK Treasury is approximately £3.47 billion, can the minister tell us how Scotland would benefit between now and 2016 if the UK Government were to implement a general anti-avoidance rule?

John Swinney: As I made clear to Parliament in the introduction of the Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Bill, the bill will include a general anti-avoidance rule that is simple and more comprehensive than the corresponding provisions that the UK Government is considering. Our general anti-avoidance rule is designed to catch artificial tax-avoidance arrangements, whereas the UK approach is based on a narrow test of abuse.

Our general anti-avoidance rule will, of course, apply only to devolved taxes. If we had the ability to apply it across the full range of taxes, we could apply the ethos and approach that I have set out to consideration of wider taxation issues.

In introducing the Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Bill, I have made it clear that I want Parliament to consider and to test the provisions that the Government is putting in place. If there are measures that Parliament believes would strengthen the general anti-avoidance rule that we have advanced, I would be very open to considering them and to ensuring that Scotland embarks on its approach to tax collection with as robust an approach to tackling tax avoidance as possible.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The cabinet secretary has spoken about building a new culture of stopping tax avoidance so that we never see the scenario that the UK has in place, in which so much more effort is spent on chasing a relatively small amount of benefit fraud than is spent on chasing a vast amount of tax evasion by the wealthiest. A general anti-avoidance rule is a good start, but does the cabinet secretary agree that additional measures such as conditions on public procurement or conditions on corporate welfare payments, such as legal selective assistance

grants, can create additional disincentives for companies to engage in tax avoidance?

John Swinney: I reiterate the last point that I made to Stewart Stevenson, which is that the Scottish Government intends to embark on the design of a tax-collection system with maximum intolerance of tax avoidance. The test that I have set my officials, and on which I have been advised by the tax consultation forum—whose contribution I value enormously in relation to the formulation of the Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Bill—has been to take that maximalist approach. I know that Patrick Harvie will support that approach, given his contribution to the matter over many years in Parliament.

We have brought forward a sophisticated proposition in the bill. The invitation is there to Parliament to test the position and see whether it can be taken a stage further. Obviously, I will engage seriously with the issue when feedback from Parliament is received.

It is important that we ensure in the design of every measure that we undertake that it is legally compliant—something that the Government would have to wrestle with in relation to the procurement legislation that Mr Harvie suggested—and that we take every step that we can in our wider policy interventions to ensure that the spirit and the letter of measures to tackle tax avoidance are reflected in all our actions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will hear a brief supplementary from Gavin Brown, and, I hope, a brief answer.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The cabinet secretary said that he had a “sophisticated proposition”. Can he share with Parliament the targets that have been set for revenue Scotland in relation to tax avoidance?

John Swinney: I want to minimise tax avoidance. I am certainly not going to go around saying that X amount of tax avoidance is okay. What an absolutely absurd proposition.

Gavin Brown: It is in the financial memorandum.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

John Swinney: I want to ensure that the Scottish Government is able to take all possible steps to tackle tax avoidance and to put in place the measures to do so.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment and Retention (North-east Scotland)

4. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions ministers have had with Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council and

public sector agencies in the north-east regarding the recruitment and retention of staff. (S4O-02930)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): The Scottish Government and public bodies have policy and delivery functions across Scotland. Any allocation of central Scottish Government resources, such as to health boards and councils, is typically distributed through needs-based formulae that incorporate indicators such as population, deprivation and rurality.

It is for councils, in collaboration with their community planning partners, to determine appropriate use of the resources that are under their control, including decisions on recruitment and retention of staff.

Richard Baker: Last week, in the *Evening Express*, Richard Carey talked about the difficulty of recruiting to the health sector and other public sector bodies in Grampian, and both local authorities have highlighted problems with recruitment due to the high cost of living in Aberdeen and the north-east more widely. What consideration has the Scottish Government given, or what consideration will it give, to the calls of trade unions and others in the area for an Aberdeen weighting?

Derek Mackay: We are able to give local employers the flexibility to deliver schemes that are suitable for local circumstances, where there are pressure points. With regard to the health service, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing receives updates about any vacancies that arise. We keep a close watch on the issue.

The matter that Richard Baker raises relates to the general issue of resourcing. Things would be somewhat easier for Aberdeen City Council in that regard if it had access to the £7.3 million that the Labour Party has denied the area, having turned down the needs-based formula that would on this occasion have supported that local authority. I ask the Labour Party to look closely at the mess that it has created in the city.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the main problem in recruitment and retention of staff is the lack of affordable housing in the area, and that it would be better for the Labour-led council to agree with the proposal of the Scottish National Party group on the council that the strategic infrastructure plan should include the building of 2,000 council houses, instead of the council's suggestion to build 1,000 private sector and shared-equity homes?

Derek Mackay: Clearly, housing is a critical issue in relation to the concerns around growth and demand in that part of the country. I am sure that Maureen Watt will welcome the fact that

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's share of housing resources has increased, in terms of the housing planning resource assumptions.

Furthermore, if we had followed the needs-based formula, not only would revenue to Aberdeen City Council have increased but capital would have increased as well, which would have given the council even greater flexibility to deliver on housing targets. I am at a complete loss as to why the Labour leadership in Aberdeen City Council has turned down extra resources for its area. It seems to be the result of ignorance, incompetence and ineptitude.

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Meetings)

5. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth last met the Chancellor of the Exchequer and what was discussed. (S4O-02931)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Scottish ministers regularly meet ministers from the United Kingdom Treasury to promote the steps that we are taking within our limited powers to deliver a more prosperous and fairer Scotland. I will engage with UK ministers in the coming weeks to highlight Scotland's priorities for the UK budget in March.

John Pentland: I assume that you are not sticking with plan A like the Deputy First Minister, so will you tell me whether the First Minister's plan B would be a temporary fix and, if so, for how long using the pound without a currency union would last before we were forced to consider a plan C?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to speak through the chair.

John Swinney: As I explained in my answer to Dr Murray, the Scottish Government took the advice of the fiscal commission working group, which considered a range of what it described as "viable currency options" for an independent Scotland. We accepted its preferred approach, which is the establishment of a currency zone and continued use of the pound sterling, which is Scotland's currency as much as it is that of the rest of the United Kingdom. That is the approach that the Scottish Government will continue to express to the people of our country.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary confirm that he will, if he meets the chancellor, discuss the debt as well as the pound, and the suggested figure of something like £25,000 per head by which Scotland will be better off if the chancellor refuses to share both?

John Swinney: Mr Mason makes the point that, if the chancellor wishes to continue with the line of

argument that he took during his speech in Edinburgh, he will be signing up to saddling the United Kingdom with additional debts of up to £130 billion and debt servicing charges of between £4 billion and £5.5 billion each year. That is equivalent to increasing the basic rate of income tax by 1p.

If the chancellor wishes to sustain that line of argument and explain it to the people of the rest of the United Kingdom, that is up to him. However, it is an example of why the story from the UK Treasury will change once there is a successful yes vote in the referendum, and the practical benefits and realities of a currency zone between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom are clearly demonstrated and deliverable.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): John Mason raised an interesting question. Many people in Scotland might think that there is some attraction in what he suggests because we would not have to pay that money in debt. However, many disadvantages would clearly go along with that scenario. Why cannot the cabinet secretary be honest with the people and spell out what he regards as the disadvantages?

John Swinney: Mr Chisholm should know that the fiscal commission assessed a number of credible and viable currency options for an independent Scotland. The Scottish Government accepted the preferred option that the commission proposed, which was the establishment of a currency zone. We have set out that argument. It is strong and compelling not only for Scotland but for the rest of the United Kingdom. We will continue to put that point of view to the people of our country.

Minister for Youth Employment Visits (Stirling)

6. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the Minister for Youth Employment will next visit the Stirling constituency. (S4O-02932)

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): As it happens, I will visit Mr Crawford's constituency tomorrow. I look forward very much to visiting Fallin Community Enterprises and learning more about its recyke-a-bike project and the contribution that the project is making to employability in the Stirling area.

Bruce Crawford: As members might imagine, I am delighted that the minister will visit the Stirling constituency tomorrow to see for herself the great work that is undertaken at the recyke-a-bike project at Riverside.

In the meantime, will the minister please confirm how many modern apprenticeships were completed in Scotland between 1 April and the end of December 2013 and how many were in

training at the end of December in the Stirling area?

Angela Constance: As Mr Crawford and other members in the chamber will be well aware, the Scottish Government has signed up to a very ambitious target of 25,000 new modern apprenticeship starts for every year of the lifetime of this Parliament. It was only last week that Skills Development Scotland published information over quarters 1, 2 and 3 to the end of 2013. I am pleased to inform the chamber that we are indeed making very good progress towards meeting that target.

At the end of December 2013 we were at 19,124 modern apprenticeship starts. I am pleased to say that that represents a 7 per cent increase on the number at the end of 2012—that is, there were 1,200 extra starts. In terms of the achievement rate, there has been an 8 per cent increase in modern apprenticeship completions. In response to Mr Crawford's specific request for information, I note that there were 343 starts in the Stirling local authority area and that the total number of people in training there was 642.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 was not lodged and an explanation has been provided.

Innovation (Links Between Key Partners)

8. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to establish links between key partners in innovation. (S4O-02934)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government and its partners already have strong connections in innovation and we are working collectively to develop those links further. Through the Scottish Government's innovation and entrepreneurship framework, we are developing—with public, private and third sector partners—practical actions that are aimed at developing and embedding a culture of innovation across Scotland.

We are also taking steps to improve industry and academic links by establishing innovation Scotland as well as a network of innovation centres.

Partners in health are collaborating through programmes such as the innovation partnership board and health innovation partnerships. Those initiatives will provide a supportive environment for industry to engage with clinicians and the national health service.

Jim Eadie: I thank the cabinet secretary for that comprehensive answer. Does he agree that the Edinburgh BioQuarter epitomises what can be achieved through successful collaboration

between key agencies such as the University of Edinburgh, Scottish Enterprise and NHS Lothian to support innovation in the development of new medicines, diagnostic tools and devices to treat diseases? Also, what more can the Scottish Government do to support and promote Edinburgh as a leading European and global destination for innovation and translational medical research?

John Swinney: The Edinburgh BioQuarter is a stunning example of the collaboration between the University of Edinburgh, Scottish Enterprise and NHS Lothian—and I will add the City of Edinburgh Council to that list.

I chair a biannual forum on the Edinburgh BioQuarter to drive its further development and to open up and realise the opportunities that were highlighted by Mr Eadie in his question. The life sciences advisory board—which is jointly chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and Dr John Brown of the Scottish Lifesciences Association—provides significant leadership in driving forward the degree of health collaboration that is required.

Scotland is very well placed to be a focal point for innovation within our health service. We continue to develop the links between clinical research, academic research and the private marketplace. The commercialisation programme at the Edinburgh BioQuarter has created seven spin-out companies to date, most recently Edinburgh Molecular Imaging, which was established with a £4 million initial investment led by Edinburgh-based Epidarex Capital. There are many good examples of innovation and investment arising out of that tremendous cluster of healthcare leadership and activity in the Edinburgh BioQuarter.

Spring Budget Revision 2013-14

9. Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what main changes will arise from the 2013-14 spring budget revision. (S4O-02935)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The substantive changes are detailed in the introduction section of the supporting document to the spring budget revision, which was published on 6 February 2014.

Gavin Brown: The budget line “supporting economic growth/housing supply” was £373 million at the autumn budget revision. It is £341.6 million as a result of the spring budget revision. Can the cabinet secretary explain the sudden £30 million drop?

John Swinney: Issues in connection with the spring budget revision will be considered fully when I appear before the Finance Committee in

the next few weeks to discuss the relevant Scottish statutory instrument. As Gavin Brown well knows, we make a range of changes to budget programmes to align them with a variety of factors to satisfy the Government's financial objectives in any given financial year. I will ensure that all the changes that we are considering for the spring budget revision are considered fully by the Finance Committee when members assess the statutory instrument.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The outturn figures from the 2013-14 spring revision, among many other things, will inform the cabinet secretary's preparation of a draft budget for 2015-16. We would usually expect to see that document in early September. When does he expect to publish his draft budget this year?

John Swinney: I expect to publish my draft budget in October 2014.

Work Sharing and Work-time Accounts

10. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on promoting the German model of work sharing and work-time accounts as a means of moderating the worst effects of the recession. (S4O-02936)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government has used all available powers and resources to allow Scotland to continue to provide the most competitive environment for business in the United Kingdom, and to support employment and protect people during the difficulties of the recession. While employment and industrial relations are currently reserved to the UK Government, we have made clear our commitment to a partnership approach involving employers, employees, trade unions and other interested parties to deliver sustainable economic growth.

Ken Macintosh: Does the cabinet secretary agree that, as we emerge from the recession, we have the perfect opportunity to end the old-fashioned practices and them-and-us attitudes that have so often soured employee-employer relationships and move to more collaborative ways of working? Those could include recognising trade unions; promoting tax transparency and employee representation on boards; and focusing on long-term investment and sustainability and commitment to local communities. To what extent might the cabinet secretary use the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill to begin that process?

John Swinney: I agree substantially with Ken Macintosh's point, which is why, on 11 February, the Government set up an independent review of progressive workplace policies. As I am sure Mr Macintosh is aware, the group will be chaired by

my former colleague Jim Mather, who was Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism in the previous session of Parliament. I think that it is beyond dispute that he will bring to that area of policy some of the most creative thinking on how some of the practices of the past can be eliminated and we can work more collaboratively. I am delighted with the participation that has been secured for the review, which will involve representatives from the trade union movement, the public sector and private industry in Scotland. I look to the review to produce some creative thinking on how we can advance these issues.

The Government's Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill is designed to ensure that, in the areas of activity in which we are actively procuring goods and services, we can maximise the economic impact and provide sustainable benefits for the Scottish economy and the workforce in Scotland. The Government will seize on any ways in which the bill can be strengthened.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of interests, and in particular to my membership of Unite the union.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement on building better relations between employers and employees. Can he outline the additional tools that will be available to build further on better relations in an independent Scotland?

John Swinney: One of the limitations of the current arrangements is that many aspects of employment policy and workplace practice are reserved to the United Kingdom Government. The review that Mr Mather is chairing may well raise issues that stray into areas of policy over which the Scottish Government does not have responsibility. We will be able to reflect on those issues once Scotland has voted yes in the referendum. There is of course a wider range of responsibilities that can be taken forward. In "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland" we have set out plans to establish a fair work commission and a national convention on labour and employment relations, which will emphasise further the partnership approach that the Government believes should be taken on employment issues.

Local Authorities (Private and Institutional Funding)

11. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it encourages local authorities to take advantage of the private and institutional funding streams that are available to them. (S4O-02937)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): In the current

economic climate, the Scottish Government and local authorities have been working jointly to find innovative ways of financing investment in a range of areas, including through the hubco initiative and the Scotland's schools for the future programme, which includes revenue-financed secondary schools, and by attracting private investment to support affordable housing.

Alex Johnstone: The minister might be aware that a number of businesses that operate in Scotland are talking to local authorities about funding, in particular for the construction of affordable housing. Deals are close to completion in many cases, but there seems to be a logjam and an unwillingness on the part of local authorities to take the issue forward. Is there anything that the minister can do to encourage local authorities to make the move and take the opportunity to help people who need housing in Scotland?

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government welcomes opportunities to work in partnership. There can be partnership between local authorities and private developers to deliver housing in a constructive and innovative way. Issues have emerged to do with risks and guarantees, and the Scottish Government has offered constructive support in mediating and navigating our way through such issues.

The unlocking of the potential of the pension funds, for example, to help to deliver sustainable economic growth, is to be encouraged. Scottish Government officials work closely with local authorities to try to unlock that potential.

Island Areas Ministerial Working Group

12. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government when the island areas ministerial working group will next meet and what will be discussed. (S4O-02938)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): The island areas ministerial working group will next meet on 24 March in Stornoway. Although the agenda has yet to be finalised, the subjects for discussion will be issues of interest and importance to the island council areas.

Liam McArthur: The minister will be aware of opposition in the islands to the decision to move control centres for police and fire and rescue services to the central belt, and he will have heard Orkney Islands Council's criticism of the move. Can he advise the Parliament whether his working group will take time in Stornoway to consider the impact that that decision and other centralising decisions are having on the three island communities, as well as the other issues that will no doubt be discussed?

Derek Mackay: I advise Mr McArthur that the island areas ministerial working group will consider whatever items local authorities want to discuss with us. There has been a wide-ranging agenda in that regard.

We will work closely in partnership, in a constructive and positive way, as we approach the referendum and develop the proposition about how we can unlock the islands' potential in the context of independence. Scottish National Party members understand that only through independence and new powers for Scotland can we truly empower the islands. I look forward to constructive on-going engagement with our island communities.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am sure that the minister agrees that the provision of interconnectors to the island groups is one of the most significant problems that our islands face. Does he share my disappointment at the recent decision by wave energy company Seatricity to relocate from Orkney to Cornwall because of a lack of grid connection to Orkney? Does he agree that that is entirely a failure on the part of the United Kingdom Government, which has continually postponed the provision of a new interconnector to Orkney?

Derek Mackay: I concur with that. Mr Ewing has been leading work on connectivity on the islands. I am sure that we will return to the subject.

"Coping with the cuts? Local government and poorer communities"

13. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, "Coping with the cuts? Local government and poorer communities". (S4O-02939)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): At a time when the Scottish Government's budget has been cut by around 11 per cent in real terms over the period from 2010 to 2016 as a result of the Westminster parties' austerity agendas, the Scottish Government has worked closely with our local government partners to protect communities from the worst of the cuts.

As the interim Joseph Rowntree Foundation report makes clear, Scottish local authorities have fared far better than their English counterparts. Over the four-year period from 2012 to 2016, local government's revenue funding and capital share will be maintained on a like-for-like basis, with extra moneys for new duties.

Although the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report recognises the protection that we have provided to council budgets in Scotland, it is disappointing that the analysis fails to recognise

that the level of funding for individual local authorities in Scotland has until now been determined by the needs-based funding formula agreed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which is largely the same as the formula that we inherited from the previous Labour Administration and is driven by population and pupil numbers. COSLA has indicated that it wants to move away from the needs-based formula for the 2015-16 settlement.

Sarah Boyack: Will the minister acknowledge the toxic combination of local budgets falling while costs rise by 10 per cent and the underfunding of the council tax freeze since 2007, which has led to a crisis in council funding and undermined councils' capacity both to serve low-income groups and to provide the range of services that we would all support across the social spectrum? Will he acknowledge that pitting authority against authority is the antithesis of the partnership working that our constituents urgently need?

Derek Mackay: I say again that it is the Scottish Government that has delivered the fair funding settlement to local government. I remind the Labour Party that, this year, it voted for the budget and the share of resources that goes to our local authorities. When the Labour Party was opposing all the previous budgets, I never heard it call for extra resources for local authorities around Scotland.

I quote Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell, the chairman of the Local Government Association south of the border:

"Every year I meet my opposite numbers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and they listen to us in wide-eyed disbelief at the budget cuts we are enduring and they are not."

I agree. We have protected budgets in Scotland to protect our front-line services and the most vulnerable in this country.

Tourism (2014 Priorities)

14. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what areas of tourism it is prioritising in 2014. (S4O-02940)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): In 2014, the Government will be taking forward a range of events with partners. Homecoming Scotland provides the key focus with Scotland joining more than 700 events across the length and breadth of the country, as well as being host to some of the biggest sporting events in the world, such as the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup, and hosting the MTV Europe awards.

Rhoda Grant: Will the cabinet secretary join me in congratulating Lewis, Harris and the Western Isles on coming top of TripAdvisor's top 10 European islands?

The cabinet secretary will also be aware of the Outer Hebrides Tourism Industry Association's concerns about ferry capacity to the islands. The Stornoway to Ullapool route was at 84 per cent capacity on sailings in July while the Oban to Lochboisdale route was at 100 per cent for the same period. In the past, I have asked to see stand-by lists to ascertain the level of unmet need, but I cannot access them.

Will the cabinet secretary take steps to monitor, keep a note of and make public the figures for unmet need? Will he also make more capacity available by making the Lochboisdale to Mallaig sailing permanent?

John Swinney: I agree unreservedly with Rhoda Grant's comments about Lewis and Harris. They have very special places in my heart, and my family and I visit them regularly. We will not have the privilege of wrestling to get on ferries to the Western Isles this summer because we shall be wrestling to get on a ferry to Tiree, which will, I suspect, be as congested as it was last summer.

I take seriously Rhoda Grant's point about ferry capacity. It is invaluable in ensuring that the tourism industry is able to fulfil all its aspirations during the busy periods of the tourist season. The ferries are also critical at other times of the year because they provide support to communities.

I am not sure of the historical context, but for the first time in my recollection the Government has taken steps to put in place a Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry connection and I know that it has been welcomed. The Government will, of course, continue to monitor capacity and the utilisation of all ferry routes. It is in all our interests to make sure that we maximise the number of people who are able to visit those most special parts of our country.

Scottish Loan Fund

15. Christian Allard (North East Scotland)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the Scottish loan fund is helping small and medium-sized enterprises. (S4O-02941)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The £113 million Scottish loan fund issues loans that range from £250,000 to £2 million and, in exceptional circumstances, up to £5 million. The fund is aimed at established growth and exporting companies.

Christian Allard: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Scottish loan fund's investment of

£3.5 million in Coretrax, an energy services company based in Aberdeen, demonstrates the Scottish Government's commitment at every level to the continued success of the energy sector?

John Swinney: I welcome the investment that was made in Coretrax, which is an example of a number of investments that have been made in the oil and gas sector.

On Monday, the Government also announced an oil and gas innovation centre to be based in Aberdeen, which will develop many of the new technologies and interventions that the Government is supporting and the oil and gas industry is championing. That demonstrates the strong support that we can give to the industry to ensure that it realises its full potential within the North Sea sector.

Justice

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09133, in the name of Graeme Pearson, on justice. I call Graeme Pearson to speak to and move the motion.

14:40

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):

I am grateful for the opportunity to move the motion and speak in support of it. I note that the rather wordy amendment from the Government focuses on what we in the chamber have come to know as "operational outcomes" rather than the business of Government. I am sure that we will come on to that during the debate.

I acknowledge the sterling work that is performed on behalf of Scotland's communities by the staff of Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and all the emergency services. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has changed the very essence of policing in Scotland. He has abandoned his responsibility for oversight of the exercise of police powers and services and has allowed an undemocratic authority, selected by him, to implement a change from a focus on local policing to a metrocentric approach. Policing by consent as a basic principle appears to have become an archaic rule. Accountability and transparency within the decision-making processes of the justice system have been all but eroded, making the notion of consent redundant.

The public consultation exercises that were undertaken on public counter closures, traffic wardens and the police and fire services' control room rationalisations were farcical exercises. They were hurried and confused, and they lacked any real opportunity for meaningful consideration of important local views and local priorities, which were reduced to an afterthought as national teams for firearms, road policing, football policing and ports policing and national air support and mounted sections were deemed to be of greater import.

Key performance indicators have become the language of Mr MacAskill's new force. Stop and search, the subsuming of crimes into single reports, the downgrading of reports to avoid the realities of crime in our communities and reports from police officers themselves of the fiddling of crime reports all contribute the creation of a service that is focused on headlines, good-news stories and information management instead of public protection and victim-centred services.

The widespread changes, together with worsening conditions for our police officers, have been widely reported to cause morale to reach

new depths among our front-line officers and staff. A recent poll showed that only one staff member in 10 feels valued, with backroom cuts causing mounting workloads for civilian staff and almost 300,000 hours of extra duties for front-line officers, reducing the time that they have available to patrol our streets. A recent Unison survey also found that two thirds of staff believe that their workload has increased with the advent of Police Scotland, and morale among support staff appears to be even lower, with almost 1,200 jobs already lost and hundreds more to go.

Many people fear for their jobs, having seen colleagues sacrificed at the altar of the Scottish National Party pledge to deliver 1,000 additional officers at a cost of £50 million, which overlooks the need to scalp another £60 million a year from police budgets, no matter what. Simple mathematics shows that 1,000 more officers minus 1,200 support staff leaves a staff deficit in the service.

The recently announced executive-level pay hikes of more than £20,000 for some staff have left many in the police feeling let down and disappointed. The police family looks to be on the verge of breakdown. A vocation has been reduced to a job, and a mission has been replaced by a form of Taylorism time management previously unknown in the emergency services.

The closure of public counter services and the abandonment of control rooms have been predicated on Government efficiencies. The truth is that the need to rid Police Scotland of low-paid staff to meet Government cuts ensured that the services, once reduced, could be maintained thereafter only—

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Graeme Pearson: I am happy to give way.

Mark McDonald: Like many other members, I have made representations about the service control centre that is based in my constituency. Given that the member backed the creation of the single force and the Government budget that allocates the money to the police force, what would he do differently within that envelope, based on his voting record?

Graeme Pearson: I am very grateful for that question. I hope that it is meant in the good faith in which it is received. We have a different approach to what is being delivered, and I promise to come on to that.

The rush to close the Dumfries control room a matter of weeks after a total absence of meaningful consultation and the subsequent closures in Stirling, Glenrothes and Aberdeen ahead of any effective information and

communication technology strategy or new contracts to replace what is described as the very expensive Airwave provision all smack of crisis management that is driving towards an announcement of the great success of a £60 million saving for the public. In the meantime, the true cost to the police and, to an extent, the fire and rescue service in terms of front-line, public-facing services is denied. Where is the evidence of any true reform of control rooms in the past seven years? There has been no attempt to rationalise emergency services across boundaries. Shared control rooms for police, fire and ambulance services, or even—

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Will the member take an intervention?

Graeme Pearson: I am happy to do so.

Kenny MacAskill: Is the member aware that, in 2004, the previous Labour-Liberal Executive moved from eight to three ambulance command-and-control centres? Was that wrong?

Graeme Pearson: I do not know whether that was wrong or right at the time; I am suggesting to the cabinet secretary that the past couple of years presented Scotland with a real opportunity to move its emergency services into the 21st century. The cross-boundary provision of control rooms would have been the opportunity for the next 50 years.

The co-location of services on sites across the country would have ensured savings in relation to buildings, heating, facilities and support. It would have been an opportunity for the services to share control rooms across the country at a cost that they could have afforded, while delivering a more effective service. What has happened to genuine consultations with local communities on their expectations, priorities and service needs before decisions are taken at headquarters? Instead, we have HQ talking about what is good for communities from a distance.

Recently, the cabinet secretary attended the Dumfries control room, shortly after it was visited by the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing. He failed to speak to the control room staff who stood on the pavement waiting to talk to him. Furthermore, in response to all the local concerns that have been raised, in media reports thereafter he focused heavily on firearms teams, helicopter support and mounted officers. All those services are highly valued, but he failed to demonstrate his understanding of communities' need to feel confident in their local emergency services with regard to everyday calls such as those about antisocial behaviour related to drunks, dogs fouling in public areas, shoplifters and vandals, all of which destroy quality of life.

If recent reports about the subsuming of crimes into one report are accurate, if the reports on negative stop and searches are true, and if the feedback that MSPs from right across the chamber have received from their constituents is anything to go by, there are concerns about how the police and fire services are being delivered.

The Police Service is insufficiently accountable and it needs to be subject to proper governance, because if it is not properly governed, there is a danger that it will become merely an army of occupation that is maintained at public expense. Police and staff did not join the service to be party to that ethos, and they did not expect to be abandoned to enable such an approach to be taken.

It is time for a change in approach; it is time for openness on what is going on across our services; and it is time for SNP policy to deliver not merely announcements, but quality services in and for our communities—services for which it is accountable to those communities.

This week, the chief executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland, Ross McEwan, announced a commitment to rebuild his bank from the ground floor up.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I need to get you to wind up, Mr Pearson.

Graeme Pearson: I will.

He committed to getting the bank to deliver services that are important to its customers. The cabinet secretary needs to focus on locally based services. He needs to ensure that the Scottish Police Authority is linked to the local boards, and that those local boards are heard with some clarity.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government should better support community and staff involvement in policing and fire service decisions.

14:51

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I welcome the opportunity to respond to Graeme Pearson in this Labour debate.

At a time when we are 11 months into the historic reform of our police and fire services, we can reflect on and take pride in the positive achievements that have been made and the legislative change that was overwhelmingly supported by the Scottish Parliament following detailed scrutiny by four parliamentary committees. Collectively, the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority are committed to protecting and supporting front-line services.

Let us consider what has been achieved at a time when crime is at a 39-year low, supported by an extra 1,000 officers in our communities in comparison with 2007. The reform of the police and fire services aimed to strengthen the connection between those services and communities, and it has done that. Local policing remains the bedrock, and police and fire services are positively engaged in community planning. Local police plans are in place across the country, local fire plans are being finalised, and communities and councillors have more access than ever before—

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): If the SPA and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are so engaged in community planning, how come there was no consultation with local communities before the control centres were all closed?

Kenny MacAskill: There are procedures that have been agreed by the unions and management on how consultation should be carried out, given the legal requirements on redundancy. That consultation process has begun. No one should have been in any doubt—Unison certainly was not—that discussions were under way about where matters were heading. The appropriate consultation period is being followed, as is statutorily required. Indeed, that is not just a statutory requirement—it is good practice.

There are designated local police commanders for each of the 14 divisions, and there are 17 local senior fire officers.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary not appreciate that Elaine Murray's question, rather than being about consultation with staff regarding redundancy, which is clearly appropriate, was about consultation with community planning partners regarding the closure of local services?

Kenny MacAskill: Those consultations and discussions are on-going. The whole purpose of community planning is that people get together in the same room. Indeed, that is why we have local police plans.

Graeme Pearson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Kenny MacAskill: I will make some progress and then I will come back to the member.

What is more, the SPA and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board have designated board members who engage with all 32 local authorities, which ensures that they have a direct way of influencing the governing bodies. That has been done.

Graeme Pearson: Would the cabinet secretary at least acknowledge that consultation normally means having the ability to have some impact on a

decision before it is made, as opposed to being informed of it once it has been made and having to deal with the consequences?

Kenny MacAskill: The consultation is on-going and the police will discuss and debate the issue. At this point, however, I want to put on record that the police are most certainly not an army of occupation. Those who wear the police uniform do so with grace and dignity as they face daily difficulties and challenges in such an outstanding way.

The aim of police reform was to create more equal access to specialist support and national capacity, and that is what it has done. Our national resources—the air support unit, the marine and underwater unit, the mounted branch and specialist crime teams, to name but a few—have supported a range of incidents across the country. We need think only of our emergency services' outstanding response to the tragedy at the Clutha bar, the co-ordinated search for young Mikael Kular or the Willowbrae shooting.

The divisional domestic abuse investigation unit has proved effective in investigating prolific and high-risk offenders, leading to arrests of people who might otherwise have escaped prosecution. In the Highlands and Islands, officers from the organised crime and counterterrorism unit have been effectively deployed on an operation in the Shetland Isles aimed at disrupting the availability of drugs in that community. In Tayside, a total of 137 officers from across the service were deployed in operation amaranth to manage a Scottish Defence League demonstration and ensure limited disruption to local communities, while in Dumfries and Galloway the smooth running of the Wickerman music festival was supported by a total of 56 officers deployed from national and regional resources to detect and prevent any antisocial behaviour and related crimes.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary accept that the Wickerman festival has run very smoothly ever since it was first brought into being and before it had the so-called benefit of Police Scotland?

Kenny MacAskill: It has run smoothly but I think that the additional officers were welcome. I also remember meeting officers in the area when Annan was playing Rangers. I understood the significant disruption that the match would have caused the Annan community had the matter been left simply to officers from Dumfries and Galloway. People were delighted and welcomed the fact that the football unit and other officers from Glasgow were able to come down to ensure an appropriate level of policing.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware of concern in Dumfries about how members of staff can realistically benefit from any relocation opportunities that arise from the closure of the Dumfries control room, given the town's remoteness from such opportunities. What efforts are being made to address such concerns?

Kenny MacAskill: The chief constable is making every effort to engage; indeed, when I met him last week, we discussed the matter. Discussions are on-going and everyone is happy to continue that process. Indeed, I myself have met the council's leader and deputy leader to continue the discussions.

In comparison, almost as many officers as serve here in Scotland have been lost south of the border. What is more, we now hear that Labour is promoting the idea of merging police forces and axing elected crime commissioners down there. It is clear, therefore, that Scotland is leading the way.

Graeme Pearson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is in his last 30 seconds.

Kenny MacAskill: Eleven months on, we have already successfully delivered the £42 million of savings that were identified for year 1. We can look forward to Scotland's outstanding police force continuing. We have a 39-year low in recorded crime; we have the lowest homicide rates since we started recording them; violence has dropped by 60 per cent; and crimes of carrying and handling offensive weapons are down by two thirds in Glasgow. That is all down to our outstanding police service.

I move amendment S4M-09133.1, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"recognises the excellent work done by the officers and staff in Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) in keeping the people of Scotland safe with an unprecedented level of engagement with communities and local authorities, which is complemented by a process of engagement with staff; further recognises that crime is at a 39-year low and welcomes the 1,000 extra officers that the Scottish Government has delivered in communities since 2007; welcomes the lowest number of fires recorded in Scotland in the last 10 years; acknowledges the positive impacts of reform; recognises the value of national governance provided by the Scottish Police Authority and the SFRS Board; acknowledges that more locally elected members than ever are having their say on local policing matters as a result of local scrutiny arrangements, and agrees that significant progress has been made on the reform journey that began with the legislation that received the overwhelming support of the Parliament."

14:58

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I rise to support Graeme Pearson's motion. I do so because of my own experience.

When I was listening to the minister, I became slightly worried that he was going to come to that wonderful conclusion reached by many a minister before him, which is that those of us who are concerned about the structures of a public service are somehow levying direct criticism at those who provide it. At the outset, I make it absolutely clear that my sympathies lie with those who provide the police and fire and rescue services and that my criticisms are directly targeted at this Government and minister. In my experience, our police and firemen are members of our community. I have cause to talk to them about many things, not only the provision of their service, and they are often all too willing to volunteer their experiences.

As a Conservative, I make it quite clear that when we considered the original proposals for streamlining our fire and rescue service and police service we were quite convinced that there was a case to be made for such a move.

Kenny MacAskill: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I will carry on for the moment—I have only five minutes.

However, during that process, it became increasingly clear to us that there was no accountability in the new proposals. That is why I, as a Conservative, was happy to vote against the proposals at the end of the process.

We have seen many things happen. We have seen radical decisions being taken with the police counter closures, which have impacted on many areas across Scotland—I am sure that individual members will bring forward cases in their particular areas. The closure of the control rooms has caused a great deal of concern. The loss of both fire and rescue and police control rooms in Aberdeen is seen as creating a vacuum in an extremely important area of the country that requires a foot on the bedrock of control in our services. Can anyone imagine what would happen if—heaven forbid—another Piper Alpha incident happened and there was no control facility available in the north-east of Scotland? I am very concerned that that was not taken into account.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I will carry on, given the limited time that is available to me.

I want to bring the consultation process to the fore in the debate, because we have heard quite clearly from the minister that consultation has acquired an entirely new meaning. It seems that,

in this fine new world of ours, consultation starts with an irreversible decision and is then about discussing that decision with the people whom it directly affects. There has been no proper consultation in the process. No discussion has taken place with those who should have some influence over the process or with those who work in the services. Worse still, we have seen no effective business case to demonstrate that the approach will save us much money.

The fact is that we have been presented with a fait accompli, and we have no decision-making process that can be taken into account. Worse still, we have the minister's amendment, which he has just moved and which deserves to be printed in large type, framed and hung on a wall somewhere in this building, because it has no grip whatsoever on reality.

When I was thinking about what I would say in my speech, I was reminded of something that happened during the Gulf war. I do not want to make light of the Gulf war, which was a serious event that we should all consider carefully, alongside the lessons from it. However, there was one light moment in it: the emergence of a character who became known to us all as comical Ali. Comical Ali was the man who, during an interview, stood and claimed that an American soldier would never set foot in Baghdad as a line of American tanks drove up the street behind him. I was concerned about comical Ali and was worried about where he was. Having read the amendment, I am convinced that he is alive and well and working as an SNP press officer somewhere in Holyrood.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind members that they have four minutes.

15:03

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): I thank Graeme Pearson for bringing this debate to the chamber and giving me the opportunity to talk about locally delivered police and fire services. However, I do not recognise the picture that he has drawn. This month, I got all the updates that I needed from the local police force when I attended the community council of my wee town of Westhill in Aberdeenshire. We can see in all those communities that strong local engagement, which is getting better and better.

Over the years in my community, we made it clear where we wanted our police officers to be. We told them to leave the counter and get on their bikes. In fact, the counter in my wee town of Westhill is manned by Aberdeenshire Council and is shared with a small police station to minimise costs. Perhaps a previous Administration failed to

do that. It is most important to keep our police officers on the beat.

What brought me to the idea of single police and fire services was the example of our Grampian fire chief, who lives locally in Westhill. Over the years, he made some incredible statements. Believe you me, I was very surprised when I read in the *Press and Journal* on 1 April 2002 that new fire engines would be white from then on. I did not get any consultation papers and nobody asked me whether I thought that it was a good idea to have fire engines painted white. However, Mr David Dalziel, the firemaster, decided that it would be a good idea.

Mr Dalziel hit the news again in the *Daily Record* in April 2010, when it emerged that that same Grampian fire chief was offered a £350,000 payout for agreeing to stay in the same job. David Dalziel was meant to retire, but Grampian fire brigade rehired him on a new contract after he got a lump sum from his pension. Do we want to go back to those levels of regional payout? That is perhaps the alternative that some of the political parties here would like us to go back to.

Dr Simpson: I think that the member is making the point for our motion. We voted for centralisation of the police, but the major criticism of that from outside was localisation would be lost. The decisions on control centres and traffic wardens have been taken in a dictatorial manner and without consultation. In the case of Stirling, it shares an out-of-hours service with Clackmannanshire Council, but it was not even consulted. That is an SNP council, so the member is making our point for us.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Allard, you now have 45 seconds.

Christian Allard: What I was trying—and managing—to explain is that we had a dictatorial situation beforehand. We also had the problem of political intervention. I can remind a Lib Dem MSP who is present today—Alison McInnes—that she had to say sorry to the fire service because she had used a picture of the fire chief on her election leaflet. I think that such political interference is not acceptable. Thank goodness that the police service is now away from the politicians and is a single force, which is a lot better.

15:07

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): As we said at the time, the creation of single police and fire services has brought both opportunities and risks. The biggest risk was that those services would fail to get the balance right among Scotland's regions, and we are here today precisely because they have already failed that test. The other big risk was that concentrating

power in the hands of ministers and their appointees would mean an end to any meaningful local accountability. The decisions to close police and fire control rooms and the way in which they were taken have confirmed all the worst fears about that lack of accountability to local people.

Ministerial appointments to the police and fire boards included not a single individual from the area served by the former Grampian police and fire services. There was no one from the Grampian area to speak up for local services when the police and fire boards decided last month to close the police and fire control rooms in Aberdeen, and the police service centre at Bucksburn. There was no discussion with community planning partners such as Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council, which rely on police staff and pay the police for a number of out-of-hours services.

The fire control closures were forced through against the wishes of board members from regions outwith the central belt. The police closures were nodded through without a business case, a meaningful debate or even a show of hands on the SPA board. It was claimed that there was no need to consult the public, because the public were not fit to make such complicated decisions. Unions representing staff in both services made a powerful case against the scale of cuts and closures, but what we got instead were mirror-image decisions from the two boards to concentrate resources and services in Tayside, Lothian and Strathclyde and to discard all the technology, expertise and experience that had built up in the other regions of Scotland.

The anger of local people in and around Aberdeen has been palpable. The *Evening Express* has mounted a strong campaign to "stop 999 cuts". A poll of *Press and Journal* readers found that more than 90 per cent wanted the closure decisions reversed. A petition to this Parliament called for a parliamentary inquiry into closures planned across the north and north-east, and it very quickly attracted over 1,000 signatures.

The people who work in those services are angry, too, and some have already walked away. Skilled and highly trained people whose services are no longer wanted will go elsewhere, and public services will be poorer as a result. A worker whose job in Aberdeen is scrapped when there is no comparable post anywhere north of Dundee has no choice about being made redundant. There is nothing voluntary about these redundancies. That is the situation that control room and service centre staff now face.

In the eyes of many people in the north and north-east, the police and fire services have shown the worst kind of central belt bias, forcing through their plans without even a pretence of

consulting local people or their community planning partners in local government. Staff have had no chance to make their case. This week, the Scottish Cabinet ventured north to Portlethen, and some ministers heard directly from local police staff. It is a pity that the First Minister felt that he had more important things to do than to engage with his constituents who came to talk to him about these issues.

What people in the north-east see is Government agencies that act as if Scotland stopped somewhere south of Stonehaven, and a Scottish Government that sees nothing wrong in concentrating public services in the central belt.

Christian Allard: Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: The member is in his last 30 seconds.

Lewis Macdonald: The police and fire boards, by their actions, have lost the confidence of whole regions of Scotland, and ministers are in danger of doing the same. It is time that they stopped telling each other how well it is all going and started actually listening.

15:11

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): In this debate, we should keep it clear in our minds that the role of the police and fire services is to protect the public. Police Scotland's purpose is

"to improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places and communities in Scotland",

and the SFRS protects communities by responding to incidents, but also helping to prevent them from happening in the first place.

Statistics, including a near 40-year low in recorded crime and significantly reduced incidences of fire, show the levels of success that the new police and fire services have had in recent months, building on past improvements. There is no room for complacency, and the Government, Police Scotland and other agencies still have a lot of work to do, but overall the picture is one of crime dropping and Scotland becoming a safer place.

Graeme Pearson mentioned the SNP Government's manifesto commitment to deliver 1,000 extra police officers. Let us never forget that, at the same time, officer numbers in England and Wales are falling. The commitment by the SNP Government is central, but it is clear that, at a time of austerity, it is imperative to deliver both police and fire services more efficiently. That is the background to police and fire reform.

One of the overriding principles of the recent reform is to ensure that local involvement in

policing is maintained. That is why every single one of the 353 council wards in Scotland has a local policing plan based on feedback that local officers receive from the community, and it is why, despite the unification of Scotland's eight former police forces into a single force, there are local commanders in each of the 14 divisions.

Decisions on police and fire control rooms were made by the SPA and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board. Surely the Opposition recognises the need to minimise political interference. I do not wish to sound flippant, but it is fair to point out that Graeme Pearson himself said on the BBC's "Sunday Politics Scotland" on 2 February:

"It doesn't matter where the telephone is answered."

That is patently true in operational terms, and it is why the SPA and the SFRS boards took the decision to reduce the number of control rooms.

Graeme Pearson: Will the member take an intervention?

Roderick Campbell: I am tight for time. No offence is meant.

Chief Superintendent Val Thomson said:

"I am personally convinced that what we are proposing provides the best means for us to improve service levels to the public, to enhance our operational response and realise efficiencies."

In the fire service, Chief Officer Alasdair Hay said:

"I've been in the fire service for over 30 years, and my sole professional purpose is to make the communities of Scotland safer. I would not bring forward a proposal that would compromise the safety of the people of Scotland."

It is clear that the geographical location of a control room has absolutely nothing to do with the provision of local policing or indeed fire services. Having a smaller number of larger control rooms allows the services to rationalise and consolidate their resources without compromising their ability to protect the public and local communities.

Recently, I visited the police control room in Glenrothes, which is a fine control room with room for expansion. To me, as a local member in Fife, it is galling that, as a result of a sensible policy to reduce the number of control rooms, that facility is closing, but I respect the board's right to take that decision.

It is clear that talk of consolidation and efficiencies will always cause concerns about job security, but let us not forget that control room staff are protected by the Scottish Government's policy of no compulsory redundancies. There has been a lot of interest in the voluntary redundancy scheme. I take on board Aileen McLeod's comments about Dumfries and Galloway, but we

must recognise that offers of relocation and travel expenses have been made.

That all allows Police Scotland to protect the number of officers who are working in local communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Please draw to a close.

Roderick Campbell: In all the criticism of the decision, I accept that there are concerns about how the decision was announced. Could the Government do better? I have no doubt that, like all Governments, it could. However, the proposals are now the subject of consultation with staff and unions. I hope that, at the end of the process, at least some of the concerns that have been expressed today will be allayed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alison McInnes, who has a precise four minutes.

15:15

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): The Scottish Liberal Democrats are deeply concerned, too, about the dismantling of local services across Scotland and the manner in which that is occurring. Sixty police public counters are set to close; road safety units and the police traffic warden service have been scrapped; and the network of police and fire control rooms and service centres is to shrink, to the extent that 999 and 101 calls that are made anywhere in Scotland will be diverted to the central belt.

In my region, Aberdeen will be among the hardest hit places, as three facilities are condemned to closure. As I noted in yesterday's debate on the traffic warden service, a worrying pattern has emerged since the nationwide services became operational last April. The approach to each significant reform has been characterised by a lack of proper public engagement and community partner consultation. Even when public-facing local provision is at stake, the predilection is for unilateral decision making. Community planning partners, which were once central to the decision-making process, are being sidelined and left to find out about developments on the news.

The staff involved, such as those whom I met in the Aberdeen fire control room, often have decades of experience, but they are typically consulted only after a decision has been all but made. The only genuine discussion is about whether to accept voluntary redundancy, take early retirement or be redeployed elsewhere, perhaps many miles away. The discharge of many will therefore in effect be compulsory.

I have been contacted by a wealth of people, not just from my region—North East Scotland—but

from the Borders to the northern isles. Every one of them is concerned that crucial knowledge of their area will be lost. Every one believes that the service that they receive will be poorer for the reforms. Every one of them—from the north and the south of Scotland—argues that their needs have been ignored.

Communities and newspapers across the country have launched campaigns to protect locally delivered services. Petitions have been lodged in the Parliament, and others that are circulating on social media have gathered the support of thousands. The new nationwide Police Service is keen to increase its profile online and on social media, but I doubt that that is what it intended.

There is genuine anger about the democratic deficit and a formidable appetite for wider participation in decision making. The frequency with which deficiencies are raised in the chamber by members of all parties highlights that. In that context, the justice secretary's amendment is nothing short of ludicrous. I do not know whether he has been transported to Airstrip One or whether he has stepped through the looking glass, but whatever—his words mean the opposite of what everybody else understands.

For example, the explanation that the police gave the SPA for not holding a consultation on control room closures was extraordinary. They claimed that the closures would lead to an enhanced service, so there was no need to ask the public about them. The police claimed that the issues were too complex to expect people to come to an informed opinion on them. They also claimed that the public would naively want to protect jobs in their areas, so any consultation would not be meaningful.

SNP members may decry the closures in their areas, but I am sure that their constituents will remember that they backed the justice secretary to the hilt when the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill was passed in Parliament. At that time, 125 amendments that were aimed at improving accountability, reasserting local authorities' roles and creating greater transparency were rejected—without exception.

The manner in which the reforms are being undertaken leaves a great deal to be desired. Inevitably, people are asking themselves what is next and when they will be informed.

Lewis Macdonald: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Alison McInnes suggested that the cabinet secretary has been transported to Airstrip One. Presiding Officer, will you advise whether it is in order for Mr MacAskill to move an amendment and be missing for as much of the debate as he appears to have been absent for?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: What Mr MacAskill does during the debate is a matter for him. Like Mr Macdonald, I would have expected him to be in the chamber. However, that is not a point of order.

15:19

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I welcome the debate on this issue. I acknowledge that the changes that have driven the motion are not without their challenges, but it is interesting that the essence of the motion calls for the Scottish Government to become more directly involved in the decision process.

We should reflect on the fact that the final decisions on police and fire control rooms and police station counters were made by the boards of the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. They are matters for the boards, not the Scottish Government. I seem to recall that during the passage of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill, Opposition members repeatedly emphasised the need for the avoidance of political interference. Indeed, Alison McInnes spoke at that time of protecting the independence of the chief constable and Scotland's police.

Graeme Pearson: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: I am afraid that I do not have time today; I apologise.

Willie Rennie said:

"People want police and fire services to be laser-focused on local needs, not subject to political control from ministerial offices."

Call me cynical, but if we had the reverse situation and saw the Scottish Government exerting the level of political control that members were concerned about, today we would be debating a Labour motion slamming that.

We have established the structure of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services, supported by the Labour Party. Surely it is right to let them make operational decisions.

Graeme Pearson: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: I am afraid not, for the same reason I gave before.

I turn to the specific changes that have been raised in the debate. The changes to control rooms do not directly affect my constituency, as there is no control room in it. However, I am somewhat intrigued by the concern about the loss of local knowledge. The Johnstone control room demonstrates that that should not be a huge concern, because it serves the whole of the Strathclyde area, including islands, and handles

more than 50 per cent of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service calls. That area includes my Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency and it stretches from its boundaries with Ardnamurchan in the north to its border with Galloway in the south. It is an enormous area.

It was somewhat before my time, but during the last reorganisation in the 1970s there would have been a reduction in the number of control rooms and I do not doubt that the issue of a lack of local knowledge would have been raised then. Not once has a constituent contacted me regarding a problem with the control room in Strathclyde having a lack of local knowledge.

I turn to the issue of police station counters, which has affected my constituency. The chief constable said that the changes were being made because he and the police force

"want police officers out on the streets and responding operationally to the public."

I agree with that; surely we all do.

That has not been a big issue in my constituency. Two constituents have contacted me about the change, neither of whom had ever visited the police counters at the time when their closure was proposed and neither of whom was concerned. They and, I suspect, most people are more concerned about how the community will be policed properly and safely.

I am regularly in touch with the local chief inspector; I meet him regularly. He and his inspector are assiduous in engaging with local communities. As Christian Allard said, the police are always at community councils. I also engage regularly with Cumbernauld fire station, which is also engaged with its community.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please draw to a close.

Jamie Hepburn: I do not recognise the suggestions that we do not have a locally responsive police force or a locally responsive fire service. Frankly, such suggestions are insults to those who work day in, day out to protect us and our communities.

15:23

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): The US president, Harry S Truman, famously had a sign on his desk that said, "The buck stops here." I am not sure whether that sign could be found on the desk of the cabinet secretary—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Pull your microphone up and point it at your mouth, please. It is a directional microphone.

John Pentland: There is every chance that I may swallow it, Presiding Officer.

Although we accept that the chief constable should have responsibility for operational matters, should that mean that the cabinet secretary escapes responsibility for his actions or is allowed to pretend that his inaction is simply an avoidance of being political?

It is clear to me and the public that the cabinet secretary's chosen role on this reform journey is to sit back and watch the decline and destruction, and wash his hands of the consequences. The public have the right to answers from the cabinet secretary. Does he support the cuts and the closures of police stations and control rooms? Does he support thousands of civilian jobs being axed? Does he really believe that those are purely operational matters?

As we have already heard, the cabinet secretary does not even insist on proper consultation with staff and communities before decisions are made. Further, let us be honest: consultation after decisions have been taken is not really consultation. It is just letting people say what they think and then ignoring them.

Members of the SPA may complain about a lack of consultation and a lack of evidence but, at the end of the day, that looks like posturing when they accept closure plans without amendment or delay.

Next month, we will see the publication of the corporate business strategy for 2013 to 2016. Presumably, that will retrospectively seek to justify last year's cuts alongside future financial savings. Never mind the quality, feel the cuts. Has the cabinet secretary had any say in the next £60 million that will be cut from the budget, or will it be dismissed as just another operational matter?

I believe that, whatever is in the document, the continued demolition of Scottish policing is a direct consequence of Scottish Government policy. The inevitable result will be that public confidence in the police will be undermined.

The good will of civilian staff is being severely strained by their treatment. Do not take my word for it. We now have a Unison survey that shows that staff cuts are leading to heavier workloads and increased bitterness. Some 86 per cent of the 1,300 staff who were surveyed felt undervalued; almost three quarters complained that senior management neither knows nor cares about their contribution to policing; and two thirds reported an increase in workload. Meanwhile, others stated that they had less work because some duties had already been taken on by police officers, perhaps in anticipation of the future lay-offs.

It has been calculated that front-line officers are looking at more than 250,000 hours of extra

duties. Does the cabinet secretary really believe that that will not reduce the time that they spend patrolling the streets? Why does he pretend that that has nothing at all to do with him?

The Scottish Government's cuts have created this festering sore. When will the cabinet secretary accept that it is his responsibility to deal with the situation? He needs to stop passing the buck for the problems and putting Harry Truman's sign on the chief constable's desk.

15:27

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I will pick up on a point that John Pentland made about the thousands of jobs that he said were being axed. Given that there are no compulsory redundancies, that is not really the case, is it? *[Interruption.]* So it is? Is it the same thing, then? The claim is scaremongering, as is the motion.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member take an intervention?

James Dornan: There will be no interventions. Not one of the member's colleagues took an intervention.

Lewis Macdonald: That is not the case.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Macdonald, the member is not taking an intervention.

James Dornan: As everybody knows, I represent a Glasgow constituency, which, like Jamie Hepburn's constituency, is not affected to a great degree by the control room closures. However, even with regard to the counter closures, which have an impact on my constituency, I have not had one complaint. The reason is that the people of Castlemilk and the other areas of my constituency recognise that it is much more important to them that antisocial behaviour and low-level and high-level crime are dealt with more effectively by having policemen on the beat.

Earlier, Graeme Pearson complained about police not being on the street. However, in the next breath, he said that he wanted the counters to stay open, with a police officer standing behind a desk when they should be out on the street. I think that it is clear that this is a politically motivated motion that has got no reason to be debated except to allow an opportunity to have a go at the Scottish Government.

We live in difficult financial times. The move will save £1.1 billion over 15 years. That important saving will be made by reducing duplication. We know that duplication takes place. We live in a world in which technology means that we do not have to continue to do things the same way as we always did them.

I did two things before I came in to the chamber. One was to ask my staff whether we had ever received any complaints about the counters, and I was told that we had received none.

The other thing I did was to look at the history of Glasgow city police. In 1886, all police stations and fire stations were connected by telephone, and I have no doubt that the Labour politicians of the day were up in arms that the common touch was being lost because people would not be able to walk from here to there to make their complaint.

In 1931, the police force was reorganised and fingerprint and photographic evidence was introduced. That probably took officers off the street and, again, a Graeme Pearson of the day probably had a go at the police for that. The first radio patrol car was introduced in 1936 and the police information room was set up in the central police office in 1957. Those changes were all driven by technology. It changes the way that we police. It changes the way that we do everything.

You are saying that we should keep all the control rooms that we had because some people will be upset about losing them. I understand the concerns of people who are affected by any change—people do not like change; that is its nature—but the Government must consider things in the round and think about how to improve services. If you had been in power—I am sorry, you were in power; I forgot because it is such a long time ago—you would have made similar changes if you had had the courage to take on the vested interests. The restructuring is an important thing to do and the right thing to do.

In 1960, the regional crime squad was formed. That would have meant taking officers from all the different local areas, and I have no doubt that we would have heard some of the complaints then that we hear now.

The restructuring is a good and sensible move. It will make life safer for the people of Scotland.

Graeme Pearson said that the important thing about the police force was the quality of service. There is no greater quality of service than having the lowest crime figures in 39 years.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that all remarks should be addressed through the chair.

I call Alex Fergusson. You have four minutes.

15:31

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Given that I have only four minutes, I make no apology for being entirely parochial and concentrating on the closure of the police and fire control rooms in Dumfries—a

decision that has caused, and continues to cause, a level of anger and frustration the like of which I have rarely witnessed in my constituency since I became a member of the Parliament in 1999.

Local people are absolutely furious. Many of them voted for the Parliament—some, indeed, for the Government—in the belief and expectation that their communities would be protected, that services would be delivered as locally as possible and that, when change, which inevitably comes, was proposed, they would be fully consulted on the outcome and consequences of it. That fairly accurately sums up most people's aspirations for devolution, so no wonder they feel angry and let down.

In the justice portfolio alone, those hopes and aspirations have been well and truly shattered. First, we lost our local police force, then we lost our local courthouses, then the ability to access our police officers face to face across the counter and now, as well as losing our traffic wardens, we are to lose our local police and fire control centres. No ifs, no buts and no consultation: the centres in Dumfries are to close and close soon.

My constituents and those of Dr Elaine Murray are totally justified in asking what, if any, options were considered before the decision was taken. Did anyone consider the possibility of Inverness and Dumfries sharing the workload of the proposed police national computer, given that Dumfries already possesses the technology, training and licences and already provides a service to officers on the beat? That solution would have provided a degree of geographic balance in the restructuring.

Did anyone consider the possibility of locating one of the remaining control rooms in Dumfries or combining the Dumfries control room technologically with, perhaps, the one in Motherwell? Did anyone consider the possibility of a joint police and fire control room?

Did anyone, in fact, consider anything other than closure and redundancy for Dumfries? It certainly does not look that way. I hope that the cabinet secretary does not hide behind the cloak of no compulsory redundancies because, as has been stated, for someone who lives in or around Dumfries, being offered alternative employment in Govan or Motherwell is compulsory redundancy by another name.

The day after the police control centre in Stranraer was closed in 2004, a constituent of mine phoned the control room to report that her uncle had gone missing late at night, having last been seen near "the Port". The control room, which was newly transferred to Dumfries, sent police officers to search the ferry port in Stranraer—logically—but found nothing. The next

morning, the missing person was sadly found dead in a field near Portpatrick—the village that anyone living in the west of the region knows as the Port.

The lack of local knowledge might not have cost a life on that occasion, but it certainly did nothing to save one. That situation was brought about by centralisation within the region and suggests to me that it does matter where the telephone is answered.

Just last week, in response to a question from my colleague Margaret Mitchell at the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing meeting about the potential of retaining the existing control room sites, Stevie Diamond, the chair of Unison police staff Scotland, said:

“The service has gone for centralisation of control rooms ... It is as if there has been a need to dispense with people—that is certainly the case in Dumfries, where there has been obscene haste in trying to close the control room by the end of April”

just to save money. He added that they were in

“the first part of a consultation process around the C3 proposal”

but that, in essence, local knowledge would be lost because no other options were being consulted on.

That is no way to run a consultation, but then, as the motion suggests, this is no way to deliver any decision, least of all one that throws good people out of work in an area in which they have little hope of finding an alternative. It is no way to run a consultation and I suggest that this is no way to run a country.

15:35

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham): In summing up, I want to say something about the fire service, for which I have responsibility. It is crucial to acknowledge the clear and shared passion that is reflected in the chamber for delivering safer and stronger communities across Scotland. In respect of the fire service, that is a Scotland in which fires are already at their lowest level in a decade.

In any change programme, decisions will be made that cannot please all of the people. We could exchange opinions at length about how best to involve and consult communities and staff around the services designed to keep them safe. Graeme Pearson, however, does himself and his argument no favours at all by applying phrases such as “army of occupation” to Scotland’s police.

Graeme Pearson: For the record, I said that there was a danger in future that the Police

Service could become an army of occupation—not that it currently was.

Roseanna Cunningham: I see that Graeme Pearson is already wishing that he had not said what he did.

To build on the cabinet secretary’s remarks about policing in Scotland, I will highlight the significant progress since the inception of our national fire service last year. I will look at progress against each aim of the reform.

One key aim is to strengthen the connection between services and communities. That has been ensured by making the fire service a statutory partner in community planning and by designating a local senior officer for every local authority. What impact has that had? Public consultation on the first local plans that were prepared by local senior officers has recently concluded. The overwhelming message from local partners is that information flow and engagement has never been stronger. The result will be tailored, action-focused plans with prevention and partnership embedded in them that reflect risks affecting individual communities across Scotland.

Another aim is to improve access to specialist resources. Progress in the past eleven months has delivered a Scotland in which access to national capacity, when and where it is needed, is already enhanced. I shall simply highlight the fire investigation unit in Aberdeen, now covering the whole of the north, which has mobilised to work with police in Orkney to investigate a fire at a children’s home there; the Clutha bar tragedy, during which specialist resources and crews from across Scotland were deployed, either to the scene or to provide back up at affected stations, without the previous bureaucracy; and the state of the art Clydesmill training centre, which is now available to all firefighters across Scotland.

The aim of protecting and improving front-line outcomes is a true success story, so Rod Campbell’s intervention was timely. Have any communities in Scotland noticed a drop in service provision? No, it has been seamless. Has the fire service been unable to respond to the call to protect our communities? No, it has met that challenge head on, even in its early days, when Scotland was hit by wildfires and when the threat of industrial action was very real.

Facing Westminster cuts, we are improving local services and placing community participation at their heart, not simply closing fire stations, as has recently been seen in London. I notice that Alex Johnstone did not mention that inconvenient fact.

I will say, returning to the subject of consultation and engagement, that I simply did not recognise Graeme Pearson’s sweepingly apocalyptic

description of a failure of consultation in the fire service.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention?

Roseanna Cunningham: The feedback that we have had from the local planning process highlights the improvements that have been felt locally. The process is supported by board members who are each taking responsibility for strategic engagement in a specific service delivery area in Scotland. Alison McInnes should know who the relevant board member is for the area that she covers, as should other members if they are doing their jobs.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention?

Roseanna Cunningham: I mean, of course, if the MSPs are doing their jobs, because I know that the board members are.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention? No? Why not?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Macdonald, it appears that Ms Cunningham is not taking an intervention.

Roseanna Cunningham: On the recent discussions about the rationalisation of the fire service estate, including control rooms, I can point to a programme of engagement that chairs, chief officers and members undertook throughout Scotland. That engagement ranged from visiting local authority chairs and chief executives to one-to-one meetings with affected staff to discuss the range of change management options that were open to them.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention?

Roseanna Cunningham: Lewis Macdonald's characterisation of the SFRS board position was ridiculous, given that there were two separate board discussions months apart, the first of which certainly did not accept the recommendations that were put to it.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention now?

Roseanna Cunningham: Indeed, the discussions included members in the chamber, not least—as I understand it—Lewis Macdonald himself. I hope that he has taken the time to visit Johnstone control room, which Jamie Hepburn rightly mentioned.

The way in which Alex Fergusson described the situation in his area suggests that he is arguing for a control room in every single community in Scotland. He must know that that is wildly impractical.

With regard to relationships with staff, we should not forget that retraining is an option. All 18 of the first cohort of trainee firefighters who are graduating under the new service are former support and control room staff, so it is clear that the service is presenting a real retraining and redeployment opportunity to staff.

The service has established the "Working together for a safer Scotland" framework with the Fire Brigades Union and is actively involved in partnership working to consider how best to deliver the benefits of reform.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister should draw to a close.

Roseanna Cunningham: Just today, the service and the FBU published a joint statement that outlined an agreement on future standardised crewing arrangements. That demonstrates the partnership in action, and stands in contrast to the misrepresentations in today's debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister must close, please.

Roseanna Cunningham: Presiding Officer, we should jointly celebrate the significant successes that police and fire reforms are already delivering on the ground. Frankly, Opposition parties need to decide whether they want political interference in the police and fire services or not.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister must close, please.

Roseanna Cunningham: On today's evidence, it sounds as if they do.

15:42

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): Like other members, I make no apologies for being parochial, because in Dumfries and Galloway 34 civilian staff in the Dumfries police control room and 15 staff in the Dumfries fire and rescue emergency centre face an uncertain future. They are well-trained, experienced and dedicated workers—the vast majority of whom are female—with many years of service, and their local knowledge and professionalism have provided help and reassurance and have on many occasions saved lives. Their loyalty has now been rewarded by the jettisoning of their jobs.

The chief constable told the Justice Committee during our budget scrutiny that civilian staff are queueing up for voluntary redundancy. Well, I have spoken personally to one member of police staff who wanted the redundancy package; the rest who have applied have told me that they did so because they felt that they had no choice. That is, as Lewis Macdonald said, compulsory redundancy in all but name.

Commuting to Glasgow or Motherwell in the case of police staff, or to Johnstone in the case of fire control staff, is not a viable option. Relocation for workers with families and partners with jobs in Dumfries and Galloway is not an option for most staff. Despite receiving assurances from C3 management in Police Scotland that no closures of police control rooms would happen in advance of the Commonwealth games, police control room staff learned on 30 January that their jobs were to go in April and May.

Those were not the only assurances that proved to be hollow. Staff were told that there would be full consultation with Dumfries and Galloway Council before any proposals were put forward, but that turned out to be a conversation between David Hume and the chief executive and the convener of the police and fire sub-committee prior to the SPA meeting on 30 January. That hardly fulfils the statutory duty to participate in community planning.

The minister spoke about fire staff, but fire and rescue emergency control staff in Dumfries have been treated no better. They were advised almost a year ago that the fire and rescue service emergency control room in Dumfries was likely to go, but they still await details of when it will go, as well as details of redundancy terms and any redeployment and retraining opportunities.

There has been a degree of misinformation about fire and rescue emergency control staff. They are classified as firefighters (control), but they do not, and never have, ridden fire appliances. Therefore, their opportunities for redeployment are limited. They could retrain on fire safety, but there is no indication of how many community safety posts might be available or what the mix of uniformed and support staff posts will be. Control staff might be expected to apply for administrative posts at considerably lower salaries than they currently command.

Kenny MacAskill: This is the same question that I asked of Mr Pearson. In 2004, under the Labour Executive, in which the member served, the number of ambulance control rooms went from eight to three. Was Labour wrong?

Elaine Murray: I will touch on that at the end of my speech, because there are lessons that have to be learned from that experience in Dumfries and Galloway.

As Alex Fergusson, Alison McInnes and Lewis Macdonald said, there has been no meaningful consultation about the closures with staff, police and fire officers or local people. No serious consideration has been given to whether to bring control rooms together or to sit police and fire control with control rooms that are provided by health boards or councils. No such possibility has

been explored and there has been little interest in retaining the expertise of staff.

The leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council was told that Police Scotland would seek opportunities to locate other business functions in Dumfries, to support employment, but there has been no indication of how that might be achieved. As Alex Fergusson said, it has been proposed locally that the PNC bureau be split between Inverness and Dumfries, thereby retaining some of the staff expertise, but there has been no indication that the approach will be considered.

In Dumfries and Galloway, as in other parts of Scotland, the cuts come hard on the heels of court closures. Annan and Kirkcudbright courts closed only in November, and next week we can look forward to police counter closures at Kirkcudbright and Dalbeattie, and reductions in opening hours at Cornwall Mount, Annan, Sanquhar and Lockerbie, to name just a few. We are losing experienced police civilian staff in large numbers and we are losing experienced firefighter control staff.

There is a strong and enduring perception that services are being centralised. The First Minister likes to quote Vince Cable on services being sucked into the maw of London. From the point of view of my constituents, services are being sucked into the maw of the central belt.

The minister mentioned Unison. I can tell him what Unison has been doing in my constituency: Unison has collected nearly 7,000 signatures on a local petition against the closure of the police control room. Local people are worried that safety will be compromised when control functions are centralised. The IT systems will not be in place. I understand that the SPA has announced that the i6 contract is running late and has achieved only one of its five targets, which are to be met by 31 March.

People are right to be worried. We do not know what sort of technology will be used to locate callers. Will location depend on the caller knowing the postcode of the place where the fire or incident is? Will it depend on there being a good GPS signal? In parts of my constituency it is not possible to get a GPS signal—in some parts we cannot even get a mobile signal. How will the information get to the new centre?

Our local staff know the area and are familiar with the landmarks. What happens if staff in the central control rooms are unfamiliar with local names and landmarks? Will they have to phone police officers in the area to check exactly where callers are before they send out the police?

Let us remember what happened when NHS 24 was formed, with two call centres, one in Glasgow and one in Edinburgh—and yes, that happened under the Labour-Liberal Government. It was not

long before a call centre at Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary had to be re-established. We know that there have been problems when patients have had to wait for a seriously long time to get an ambulance or an ambulance has taken far too long to get someone from Stranraer, for example, to DGRI. There have been problems for the Scottish Ambulance Service, but the Scottish Government has failed to learn from the experience.

John Pentland was right to say that there is a lack of accountability. The cabinet secretary, as always, tries to wash his hands of all responsibility, this time by lodging an arrogant amendment, which Alex Johnstone said has no grip on reality and which led Alison McInnes to ask whether the cabinet secretary is on Airstrip One. Alex Johnstone mentioned comical Ali, but, to be frank, I am not laughing at comical Kenny and my constituents are not laughing. The Government passed legislation that was supposed to ensure community planning involvement with new service providers. That has not happened. There has not been consultation. What is this Government going to do about that?

Scotland's Children

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09140, in the name of Neil Bibby, on Scotland's children. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:50

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Like all parties in the chamber, the Scottish Labour Party continues to support curriculum for excellence. We want it to work, and that is why Scottish Labour have brought the debate to the chamber today, so that members can raise concerns and reflect on the evidence that was given to the Education and Culture Committee yesterday, and ask the Scottish Government to spell out what it intends to do to allay the concerns of teachers, parents, and pupils.

We have a responsibility and a duty to listen to the concerns about preparations for new national 4 and 5 exams in May and the proposed implementation of new national 6 higher courses in June. I say at the outset that Scottish Labour welcomes the announcement about extra resources that was made on Friday ahead of yesterday's Education and Culture Committee meeting. I hope that the announcement will settle some of the nerves of teachers and parents. However, we have to recognise that the resources have come very late in the day. Such belated actions are welcome, but the minister should have made the resources available long before now.

The Scottish Government has been warned by teachers, parents, pupils, and local authorities for more than two years. Indeed, the Labour Party led a debate in March 2012 to raise those concerns. What we have seen since is months of complacency and the Scottish Government grossly underestimating and ignoring teacher workload issues and concerns. As Larry Flanagan, the Educational Institute for Scotland general secretary said yesterday, the resources are very welcome,

"but it will not have a major impact on national 4 and national 5, because we are only six school weeks away from the deadline for those qualifications."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 25 February 2014; c 3620.]

We have to take very seriously what our teachers have said and the concerns that they continue to raise. The EIS also told the Education and Culture Committee:

"It would not be an exaggeration to say that we have not encountered as widespread anger and disappointment and frustration with the exams authority as we are currently witnessing. Our members feel that SQA communication

has not been effective, support has not been sustained or sufficient, and that too much bureaucracy has crept into the process."

The Scottish Secondary Teachers Association has listed 31 complaints in six different areas. It complains about the impenetrability of the Scottish Qualifications Authority website; the lack of time to prepare for new highers; the materials from the SQA that contain mistakes, grammatical errors and poor-quality graphics; the extreme shortage of clear exemplars; the lack of detail and direction in marking schemes; the inconsistency of standards by different verifiers; and the workload issue, with many teachers working in excess of 50—some are working 60—hours per week.

The SSTA also raises concerns about Education Scotland, which it accuses of seriously failing to deliver real support, and it has concerns about there being virtually no course texts available. Although Alan McKenzie, the general secretary of the SSTA, also welcomed the Government's announcement last week, he acknowledged that it is not the complete answer that the SSTA members have identified. The current situation is completely unacceptable and it needs further urgent action from the Government to address the outstanding issues and concerns that teachers have. We have seen a couple of press releases from the Government and the SQA during the past week, and they are welcome, but we should have a full report and full details of what the Government is going to do to address all those concerns.

What is the Government going to do about the lack of practice papers? What is it going to do to ensure that teachers have sufficient higher textbooks, that we do not see industrial action taken by teachers, and that those who have additional support needs and those pupils who are studying for qualifications at colleges get the support that they need? What is it going to do to address all the other concerns that we heard at yesterday's committee?

On the issue of practice papers, we heard yesterday that teachers urgently want three practice papers in each subject, but they are to receive only one. The minister has said that that is adequate, but teachers do not think that it is adequate, and I believe that parents and pupils will agree. It is not good enough for the minister to say that he is listening; he needs to act, and with only six teaching weeks left before the new exams, he needs to act urgently.

If the Scottish Government disagrees with Scotland's teachers and feels that nothing more is required, I hope that the minister, who is ultimately responsible, will tell the chamber that all the necessary support and resources are in place to allow teachers to deliver these important changes.

In the interests of transparency and to reassure parents, the Scottish Government must also compile and publish, as soon as possible, a report on how many pupils are studying the new highers and the existing highers and in what subjects. We need to hear reassurances from the minister, because teachers clearly have many concerns about workload and assessment issues.

An EIS survey from December showed that, in Renfrewshire, 92 per cent of teachers spend more time on curriculum development than is allocated in their working time agreement, and they do not feel confident in delivering the new higher exam. I will read some of the comments from the teachers who responded.

"Never before have I disliked coming to work, I am by nature an organised person and I am finding the stress of not knowing unbearable. Late information from the SQA has been a major factor."

"The SQA have made a real mess of the implementation of the N5 and I have no confidence that they will be any better in the new higher."

"The lack of planning, organisation and support given to teachers is a disgrace."

"We are starting 2014 with SQA still making changes to units which people are presenting from in May—a disgrace."

"The SQA implementation of the Senior Phase has been a disaster."

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Will the member give way?

Neil Bibby: I am happy to give way to the minister, who I hope will respond to the concerns of those teachers.

Dr Allan: I am grateful to the member for raising these issues. As I have indicated throughout the process, the Government is keen to hear from teachers. It is important to note that the reason for the SQA making changes to some of the materials is that those changes were specifically requested by teachers. Does the member accept that, if the SQA is to respond to teachers, it must act and we cannot complain about the fact that it has done so?

Neil Bibby: Teachers can complain about the situation because it is completely unacceptable. We need a review for the very reasons that the minister has just outlined. It has taken an outcry in the teaching community to get some of those changes made.

The teachers whom I have just mentioned are not alone; I have received emails from teachers throughout the country. To put it simply, this is a completely unacceptable situation. We need to understand what has gone wrong and what can be improved. We also need to understand why it has

taken so long for support to arrive, and we need to know why warnings were ignored.

In March 2012, in a debate in the chamber, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Mike Russell, said:

"I do not believe that any teacher in Scotland who has the right support, the right help and the right leadership—which will come from the Government, from Education Scotland, from their local authority and from within their school—cannot rise to the challenge and deliver the conclusion of a programme that has been eight years in the making."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2012; c 7003.]

Given that so many schools will not be teaching and so many pupils will not be studying the new highers next year, one must deduce from the words of the cabinet secretary that our teachers have not had

"the right support, the right help and the right leadership".

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The member has just asserted that

"so many pupils will not be studying the new highers next year".

Can he benefit the chamber by telling me how many? What precise number of pupils will not be studying the new highers next year?

Neil Bibby: Forgive me, Presiding Officer, but I did not know that I had assumed the position of Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. If I was the cabinet secretary, I would want to know how many children were in that situation. It shows that the cabinet secretary has not got a handle on the situation that he is asking me how many pupils will not be studying the new highers next year.

Michael Russell: He does not know.

Neil Bibby: Mr Russell does not know, and that is concerning. Instead of leadership, we have seen complete complacency—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have a bit of order, please? [*Interruption.*] Order!

Neil Bibby: It has fallen to local authorities such as Fife Council to give the leadership that has been lacking from the cabinet secretary's actions. Such is its commitment to ensuring that no pupils are disadvantaged, Fife Council put in additional funds of more than £400,000. In contrast, we have had mixed messages from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland. For example, on 8 November 2013, the chair of the curriculum for excellence board stated in a letter that there was an expectation that all schools would implement the new highers only for that advice to be amended just 12 days later.

Like the Educational Institute of Scotland, I hope that, in spite of the lack of support that the

Government has received, the commitment of teachers will ensure that the initiative is successful. However, it is also absolutely right to call for a review of the process because lessons must be learned. We are calling for urgent action and an independent review of the actions of the SQA, Education Scotland and the Government with regard to the preparations for the new exams and courses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the member to move his motion as he draws to a close.

Neil Bibby: It is vital that lessons are learned, so that we can prevent such a situation from happening again.

The situation is unacceptable and the Government has been complacent. We have heard serious concerns from the front line and teachers on the ground. The Government has failed to listen; it needs to listen fully and act on what has been said. Curriculum for excellence represents a great opportunity for our young people and we want it to succeed.

I move,

That the Parliament reaffirms its support for the curriculum for excellence, which it believes can make a significant contribution to Scottish education; however notes the serious and continuing concerns expressed by teachers and the worries of parents across Scotland about the readiness of preparation for the new National 4 and 5 examinations and the introduction of new highers, including over 30 complaints by the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association and also the EIS, which has "not encountered as widespread anger and disappointment and frustration with the exams authority as we are currently witnessing"; welcomes the somewhat belated announcement of extra resources and materials by the Scottish Government, which hopefully will allay many of these concerns, and now calls on the Scottish Government to publish a full action plan; agrees with the EIS that "lessons must be learned", and further believes that an independent review should be carried out in summer 2014 on the actions taken by the SQA, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government when implementing the current phase of the curriculum for excellence.

16:00

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): I am grateful for the opportunity to pause to remember why we are doing what we are doing in CFE and to reflect on the positive progress that has been made for our learners, parents and teachers. As I have said, vital as it is for us to listen to teachers during the process—we will listen to them—it is important to reflect on why we are doing the work, which is for the benefit of young people.

I have visited schools regularly in my job for almost three years and can testify to the excellent work that is going on. It is particularly inspiring to

hear young people enthusing about their learning. At yesterday's Education and Culture Committee, I said that we all share the vision of Scotland's being the best place in the world to go to school. Nothing has changed my view on that, and nothing has changed the recognition that we have a broad consensus in the chamber on the principles of curriculum for excellence—a policy that was begun under the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition and which has been continued by this Government. Putting in place the last pieces of the CFE jigsaw is a prize that all parties have played a part in—or, as the EIS put it more trenchantly yesterday, it is a prize in which all parties are “complicit”.

I cannot emphasise enough that this Government recognises and appreciates teachers' hard work, commitment and dedication. Much of the basis of curriculum for excellence is the intention to free teachers to use their professional judgment, so everything that we do nationally and locally must support that.

We hear reports that some teachers are anxious as we move to the new qualifications. That is a reflection of our teachers' deep commitment to doing their absolute best for young people. However, we take very seriously the points that are raised around support and workload issues. I have never tried to shy away from the reality that this level of change in any education system implies a great deal of hard work. To that end, the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and the SQA have worked closely with local authorities, teachers, and parents in order to ensure that effective support is available; indeed, unprecedented levels of support have been provided. Much of that has been long planned and agreed, and all national support has been provided on or before schedule.

We have also always been willing to listen to calls for further support and to put that in place. Last Friday, I announced a package of £5 million further assistance, which the unions and others have welcomed. I take issue with Mr Bibby's assertion that that is somehow the Government's first meaningful response to what teachers have told us. Since 2012, we have in total provided more than £10 million of additional funding, three extra in-service days, including a further day for higher in 2014-15, full course materials for each of the 95 national 4 and 5 courses, and we will provide higher materials by April, and subject-specific and other events for thousands of teachers.

Neil Bibby: Pupils, parents and teachers all need to feel confident before exams take place. Will the minister help to alleviate concerns by ensuring as a matter of urgency that adequate practice papers are made available?

Dr Allan: I am glad that Neil Bibby has asked that, because it was one of the interesting issues that was raised at yesterday's meeting of the Education and Culture Committee. With his permission, I will come on to that subject in a moment.

Before I do, it is important to say that the £4.75 million that I announced last week is specifically designed to enable local authorities to bring teachers together to work through the assessment process.

Another crucial component was announced by the SQA last week. Because it now has clear evidence that people have a good understanding of the standards that are required, the SQA has been able to make important changes to its approach to quality assurance, which will begin in April.

To pick up on Neil Bibby's point about requests for practice papers—which came up at yesterday's committee meeting—I note that a specimen paper for every national 5 course has been available since February 2013. By the end of March, the SQA will also have produced guidance that will capture still-relevant questions from past papers from the previous three years. I will be happy to ensure that that additional work is made available, because it will provide a rich pool of questions for learners to draw on as they prepare for their new national 5s. By the end of this week, the SQA will also release specimen papers for all new higher courses.

In addition, the SQA is writing to all young people who will take exams in 2014 to explain the new results services. From this summer, all candidates who suffer a bereavement, serious illness or other exceptional circumstances will find that they are much better served than they would have been under the previous appeals system, and candidates who wish to have their exam scripts rechecked will have the opportunity to request that service. For that reason, although the motivation of the Conservative amendment is reasonable enough, I believe that the concerns that it raises have been addressed.

Neil Bibby: Will the minister clarify how many specimen higher papers will be published? He will be aware that concerns have been raised about the lack of resources for highers textbooks. Will he set the record straight and address those concerns. How much will be made available for highers course textbooks?

Dr Allan: On the last question, the Government recently made an extra £1 million available to assist local authorities with textbooks, and we remain open to schools' assessing needs. Education Scotland staff are visiting many schools to discuss those very issues.

What was the first question about?

Neil Bibby: It was about the number of specimen papers that will be published.

Dr Allan: In the next few days, a specimen paper will be made available for all the new higher courses.

On the subject of highers, it is also worth saying—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close.

Dr Allan: The Government is listening—not only to parents and schools, but to teachers. We want to do what we can to ensure that confidence is not undermined at this crucial point, and we hope that all parties understand that. The knowledge that we have in place appropriate mechanisms for evaluation is crucial to instilling confidence in people.

I hope that I have reassured members of the emphasis that we are placing on supporting and listening to teachers.

I move amendment S4M-09140.2, to leave out from “however notes” to end and insert:

“commends the hard work of teachers and pupils across Scotland in preparing for the new national qualifications; recognises the concerns of some teachers regarding workload and the need for continued support from local authorities, national agencies and the Scottish Government; welcomes the wide range of support already provided including the recent announcement of a further £5 million in support; further welcomes the commitment to drawing on feedback and experience as the curriculum is implemented and the new national qualifications are rolled out; believes that it is important to maintain a broad political consensus and partnership approach to the curriculum for excellence involving all key interested parties committed to the successful implementation of the curriculum, and agrees with the National Parent Forum of Scotland that the best thing for the young people taking the new qualifications is to focus on successful delivery of the exams.”

16:08

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for selecting the topic for debate at what is clearly an extremely important time for the curriculum for excellence and the new qualifications.

With less than nine weeks to go until the 2014 exam diet gets under way, it is surely a time for teachers, parents and pupils to be given some positive reassurance that everything is on schedule. It is certainly a time to thank teaching staff for the Herculean effort that they have made to cope with the disproportionate workload. In addition, I take the opportunity to thank the Scottish Government for the funding package that was announced on Friday.

Notwithstanding that help, yesterday's meeting of the Education and Culture Committee proved that some key problems remain, several of which cannot necessarily be addressed by provision of funding, as was brought out in the surveys by the EIS and the SSTA. Those problems fall into four distinct areas, which I think it would be helpful to flag up.

The first area is the continuing confusion and mixed messages on some of the support materials, which Larry Flanagan highlighted at yesterday's Education and Culture Committee meeting. There was a bit of confusion between the SQA and the teaching unions on the support materials and specimen papers that are verified, so it would be helpful if the minister could offer clarification on that, because Dr Brown's answer was not quite the same as answers that we have had from elsewhere.

On the question of verification for the national 5 exam, there is a concern that not enough is being done to explain to parents why in some subjects only interim evidence for a pupil's work can be provided. In some subjects, units 1 to 3 are taught sequentially; in biology and maths, for example, pupils will finish one topic before they go on to the next, which means that the evidence for, say, unit 1 is clear. However, in subjects such as English and drama, the units are taught at the same time, which means that it is not possible to come to a pass or fail judgment. That has led to a little bit of confusion.

Moreover, in other subjects including business management, it is essential to get a 50 per cent pass rate in all the learning outcomes, whereas in others pupils need only get an average of 50 per cent. There might be very good reasons for that difference, but if we are to address the issue of academic robustness we need to be very clear what those reasons are, particularly in relation to how this approach relates to the verification process.

We also have to be very mindful of the tensions that have arisen. As the minister has rightly pointed out, the substantial culture change involved in curriculum for excellence meant that some teething problems were inevitable. I do not think that anyone would take away from that, but what came through loud and clear at yesterday's Education and Culture Committee meeting was the need to plan now for the articulation between the national exams and the new highers—and, more important, the advanced highers, which will not run alongside any of this for an extra year. On top of everything else, there are issues about the workload that people are being asked to take on, and those real concerns will obviously have an impact on future development work on the new highers and advanced highers.

On the post-results service, I firmly believe that the previous appeals system needed to be reformed. It did not work well; there were too many appeals and I do not think that what was happening with the mechanism that most teachers called the automatic appeal was right. I am therefore very much in favour of the changes to the system and welcome the scope for altering marks in both directions, which I think will give the system more integrity.

That said, a couple of weeks ago *The Courier* raised an important issue when it asked Perth and Kinross Council, Fife Council and Stirling Council whether the bill for an unsuccessful appeal falls on the individual school or is captured in the budget of the education department of the relevant authority. Parents would like that to be clarified; when I asked the minister about that at last week's education question time, he was not able to clarify the matter fully, and we did not get full clarification yesterday. It is important that we get that clarification, because there must be no disincentive for any school—

Michael Russell: Will Liz Smith give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): The member is concluding, cabinet secretary. You must be very brief.

Michael Russell: The SQA has made it clear that local authorities take the ultimate responsibility, but I thank Liz Smith for raising the issue in the way that she has raised it. Her amendment is helpful and I wish that we could have accepted it. We will look at the issue and come back to her very soon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude now, Ms Smith.

Liz Smith: I very much appreciate the cabinet secretary's comments because the issue is certainly worrying parents.

I agree with Labour that, whether we are talking about the post-results service or the whole set-up, it would be very helpful to have a firm review at the end of the process.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you really must finish, Ms Smith.

Liz Smith: If the Government could commit to that, we would support it.

I move amendment S4M-09140.1, to insert at end:

“, and calls on the Scottish Government, in accordance with the SQA, to ensure that the new Post Results Service fee system does not create any disincentives to request a marking review where there are clear academic grounds for doing so.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As we are now very tight for time, I must ask for four-minute speeches.

16:13

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I agree with Alasdair Allan, the minister, that the most important people in this process are the young people who are going through it in schools throughout Scotland. With only six weeks to go, they believe that things are moving in the right direction.

When we set out on this road in 2002, everyone in Parliament believed that this new and radical way of delivering education for eight to 18-year-olds was the way forward. Since that time, we have continued to agree that it should be the way forward and that we would face difficulties and challenges along the way. For its part, the Scottish Government has been open and has listened to all the professionals, teachers and unions who have been involved in the process; the minister has provided examples of that.

I believe that the curriculum for excellence is the way forward for our children and young people and that it gives them the rounded education that they all need to be everything that they possibly can be in life, and I have faith that the professionals in the process will work with all the education authorities to ensure that we deliver everything successfully. That is not just blind faith; it has been said in information that we have received in the Education and Culture Committee. Even the EIS said in its paper to the committee:

“Our *raison d'être* as teachers is to ensure that pupils achieve their full potential”.

Let us not forget that that is what people go into teaching for; they want pupils to achieve their full potential. Anyone who says anything different doubts the professionalism of the people who are involved in education in Scotland.

Larry Flanagan went even further yesterday when he said:

“Our key priority at this stage is to ensure that the first diet is a successful one for the young people who are currently in secondary 4. Teachers across Scotland are working extremely hard to ensure that ... the new national 4 and national 5 diet delivers for young people and their families.—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 25 February 2014; c 3608.]

That is the most important thing for me and for all the parents out there. We must stay focused on the prize, because we have worked on the matter on a cross-party basis since 2002.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Will George Adam take an intervention?

George Adam: Unfortunately, I am not able to do so because I do not have enough time. If Labour had wanted to have a proper debate and not a quick-fire round, we could have that debate in full. I would like to make some further points. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

George Adam: The debate is extremely important, and I will talk to anyone about the issue.

On the information that was brought up yesterday, Dr Janet Brown gave an example of the SQA working with the educationists. She said:

“One of the things that we have been doing over the past several months is very much focusing on the engagement that we have with teachers and with the professions to really understand the challenge associated with the introduction of the new qualifications. The teachers are absolutely focused on ensuring that they take the best advantage of curriculum for excellence, and the qualifications play an important part in that.”—*[Official Report, Education and Culture Committee, 25 February 2014; c 3611.]*

We can see from what we were told in evidence yesterday that they are working together to try to ensure that our young people get the opportunities that the curriculum for excellence offers them. As I have said, we have all worked on that together since 2002. That has shown the Parliament at its best.

The curriculum for excellence is a new approach to learning and teaching. It is a transformation in education in Scotland to offer a more flexible and enriched curriculum for three to 18-year-olds. As I have already said, the most important thing is that we do not lose sight of the prize when we are so close to the finish line. Let us support and have faith in the professionals and take the approach over the finish line.

16:17

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I support Scottish Labour's motion, which voices significant concerns from teachers, unions and parents about the readiness of the curriculum for excellence and the changes that it is bringing in Scotland's classrooms.

I put on record my support for Neil Bibby's call for the Scottish Government to conduct an independent review of what it and its agencies have done to prepare teachers for the new national 4 and national 5 exams and for a plan of action to address the on-going concerns of the SSTA and others.

It is clear from the speeches so far in the debate that those concerns are being felt in classrooms throughout Scotland, not least in my home city of Dundee. This morning, the local Dundee *Courier* reported that Dundee City Council is one of nine

councils in which the consultation process has failed to happen. I hope that the minister will address that issue in his concluding remarks.

I would like to address a couple of issues in Dundee and Angus that deeply concern me. I am concerned that, in 10 to 12 years' time, pupils will not be ready to sit their exams, because there have been some significant developments. Over the past few days, *The Times Educational Supplement* has reported that

“By the end of the summer, Angus Council hopes to have transferred all its nursery teachers to primary classrooms ... to save”

£120,000. The ministers know as well as I do that the curriculum for excellence is a learner's journey and that it starts at three years old. I hope that they share my concern that taking nursery teachers out of schools is absolutely the wrong way to go. Early years expert Professor Aline-Wendy Dunlop warned this week that there is a danger that nursery teachers will disappear from pre-school education altogether across Scotland unless the Scottish Government changes the law to protect them. She has recommended legislation to address that.

The figures are quite shocking: only 6 per cent of pupils in the whole county of Angus have regular access to a nursery teacher, which is not even a regular nursery teacher every day. That is the lowest proportion in Scotland. However, nursery teachers are coming out of nurseries across the country. The EIS has called for the Scottish Government to protect nursery teachers.

I ask the ministers and the cabinet secretary this: is the Scottish Government concerned that they are entrusting the curriculum for excellence in the early years to staff with lesser qualifications? I would really like to hear the cabinet secretary's opinion on that. It was only a day after I raised concerns about early years practitioners being removed from 22 schools in Dundee and the lesser qualifications of the staff who will assume some of their duties that the Scottish Government announced a review of the pre-school workforce and their qualifications. Perhaps the cabinet secretary will commit today to bringing the findings of that review to the chamber for debate when they are published, and to consider legislating in order to protect nursery teachers with the force of the law. I am sure that the cabinet secretary and the ministers hear my plea that the teachers for the early years must be properly qualified if the journey on the curriculum for excellence is to be successful. I hope that they will consider that suggestion.

16:21

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I start by extending my thanks to official report staff for producing the *Official Report* of yesterday's Education and Culture Committee meeting so promptly. It has been very useful.

I know that there is a high level of consensus that the curriculum for excellence will provide substantial benefits to Scotland's educational system and will prepare our young people for a life very different from the one that we had when we were their age. We are now at the cusp of a decade's worth of planning, and those 10 years have seen the involvement of many different stakeholders to ensure that consensus has been gained around the fundamentals of change. More than 1,000 teachers were involved in the creation of new qualifications that reflect revised content, a new approach to learning and a focus on knowledge and skills. The Government sought feedback from many more teachers beyond that. In total, more than 5,000 teachers, academics and lecturers were involved in helping to construct, design and implement the new curriculum. Simply put, the curriculum has not been designed in isolation. The Government has certainly sought the input of those who understand exactly what is required.

Beyond that, the Scottish Government has provided £5 million of additional funding in the past two years, not to mention an additional two in-service days, one of which is intended to allow teachers time to reflect on the new highers for next year, as the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages informed the Education and Culture Committee just yesterday.

We have also seen the creation of all full-course materials for each of the 95 national 4 and 5 courses, not to mention the subject-specific events that have been held to provide support for thousands of teachers. Another of the assets that will be delivered as part of the package that was announced on 21 February is £250,000 of funding that is designed to allow local authorities to hold school-level events to improve parents' understanding of the new qualifications. I believe that that step will enable students to get help from all sources around them and to go to both teachers and parents for support. Those measures should not be underplayed at what is a stressful time in the life of young people. Indeed, Iain Ellis, the chair of the national parent forum of Scotland, welcomed the additional support and said that the package showed

"the continued commitment of Scottish Government to listen to parents and teachers and to ensuring that everything possible is put in place to help our young people taking the new qualifications do as well as they possibly can."

I understand the concerns of my Labour colleagues on the committee regarding the readiness and the preparation of the new national 4 and 5 examinations, and the introduction of the new highers.

The Scottish Government's 21 February announcement of its £5 million package of support may well allay some of those fears. The vast bulk of that will allow local authorities to fund more time for the involvement of teachers and schools in the delivery of the new qualifications. As a matter of fact, the surveys that are quoted in the motion were conducted before the package was announced, and I would hope that the responses would be much more positive if the same surveys were carried out today.

I take issue with the description of the £5 million package as "somewhat belated". As I mentioned, curriculum for excellence was created over the past 10 years and it took input from a vast range of professionals and stakeholders. The timescales and plans that we are working to have been in place for the past four years, and the package is a response to feedback from young people, the teaching profession and the wider educational community. It is important to remember that the whole process is intended to be on-going, and thoughts and opinions will continue to be taken on board as we progress. Last Friday's announcement reflects that mindset.

Further to that, Education Scotland has already produced all professional focus papers and web-based course materials for the national 4 and 5 courses, and learning and teaching advice is available for all units in national 1 and 2 courses.

I am sure that all my colleagues in the chamber would agree that Scotland has, to quote the minister for learning,

"an exceptional teaching profession ... that cares deeply about the best outcomes for its young people".

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude, please.

Colin Beattie: Overall, curriculum for excellence provides the vehicle to ensure that our teaching profession has the opportunity to fully develop the potential of our young people.

16:26

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I agree with other members that this is an important issue. It is obviously critical to the future for Scotland's young people.

I am not a member of the Education and Culture Committee, so I was not privy to the discussion yesterday. I put on record my gratitude to the clerks to that committee and the official report for hurrying out the *Official Report* so quickly in order

to allow those of us who were not at the committee and not privy to the discussions to get at least a flavour of them by looking at the *Official Report*.

Like all members, I have a number of secondary schools in my constituency and I am in regular dialogue and discussion with them, be it with the teachers, the pupils or the parents. To date, I have not had any concerns raised with me regarding the readiness for the qualifications of the schools in Aberdeen Donside. I had some concerns raised with me in 2011-12, when I was a regional MSP, but they were a product of the approach being taken by one or two individual secondary schools rather than a wider issue affecting the approach that is being taken with the curriculum for excellence across the country.

I understand that, whenever a member stands up and says that they have not heard concerns or not had concerns expressed to them, they can be accused of being complacent. However, this is not complacency. I sometimes feel that, unless a member is wearing a sandwich board with "the end is nigh" written across it, they can be targeted for complacency. I am not complacent in any way, shape or form, and I do not think that the Scottish Government is being complacent, either. Obviously, the Government wants every young person to achieve the best they can and its approach is to work with and listen to teachers, unions and parents. That dialogue has been ongoing for a considerable time.

Kezia Dugdale: Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: I am sorry, but I have only four minutes.

The dialogue started back in 2002 when the previous Labour and Liberal Executive was involved in the beginnings of curriculum for excellence, and it has continued all the way through. As with any change in qualifications that takes place, there have been concerns. I know from speaking to people who were around in the education system at the time of the change from O grades to standard grades that there were concerns and there were predictions that things would not work, yet the transition took place and worked effectively.

That is not to say that we can simply assume that that will happen, but if we look at the interventions that the Scottish Government has been making, we can see clearly that it has acted on concerns. There has been reference to the belatedness of the funding that the Government has provided, but that funding had to be provided on the back of feedback that was received from the professionals—from teachers—following the undertaking of live assessments. The funding followed that experience. However, as the minister

said, funding has been provided throughout the process in order to assist.

Liz Smith was correct to make the constructive point that the issue is not always the amount of money that is allocated; the cultural and mindset aspect also needs to be addressed. The money from the Scottish Government is critical and welcome, but I recognise Liz Smith's point and I am sure that the Government will take on board the constructive suggestions that she made.

We must remember that there is an important role for local authorities to play, which I noted in reading yesterday's committee discussions. As well as the Scottish Government fulfilling its end of the bargain, we must ensure that work takes place across the board, which includes working with local authorities to ensure that they fulfil their end of the bargain and that the process works effectively, which I am confident that it will.

16:30

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I thank Neil Bibby for lodging the motion. It is important that teachers, parents and pupils across Scotland know that the Parliament is concerned about and takes seriously the issues that they are raising. I welcome the debate that is taking place today.

Colin Beattie said that curriculum for excellence has been 10 years in the planning. I agree that a lot of planning has been done, which is why it is even more important that, when we reach the stage of implementing curriculum for excellence and major concerns are being flagged up to us, we take those issues seriously.

I welcomed the announcement by the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages of an additional £5 million for curriculum for excellence. That shows that the Government acknowledges that there are issues out there that need to be tackled.

Earlier this month, Fife Council announced investment of £400,000 after receiving representations from teaching unions, teachers, parents and pupils on concerns about the new highs.

Michael Russell: I will repeat what I have said to Alex Rowley privately. I put it on record that I very much welcome that contribution from Fife Council. The partnership work between that council's officials, Education Scotland and the SQA is important and will very much help delivery. That is a great thing.

Alex Rowley: I thank the cabinet secretary for that.

The moneys that have been put in are welcome. I note that £4.75 million of the moneys that have

been provided will be distributed through the normal means, which will mean that Fife gets about £330,000. That will be very welcome in how it is spent. However, no moneys have been provided for materials or books.

When Fife Council surveyed schools, one issue was the allocation of books. A proposal was made to the administration that £225,000 should be allocated to resources for the new curriculum in each of the 17 secondary schools in Fife. That would allow at least three departments in each secondary school to purchase textbooks for their children. If £1 million had been put in earlier this year, we can see how far it could have gone. I understand from the evidence that the teaching unions gave yesterday that there is a desperate need to get more resources into local authorities and directly into schools for books. I appeal for those resources.

The cabinet secretary asked how many pupils will not take the new highers. Nobody can answer that question at this stage. Fife Council has been advised that there have been and continue to be many challenges with the quality and quantity of the information that comes from the SQA and that, as a result, it is unclear at this stage how many teachers and departments will be able to proceed with the highers in the coming year.

I say to the cabinet secretary and the minister that it is disappointing that their amendment shows that they are unwilling to proceed with a review, because we need to learn the lessons. We—and parents and pupils—need to know where schools are at. A review would allow us to know that. I welcome the additional resource, but I ask the Government to consider again having a review, so that we can find out where schools are at, get the information out to parents and provide support.

16:35

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I associate myself with Liz Smith's comments about the teaching profession and its Herculean effort in its work on the implementation of the curriculum for excellence. I absolutely agree that we are proud of the teaching profession in Scotland and we appreciate its efforts at what is a difficult time. It is always a difficult time and there will always be obstacles overcome in that process.

There has been a lot of talk about the oral evidence that was given to the Education and Culture Committee yesterday, but I want to remind members that the committee received written evidence from the national parent forum of Scotland, which said:

"Much work has been done, particularly in the last couple of years to prepare secondary teachers for delivering the new courses and qualifications."

I therefore take issue with Neil Bibby's statement that things have been ignored for two years. It is just not tenable to say that.

Liz Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: No, sorry. I do not have time.

The national parent forum of Scotland goes on to say:

"There have been a range of resources and materials, and events that have been made available by ourselves, Education Scotland and SQA ... However, we are at a crucial stage for our children and young people. The National Parent Forum of Scotland has played its part in working in partnership with Scottish Government to help parents and Parent Councils understand the reality of the changes, against a backdrop of some particularly negative media at times, and also some scare-mongering by those who can only have their own interests to serve, and not those of our children ... We believe that if we really want to demonstrate that we want the best for the young people taking these new qualifications in only a few months' time, we need to get on and finish what was started nearly 10 years ago—and provide that better learning and teaching experience for our children. We would hope that there is no further talk of delay, of crisis and of sticking with old style qualifications."

It is absolutely clear that parents want us to get on with this process and deliver what has been a transformational change in education in Scotland, and that is to be welcomed.

Mr Bibby made a statement about ignoring things for two years. I have in front of me an Education Scotland publication from May 2012 entitled "Progress in preparing for the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence in secondary schools." It has seven key findings and if I have time I will read some of them out. The first key finding is:

"Overall, almost all secondary schools are making good progress in preparing for delivery and implementation of Curriculum for Excellence."

Finding 2 is:

"There is a clear understanding that the next two years are a period in which schools' curriculum planning and structures will evolve progressively."

Neil Bibby: Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: No, I do not have time.

Number 3 is:

"Schools are engaging well with a range of key stakeholders in developing curriculum plans and structures."

Finding number 4 is:

"Overall, secondary schools are making good progress in their preparation for the new NQs"—

national qualifications—

“and are on track to implement them within the national timescale without invoking exceptional circumstances.”

Point number 5 is:

“While progress is generally good, it is clear that some departments will need more support to help them prepare effectively for the new NQs.”

The publication lists key areas in which that support was going.

There are seven key findings in the report, which paints a picture of an Education Scotland that is working dynamically with our secondary sector to ensure the delivery of the curriculum for excellence on time. I appreciate that, because it is a dynamic process, some of the changes will have increased teachers' workload, but there is no doubt that the additional funding that the Government announced last week will give the EIS what it wanted, which is the time and space to deliver the national 4 and 5 exams effectively. Larry Flanagan said:

“The EIS believes that this new support package is a positive development that will be very welcome in our secondary schools”.

Let there be no doubt that we are on track to deliver this transformational change in Scottish secondaries and parents and pupils should take confidence from this debate that it will be on track.

16:39

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

If Neil Bibby continues with performances such as today's, his day as education secretary will come. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mary Scanlon: His day will come. *[Interruption.]* Come on, I only have a few minutes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please, Mr McDonald.

Mary Scanlon: We would be content to support the Government amendment to the Labour motion on the basis that the Government will bring forward the independent review. It would be helpful if the minister could confirm in his summing-up speech whether that will happen, so that we all know how to vote.

As Liz Smith did, I thank the Labour Party for choosing to debate this subject in its own business time. What could be more important than the education and opportunities of young people across Scotland?

The motion that is set out in the name of Neil Bibby today is thoroughly reasonable, noting the serious concerns that have been expressed by teachers, and the worries of parents and pupils about the readiness of preparation and, indeed,

the level of support for the new exams. The SSTA and the EIS have also expressed the levels of anger, disappointment and frustration that are felt by their members. Like Clare Adamson, Liz Smith and others, I put on record my appreciation of the first-class work that is being done in our schools. I have no doubt that that will continue and that any issues that arise will be to do with maintaining that excellent standard.

Some weeks ago, Kezia Dugdale and I were invited to a meeting with the minister, Alasdair Allan. Being new to the portfolio, I was delighted to accept the invitation. I knew that the meeting would concern either an important Government announcement or further information on national 4 and 5 exams. However, I knew that it could not be an important Government announcement, because there was nothing on the radio or in the papers that day, so I was pleased to go to the meeting to get an update on the exams. The update was informative, upbeat and positive, and I left the meeting in no doubt that everything was on track. I was so impressed at how well things were going that I was amazed that another £5 million had to be spent to sort things out, only weeks after that meeting.

However, with nine weeks until the exams, Scottish Conservatives want to work with the Government in an open, transparent and constructive manner. Education is too important for anything less.

All parties have a stake in the successful implementation of the national exams, and I hope that the Government will reflect on several of the thoughtful speeches that I have heard today. In particular, Neil Bibby and Liz Smith struck the right note between expressing the concerns of the teaching profession and recognising that this year's exam diet is less than nine weeks away.

When 93 per cent of teachers respond to an SSTA survey saying that they think that Education Scotland and the SQA have not offered enough support, it is clear that there are significant issues with the roll-out of the new exams. Some of the issues around course materials are worrying and, as others have pointed out, should have been addressed in advance. I was comforted, to an extent, by what the minister said earlier. However, today, I received an email from a parent in Inverness who was at a parents evening last night. She wrote:

“As a parent of a child with some literacy difficulties and Autism I would like to ask how we are supposed to sufficiently prepare our child for the new format of the exam without more than one sample.”

She said that she feels that her son is being discriminated against, and that

"his outcome in this years exam will be less favourable because he has not had the opportunity to practise how to answer the kinds of questions being asked when his Autism makes it difficult".

I hope that the minister will take that on board.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must come to a close now.

Mary Scanlon: I would like to pay tribute to the teaching profession and the excellent work that teachers have done. Again, I put on record that we would like the Government to support the independent review, and that we are committed to working with the Government to make the curriculum for excellence a success.

16:43

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): At the outset, I confirm this Government's continuing, on-going and long-lasting support for the curriculum for excellence in not only words, but actions. Again and again, we have ensured that all the resources that are required are in place and that the work is being done to support teachers, schools, local authorities and, above all, pupils.

We have kept faith with the curriculum for excellence because that is the right thing to do, because it is a dynamic and modern education system that will serve Scotland and Scotland's young people well. We will go on doing that through the first diet of exams because, as Liz Smith knows, the curriculum for excellence is not an event, it is a process. It is the way in which we do education in Scotland, and we will carry on with it for years to come.

Other members have taken the same position. I am grateful to Liz Smith, whose speech was tremendous. We will miss her in her portfolio, because she asked exactly the right questions.

Liz Smith: I am not going.

Michael Russell: I am glad that she is not going completely, because she asks the right questions. I will answer some of them in a moment.

The party that has wobbled on curriculum for excellence is the Labour Party, regrettably. That was summed up today by two things—one in the chamber and one outside.

At the start of the debate, Mr Bibby made an assertion—I am glad that Alex Rowley drew attention to it—about the numbers. He talked about so many young people not taking the highers. Mr Bibby could not know—it is impossible to know, as Mr Rowley confirmed—how many young people may not take the new highers.

To offer openness about moving forward was exactly the right thing to do, because there was

always going to be dual running of the highers, given the situation in S5 and S6. It was warmly welcomed. It was what needed to happen, but the offer has been traduced by Mr Bibby into a political excuse to attack the Government. Mr Bibby cannot know the numbers—nobody can know—but he asserted that he did. That is not the action of somebody who supports curriculum for excellence.

Regrettably, Kezia Dugdale did the same in *The Times Educational Supplement* two weeks ago. I look forward to her speech, because I hope that she has moved away from this position:

"The spectre of the infamous millennium exams debacle is hanging over the introduction of the new National qualifications, shadow education secretary Kezia Dugdale has suggested."

She went on to say that

"The first students to sit the exams were being treated like 'a generation of guinea pigs'".

That was a most unfortunate thing to say. It could not have come from somebody who supports Scotland's young people and their progress through exciting, positive and really important sets of exams. Yet again, it was making use of Scotland's young people for political purposes. I deplore that. Attacking staff and attacking curriculum for excellence—

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Will Mike Russell give way?

Michael Russell: No, I will not take an intervention from Mr Macintosh.

Neil Bibby: Will Mike Russell give way?

Michael Russell: I will take one from Mr Bibby.

Neil Bibby: I listed more than 30 complaints raised by the SSTA and the EIS this week. The cabinet secretary has spent three minutes attacking the Labour Party; when will he start responding to the issues that have been raised?

Michael Russell: Well, Mr Bibby, I started responding to those on the day that I came into office—four years and three months ago—and I have gone on responding to them by meeting the unions and spending time in schools. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Michael Russell: Mr Bibby, I was responding to them when you had not even heard of curriculum for excellence.

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

Michael Russell: I will now come on to the issue of a review. I am grateful for Alex Rowley's remarks. Incidentally, he is right about the

allocation of resources. We should all do as much as we can.

I also respond to Jenny Marra's point by saying that the Government has already announced a review of the teaching and nursery workforce. The mix of qualifications works well—we know that. We will have union input to the review so that we can take it forward. Ms Marra looks sceptical. That is because I am trying to do something positive. Labour hates the Scottish National Party doing things that are positive.

I will come to the review.

Jenny Marra: Will Mike Russell give way?

Michael Russell: No. The review process already exists. I want to make that point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Marra, the cabinet secretary is not taking an intervention.

Michael Russell: I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, I was just telling Ms Marra that you were not taking an intervention so that she could resume her seat.

Michael Russell: Thank you very much for confirming that.

The review process already exists. I point to it because I hope that it will help.

Liz Smith rose—

Michael Russell: I will take an intervention from Liz Smith if she wishes to make one.

Liz Smith: I thank the cabinet secretary for taking an intervention.

One of the purposes of the review is to deal with some of the issues. I will quote what Dr Janet Brown said yesterday about specimen papers:

"We are looking at the significant number of previous practice papers that are available and identifying what aspects of those papers are relevant to and valid for the current qualifications."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 25 February 2014; c 3630.]

That implies that there is a lot of work to be done, which is why the reviews are necessary.

Michael Russell: I understand the point. I will make two points about the review—there are two parts to the matter—that I hope will reassure the fair-minded in this chamber.

First, the management board for curriculum for excellence is independent of all practitioners. It brings in all the experiences. It has a job to review and plan constantly. I am happy to ask it whether, at the conclusion of the first set of diets, it will take a special look at what took place in that set of diets.

However, another review has already been announced. The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development has been invited to review curriculum for excellence. With our encouragement, it has engaged the support of the Royal Society of Edinburgh—those two bodies are absolutely unimpeachable in such matters—and will consider it at the right time. It would be utterly wrong to undertake a full review of curriculum for excellence and its effect while the programme is not complete and when the highers have still to take place. It would be disruptive.

I make an appeal to members. Labour was wrong to approach the debate in the way that it has done. I hope that, at the end of the debate, we might have from Kezia Dugdale something more consensual. Then, let us move forward united to support Scotland's young people as they go forward. We will support the teachers every inch of the way. We will do even more if we have to do it. We will listen to teachers, as we always do. We will listen to pupils. We will work with schools. That is what we should all be doing. We should not be trying to make political use of Scotland's young people in order to attack the Government. That is disgraceful. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Bibby.

Michael Russell: I do hope that Mr Bibby's speech was an aberration and that Kezia Dugdale will rise—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Bibby. Cabinet secretary, please conclude.

Michael Russell: —into the position to which Mary Scanlon wanted to welcome Mr Bibby: into the position of somebody who might one day hold this office.

16:50

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Until the cabinet secretary stood up, we had quite a constructive debate about the detail of curriculum for excellence and where we are at with the current exam diet.

Labour used its business time today to give voice to thousands of parents, pupils and teachers across Scotland who are going through an anxious and stressful time. Neil Bibby has already made the point that Labour has brought the issue to the chamber on several occasions and has been making these points for two years now. We do that because we want it to work. We want it to work.

I said "give voice" to the concerns of parents, pupils and teachers, because many of the speeches from Labour members have included the words of others: the words of third parties—parents, teachers and pupils—who are anxious

about the future and anxious about the weeks ahead. I will quote directly from more such people in my summing up because it is important that we give voice to those concerns.

Before I do that, I commend teachers across the country for the job that they are doing under incredible pressure. They are doing the job and putting in all the extra hours because they care so deeply about their profession and about their responsibility to the children and young people whom they look after. They have devoted their lives to that. That is why, when I got an email yesterday from a principal teacher of social subjects, I was really quite distressed. The email reads:

"the situation re these new exams is frightening ... I have taught for 31 years and I have never known a situation like this. Indeed I am thinking of leaving the profession because of the stress and pressure that delivering these new courses will bring ... We are at our wits end ... I think if parents really knew what was going on there would be a mass revolt."

Those are the words of a principal teacher of a social subject in a high school. SNP back benchers can say that it is all fixed, that we have had reviews and that the EIS survey is out of date, but a principal teacher yesterday expressed serious concerns about their ability to deliver for pupils in their classroom, quite possibly right now studying for exams that are just six weeks away. It was very telling that not a single SNP back bencher took an intervention during the course of the debate.

We had a very quiet, tempered tone from the education minister at the start of the debate, only for Mike Russell to bluster in at the end. I say to Mark McDonald that, had he let me intervene, I would have encouraged him to look again at the five or six different quotations that Neil Bibby gave in his opening speech from teachers who are concerned about what is happening now. Perhaps Mark McDonald can look at the *Official Report* of the debate and then assess for himself whether he thinks that there is anything to worry about.

Mark McDonald also made a comparison between the standard grades and higher stills and what we have now. The standard grades and higher stills were introduced over ten years. We have sets of exams just now that are being introduced over two years. That is the difference. That is the problem that we are facing. That is why Larry Flanagan is left saying that

"we have not encountered as widespread anger and disappointment and frustration with the exams ... as we are currently witnessing".

Those are Larry Flanagan's words.

George Adam is another member who did not take any interventions. We have a comment from a teacher in his constituency who says:

"The lack of planning, organisation and support given to teachers is a disgrace."

That is a teacher in Mr Adam's constituency, who has nothing to say except that everything is fine. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Mr Adam. Please do not interrupt.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Who runs the council?

Kezia Dugdale: Mr FitzPatrick has just asked who runs the council. Of course, it has nothing to do with Alasdair Allan or Mike Russell: it is the fault of the council. There we go again. Mr FitzPatrick, where were you two hours ago? Now we know the blame game.

I say to Clare Adamson, another SNP member who failed to take any interventions, that Larry Flanagan used the words

"anger and disappointment and frustration".

Those are not words that teachers use on a whim. Larry Flanagan has pointed out very clearly that teachers have serious concerns. Why are those serious concerns from committed professionals not being respected and rewarded with a review?

We welcome the £4.75 million funding package, but EIS has said that it is of course too late to make any impact on the national 4 and 5 curriculum and the exams that are six weeks away. I would welcome an acknowledgement from the Government that the additional money will in fact do nothing to help those who are facing national 4 and 5 exams.

I see that the cabinet secretary is sitting there shaking his head. If he would like to correct Labour members, and tell us that the £5 million will be helpful in the next six weeks, I would be willing to hear that.

I see that there is no response from the cabinet secretary.

Michael Russell rose—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Russell.

Michael Russell: The money will be helpful to all teachers and all pupils.

Kezia Dugdale: Perhaps the cabinet secretary can phone Larry Flanagan after the debate and put that point to him, because Larry Flanagan recognises that the funding will do nothing to help with national 4 and 5 exams.

I ask the cabinet secretary again, since he was so interested in putting statistical questions to Mr Bibby, how many people are studying national 5 qualifications in our colleges.

It appears that he does not know the answer to that. I phoned the SQA and Colleges Scotland this afternoon to try to get hold of those figures. Of course, until the end of March, we will not know the full numbers of people who are sitting national 4 and 5 exams. However, we get a different story when we phone the colleges.

The colleges know how many people are studying for national 5 qualifications because they are teaching them. At Edinburgh College, for example, 107 students are studying for national 5 qualifications. Can the cabinet secretary tell me how the additional £5 million will help those students in our colleges? Everything that the Government has to say is about supporting local authorities to support pupils in schools who are studying for national 4 and 5 qualifications. Yet again, colleges are left in the back seat and the cabinet secretary has nothing to say to them.

We are told that there is £1 million for textbooks, but yet again the EIS tells us that the money, when it is broken down on a per capita basis by school, is not enough to buy a single classroom a single set of textbooks for a subject.

The cabinet secretary is shaking his head again. Those are not my words, but the words of the head of the teaching union, who is telling him that there are not enough textbooks in our classrooms.

If members look at the SQA website today, they will see that the front page says, "Official SQA Past Papers", under which bullet point 2 says:

"Practise on the real thing".

That message is going to pupils just now. However, when they click on it, they get past papers for all the standard grades and higher. There is no link to a single national 4 or 5 past paper on the front page of the SQA website. [Interruption.] Yes, if members dig around the website they will eventually get to a past paper, but they need a national 5 in computing to find it. [Interruption.] For the benefit of the *Official Report*, I hear the cabinet secretary saying that that is absolutely pathetic. I quite agree: it is pathetic that a pupil in this country cannot go on the SQA website and see what type of exams they will be facing in six weeks' time.

The Labour motion asks for two clear things. First, it calls for an action plan, which we believe could address the issues around practice papers and textbooks, and potentially avoid future industrial action, given that teachers are now saying, "If we are not prepared for higher, we will have to strike."

Secondly, our motion calls for an independent review in 2014, because it is critical that we understand the relationship between the SQA, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government.

We cannot support what the Government is setting out today, and it is complacent in its approach to the new exams. We fully support curriculum for excellence and wish the students who are facing those exams in the next six weeks the very best of luck.

Business Motions

16:58

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09145, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I call Joe FitzPatrick to move the motion.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): Presiding Officer, the motion was agreed at the Parliamentary Bureau meeting on Tuesday, and I commend it to members in the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 4 March 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Responding to Welfare Reform

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Deep Sea Mining Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 5 March 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Rural Affairs and the Environment;
Justice and the Law Officers

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Update on Delivering the 2020 Vision in NHS Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 March 2014

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate:
Maximising the Opportunities for
Scotland from District Heating and

Decarbonising the Heat System

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 11 March 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Tribunals (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 12 March 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Health and Wellbeing

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 13 March 2014

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09147, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Courts Reform (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Courts Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 23 May 2014.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09148, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable

for stage 2 of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 21 March 2014.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-09158, on committee membership.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Richard Baker be appointed to replace Hanzala Malik as a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:00

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

The first question is, that amendment S4M-09133.1, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09133, in the name of Graeme Pearson, on justice, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09133, in the name of Graeme Pearson, on justice, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)

Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the excellent work done by the officers and staff in Police Scotland and the Scottish

Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) in keeping the people of Scotland safe with an unprecedented level of engagement with communities and local authorities, which is complemented by a process of engagement with staff; further recognises that crime is at a 39-year low and welcomes the 1,000 extra officers that the Scottish Government has delivered in communities since 2007; welcomes the lowest number of fires recorded in Scotland in the last 10 years; acknowledges the positive impacts of reform; recognises the value of national governance provided by the Scottish Police Authority and the SFRS Board; acknowledges that more locally elected members than ever are having their say on local policing matters as a result of local scrutiny arrangements, and agrees that significant progress has been made on the reform journey that began with the legislation that received the overwhelming support of the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-09140.2, in the name of Alasdair Allan, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09140, in the name of Neil Bibby, on Scotland's children, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

The Parliament is agreed, so—[*Interruption.*] Order. When I put the question on the amendment in the name of Kenny MacAskill, members were nice and loud in their disagreement—thank you very much, Mr Johnstone. [*Laughter.*] If members want to disagree, please make your voices heard loud and clear.

The question is, that amendment S4M-09140.2, in the name of Alasdair Allan, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09140, in the name of Neil Bibby, on Scotland's children, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No! [*Laughter.*]

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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (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)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

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)
 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)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (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)
 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)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (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)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (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 83, Against 33, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-09140.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09140, in the name of Neil Bibby, on Scotland's children, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 48, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09140, in the name of Neil Bibby, on Scotland's children, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (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)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 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)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGregor, 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)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (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)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)

McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (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 84, Against 0, Abstentions 32.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament reaffirms its support for the curriculum for excellence, which it believes can make a significant contribution to Scottish education; commends the hard work of teachers and pupils across Scotland in preparing for the new national qualifications; recognises the concerns of some teachers regarding workload and the need for continued support from local authorities, national agencies and the Scottish Government; welcomes the wide range of support already provided including the recent announcement of a further £5 million in support; further welcomes the commitment to drawing on feedback and experience as the curriculum is implemented and the new national qualifications are rolled out; believes that it is important to maintain a broad political consensus and partnership approach to the curriculum for excellence involving all key interested parties committed to the successful implementation of the curriculum, and agrees with the National Parent Forum of Scotland that the best thing for the young people taking the new qualifications is to focus on successful delivery of the exams.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09158, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Richard Baker be appointed to replace Hanzala Malik as a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee.

Eating Disorder Awareness Week 2014

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-08741, in the name of Dennis Robertson, on eating disorder awareness week. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 24 to 28 February 2014 marks Eating Disorder Awareness Week; recognises that, throughout the country, people and organisations will mark the week by raising awareness of the impact of eating disorders and the challenges faced by those who are affected by them; commemorates the third anniversary of Caroline Robertson's death, and acknowledges the continued work by clinicians, government and people affected by eating disorders in the progress that is being made in the fight against this illness.

17:08

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Presiding Officer, it was two years ago this week that I stood on this very spot and opened my first members' business debate. It was emotional for me because it was when I was grieving the loss of my daughter, Caroline. That debate was about raising awareness of eating disorders. I come back to the chamber today to give members an update on where we are and where I hope we are going.

Yesterday was the third anniversary of Caroline's death, but this debate, like the previous debate, is about leaving a legacy in Caroline's name.

This week, many events will be held in the Parliament. This afternoon, I had the pleasure of sitting in with the child and adolescent mental health services teams from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Lothian and NHS Grampian. Apart from the psychologists and specialist nurses, there were parents of people with eating disorders. Although the medical profession, the clinicians and the specialists are important, the parents and those with eating disorders are more important. I welcome many of the people who were there this afternoon to the public gallery this evening, along with many of the parliamentary staff, and I make special mention of my wife, Ann.

The pain never leaves you, although the period of grieving eases. Where are we now? During the first debate, I was raising awareness and hoped at that time that we would raise awareness among general practitioners, guidance teachers, school nurses and the medical profession in general. I believe that we have come a long way, as more GPs are now aware of eating disorders. They are

more aware and can refer at an earlier stage, but the sad fact is that young people are still dying because the mental illness is such that, sometimes, the pathway to recovery just cannot be found.

In many ways, it is with a heavy heart that I stand here, but it is important that I do. It is important that MSPs such as me go into their constituencies and listen to the patients, parents and clinicians who are fighting the illness.

Just at the end of last year, we held the first conference of specialist school nurses and guidance teachers at Portlethen, just outside Aberdeen. The conference was organised by a headteacher called Neil Morrison who, at the time when Caroline died, was a depute principal at Westhill academy in my constituency. There was a young girl with an eating disorder in his school and he felt that we needed to do something. He felt that the awareness needs to be within the schools, so the conference was held and involved other people in the Grampian area, and it was a success. A conference on the same lines is now being held here, in Edinburgh. We are moving forward, and the pathway is not as difficult as it was back then.

I believe that awareness among the media has also shifted. I no longer hear the same sensationalist stories about people with eating disorders, although I still challenge the people at Channel 4 and their programme “Supersize vs Superskinny”, which I mentioned in my last debate. The programme demeans the problem with eating disorders, sensationalising it to a point, and I challenge them now, as I did then, to speak with me. They have not done so.

On Friday, we will have a conference here, in the Parliament. We will look at social media and at the fashion industry and how it impacts on people with eating disorders. Most important of all, we will have a debate with families and carers, who are the people who need to be listened to.

Presiding Officer, it is a difficult journey. It is a journey that I will have to continue, not just for this debate but for many years to come because I fear that many more young people will die. Many more young people will lose their lives to this dreadful illness. We must do what we can and that is not just about resources, but about networking and sharing good practice. This is a global problem, but here in Scotland we can take it forward. We can be leaders, and we should be.

17:15

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I thank everybody who listened to Dennis Robertson’s speech. I offer him an apology: two years ago, I was not here, as I was not yet an

MSP, but I watched his marvellous debate on eating disorders, much like many other people will be watching today online or on TV.

Dennis talked about a journey. Perhaps I can explain a little bit about the journey that he and his family have been on—it is a journey that, unfortunately, a lot of families are going through. Three years ago, when Caroline died, I was with Dennis, Ann and Fiona. I tried to give as much support as I could, although I did not always use the right words, I did not know about the issue and I did not always know what to say or do. It is for every one of us to put the issue before the Scottish Parliament and create more awareness about it. It is for every one of us to understand not only what the sufferers are going through, but what the families, guardians and siblings are going through. I take the opportunity to thank Dennis and Ann, who is here today, for having the strength to champion the issue. However, it is an issue that we should all champion.

Dennis talked about a meeting with Neil Morrison, the depute head of a local academy. I was at that meeting. Neil said something strange at the end of the meeting. He said, “Christian, I have been to a lot of meetings with you, but this is the first one where you haven’t said a word.” There is something very important in all this: Dennis is the right person to lead the debate because he has fantastic listening skills. I remember that meeting, when he listened to everyone, including the teachers and the parents. He knew all about the issues and how it affected them.

We need a lot more support for professionals but, more important, for parents, guardians and siblings. Families and friends—friends like me—need to have a lot more awareness. That awareness can come through the media but, unfortunately, that is sometimes too sensationalist, as Dennis pointed out. We must treat the matter as we would any other issue of such importance, in which a lot of people suffer and which some people, such as Caroline, unfortunately do not get through.

Last week, we passed the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, which talks about getting professionals not only from education but from the police and health all working together. We really need everybody to work together because the idea that families must go through such suffering with one of their children without having help is unbearable.

As Dennis said, it is a global problem, but we can do something here in the Parliament. My niece left a clinic in Paris last week under similar circumstances. She had an eating disorder and now she is self-harming. These issues are all

bound together. We need the support of everyone to help families get through.

17:20

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I thank Dennis Robertson for, and congratulate him on, bringing forward his motion, and I join other members in honouring the memory of his very dear daughter, Caroline. I would like to show my absolute support for his motion and to put on the record my admiration for his strength of character in tirelessly campaigning to improve the lives of so many others who suffer.

As parliamentarians, we can do our best to provide a framework for clinical and emotional support, but we must acknowledge the need to engage with others in campaigning and awareness raising. Before I mention some of what has been done, I want to touch on why it is necessary and to give up-to-date statistics on the task that confronts us.

Material published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland cites studies that suggest a

“prevalence of eating disorders in teenage girls as high as 13%, with about 1% meeting criteria for anorexia nervosa”.

We know, too, that male eating disorders are increasingly being recognised. The conditions are seen throughout life,

“because of persistence, recurrence or new occurrence.”

Figures provided by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence suggest that 1.6 million people in the United Kingdom are affected by an eating disorder, of which around 11 per cent are male.

What is encouraging is that eating disorders have now become a recognised mental health problem. As we learn more about how best to approach treatment and awareness raising, we start to hear stories of help and successful recovery. For example, I have seen figures that suggest that almost 50 per cent of people with anorexia nervosa or bulimia make a full recovery but, as Dennis Robertson reminded us, far too many people are still dying.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland points out that anorexia and bulimia nervosa are not always exclusively a result of attempts to regulate appearance. In some cases, they may relate to deeply rooted trauma and other mental health issues. The college correctly points out that management of disorders

“depends on people being helped to tolerate difficult feelings without using dysfunctional strategies”.

Fundamentally, that comes down to giving individuals an opportunity to come forward and

present confidentially, creating a relationship of trust and equipping them with the tools to adopt new coping strategies. Ideally, those strategies would include receiving help from friends and family, who require support and direction to cope with the pressure and distress that are often felt.

Later this week, I will chair a session at the all-day conference that Dennis Robertson mentioned. The conference will explore the challenges that individuals and their families face, and the session that I will chair will involve discussion of the issues that families and carers face in supporting those who suffer. That is extremely important, as the better equipped a family is to recognise and understand destructive behaviours, the more able it will be to offer support without experiencing as much of the fear and anxiety that are often experienced.

The conference will also address the role of new technologies, particularly social media, in eating disorders. It will, in part, analyse the impact of negative images on young people and the effect of media pressures, but I hope that it will also look at how new online technologies and apps can be used as a tool.

However, there is no substitute for face-to-face therapy and a supportive human relationship in the fight against eating disorders. That is why it is important to make sure that that is available at the point at which a patient presents to a GP, and I was pleased to hear Dennis Robertson say that GPs' knowledge and awareness of the issue have increased markedly.

There are several excellent examples of services for people with eating disorders in Scotland, such as the managed clinical network for eating disorders that was set up at the end of 2005 to cover Grampian, Tayside, Highland, Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles.

I see that my time has almost run out. I again congratulate Dennis Robertson on bringing the debate to the chamber. As he said at the beginning, two years have passed since he led a members' business debate on the subject, and we are a little closer to gaining a better understanding of what is a complex and challenging mental health problem.

More important, we have been able to show our own support as a Parliament for the incredible work that is being done across the country and to put the full weight of our cross-party backing behind the people involved. We must speak out so that in future the thousands who suffer feel able to speak out as well.

17:25

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): In 2010, the United Kingdom Royal College of Psychiatrists said in what was at the time a very well covered public statement:

“Although biological and genetic factors play an important role in the development of these disorders, psychological and social factors are also significant.”

As Malcolm Chisholm pointed out, there are both dysfunctional strategies and contributing factors at work. The RCP called for public restraint in how the issues and eating disorders in general are portrayed in society, but as we have heard, more progress has been made in some areas than in others.

As a policymaker, I cannot change biology or genetics, but social factors might come within the ambit of what can be changed. When, almost 200 years ago, the poet Lord Byron starved himself out of 5 stones in weight, he triggered a moral panic as the ladies of the day went on a rice and vinegar diet to imitate him. Moving on two centuries, we have the Atkins diet, the Dukan diet, the South Beach diet, the 5:2 diet, the paleo diet, the cabbage soup diet, the apple cider vinegar diet, the acai berry diet, Slim Fast, WeightWatchers, fruitarianism and Beyoncé’s diet of maple syrup and cayenne powder. Some people are motivated by health considerations but, being what they are, most human beings are at least partly motivated by other reasons. A £2 billion industry has grown up to make people feel that they can look like what the £21 billion fashion industry repeatedly tells them they should look like.

Many people today are caught between the immovable object of how they are told they should look and the irresistible force of the relentless and seductive marketing of fast food. We should remember that the makers of Slim Fast are also the makers of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream.

Having been born into a chip-shop family, I accept that that industry in a small way put a roof over my head, clothes on my back and so much food on the table that I left school at the age of 18 clinically obese. UK figures are hard to find but, as far as the United States is concerned, in 2010 Yale academics estimated the sum of less-healthy food advertising at \$4.2 billion per year. I am sure that even when scaled for size, that figure dwarfs by far the minister’s health promotion budget.

We all like to believe that the advertising, the magazines, the television shows, the body images and the presentation of what is normal do not get to us and that we alone can stand against that tide.

Dennis Robertson: Mr Biagi might be aware of legislation in Israel that stipulates that models in the fashion industry cannot have a body mass

index of below 18.5. Although that is still very low, at least the industry is subject to legislation. I am not suggesting that we go that far, but the fact is that steps are being taken in other countries.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can take that time, Mr Biagi.

Marco Biagi: I saw that fact when I was researching the debate. It is not often that we look to Israel for examples, but in this case the example is a useful one that we might want to follow.

We like to think that we are different here, but we know that in politics as in everything else a certain look commands air time and column inches in a way that other looks might not. We have to factor into this subconscious chaos the fact that we live in a nation where 62 per cent of adults are overweight. We face a dual-effect dilemma. Taking a stand that is even slightly off-key can trigger counterproductive anxiety among the general overeaters, while giving those who take to the so-called pro-ana websites at the corners of the internet validation that they can whisper to each other. The human mind is a great tangled complexity.

To date, this has, I am sad to say, been a gendered problem—it affects more women than men to the tune of nine times—and that figure is consistent from country to country. There is also a crying need for more peer-reviewed research somewhere in the world into reports that there is a greater propensity to eating disorders among men who are gay or bisexual.

To look ahead, we cannot all be Naomi Wolf and attempt to tackle the beauty myth single-handedly, and no one has solved how to be passionately evangelistic about sensible moderation. Those two approaches seem to be almost contradictory. However, the explosion of eating disorders across the developed world has a human cost, which is paid in every life that is lost and every life that is ruined. They are illnesses that are real, terrible and life limiting, and we owe it to ourselves to look at all the factors that may cause them, and to take resolute action. Until a solution is found, let us raise awareness, reach out, and try to understand and help anyone around us whose life may be a silent daily battle with one of those conditions.

17:30

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Dennis Robertson for once again bringing to the chamber the challenging and complex subject of eating disorders. I acknowledge his tragic personal experience and his on-going strenuous efforts to make things

better for people who are still struggling to fight their personal battles with the conditions.

Last November, Dennis Robertson led a members' business debate on one aspect of eating disorders: the presence in culture and fashion of an unrealistic image of size 10 models and mannequins. Marco Biagi referred to that. The knock-on effect of such images on vulnerable people—especially young girls—was highlighted. I hope that that subject will play a part in this year's eating disorder awareness week and that other subjects will be looked at in it.

I would like to use the time that is available to me to focus on situations that occur in our schools, colleges and universities. The UK-wide programme of events that Beat has organised to promote further understanding of illnesses such as anorexia and bulimia is impressive. In particular, I welcome events that are taking place in our university towns, from Durham to Bournemouth, where students arrive in unfamiliar settings for the first time to face the challenges of student life. It is a difficult time for young people, as they adjust to being away from home and their parents, make new friends, meet students from other backgrounds, and deal with the pressures of their academic subjects.

A recent survey of 200 students with eating disorders found that 32 per cent of them were diagnosed after they started their courses, and almost a fifth said that their condition had forced them to drop out of university altogether. I fully acknowledge the important role that student support bodies play in reaching out to people on campuses who have eating disorders, but the same survey showed that a significant majority of those who were asked—nearly 70 per cent—said that they had struggled to access treatment while they were at university. It is clear that we need to do more.

On schools, I will not be the only member in the chamber who was shocked by reports in various newspapers on what *The Times* described as

"A silent epidemic of anorexia ... sweeping through"

Britain's

"top independent schools, affecting thousands of teenage girls".

The desire to achieve high grades and the competitive nature of highly academic girls schools are often celebrated and championed. I make absolutely no criticism of that, but they are also risk factors that contribute to eating disorders at such schools, as key experts such as Susan Ringwood of Beat have identified.

In independent schools, unlike in the state sector, there are no guidelines on provision of pastoral and psychological support for pupils. I

recognise that many of those schools have a designated teacher who is responsible for pupils' wellbeing, as well as having nurses and counsellors to deal with issues, such as anorexia, that affect teenage girls. However, it is quite clear that some girls—especially those who are away from home at boarding schools—feel more vulnerable and are at risk of turning to eating disorders as a response to the stresses that are associated with such institutions.

On a more positive note, I read with great admiration about Constance Barter, who is a student in Edinburgh. At the weekend, she had the courage to speak publicly about her battles with anorexia while she was at school. She described how her desire to succeed as a runner on the track led her down the road to an eating disorder and how, after the initial feeling that she was not given the emotional support that she required, her school, once it became aware of her illness, was "very helpful" and she had

"a really amazing time there".

Sadly, Constance acknowledges that other girls with similar conditions did not recover. That is why we must have in place in all educational establishments the right tools to aid those who are afflicted by these terrifying and isolating illnesses.

I welcome the various events that are being held in Parliament this week and hope that the exposure that is generated will help people—especially teenage girls—to come forward and seek help to tackle the problem of eating disorders.

Once again, I thank Dennis Robertson for his enormous contribution.

17:35

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I am proud to call Dennis Robertson my friend, and I am proud of the fact that he, his wife Ann and his daughter Fiona continue the campaign to have eating disorders recognised by many more people. I know that this is not easy for Dennis, but what he is doing is definitely providing a legacy for Caroline.

I am pleased that Parliament has rallied round and has allowed the conference and the events to take place here this week. Beyond that, I am pleased about the recognition that the Government has given to the campaign. However, one of the main things about this week is that it gives us all the opportunity to talk to folk who are in the front line on eating disorders, whether they are folks who have been affected by the disorders because they have suffered themselves, are family members of sufferers or are professionals. I think that if we do not learn something new every

day, then we are probably failing. Over the past few days I have learned quite a number of new things about eating disorders.

I had the pleasure today to talk to Kathryn Kerr, who is a young ambassador for Beat, the beating eating disorders organisation. She is a very articulate girl who has suffered from an eating disorder herself. We had quite a long conversation, but one thing that struck me during it was that she said that we do not blame someone for having cancer, but we blame folk for suffering from eating disorders. Far too often in life we tend to look at folks with mental health difficulties and treat them so differently from folk who are suffering from physical ailments. Although we are getting better in our response as human beings to those things, I feel that we still have a long way to go.

The education that will be provided through the events that will be held in Parliament this week will help us to some degree to understand and will—I hope—make us crusaders against the folks who are prejudiced against people with mental health difficulties and eating disorders. Beat should be immensely proud of Kathryn and she should be immensely proud of how she articulated her thoughts today. I understand that she has been speaking in schools, which will be of great benefit.

Dennis has told me that we have a greater incidence of eating disorders here in the UK than exists in the rest of Europe, which is extremely concerning. Members have already pointed out the media's fixation with body image. I think that some people need to reflect on what they are publishing in their magazines and broadcasting on their radio shows or television programmes. If we do not fix some of those issues, we will continue to have this problem.

I thank Dennis Robertson for giving us the opportunity to highlight the issues again today. I pay my regards to his wife, Ann, and his daughter, Fiona, who I know are great rocks for him. I thank Dennis's staff as well, who have done a huge amount in setting up events here this week. I thank especially the people who are here this week and who are able to articulate their stories so that we can all learn a little more.

17:40

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Like others, I offer Dennis Robertson my congratulations on securing time for this debate. It is the third such debate that he has brought to the chamber, and I had the responsibility of responding to the previous debates as well. One thing that always strikes me about the debates that he brings to the chamber on this important issue is his level of personal

insight, which no other member is able to offer. Given his drive to do something in memory of his daughter Caroline, I am sure that no member is in any doubt about the work that he has undertaken over the past three years. He has done a tremendous amount in memory of his daughter and he continues to undertake a whole range of work in order to build on her memory.

Dennis Robertson: I thank the minister for his kind words, but I pay tribute to him, because he has been listening and he has been supportive, both of many of the events that are taking place this week and in relation to many of the challenges that we have faced over the past couple of years. I put on the record my thanks for the support that he has given on this issue.

Michael Matheson: I thank the member for his intervention. It has certainly been my intention to offer what support I can and to do as much as I can in taking this agenda forward in Scotland.

In my engagement over the past three years with Dennis Robertson and others in the sector, I have been struck not only by the focus on improving the way in which services are delivered and taking further action to raise greater awareness, but by the focus on helping to provide greater support to families and individuals.

Back in 2012, I was honoured to attend, with Dennis Robertson and his family and many others, the first Scottish memorial service, at St Giles in Edinburgh, to remember all those who have lost their lives through eating disorders. I am sure that all members recognise that a tremendous amount of effort is being made by a range of individuals and organisations across the country to raise greater awareness of eating disorders. I take this opportunity to pay tribute on the record to their dedication and the continued work that they undertake—the professionals, the staff and the volunteers across all sectors, and particularly those people with eating disorders and their carers and families, who have undertaken a tremendous amount of work to raise greater awareness of the issue and support families as well.

I am sure that all members will be particularly pleased about the range of activities that are taking place this week as part of eating disorder awareness week. Several members mentioned the conference on Friday, at which I will be speaking, and a range of other events are taking place. I know that some members will be joining us at Edinburgh castle later tonight at the First Minister's reception to recognise eating disorder awareness week.

I listened carefully to members' comments and the issues that they raised in the debate, and I want to take this opportunity to provide members with some insight into the work that we are taking

forward as a Government to tackle eating disorders and further improve care and support services. In its briefing in advance of this evening's debate, the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland acknowledges that, although more needs to be done,

"Scotland has seen striking improvements in the provision of specialist eating disorders services over the past decade".

The range of community and specialist in-patient services that are now in place across the country clearly demonstrates that. Malcolm Chisholm referred to the managed clinical network in the north of Scotland. We have the specialist eating disorder unit at the Royal Cornhill hospital in Aberdeen, and we now also have the unit at St John's hospital in Livingston to serve the east of Scotland, which I had the pleasure of opening a couple of years ago.

Our improvement agenda is also driven by work to improve mental health services across the country. That is being taken forward as part of our mental health strategy, which takes us up to 2015, and our recently published suicide prevention strategy. The mental health strategy will deliver a range of commitments that will have a positive impact on improving care services and support for those with an eating disorder and their families.

For example, one aim is to deliver faster access to psychological therapies, which we know contribute significantly to treating mental illness such as an eating disorder. Early data shows that, even before the deadline of December 2014 that we have set for ensuring that no one waits longer than 18 weeks to access psychological therapies, 83 per cent of patients had begun treatment within 18 weeks by the end of September last year, and the average wait was eight weeks. The figures are encouraging and are the result of significant work that colleagues are undertaking across the national health service.

Dennis Robertson referred to the need to improve access to child and adolescent mental health services. For several years, we have put significant additional investment into improving those services, in order to speed up access to them. Significant improvement has occurred in the past couple of years and the targets have been achieved across all our NHS boards.

Alongside that, we are working on how we can improve our response to people in distress in our community, for example, which includes those with an eating disorder who might present to our services in distress. We must respond to those people much more effectively and give them more comprehensive support than we do at present.

We have made progress. Dennis Robertson has been a major driver for much of that progress in

recent years. The Scottish Government remains committed to continuing to tackle all the issues that relate to eating disorders. I have no doubt that all members in the Parliament will support Dennis Robertson in taking the work forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank all members for taking part in the debate.

Meeting closed at 17:47.

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