



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 11 June 2014

Session 4

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 11 June 2014

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Health and Wellbeing

#### The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions. As ever, I would prefer short and succinct questions and answers, in order to get in as many people as possible.

#### National Health Service Boards (Meetings)

**1. Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of national health service boards. (S4O-03326)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** Ministers and senior officials meet regularly with representatives of NHS boards to discuss issues of interest to the people of Scotland.

**Cameron Buchanan:** Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether there have been any discussions about the use of robots in the surgical treatment of prostate cancer following Prostate Cancer UK's highlighting of the fact that it can deliver better outcomes than other forms of surgery? Moreover, given that England has 33 of these robots and Scotland none, can he advise why they are available in England but not in Scotland, when they will be available in Scotland, and whether any arrangements are in place to ensure that in the meantime Scots can use the facilities in the English NHS?

**Alex Neil:** There have been extensive discussions on the use of robots in prostate operations, particularly in the west of Scotland and Grampian. The national planning group is looking at the issue in great detail, including the lessons that can be learned from America, where robotic surgery is used much more extensively. The group will report in due course, and I will update the Parliament at that time.

**Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab):** When did the Scottish Government last meet Lanarkshire health board? Has it received an update on the norovirus outbreak at Hairmyres that has closed two wards, restricted patient places in four others and led to patients being sent away or directed to Wishaw general hospital? If it has received such an update, can we in the chamber also receive it?

**Alex Neil:** We are in regular touch with NHS Lanarkshire about the very exceptional outbreak of norovirus at Hairmyres hospital, the extent of which has led to some disruption in the provision of services. The outbreak at the hospital is unprecedented in scale, and the action that has been taken by NHS Lanarkshire has focused on the safety of patients and, indeed, staff. I will ask NHS Lanarkshire to ensure that all Lanarkshire MSPs are updated as soon as possible on the current situation and are kept up to date with any further changes.

#### Waiting Times (NHS Lothian)

**2. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address waiting time challenges in NHS Lothian. (S4O-03327)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** I am aware that the board has been experiencing capacity difficulties delivering the waiting time guarantee and standards. Indeed, that is why it has already indicated that it will be investing more than £8 million in the current year to increase capacity by recruiting around 80 full-time equivalent staff, including consultants, nurses and other clinical support staff in specialties such as ear, nose and throat, ophthalmology and orthopaedics.

That additional capacity will come on stream soon and should enable a significant reduction in waiting times over the coming months, with the 12-weeks legal treatment time guarantee being delivered by the end of this year and the out-patient waiting times standard by March 2015. My officials will continue to work closely with the board to support the delivery of waiting times.

**Sarah Boyack:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his reply, particularly his commitment to his officials working closely with NHS Lothian.

NHS Lothian struggles to meet these targets; it is one of the worst performers with regard to the 18-week and 12-week targets, and every month it is spending £1.5 million on private procedures. Does the cabinet secretary accept that, despite the best efforts of the staff, there is a serious capacity problem and that the sheer demand of patients needing treatment must be addressed? Given that shifting resources into this area will inevitably impact on other areas in NHS Lothian, is the cabinet secretary confident that NHS Lothian has the resources to increase capacity and to meet the increasing demand that it is currently challenged in meeting?

**Alex Neil:** I have two points to make in response to that question.

First, I am absolutely confident that the health board has the money to deal with this issue

without adversely affecting other areas. It has had a real-terms increase in its budget for this year, and it will get a real increase in next year's budget.

Secondly, the fundamental problem in NHS Lothian is that the capacity planning that was done 10, 12 or 15 years ago grossly underestimated the population growth in Edinburgh by up to 20 per cent. As a result, NHS Lothian has had to invest in additional capacity in the Royal Victoria hospital and elsewhere to cope with the demand for day-to-day services.

I am confident that NHS Lothian has a workable plan that will be delivered. As I have always made clear, I expect the board to deliver the TTG for in-patients by the end of this year, and the TTG for out-patients by March next year.

### Healthy Eating (Children)

**3. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to promote healthy eating choices for children. (S4O-03328)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** We are progressing a range of activities to support children to eat a healthy balanced diet, including nutritional standards for school meals and our £3 million food education fund to support teaching children about the food that they eat and its impact on their health.

Last week, I launched "Beyond the School Gate—Improving Food Choices in the School Community", which offers guidance on how we can positively influence the food environment around schools. It builds on "Better Eating, Better Learning—a new context for school food", which was published in March and sets out refreshed guidance to support further improvements in school food and food education. Together, those strategies offer a holistic package to help partners to support children to make healthier choices inside and outside school.

The First Minister announced earlier this year that the entitlement to free school meals would be extended to all children in primary 1 to 3 from January 2015 to support the development of healthy eating habits at a young age.

**Angus MacDonald:** I welcome the Scottish Government's announcement of its "Beyond the School Gate" strategy, among others. It is important that local authorities do all that they can to ensure that healthy options are available for children.

Does the minister share my disappointment, however, that our shared local authority, Falkirk Council, has failed to sign up to previous initiatives such as the seafood in schools project? Will he do all that he can to encourage Falkirk Council and

other councils to embrace those healthy eating initiatives more positively?

**Michael Matheson:** As Angus MacDonald will recognise, everyone has a part to play in trying as best they can to encourage schoolchildren to eat a balanced and healthy diet. That includes those in the retail sector, local authorities—particularly education departments—and Government and other agencies, which can all help to achieve that aim.

I am aware that Falkirk Council has not proceeded with the seafood in schools programme. I share Angus MacDonald's disappointment in that respect, and I encourage the council to reconsider. We need to encourage children to eat seafood, as it is an important part of a balanced diet. The seafood in schools initiative is very positive, and Falkirk Council could take it forward.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Is the minister aware of the responsible retailing of energy drinks campaign that the Educational Institute for Scotland has recently endorsed?

The campaign in Scotland is led by Councillor Norma Austin Hart and seeks to encourage retailers not to sell energy drinks to children, building on Scottish Labour's ban on those drinks being sold in schools. When children consume energy drinks, they often come to school agitated and unable to concentrate and learn, and they can be disruptive in class.

In addition, the wider health implications are not known. Retailers—especially those who are close to schools—are being asked not to sell those drinks to young people under the age of 16. Will the minister back the campaign in order to ensure that children come to school ready to learn and are not disruptive?

**Michael Matheson:** A number of important factors must be addressed. One issue is the need to encourage schoolchildren to remain in the school environment for eating, and another concerns the type of food that is provided in schools.

Local authorities are progressing a range of approaches in order to address those issues. For example, a school that I visited just last week has had a 40 per cent increase in the number of children who remain in school to consume food as a result of the approach that it has undertaken.

Secondly, we need to work with the retailers that are in close proximity to our school gates and consider what action they can take. As the guidance for local authorities sets out, councils can take action in areas such as licensing in order to address some of those issues.

The combination of those factors is extremely important. The “Beyond the School Gate” strategy focuses not only on fizzy drinks but on foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, which have a significant impact on children’s health.

We have to deal with all those factors, not just one, if we are to tackle the issue comprehensively. Our schools and local authorities have a key role to play in helping to deliver that approach through their policies in areas such as licensing.

#### **Malnutrition (Vulnerable Older People)**

##### **4. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):**

To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to combat malnutrition, which affects some of the most vulnerable older people. (S4O-03329)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** The Scottish Government is doing many things to tackle malnutrition among older people. Since 2008, we have provided £1.75 million to improve nutritional care for older people through measures including malnutrition screening of all patients when they are admitted to hospital, nutrition champions in every national health service board and the introduction of protected meal times. Scotland was the first country in the United Kingdom to make screening for malnutrition a mandatory requirement. The Care Inspectorate expects all care for older people and support plans to detail specific food likes and dislikes.

We have made available £2 million for 2012-15 to Community Food and Health (Scotland) to promote healthy eating in the least privileged communities and improve food access and awareness of nutritional guidelines, with the aim of tackling health inequalities. Another initiative that we support is Scotland’s national oral health promotion, training and support programme, caring for smiles, which aims to improve the oral health of older people, particularly those who live in care homes.

**Margaret Mitchell:** There is a worrying lack of data about the number of older people in Scotland who are malnourished. In fact, the estimated figure of 100,000 malnourished older people in Scotland is projected from UK data. Is the cabinet secretary aware that, although Age Scotland welcomes the MUST—malnutrition universal screening tool—initiative to which he referred, it is concerned that there is no screening for malnourishment of older people in the community? Furthermore, is he aware that, although screening occurs when older patients are admitted to hospital, a 2013 Healthcare Improvement Scotland report was critical about the effectiveness of the screening and the limited information about patients’ nutritional needs in the five hospitals that were inspected? Does the cabinet secretary agree that

there is now a compelling argument for having more data on the issue so that we can properly assess and address the problem, whether in hospitals, care homes or among older people living in the community?

**Alex Neil:** We are implementing the recommendations of the HIS report. On the data, the estimates that we have are that up to 30 per cent of older people who are admitted to acute hospitals are at risk of malnutrition; that between 30 and 42 per cent of those who are admitted to care homes are at risk; and that 10 to 14 per cent of people in sheltered accommodation might be at risk. Over the population, it is estimated that 14 per cent of older people are at risk of malnutrition. We have a fairly good handle on the scale of the problem.

I agree, however, that we need to do more to tackle the problem outwith hospital. Of course, the best way to do that is to ensure that older people have the necessary income to be able to afford to buy the food that they need to sustain themselves. That is extremely important, and it is why we are supportive of the proposals to improve the pension for older people, many of whom, particularly women, have a very low income indeed and sometimes find it difficult to buy the food that they need to stave off malnutrition, as food is increasing in price all the time.

#### **Pharmacy Application Process (Community Involvement)**

##### **5. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands)**

**(SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to increase community involvement in the pharmacy application process in remote areas. (S4O-03330)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** I am pleased to say that I announced on 30 May the laying of amendment regulations that will ensure that there is direct community engagement and participation in the consideration of pharmacy applications. The new regulations will also ensure greater transparency in the decision-making process so that people who are affected by decisions have a better understanding of how and why decisions are taken.

**Mike MacKenzie:** It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and retain health professionals in remote areas. What support is the Scottish Government providing to health boards to tackle that issue and to support local accessible health services?

**Alex Neil:** I assure members that the Scottish Government recognises the current challenges in remote and rural areas and is committed to ensuring that all communities in Scotland receive

high-quality and sustainable healthcare services. In particular, the Scottish Government continues to promote a range of initiatives to recruit and support general practitioners working in remote and rural areas. Those include proposals for a specific programme of work to be taken forward by NHS Highland to develop and test a range of innovative ways of delivering healthcare in rural parts of Scotland. That will involve exploring approaches to building sustainable health and care services with all key stakeholders, including local communities.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I welcome the changes to community involvement in pharmacies and look forward to receiving more detail. What steps will the cabinet secretary take to ensure that people in remote rural areas access pharmacy services? I was recently in Skye, where Macmillan, Boots and NHS Highland are working on a palliative care community pharmacy project, which works really well and underlines the need for pharmacy services, not only among general practitioners who work in rural areas but also among their patients.

**Alex Neil:** It is primarily the responsibility of each board to ensure that pharmacy services are accessible through every part of their geography. I am well aware of the initiatives that have been taken by NHS Highland, which I think will be very successful. We wish to roll out to other parts of rural Scotland the initiatives that have been proven to work.

### **Boarding Out (National Health Service)**

**6. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress the NHS is making in recording and reducing the levels of boarding out. (S4O-03331)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** The Scottish Government is leading the way in the United Kingdom in tackling boarding. Health boards record and monitor boarding levels daily. We have taken a range of initiatives to reduce boarding. Those include a £30 million unscheduled care programme; the integration of health and social care; our commitment to seven-day working; the development of a bed-planning toolkit; and a programme to improve patient flow and reduce boarding and other delays to treatment. However, there is more to be done and we will continue the work to improve the quality of care in our hospitals.

**Dr Simpson:** Since the monitoring of the boarding out system was introduced under Nicola Sturgeon, we have undertaken a freedom of information inquiry. The response shows that the number of patients being boarded out between 11 pm and 6 am in the morning was 10,500 in 2011-

12, 12,700 in 2012-13 and an estimated 13,000 for the full year last year. If that is not bad enough, these shocking figures are derived from only seven out of 14 health boards. Lothian NHS Board, Tayside NHS Board, Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board and Grampian NHS Board could not even produce figures for movements at that time. Similarly, when we asked about multiple moves, five large health boards—Lothian NHS Board; Lanarkshire NHS Board; Greater Glasgow NHS Board; Tayside NHS Board; and Grampian NHS Board—were unable to say how many multiple moves had occurred.

Is the cabinet secretary really satisfied with the management of boarding out when the boards are not even recording the information? Will he issue an instruction now for the boards to comply with recording requirements—including recording of times—and to include a cross-reference to the presence of patients with cognitive impairment, a group which he and I would agree are least able to cope with boarding out? Will he invite Healthcare Improvement Scotland to make consideration of the matter part of its inspection regime?

**Alex Neil:** I believe that Dr Simpson said that the figures that he quoted relate to the period up until the end of the last year. He will be aware of the work that we have done on boarding with the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and others and the very big, substantial report that was produced last year. I accept that far too much boarding is going on, particularly when it involves people with cognitive problems. The whole purpose of the report's recommendations, which we are now implementing, is to improve the situation in relation to recording and, most important, to reduce the need for boarding in the first place. I will certainly take on board Dr Simpson's additional suggestions.

### **Health Inequalities (Most Deprived Communities)**

**7. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to tackle health inequalities in the most deprived communities. (S4O-03332)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** As a Government, we have been clear that health inequalities in our most deprived communities cannot be addressed by health solutions alone. The interventions that are most likely to reduce health inequalities are those that utilise taxation, legislation, regulation and changes in the broader distribution of income and power.

We have demonstrated our commitment to that approach with measures such as free prescriptions, free eye examinations, the expansion of free school meals and the provision



of childcare, and through our work on youth employment.

We will continue to take forward a range of policies that will assist in tackling health inequalities, in partnership with our colleagues in the national health service, local authorities and the third sector.

**Gordon MacDonald:** I read in the press recently about a pilot scheme concerning general practitioner link workers who can help people to deal with financial, emotional or environmental problems that arise as a result of housing, debt, social isolation, stress or fuel poverty issues. Will the minister provide more details of that pilot scheme?

**Michael Matheson:** The pilot scheme was launched by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing in the past few weeks. It is a partnership that was developed with several of the deep-end practices. The pilot project will see a link worker being placed in seven of those practices in Glasgow and Dundee, with eight comparator practices, to evaluate the effectiveness of the link workers. Their purpose will be to consider what support they can provide to patients whom GPs refer to them. That support can relate to housing, finance or other environmental issues.

We have worked with the deep-end practices on developing and implementing the pilot, which will be evaluated over the next couple of years. The initial intention was that it would be a two-year pilot. However, following discussion with the deep-end practices, we have agreed to extend it to five years. We will take the learning from it over the next five years and determine how we can extend it to other practices in deprived areas.

#### **Young People with Cancer (Clinical Trials)**

**8. Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to help young people with cancer access clinical trials. (S4O-03333)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** The chief scientist office of the Scottish Government funds several research networks, two of which—the Scottish cancer research network and the Scottish children's research network—operate to enhance access for children and young people with cancer to clinical trials. The CSO has entered into discussion with those two research networks to ensure that they work closely to provide support to patients in that transitional age range to take part in clinical research.

**Aileen McLeod:** Given the importance of access to clinical trials in helping to treat young people's cancer, will the cabinet secretary advise me what progress is being made on the

recruitment of a new cancer clinical research champion, when he expects the announcement of a new champion to be made and how the champion will tackle the inequity of young people's access to clinical trials?

**Alex Neil:** I am pleased to be able to tell Aileen McLeod and the chamber that, after a competitive recruitment process, Professor David Cameron—who I do not think is any relation to another David Cameron—of the University of Edinburgh has been appointed as the new Scottish cancer research champion. A formal announcement will be made in the near future.

In its early discussions with Professor Cameron, the chief scientist office will ask him to examine access to trials for young people with cancer and to obtain reliable data.

#### **Ayr Hospital (Standard Mortality Rates)**

**9. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will review the standard mortality rates at Ayr hospital. (S4O-03334)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** Hospital standardised mortality ratio—HSMR—figures for all acute hospitals in Scotland, including University hospital Ayr, are routinely considered quarterly. The next figures will be published in August 2014.

The latest data available, to the quarter ending December 2013, indicated that there had been a national reduction of 14.2 per cent in the HSMR in Scotland since such data began to be recorded in the quarter ending December 2007.

The data for Ayr hospital indicated a higher single data point on this quarter's analysis. Although the HSMR cannot be used in isolation as a marker of quality and safety of care, it can be used as a smoke alarm to trigger further evaluation. As a result, NHS Ayrshire and Arran is already undertaking further investigation of that data point and Healthcare Improvement Scotland is engaged in supportive dialogue and interaction with the board.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Scottish Government will continue to work with NHS Ayrshire and Arran to ensure that its HSMR continues to fall in accordance with the national trend.

**Chic Brodie:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his comprehensive answer.

Against the background of the standard mortality rates throughout Scotland having dropped by 14 per cent since 2007, it is regrettable that, in the last reported quarter, Ayr hospital was above the national average. However, that should not hide the fact that the

hospital and its staff have a good longer-term record in reducing the standard mortality rates.

Despite the serious economic recession, specific problems—such as methadone deaths and deaths as a consequence of social issues such as energy poverty—are being addressed. However, I ask that the Government ensure that the hospital continues its drive to improve the appropriate standards of care that reduce the levels of mortality.

**Alex Neil:** The Scottish Government expects all health boards to implement measures to prevent avoidable harm and deaths as part of the Scottish patient safety programme. It is committed to improving the safety of healthcare further and expects NHS Ayrshire and Arran to continue improving the quality and safety of care for the population that it serves. I will keep a close eye on the board to ensure that it does that.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** The cabinet secretary is aware of the shortage of available beds at Ayr hospital, which may or may not have influenced the standard mortality ratio. Will he tell Parliament what can be done to better manage bed availability at Ayr hospital, which is also key to reducing accident and emergency waiting times?

**Alex Neil:** Two specific issues affect the availability of beds at Ayr hospital. One is delayed discharges, although South Ayrshire is not one of the worst authorities in terms of dealing with those. The other is the flow of patients during the day. Too high a percentage of patients who are discharged each day are discharged fairly late in the day—for no good reason, quite frankly. A key aim of the implementation of our unscheduled care plan for all hospitals, including Ayr, is to improve dramatically the percentage of patients who are discharged before lunchtime, as those patients are medically fit for discharge and it is important to free up beds for people who are coming in through the A and E department and, indeed, through general practitioner referrals.

#### **NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)**

**10. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Board. (S4O-03335)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** Ministers and Government officials regularly meet representatives of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to discuss matters of interest to the people of greater Glasgow and Clyde.

**Patricia Ferguson:** As the cabinet secretary is aware, patients in north and north-east Glasgow and beyond who require chemotherapy more often than not have to make their way to the Beatson

centre to receive such treatment. The journey is often not very easy, particularly when taken by public transport, and is an additional difficulty for people who perhaps are already unwell.

Has the cabinet secretary discussed with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde the possibility of providing chemotherapy at Stobhill hospital, which would save the patients involved a great deal of stress and anxiety?

**Alex Neil:** I am well aware of that issue, and I have been in touch with many of the people from north of the river who are very keen to establish such services at Stobhill. I have studied the information provided by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and that provided by the people who are campaigning for the change. I think that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is taking the right decision on the matter, but I am happy to share information with Patricia Ferguson, and I am happy to meet her, with representatives of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to discuss the issue in detail. It is a very detailed issue, in terms of the statistics about the postal code areas from where people come for such treatment.

**Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary confirm, as a result of his discussions with the health board, what arrangements or contingencies it has made to cope with the large international presence in the city during the Commonwealth games and how it intends to ensure that those who attend have access to information, should the need arise?

**Alex Neil:** The health service, like all other essential public services, has been part of the resilience planning for the Commonwealth games. The health board has played a full part, along with the organising committee for the games, Glasgow City Council and a range of other bodies, to ensure that all contingencies, and arrangements to meet all contingencies, are in place during the Commonwealth games. I am happy to write to Jackson Carlaw with more detail on that, although for obvious reasons I cannot give him too much information, because, by its very nature, some of it has to remain confidential.

#### **Children with Asthma (Identification and Diagnosis)**

**11. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures are being taken to improve early identification and diagnosis of children with asthma. (S4O-03336)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** The Scottish Government is committed to providing the best quality care and treatment for people living with asthma in Scotland. Last year, Healthcare Improvement Scotland published "Asthma priorities: Influencing

the Agenda”, which includes information about the early and accurate diagnosis of asthma in children.

**John Wilson:** What work is being undertaken with general practitioners on referrals to specialist asthma services? What asthma treatments are available? I am asking particularly about new treatments that are being developed for young children, especially those under the age of four.

**Michael Matheson:** John Wilson will be aware of the recent publication of the report of the national review of asthma deaths. The review looked at the way in which asthma services are delivered across the whole of the UK, including in Scotland.

The report contains a range of recommendations. There are key aspects with regard to how services are delivered at a primary care level, such as ensuring that regular reviews are undertaken of patients who have been diagnosed with asthma, that patients are encouraged to participate in those reviews, that patients receive the appropriate preventative medication as and when appropriate, and that medication is being used appropriately.

The national advisory group for respiratory managed clinical networks is now considering all the detail of the recommendations and the actions that we need to take in Scotland to improve services yet further.

With regard to specific treatments, I am sure that the member will appreciate that the nature and type of treatment that a patient is prescribed is a clinical decision. We would expect general practitioners and clinicians in the secondary care setting to ensure that patients—particularly children—who require a particular form of treatment for their asthma are provided with that treatment in a timely and appropriate way.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I thank the minister for his response and for addressing the problem of asthma deaths.

What is the minister doing in relation to the report’s recommendation that patients who are prescribed more than 12 reliever inhalers in a year be looked at? It is reckoned that there are higher levels of deaths in relation to such prescribing, so what monitoring system is he putting in place to ensure that those people are picked up and reviewed quickly?

**Michael Matheson:** I recognise the point that the member makes. That is why the national advisory group for respiratory managed clinical networks is considering the relevant recommendations. Once we have received its report and its recommendations on which measures should be taken forward—including on

aspects of monitoring, if that is what it recommends—we will consider how measures can be rolled out nationally. There is an issue about ensuring greater consistency of approach in how we manage conditions such as asthma, and I think that the national review provides us with very helpful information on how we can do so that more effectively.

### **Licensed Premises (Health Impact of Overprovision)**

#### **12. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP):**

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the health impact of overprovision of licensed premises in urban areas. (S4O-03337)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** The provision or overprovision of licensed premises within a local area is a matter for local licensing boards to consider. One of the grounds for refusal of a premises licence is that granting it would result in overprovision, having regard to the number and capacity of existing premises. In assessing the extent of any overprovision in a locality, the board must consult relevant interests, including the police and local health board.

**Marco Biagi:** In central Edinburgh, there is an outstanding planning application for a 900-seat superpub, which is currently under appeal. One chain is looking at converting three properties into large new pubs and, last month, two new supermarkets were—controversially—licensed, against the advice of NHS Lothian and the police.

What advice would the minister give to local authorities and licensing boards on how they should weigh up the advice that they receive on health and law and order interests against other interests to ensure that we can tackle the problem of overprovision and overconsumption of alcohol, especially in city centres?

**Michael Matheson:** There is well-established evidence that demonstrates that availability is a key factor in driving overall alcohol consumption. That is the type of factor that boards should take into account when they submit their evidence to licensing boards on the potential health impact of any further provision of licensed premises.

The member will appreciate that, ultimately, it is for the local licensing board to make a decision on the matter. I would encourage licensing boards to ensure that they consider in detail the responses that they receive from their colleagues in local health boards in any decisions that they make on the provision—or overprovision—of licensed premises in their local authority area.

### **Unpaid Carers (Expert Working Group on Welfare)**

**13. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how unpaid carers could be supported by the findings of the expert working group on welfare. (S4O-03338)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** Within its existing powers, the Scottish Government provides significant support to unpaid carers, underpinned by considerable investment of nearly £114 million since 2007. The expert working group on welfare is clear that, with independence, we could go much further in supporting that vital sector. We have already committed to raising carers allowance to the rate of jobseekers allowance, as recommended by the group, if we are the Government of an independent Scotland.

The report outlines some longer-term measures to support unpaid carers, such as addressing disincentives to working and caring in the benefits system and the workplace, and tackling the current rules limiting studying and receiving carers allowance.

As the First Minister said in the chamber last week, the Government will take forward and consider fully the recommendations of the expert working group.

**James Dornan:** I recently met a representative of the Scottish Youth Parliament to discuss its care fair share campaign, and it is clear that the issues that the working group outlined that affect carers, such as low income and variable levels of support, also affect young carers. Has the Scottish Government looked at any additional assistance for young carers in the area of, for example, education maintenance allowances?

**Michael Matheson:** I am aware of the Scottish Youth Parliament report on the issue. We have done a range of work, particularly in the area of education, to help to support young carers to remain in education because it is important for them to be able to do so, whether it be in the primary and secondary setting, or in higher and further education.

We have worked with the College Development Network to look at what policies individual colleges can put in place to support young carers in education. We recently issued new guidance on education maintenance allowances to ensure that the needs of young carers are accommodated in the way in which colleges assess EMAs.

That combination of measures can help to support young carers in the education setting, but we can clearly do more and we are considering what further measures we can implement under carers legislation in the coming years.

### **Homoeopathic Medicines (Prescription)**

**14. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on prescribing homoeopathic medicines. (S4O-03339)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** The strategic direction and funding for healthcare in Scotland is set by the Scottish Government. Decisions on the allocation of funding to provide access to services, including complementary and alternative therapies, is a matter for individual health boards based on the needs of their local populations and in line with national guidance. The prescription of specific treatments is a clinical decision for practitioners.

**John Mason:** Is it becoming more difficult to get homoeopathic medicines?

**Alex Neil:** A number of health boards have carried out reviews. A review is being carried out in Lanarkshire and I believe that Lothian has also carried out a review recently. It is clear that there are different approaches to the availability of homoeopathic medicines in different parts of the country.

There is sometimes confusion between the issue of access to homoeopathic medicine and access to the services of the centre for integrative care at Gartnavel in Glasgow. The centre for integrative care provides a much wider range of effective and efficacious services than just homoeopathy. Although it is often referred to as the Glasgow homoeopathic hospital, it provides many other holistic services in addition to homoeopathy, so I make that distinction in answering the member and bringing to the attention of members the excellent provision of services by the centre.

### **Oral Cancer (National Health Service Treatment)**

**15. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what secondary dental treatment for oral cancer is provided without charge by the NHS. (S4O-03340)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** All dental treatment for oral cancer should be provided free of charge when a patient is referred to hospital dental services. The care should be provided as part of a consultant-led medical treatment plan. It should also be the case that failure to provide the care would impact detrimentally on that patient's medical condition or prospect for recovery.

On discharge and once the oral cancer team is content that the surgery and treatment has been completed and the patient's condition is now

stable, the patient will return to the care of their dentist.

**Drew Smith:** I was made aware of the problem by a member of the public who told me that he was fundraising for an individual who had been told that he needed to have dental extractions that were not covered, although he had also been advised that they would be required as part of his treatment. The individual in question is not my constituent so I am not pursuing the issue through casework, but I am grateful to the minister for setting that out.

Is the minister confident that that guidance is being followed by every board in Scotland?

**Michael Matheson:** Obviously, there are different stages in any course of treatment that a patient might require if they have been identified as having oral cancer. If the member is referring to some pre-operative work, including dental extractions, that might be required as part of the process, it would be part of the consultant-led medical treatment provision and patient's treatment plan and, if it was being provided by public dental services, it would be free of charge.

If the member has specific details that he wants to provide me with, I am more than happy to ensure that they are thoroughly investigated because any patient who receives medically led treatment for oral cancer should receive their dental treatment free of charge.

## Common Agricultural Policy

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a statement by Richard Lochhead on the new common agricultural policy. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:40

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** Today, I will announce decisions on how we will implement the new common agricultural policy from 2015, and outline the key decisions on how we will implement pillar 1 of the policy, which is set to deliver £2.8 billion in direct support to our farmers and crofters between 2015 and 2020. We are also publishing today more details of the rural development programme that will be submitted to Europe, which is worth £1.3 billion over the same period.

My objective is to ensure that those investments support food production, our rural economy and our spectacular environment, and that the men and women who deliver those benefits are supported and rewarded for doing so in all parts of Scotland: island, mainland, lowland and upland.

We know that that support is vital. Last year, the total income from farming in Scotland was £829 million, including £583 million in farm payments. It is therefore vital that we get the decisions right—within the rules, of course. We now face difficult decisions on how to implement a policy that we all want to underpin productive farming but which, of course, limits how we can support that in respect of how support is linked to production. We have, of course, a policy that is largely decided on a Europe-wide basis and which needs to be moulded, as far as possible, to Scotland's diverse circumstances.

The road to where we are today has been long and rocky, but it is now decision time and it is time for clarity. The new CAP is far from perfect and has not delivered the simplification that we were promised, but at least it is far better than what was originally feared. At the start of negotiations, people thought that the CAP budget would perhaps be cut by about 30 per cent. Thankfully, that did not materialise, and the United Kingdom Government failed to abolish or phase out direct payments, on which our industry relies. However, Scotland has been left at the bottom of the table in payments per hectare—Europe uses that formula to give out the member-state allocations—under both pillars of the policy.

To add insult to injury, when Europe gave the UK over €200 million in convergence money

because of Scotland's low payments, the Westminster Government spread that money across the whole UK. Other Governments got uplifts in both pillars and are now deciding how to invest the money.

I have to deal with budget cuts and mandatory deductions, which coincides with the biggest-ever redistribution of CAP support in Scotland. Ten years ago, Europe committed to replacing virtually all activity-based support with area payments. The Scottish Administration at the time decided to put off the difficult choices until a later date by adopting the historic-payment based approach. Now, further delay is not an option. Europe moved away from activity-based support because of overproduction, but in Scotland, 85 per cent of our land is classified as less favoured areas, so the risk that we face is the opposite—it is land abandonment and loss of activity.

The Government has worked tirelessly with stakeholders and has left no stone unturned to find the right solutions for Scotland. However, I am under no illusions: the package that I am announcing will not please everyone. Some farmers who were disadvantaged under the old CAP will finally move towards being on a level playing field, but others will see their payments go down. However, I have sought every opportunity to mitigate the impact on genuine farmers.

Overall, the package that I am presenting is the best possible one for the CAP in Scotland for the period 2015 to 2020. Given the major redistribution of support, the speed of transition is vital. New entrants have lobbied for the pillar 1 changes to be implemented in one step. Farmers whose payments will go down—sometimes significantly—have argued for time to adapt.

I feel that it is my duty to look at the impact on Scottish agriculture as a whole. I believe that an overnight transition would pose a real risk not just to primary production but to thousands of downstream jobs—in particular, in the livestock sector. Given the level of reduction that many intensive farmers face, convergence will therefore be achieved over the 2015 to 2019 scheme years. However, we negotiated the ability to put farmers who were disadvantaged under the old CAP straight on to the regional average, through the national reserve. I accept that the national reserve therefore needs, as a *quid pro quo*, to be substantially bigger than the standard 3 per cent, and I believe that stakeholders support that.

Encouragement of the next generation, who have been frozen out of the CAP up to now, is very important to me. That is why pillar 2 support will be expanded into a new entrants' package. The start-up grants will be—at €70,000 plus capital grants—the most generous that are allowed, and the pillar 2 advisory service will

include specific provision for new entrants. It is important that, under pillar 1, we secured the ability to repeat the national reserve in future years, so future new entrants will not be excluded.

A big priority is to ensure that support targets active farmers, be they new entrants or long-established businesses, so we will make every effort to target every public pound at genuine activity, and to target those who wear dirty wellies and not comfy slippers: this package tackles slipper farming. Under the Scottish clause that we negotiated, land on which there is no farming activity will get no pillar 1 payments.

I have also instructed my officials to add sporting estates whose principal activities are not farming to what is known as the negative list, whereby claimants are excluded unless they can prove that they are a genuine farm business. Those measures will ensure that no payments are made for land on which there is no farming activity. That land, in terms of what is included in the current CAP, is currently estimated at an area of 600,000 hectares. I will also limit entitlements to areas that were claimed for in 2013, in order to prevent tenancies being manipulated, in particular for unfair gain by others.

At the other end of the spectrum, the challenge is how to reward the most active farms, especially in the livestock sector, where production per hectare can vary so much. Moving away from historic payments helps because historic payments, by definition, do not represent today's activity. There is broad consensus now on splitting Scotland into payment regions based on land quality, and on targeting coupled support, at 8 per cent, on the beef sector. There remains broad consensus on treating better land as a single region at around perhaps €200 to €220 per hectare, including greening, depending on the number of hectares that are declared.

However, there have been calls to improve the way in which rough grazing is dealt with, in order to avoid overcompensation for the least active. We have a new weapon now in our armoury: extra coupled support. Month after month throughout the past few years I have battled the UK Government, which originally wanted zero coupled support, but finally moved to 5 per cent. Europe finally agreed that 13 per cent of some countries' budgets could be used for coupled support, but the figure was 8 per cent for the UK. Following discussions with Owen Paterson, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Commissioner Ciolos in Europe, we have finally secured clearance in principle to go up to 13 per cent of the Scottish pot being used for coupled schemes, which puts Scotland on a level playing field.

We had a second breakthrough on regionalisation. We have identified a way to split the rough grazing that is deliverable because it uses existing land classifications, which will be fixed at the outset. With the new flexibilities, we will address rough justice in rough grazing. Rough grazing in the non-LFA and in the less favoured area support scheme grazing categories B, C and D will be one payment region, with a rate of around €35 per hectare, including greening. In the poorest rough grazing—in LFASS category A—there will be a separate region at around €10 per hectare, including greening. However, in this third region I propose to introduce coupled support for sheep at the equivalent of around €25 per ewe. That is now subject to agreement by the rest of the UK, and we will work with stakeholders on how to implement that scheme to minimise the burden of inspections. On land on which there is the greatest risk of inactivity, payments and stocking levels will therefore be closely linked.

A further related issue is that of huge individual payments. The top five recipients in Scotland in the current CAP receive between them over £7.5 million. The changes that have been set out will, in any case, reduce that by nearly two thirds, or perhaps even more if the activity tests are not met. Most farmers to whom I speak, and the general public, think that there should be an upper limit. Therefore, part of the way through the transition we will introduce a cap on basic payments at around £400,000 per year after labour costs have been deducted. That will have no impact for the vast majority, but it is a safeguard that will fix the principle that unlimited individual payments simply cannot be tolerated.

What I have just announced is a five-pronged assault on inactivity; there is the Scottish clause, the negative list, the third region, more coupled support and capping.

The link to activity is especially important for the beef sector. Productive beef farms are high recipients under the old—the current—system. Their long production cycle means that it is hard for them to change quickly, which has implications for upstream and downstream businesses. However, beef is the engine room of Scottish farming, being worth more than £2 billion to our economy. The gradual transition that I have laid out will help and, having fought hard for coupled support, I propose to retain 8 per cent of the pot for coupling for beef across Scotland, using 75 per cent beef genetics to define the recipients.

However, I am changing the payment profile, with double rate on the first 10 calves and a flat rate thereafter, and I also propose, subject to the necessary approvals, to introduce on Scotland's islands a coupled payment top-up of around €65 per calf to recognise the extra challenges and

distance to market that our beef producers on the islands experience. Compared with today, a 100-cow beef herd will get more than 50 per cent more coupled support under the proposals.

There are, however, limits to what we can do in pillar 1, so we must also look to pillar 2. I have decided to introduce in the rural development programme an ambitious beef 2020 package. My aim is to help the sector through the transition that lies ahead, but also to encourage transformation at the same time—it is about both transition and transformation. Before deciding on the detailed shape of the package that I will deliver through pillar 2, I want to digest the recommendations that I will receive next week from the chair of Quality Meat Scotland, Jim McLaren, and his beef 2020 group.

However, I can confirm today that we will make available £45 million of new money over three years for what will be a crucial and unprecedented investment in Scotland's fantastic beef sector. Through this unprecedented scheme, producers will be financially supported on issues such as genetics, performance generally and reducing the industry's carbon footprint. The beef package will be a good example of a win-win in terms of outcomes for both economics and Scotland's environment.

The CAP must support productive farming, but it must also protect biodiversity, reduce agriculture's carbon footprint and conserve our landscapes. In pillar 2, despite the budget situation, I have already increased the agri-environment budget by more than £10 million per year, but the new CAP also has greening in pillar 1. The challenge here was to determine how to deliver environmental benefit without there being a disproportionate hit on farming operations. We negotiated substantial improvements for the three-crop rule, but there is still an issue for specialist barley producers.

With stakeholders, we have identified an alternative approach that is based on winter cover, and which gives equally good environmental outcomes without affecting production. It will have to be approved by Europe, and the approval procedure is not yet known, but we will put the approach forward and our intention is to implement the change as soon as we can—in 2015 if possible.

I have always said that there should be more on climate change in the CAP package, so I am using pillar 2 to fund carbon audits for Scotland's farms. We have also looked at options under the permanent grassland measure in pillar 1. Subject to European Commission approval, farmers who are covered by the permanent grassland measure will need to have a fertiliser plan. In later years, we may also ask for that to include soil analysis. That is a modest light-touch requirement, and many

farmers do it anyway in order to deliver the win-win of a reduced carbon footprint and improved profitability.

The final greening measure concerns ecological focus areas. We have to decide what features to count against the 5 per cent EFA requirement. I want to give farmers credit for the features that they already have, but a balance has to be struck. Counting every tree would create a mapping nightmare for farmers, and would run the risk of European Union penalties. After detailed work with stakeholders, I have decided to go as far as I can and will include as EFAs buffer strips, fallow land, field margins including hedges and ditches, catch crops and cover crops and nitrogen-fixing crops—albeit, that that will be subject to management conditions to ensure that we help biodiversity while allowing for crop production. We will continue to work with stakeholders on the details, including use of optional weighting factors and coefficients. I have also decided to strengthen the rules on buffer strips under the “good condition” element of the cross-compliance rules.

Scotland has a really good story to tell, and our food production has a fantastic international reputation for being clean and green, but we have to stay ahead of our competitors, so I will bring the industry together shortly to see how we can take the agenda forward.

I have explained how the new CAP package will impact on particular sectors in Scottish agriculture, but in designing the package I have balanced the impacts across farming as a whole. For example, the latest changes to improve targeting for beef and sheep will have no real impact on the dairy or arable sectors, which will also benefit from the five-year transition. Sectors that have been frozen out in the past, such as deer farmers, will be eligible for the first time, and the move to area-based payments is positive for crofters and for the Highlands and Islands.

In response to the consultation exercise, I am reinstating a separate capital grant scheme for crofters, with its own budget. The wider rural development programme supports rural communities, forestry, the environment, food and drink, small businesses and the £459 million LFASS budget, which helps to maintain and underpin our more fragile communities.

However well we have put the package together, there is always the risk of unforeseen circumstances. Despite the EU’s rhetoric about simplification, this is the most complex CAP ever. Under EU rules, some of the decisions that I am announcing today—such as those on coupled support—can be revisited each year, but others can be reviewed only once or not at all. That does not seem to be sensible; I will therefore call for a mid-term health check of the new CAP.

It would be naive to pretend that the new CAP, as decided by Europe, is perfect for Scotland. Important details still have to be worked up with our stakeholders, and the package requires clearances and approvals from the UK Government and Brussels. If we look at the new policy with a magnifying glass, I have no doubt that we will find lots of anomalies.

However, I believe that the Scottish Government has exploited the positive aspects of what is on offer, which we secured through tough negotiations, and that we will minimise the anomalies. That will give us the best possible package, in the circumstances. Despite the constraints in the EU rules, the outrageous budget position that we find ourselves in and the often turbulent market conditions, we are confident that the package reflects Scotland’s priorities and lays the foundations for a successful Scottish agricultural industry for many years to come.

**The Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow about 30 minutes for questions.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of his statement, although we have all been working to short timescales this afternoon. We have heard a lengthy statement, which is accompanied by briefing papers, and we all need time to analyse the impact of the decisions. I urge the Government to make time for a fuller debate on the announcement.

We should not forget the principles of CAP reform, which were to ensure best use of public money to support public benefit and reduce the environmental impact of agriculture, while rewarding investment in delivering environmental benefit and good land stewardship.

Scotland chose to delay the shift from historic to area-based payments—I suspect that the then Opposition supported that decision—and we are now at the stage when decisions must be made. In many ways, the debate has been dominated by consideration of the impact on those who currently receive support, but we are talking about change, not the status quo, so I will support measures that aim to achieve change. I welcome the measures to tackle slipper farming and I am pleased that sporting estates will be moved to the negative list, and that entitlements will be limited to areas that were claimed for in 2013.

The decisions were always going to be challenging and I appreciate how difficult it is to get the balance right. The cabinet secretary recognised that calls were being made for a quicker transition. There is concern that 2019 is at the top end of a transition period. Even when we



take into account the new entrants measures, I am sure that some people will be disappointed that the timescale is not shorter. What will the national reserve level be? Is the cabinet secretary confident that it will meet the demand?

I have some concerns about pillar 2 support. The statement focused on agriculture, but yesterday's emissions statistics show that an environmental focus is needed under pillar 2. Pillar 2 is also vital to supporting rural communities in the broadest sense.

When I argued for a larger transfer between pillars 1 and 2, I said that a lot of that money would go back to farmers, and the statement emphasised that. What will that mean for other demands on pillar 2—the cabinet secretary referred to them—such as those in relation to forestry, food and drink and the environment?

I understand that the new measures for the beef sector are intended to support the transition. Is a timescale attached to those measures? Will the £45 million come from pillar 2 resources?

The cap on payments is welcome but, at £400,000 after labour costs, it is pretty generous. Will the cabinet secretary say a bit more about why he decided on that level?

**Richard Lochhead:** I thank Claire Baker for her questions and the way in which she posed them. She raised a number of issues, the first of which was the big issue of the pace of transition. As she can imagine, my shoes are not very popular just now—everyone has told me that they would not want to stand in them, because I have had to take tough decisions on issues such as the pace of transition.

Many new entrants wanted an overnight transition, but given the potential for such a transition to create shock waves throughout Scotland's livestock sector and downstream industries—because many intensive livestock farms would face substantial reductions—I chose to use the duration of the next CAP for the transition, in the knowledge that new entrants will, from day 1, be put on the regional average for their basic payments. On coupled support and other payments, new entrants will compete on a level playing field with other farmers in Scotland, from day 1.

Claire Baker is right to say that we must look at the national reserve, in the context of how many new entrants are included and how far back we go in defining "new entrant". As I said, the current 3 per cent will have to be substantially increased, as a quid pro quo. If there is to be a slower transition for the rest of the industry, we must maximise the benefits for new entrants by maximising the national reserve. We do not quite know to what figure that will take us, but I have secured

agreement from senior stakeholders, and it is certainly the Government's view that there will be a substantial increase from 3 per cent.

On the environment, I point out that the beef scheme in pillar 2, which Claire Baker mentioned, and which is new money over three years—£15 million a year for the first three years of the policy—will have an environmental dimension. Over and above that, in pillar 2 we are putting in extra resource for agri-environment schemes, which were announced as part of the consultation process, and substantial extra resource for restoring peatlands, which is an important measure. We previously announced that resource, too, which is additional to what was in the previous rural development programme. I am confident not only that policy in Scotland will be fairer, with targeted activity, but that it will be greener, as a result of measures that have been decided in Brussels and in Scotland, in the context of pillar 2 budget decisions.

On capping, a key principle that we should build into the new policy is that there is a cap beyond which basic payments should not go, as I said. As we go through the transition from historic payments to area-based payments over the next five years, people who have the most land will gain the most, so we should cap support. As I said, there will be no immediate impact on many farmers in Scotland, particularly in relation to payments for activity. However, there are mandatory measures in the CAP, such as 5 per cent regressivity—as it is known in European language—whereby big payments will have an automatic 5 per cent cut, notwithstanding the cap on payments that Scotland will put in place. For that reason, I think that policy will be fairer overall.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement. The statement's contents will probably stop Jim Walker calling for Mr Lochhead's head on a plate, although Brian Pack might now take up that call.

Let me briefly correct some of the comment that the cabinet secretary made about the role of the UK Government and previous Administrations. I have said hundreds of times that of course we would all have liked to have had the full convergence uplift, but I want to put that in its true context: if we had received the full uplift, it would have amounted to a 4.1 per cent increase in the total amount of CAP support. That would have been welcome, but it would never have solved all the problems that the cabinet secretary has faced.

On extra coupled support, I reject any notion that the UK Government was reticent in bringing the measure forward. Indeed, I argue strongly that it fought for it in Europe and has delivered it.

Finally, the decision of the previous Administration to stick with historic payments, which was so disparaged in the cabinet secretary's statement, was unanimously backed in the Parliament. If I recall rightly, the cabinet secretary backed the decision as enthusiastically as everyone else did. There are perhaps some crocodile tears in that regard.

The cabinet secretary announced several measures that involve substantial amounts of new money. Where will the money come from?

If the transition is to be gradual, should not the introduction of capping follow the same model?

Vast amounts of money will be taken out of the most productive areas of Scotland, particularly in the beef sector. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that his Cabinet colleagues do everything they can do within their portfolios to help to mitigate the serious economic impact of the measures as they begin to bite?

**Richard Lochhead:** I remind Alex Fergusson that I have been negotiating with the UK team for the past few years and have witnessed UK ministers seeking the phasing out of all pillar 1 support over the course of the current CAP, which would have left our farmers in Scotland with zero pillar 1 support by 2019, as opposed to the nearly half a billion pounds that we are discussing today.

On the convergence uplift, there is an important principle, in that the money was given to the UK because of Scotland's low payments. That was Scotland's money and it should have come to Scotland's farmers, irrespective of whether it was £1 or £190 million.

Alex Fergusson referred to my having made disparaging comments about decisions that were taken back in 2003 and 2005, but I was simply making the point that it is difficult to implement an area-based system in Scottish circumstances. It was a difficult decision to make back then and, for understandable reasons and because there was an option not to do that, the decision was made not to go down the route of area payments. We supported that position back then—I am not arguing with that—because it was difficult to implement an area-based scheme in Scotland, given our circumstances, and because there was an alternative available. However, today we have no option and must go down the road of area payments.

On the economic impact that the changes will have on the most productive areas of Scotland, I tried to lay out in my opening statement, in the most reasonable terms, how we have gone to great lengths—indeed, to great expense through the pillar 2 injection—to mitigate, as far as possible, with the tools that we have available to us, the impact on the most intensive livestock

farms, which play a crucial role in producing food for our tables. The situation is not uniform, of course. Some recipients may have de-stocked over the past few years and, therefore, should not get the same payments. Other farmers who are still farming intensively deserve appropriate support for their activity.

**The Presiding Officer:** I recognise that this is a very important statement on complex issues, but a large number of members want to ask a question, so I would like questions and answers to be brief if that is at all possible.

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I welcome the decision that the reference year will be 2013 as opposed to 2015 to prevent tenancies from being manipulated by landlords for unfair gain. Will the cabinet secretary expand on the overall measures that are being taken to encourage active farming and crofting despite the UK-brokered rock-bottom settlement, which cannot be unaffected by the UK's rebate, which bedevils a fair settlement for Scottish farmers?

**Richard Lochhead:** As Rob Gibson says, because Scotland has such an unfair overall share of the CAP budget it is important that we are as smart as possible with the resources that we have available in Scotland to support food production and environmental protection. That is why we are pursuing a five-pronged assault on inactivity in Scotland so that we can direct what funds are available to active farming. That applies to both the crofting counties and the rest of agriculture in this country. I think that that is the right thing to do, and it is supported by the people of Scotland. Every public pound should support genuine farmers.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** Is the cabinet secretary confident that the whole new CAP takes into account robustly enough biodiversity, climate change and water quality for the public good? Yesterday, my colleague Cara Hilton expressed concern to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse, about the 11.2 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions that come from agriculture. I welcome the farm carbon audit in pillar 2, but will the cabinet secretary give more detail about how agricultural emissions will be tackled and whether regulation might be needed in that context?

**Richard Lochhead:** It is an important issue, and I laid out in my statement some action that we are taking to reduce the carbon footprint of Scottish agriculture. It is a win-win situation because we save a huge amount of money on farm for each farming business that takes appropriate action. There are around 10 green gains in the policy that we are announcing today,

many of which relate to reducing carbon footprint. Today, Scotland is sending the clear message that we are a clean, green country and that, for the international marketplace, our food is going to be produced more sustainably than ever before and certainly more sustainably than food is produced in many other areas of Europe and the world.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I thank the cabinet secretary for providing an advance copy of his statement and for the courteous cross-party discussions that he has had on the CAP regime.

I broadly welcome the transitional support, the payment regions and the island cattle payment, which will be particularly important for Orkney. Nevertheless, the cabinet secretary will share my concern over the decline in cattle and sheep numbers. Since 2004, the number of beef cattle has fallen by 13 per cent and the number of breeding sheep has fallen by 17 per cent. Does he believe that the measures that he has announced today will reverse that decline? Does the complexity of the new CAP that he has announced today—indeed, about which he has expressed concerns today—especially regarding sheep support, mean that there will be more farm inspections, sheep counts and other cross-compliance measures? On the payment regions, is he able to state what the definitions are for the LFASS grazing categories A, B, C and D? That would be of help to farmers and crofters who are now trying to work out what the measures mean.

**Richard Lochhead:** A key objective of the policy that I have announced today is to support livestock production in Scotland, particularly as the new system of area payments will have a huge impact on intensive farming in this country, be that in Shetland, in Orkney or anywhere else. Therefore, I think that it is the right thing to do to support livestock production, particularly the production of cattle and sheep.

As I said, tailoring a European policy to Scottish circumstances brings some complexity with it. We have been very careful to ensure that the third region option is implementable; if it were not, it would backfire. Brian Pack expressed concern about that, as Alex Fergusson mentioned. That is why we are using fixed grazing categories under the LFASS classifications to deliver the third region scheme.

As far as inspections and the bureaucratic burden are concerned, we will work closely with stakeholders to ensure that bureaucracy is proportionate while ensuring that we work within the rules.

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's confirmation that there will be a coupled support scheme for sheep,

following extensive negotiation on the issue with the UK Government. Despite the mixed signals on coupling that are coming from the sheep sector, can the cabinet secretary confirm that the voluntary coupled support will be reviewed in 2016-17? Can he also confirm that the eligibility condition for coupled support will require farmers to identify and register animals as per the requirements of the sheep electronic identification scheme regulation?

**Richard Lochhead:** There are mixed views in the sheep sector on the coupled schemes. The driving thrust of our policy is to target activity and genuine farming, and we have a limited number of tools available to us, one of which is coupled support. Therefore, I have taken the decision that it is right to utilise that, but it will be utilised in a limited fashion—it will apply in one of the three payment regions. In other words, not all sheep producers in Scotland will be part of the coupled support scheme for sheep. Only those that operate on certain categories of land will qualify, so it will be a modest scheme for the people who happen to be in the relevant parts of the country. Many sheep farmers will not be part of the sheep scheme.

I have already indicated that we will try to keep bureaucracy to a minimum, but we must act within the rules. Many sheep farmers to whom I have spoken have said that that is a price worth paying and that we should have the coupled support scheme because it is available to us to use.

In relation to how the scheme will interact with the sheep EID scheme, the chief agricultural officer will work closely with the sheep sector in an effort to understand how we can implement the regulations in a proportionate way.

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary will be well aware that the CAP regulations provide a one-off mid-term opportunity to review the flexibility between pillars. Will the cabinet secretary undertake to assess and review the outcomes that are delivered by pillar 2 spending over the course of the new Scotland rural development programme, particularly in relation to rural community development?

**Richard Lochhead:** I should have said this in response to the previous question: we will utilise the reviews that are available, whether in relation to pillar 2—the rural development programme—or the coupled support scheme for sheep, which the previous question was about.

We have the opportunity to review the coupled schemes once a year. Other parts of the new arrangements either cannot be reviewed or can be reviewed mid-term, if we get the agreement of the European Commission. I will certainly take up that

opportunity in relation to the rural development programme, in particular.

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** Like Claudia Beamish, I welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement that he is to bring in and fund a carbon audit scheme for all farms, which is something that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee called for. How quickly will that scheme come into operation? How does he expect it to influence on-farm behaviour? In years to come, might the charting of carbon footprint reductions—or otherwise—have a bearing on financial support levels if the scheme does not have the desired effect?

**Richard Lochhead:** I feel that our farming for a better climate initiative is very successful. A number of farmers are participating in it in an effort to reduce their carbon footprint. They have found that they make significant savings on farm from using less energy, less fertiliser or whatever options they choose. I think that it is in the interests of Scottish agriculture that we roll out that initiative, which is why I am keen to fund carbon audits. I hope that, over the next five years, all farms will participate and we will have a win-win situation. I am keen to support that.

In addition, it is extremely important to the international marketplace that our farming system is seen to be just as green as, if not greener and more sustainable than, the farming systems of our competitors. That is in the interests of Scotland, both from the point of view of meeting our climate change targets and for the bottom lines of farming businesses. I will pursue that with vigour.

**Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that Dumfries and Galloway has 20 per cent of the national beef herd, which is of particular importance to the region. Can he offer further detail on how pillar 2 will support improving the efficiency and sustainability of the sector, particularly in Dumfries and Galloway?

**Richard Lochhead:** Dumfries and Galloway will, I hope, gain from some of the measures that we have decided to adopt since the consultation document was published.

The Dumfries and Galloway area is of course extremely important to the beef and dairy sectors, which is why we have put such substantial resources into pillar 2 for the beef improvement package. I expect that many of Scotland's big beef areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, south-west Scotland and the north-east of Scotland will significantly benefit from this £45 million investment in the future of Scotland's beef industry.

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The rock bottom payment of only €10 per

hectare for LFASS category A land is simply not enough. Even when coupled with the ewe headage payment, it is still going to be met with disappointment by those who saw this as an opportunity to regenerate hill sheep farming. It is simply too low—

**The Presiding Officer:** Can we have a question, please, Mr McGrigor?

**Jamie McGrigor:** Will the cabinet secretary deal with the National Sheep Association to minimise the bureaucracy associated with the ewe scheme, given the fears of a flood of inspections and extra cross-compliance measures?

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes, I will work closely with the National Sheep Association and other stakeholders to ensure that we do all that we can within the law to minimise bureaucracy.

Jamie McGrigor is completely missing the point about the payment rates in the third region. We want to reward activity, which is why the basic area payment is as low as possible in Scotland's rougher rough grazing; the activity payment is then added in by the coupled sheep scheme. If the outcome happens to be, say, €35 per hectare when the money from the sheep scheme is added to the €10 payment, that will be the same as the payment for the better rough grazing land in Scotland. Regions 2 and 3 are aimed at supporting activity and getting the right payment to the right parts of Scotland.

The only people who will lose out from my proposals are large inactive landowners. I do not know which side Jamie McGrigor is on, but I think that most people in the Parliament will support our view that we are doing the right thing with this policy.

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** Is the cabinet secretary able to offer further information on how the Government will ensure that new entrants and prospective new entrants are made aware of the support on offer? What impact does the Government think that such measures will have?

**Richard Lochhead:** I hope that this has come across over the past few years, but I care very deeply about attracting new blood into agriculture in Scotland. It is not always the easiest thing to support, given the world in which we live and the regulations that we have to cope with, but I genuinely believe that when our new entrants, who for very proper reasons were looking for an overnight transition, see what support is available to them from day 1 under the new regime I have outlined, as well as the other support available through the rural development programme, they will feel comforted that a huge step forward has been made for new entrants in Scotland as a result of the Scottish Government's

announcements today. We will continue to work closely with them in the years ahead, because our agriculture needs lifeblood and a new generation in Scotland that has the skills to produce food for our tables.

**Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):** I note from the supporting analysis that Dumfries and Galloway will lose £18 million per annum by 2019 instead of the £22 million that we had expected. Although I suppose that that is of some comfort, the transition arrangements will be important in our region to enable farmers and the dependent businesses to adapt. Can the cabinet secretary expand on the arrangements for the transition period? For example, will reductions be equally spaced over the period or will there be different profiles? After all, it will be important to businesses that are planning to adapt over the period to have knowledge of the profile.

**Richard Lochhead:** We can do only so much to mitigate the impact on Elaine Murray's constituency, and the wider region in which she is based, of the move from large historic payments to area-based payments. However, the figures that Elaine Murray has highlighted show that we have at least mitigated as far as we can the decline in funding to that part of Scotland.

As for how the transition will be managed, we will have a formula for managing the move from historic to area-based payments over the subsequent five years. It is very difficult to predict the payment that any farm business will get, given that they are so diverse and different. Each farmer will be looking at today's announcement and working out what it means for them, but we will make as much guidance available in the clearest language possible to help people understand the impact on their businesses in the weeks and months ahead.

**Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement, and I am pleased that the capital grant scheme is being maintained. Can the cabinet secretary indicate whether the scheme's budget will be maintained at previous levels, or even increased?

**Richard Lochhead:** All figures relating to the rural development programme should be available to MSPs this afternoon, if they have not received them already. Dave Thompson will find that we have protected the budget for the capital grant schemes for crofters in Scotland. We have listened closely to the representations that we received on the need for a separate fund in Scotland that does not confuse crofters with smallholders.

Overall, the deal is very good for Scotland's crofters. Our crofting communities play a vital role

in maintaining our environment and producing food, and the measures that we have announced today will help to target support to active crofters in particular, and even more to island crofters, so it is a win-win situation for many crofters in Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** Before I call Alison Johnstone, I ask Jean Urquhart whether she wants to ask a question, as her name keeps appearing and disappearing from my screen.

**Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):** My question has been answered.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I call Alison Johnstone.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** What formula was used to arrive at the cap of £400,000, which is notably higher than the cap of £254,000 for which members of the European Parliament voted? How many farms will that cap affect, and how much money will be distributed as a result among smaller and less well-off farmers?

**Richard Lochhead:** As I indicated in my statement, there are already mandatory measures for reducing payments over a certain level by 5 per cent; that is happening to all payments. The cap that I announced is an overall cap for basic payments, and I have set it at €500,000.

The first of our announcements is aimed at rewarding activity. Given our experience with the current policy, those who get big payments but are inactive will now be frozen out completely if they remain inactive.

The top 10 recipients under the new policy will be different from the top 10 recipients under the current policy. The amount of funds that the next top 10 recipients will receive from the public purse under the new policy will be a fraction of what the current top 10 recipients receive under the policy at present.

That is a huge step forward for fairness. We picked the cap to put in place a safeguard for the transition over the next five years. As we move from historic to area-based payments, the payments for those with the biggest amount of land in Scotland, where there is sometimes less of a link to activity, will not go beyond that cap. If they qualify under the CAP, they would still have to be active farmers. We will keep that mechanism under review, but it will come into play halfway through the transition period.

**The Presiding Officer:** We have a late bid for a question from John Scott.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I declare an interest as a farmer. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the real losers under his proposals will be those in payment region 2 in the improved hill and upland areas that are still

classified as B, C and D areas in the LFASS scheme?

**Richard Lochhead:** The choices are difficult, but we have to draw a line between each of the three payment regions. The better land is in region 1, but deciding how to split the rough grazing area between regions 2 and 3 involves a complex and difficult decision.

We worked closely with stakeholders on the issue, and many—though by no means all—of them were adamant that we had to split the rough grazing into two regions so that we do not overcompensate the less active farms in the region that will have the coupled support for sheep scheme.

The wider policy is geared towards activity, and I hope that we have got the balance right across all three payment regions in Scotland. Of course, if we had had a better budget from Mr Scott's Conservative colleagues in the UK Government, even bigger payments would be coming in the next five years. Unfortunately, however, we were left with the worst pillar 1 budget in the whole of Europe, and we have therefore missed the opportunity to increase the payments rather than having to reduce some of them, which Mr Scott thinks will cause difficulties.

## Local Government Elections

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-10262, in the name of Derek Mackay, on local government elections—delivering improvements in participation and administration.

15:24

**The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay):** I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion in my name on the subject of Scotland's electoral future.

Although the business of voting in elections is a subject of keen interest to everyone in the chamber, unfortunately, too many of our citizens do not share our enthusiasm. Only last month, turnout in Scotland for the elections to the European Parliament was just 33.5 per cent. That disappointing level of participation will not have surprised anyone—rather depressingly, it might even have exceeded some people's expectations. In recent decades, the general trend has been towards a decline in voting at all elections across the United Kingdom. Turnout at the 2012 Scottish local government elections was just 39 per cent, although that was significantly better than the figure of 31 per cent south of the border. In the 2011 Scottish Parliament election, turnout was around 50 per cent. Although that figure appears encouraging by comparison, it still means that half of those who were registered to vote did not feel inclined to do so. That has to be a matter of concern to every one of us.

Voter apathy might be seen as embarrassing for professional politicians such as us but, in fact, it is more serious than that. Last month, we had the elections to the European Parliament. A great deal has been said about the results of that election and, in particular, the fact that Scotland now has a UK Independence Party MEP. Although there has been some party-political debate about who is responsible for allowing UKIP to gain a foothold in Scotland, however temporarily, one issue that might well have been a factor and which has even wider significance is that far too many of our citizens did not feel sufficiently engaged to vote for any party. The 67 per cent of Scotland's registered voters who were not inclined to vote in the European elections missed the opportunity to influence who will represent them and make decisions that will affect them and their families over the next five years.

The turnout figures seem at odds with the fact that, as we know, the public are keenly interested in how the nation's affairs are run. From our regular engagement with constituents, we all know that the people of Scotland care passionately

about issues that affect their daily lives. They feel strongly about issues such as the standard of healthcare that they receive in our hospitals and the quality of education that their children receive at school, as well as every other aspect of Government policy that affects their health and wellbeing and that of their families and communities.

There is no doubt in my mind that low turnout is not a reflection of the apathy of voters and that, rather, the figures are an indication of the alienation that is felt by a large proportion of the electorate towards current political and electoral processes. The decline in voting is not restricted to Scotland or the rest of the UK—it is a trend that is recognised across all mature democracies. However, the Scottish Government is not prepared to accept the current democratic gap and we are taking positive steps to address the underlying causes.

On 9 April 2014, we published the consultation document “Scotland’s Electoral Future—delivering improvements in participation and administration”. The consultation concerns how we can improve the quality of democracy in Scotland by encouraging wider engagement and participation in elections. The document considers participation and electoral processes and procedures. Believe it or not, some parts of the document are undeniably technical and are on ways of improving the electoral process. If we can improve the process and even make it easier for people to vote, that might be one way of increasing the number of people who bother to vote.

Vote counting in local government elections in Scotland is now done electronically. We readily accept that new technology, and the Parliament has recognised that the process in the previous set of local elections worked fairly well. I do not think that anyone would want the single transferable vote process to be carried out with a manual count, given the likely delays. Our consultation document asks people to consider whether we should go further. If electronic vote counting is acceptable, might we consider whether electronic voting would also be a desirable step? If it is not, might we explore the potential for other innovations, such as universal postal voting, through which all voters would be issued with a ballot paper by post, which they could return by post or deliver to the polling place by hand in the traditional way?

The Scottish Government is seeking the views of as wide a cross-section of the nation as possible. Following the consultation closing date on 11 July, we will publish an analysis of responses in the autumn, with proposals for action following on from that.

In addition to the written consultation, we are also undertaking some direct stakeholder engagement. We have established a group that comprises representatives from key sectors, including electoral professionals, the third sector, youth organisations and political parties. The group met for the first time on 28 May and I intend to convene another meeting in the near future to consider the follow up to the consultation. My aim is to get the perspective of a wide range of communities of interest from across Scotland and to get cross-party consensus. We will explore the issues that deter people from voting and consider how they can best be tackled. Ultimately, we will look to build a pathway towards greater and more meaningful democratic engagement.

Although the views of political groups represented in the Parliament may differ on many things, I am confident that we are united in our desire for Scotland to have a more vibrant and actively engaged electorate. In seeking to encourage debate, I ask members to consider that young people have lower-than-average turnout rates, people from ethnic minorities are less likely to be registered to vote than their counterparts, and research has shown a definite correlation between areas of multiple deprivation and low voter turnout. How can we engage more effectively with those groups?

Part of the answer may lie in focusing on why so many people are disinclined to vote. Apathy derives from people’s sense that their vote will not make a difference. How can we convince them otherwise? Part of the problem appears to lie in a certain lack of faith in political parties. Although we in this chamber may find it hard to believe, it is clear that some of our citizens are not entirely impressed by their political representatives. Some voters think that politicians and parties are all the same, and are unconvinced by our ability to bring about real change.

Who is responsible? Is low voter participation the fault of our electoral systems and those who administer them? Do we need to introduce new, more up-to-date methods of voting that are more in tune with the 21st century? Is low voter participation the fault of our political parties? Are we not communicating directly with voters to help people understand what they are voting for and how their vote will make a difference? Is there a role for schools in helping to ensure that young people fully understand the democratic process?

I have asked a number of questions in the consultation, on the cross-party panel and in my speech. I look forward to hearing members’ thoughts and ideas as we take this work forward. I feel that this is one issue on which the Parliament can work together to focus on the way forward. In any event, I reiterate that the Scottish Government

is fully committed to examining all the policy and process issues.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I note what the minister said about introducing new methods of voting. I also note that the consultation paper refers to “multiple voting methods”. However, some people like the traditional way of voting, which involves going to the polling station and filling in a ballot paper. Does he take that on board and accept that that is how some people desire to vote?

**Derek Mackay:** Yes. John Mason poses a very good question. Many people enjoy the custom of going to the polling station and casting their vote in the traditional way. Although we are exploring the potential of a pilot for all-postal voting, we have proposed that, even in that scenario, in which people can vote by post, they could go to the polling station as they usually would to cast their ballot in the traditional way. I am very mindful of not losing the people who have voted consistently in the traditional way. I am mindful that when a previous study asked people why they were motivated to vote, the top answer was that it was their duty to vote. That must remain a consideration in the work that we do.

The motion is not intended to spark a party-political debate over who is at fault; it is intended to find a way of encouraging more people to vote and to engage in the democratic process—not just in elections but between elections. I am sure that our debate will stimulate that dynamic discussion and will help me to take forward the necessary proposals to address participation in the nation's elections.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern the trend toward low turnout in elections across Europe, and welcomes the Scottish Government's recent consultation, *Scotland's Electoral Future: Delivering Improvements in Participation and Administration*, and its commitment to engage with stakeholders following the consultation, build on examples of best practice and develop a strategy to increase democratic engagement and public participation in future local government elections.

15:34

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I very much agree with much of what Derek Mackay said in his opening speech, especially his point that it is up to all of us, across the chamber, to talk not only to one another but to key stakeholders and, as important, to people who do not normally vote, because we need to ensure that, in some way, their voices are part of our discussion. I agree that it is shocking that, at the most recent local government elections, fewer than four in 10 people turned out to vote. That is simply not good enough. If the issue was just with the local

government elections, we could say that we could fix only them, but we know that, only a few weeks ago, we had an equally low turnout for the European elections.

The reason why I wanted to put in my amendment something about not only the technicalities but the politics is that it was very obvious from looking at the different boxes at the Lothian count on the night of the elections—we were not able to look too closely at them—that some areas had an incredibly low turnout of below 20 per cent but others had a turnout of up to 50 per cent. Social class was not the whole explanation, but it was part of it. I wanted to put that on the agenda. My amendment is an add amendment because it adds to the minister's motion.

We are in the middle of the Scottish Government's consultation period, so I will focus on the technical side—the mechanics—the changes that we could make now and the point on which the minister spent much of his time: how we connect and reconnect people to the political process, which is the bigger challenge and one in which we all have to be involved.

On the mechanics, I am grateful to Anne McTaggart and John Wilson for the work that they did as part of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's effort on the matter, because they examined many of the clear options that are available. We must consider how we ensure that people are eligible to vote, make it easier for them to vote and address the fact that far too many people are not even registered to vote.

Would it be possible for the minister to pull together some of the analysis of the matter? The Institute for Public Policy Research, the Electoral Reform Society and academics have done work on it. Having dipped a toe into that for today's debate, it is clear to me that a lot of work is available—some relates to the United Kingdom and some relates to other countries, particularly other western democracies, where researchers have considered the matter—but we could do a bit more work on the insights and best practice that have been suggested.

As a starting point, we should make it easier to register because far fewer people are on the register than should be on it. What more can we do to support alternatives? One suggestion to which Anne McTaggart and John Wilson refer in their report is continuous registration, which has been experienced in Northern Ireland. Others have suggested using people's day-to-day contact with local government or other state institutions, having forms available more widely, for example at post offices, Government offices, schools and universities—it would not break the bureaucratic



back to have a range of organisations where there was a set of forms that people could fill out and hand in—or using the opportunity of people registering for council tax. There is a set of ways that we could get people on to the register.

Voting is a fundamental democratic right, but we need to do more to enable people to exercise that right, so we must address eligibility to vote and consider registration on the day for people who have missed out. Much of my local work is with people who are homeless and who move house a lot. They are most likely to miss out on the registration forms that regularly come through the door. Research in the US showed that registration on the day significantly increased turnout. Would that be practical for us? What would be the downside? There are certainly benefits, in that it would at least give the most dispossessed the chance to vote.

Secondly, we must also make it easier for people to cast their vote. An electronic voting machine would have massive advantages on the night, because we would be able to press a button and suddenly know what the count was. However, that would remove a huge amount of transparency and the capacity to double-check. We would have to rely entirely on machines. I have a natural reservation about that. I do not know whether it is because I am more a 20th century person than I am a 21st century person, but I think that we should all be interested in probity, accountability and security—as well as sheer mistakes in the program.

Although I have reservations about that approach, I am attracted to considering some of the 21st century solutions that the Electoral Reform Society suggested. We should at least consider the practicalities of suggestions such as voting online and voting by phone or smartphone. Again, there are potential cyber issues—such issues have been mentioned in the news over the past 24 hours in relation to finance. Although we need to consider such measures, there could be some big challenges.

When I read Anne McTaggart and John Wilson's report, I was struck by the issue of universal postal voting. A few elections ago, I was instructed by my team to get a postal vote, because they were worried that I would not get round to voting on the day. When we talk to people, we hear that having to vote on the day is a real issue. The research and the pilots that have been done in England, Wales and Scotland show a significant uplift in voting of around 20 per cent if people have a postal vote that is automatically sent to their door.

As John Mason said, postal votes would not necessarily prevent people from handing in their vote, which can make them feel as if they really

have voted, but for a lot of people they could be quite a game changer, as receiving a postal vote would make them aware that the election was taking place. There is always a need for checks and balances, but I wonder whether we should look at that seriously.

In the police and crime commissioner elections in England and Wales, turnout was four times higher among those who were involved in a universal postal voting scheme, and Scottish local authorities that have tried it have seen significantly higher turnouts.

In the spirit of cross-party consensus, we would be prepared to look at the issues and what the choices might be. I do not think that there are technical fixes, but we have to look at what could be improved and what practical measures would help. We owe that to people who have not voted thus far, and we owe it to democracy, to try to improve it.

In the Scottish Parliament elections in 2003, voter turnout dropped below 50 per cent. We need to make voting easier and make people more aware of the system, but we also need to make them want to vote—that is crucial. In a way, my amendment focuses on what makes people want to vote. It highlights underrepresentation, particularly of young people, people from low-income backgrounds and people from areas of multiple deprivation, although those are not the only groups that do not vote. The low registration rate among ethnic minority communities needs to be addressed, as does significant undervoting by students in local elections.

On one level, we can understand why people do not vote—the disconnect—but the services that local authorities provide affect absolutely everybody, and we need to get that message across. What more can we do to raise awareness among young people? I would be interested to look back over the Scottish Parliament's outreach work over the past 15 years. There is a whole cohort that we could study. Has it made a difference? I will not be alone in having done endless school meetings and endless meetings in the Parliament. Have we made a difference?

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

**Sarah Boyack:** I will come back to social disadvantage in my closing speech. I am very grateful that I got eight minutes, and I look forward to the debate.

I move amendment S4M-10262.2, to insert at end:

“; notes the urgent need to reconnect politics and voters, particularly young people and those from less affluent areas, who are the least likely to vote, and believes that increased citizen participation on local issues is ultimately

best achieved by re-empowering local government and local communities”.

15:42

**Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** Given the latest turnout and participation figures for elections to local government, it is clear that action is needed. However, I was interested in the Electoral Reform Society's comments on the Government's consultation. Indeed, I agree with its central argument that, in a sense, the consultation conflates two separate issues. The first issue is the broad, on-going discussion about the future shape of local democracy, at the centre of which is increasing community participation and shifting decision making to a local level. How we improve engagement with communities and how we bring them into the decision-making process are fundamental questions that we are all trying to answer. Accordingly, one would hope that if we are successful in that regard and are able to rejuvenate local governance and democracy, a mark of our success would surely be increased voter turnout and participation. Put more succinctly, the consultation should not be seen in isolation, but should be part of a larger process of reform.

In that regard I have some sympathy for Sarah Boyack's amendment, although I must say that the process of centralisation did not magically appear in 2007. When one considers local government ring fencing, it is clear that the tendency to wrestle power away from local authorities was as much in evidence before, under the old regime, as it is now.

**John Mason:** Does Cameron Buchanan accept that the issue is also one of power going down beyond local government and that sometimes local communities are at a lower level than local government?

**Cameron Buchanan:** I accept that. We have to go down to the bottom. We have had a top-down approach, rather than a bottom-up approach.

Although there is a need for discussion and debate on the broad issues, the pace of the consultation has meant that there has been a focus on the administration of the voting process. However, I happen to think that there is an elephant in the room. It is surely worth considering whether the very system that we use to elect our councillors has any effect, positive or negative, on turnout, and, more broadly, on wider participation and community engagement with councils.

I accept that this specific consultation is not the mechanism for addressing the issue, but it is time to look at the impact of the single transferable vote system on local government and on local government elections. Indeed, as matters stand

with STV, we are considering what we are voting for and why we vote but not how we vote. It makes no sense for us to exclude the issue from the general discussion on the future of local governance in Scotland. In fact, in some respects, this is an ideal time to consider the issue, given that we have now had two elections under STV, with one of those being a stand-alone election—we should assess the impact that it has on participation.

When the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 was debated, its proponents told us that it would strengthen democracy, increase choice and reinvigorate local government. I have to ask, has the act delivered all that it was meant to deliver or, rather, have we been left with a system that was complicated as a result of being a compromise between two systems?

I do not think that the way forward is to have compulsory voting. In Belgium and Australia, where they have compulsory voting, there is a very high percentage of spoilt ballots. I suppose that that is one way of protesting but it serves absolutely no purpose—there or here. Talking of a duty to vote, there is always a very high turnout in countries that are voting for the first time. That is because it is their duty to vote. I wonder whether we have too many elections. How many times have members been told on the doorstep by many people all over the country—I will put it politely—to go and see a taxidermist? I have been told that, even in deepest Renfrewshire. I think that that is really because people are not focused on the whole process.

To come back to the consultation, my feeling is that it serves to remove barriers to participation from the mechanics of the voting process. As I discussed earlier, there is the bigger task of getting people interested and involved. However, as John Mason said, we probably have to work on that from the bottom up. We have to get people engaged and make it as straightforward as possible for them to vote and also to register to vote, as Sarah Boyack said.

I am grateful to my colleagues on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, Anne McTaggart and John Wilson, who undertook to investigate this area last year on the committee's behalf. It is not an easy task. While making the process easier, we must ensure that the integrity of the process is maintained; although we do not, by and large, have any great problem with electoral fraud, we should always be vigilant.

It is worth bearing in mind what we are aiming to achieve and what can be achieved. We are aiming to achieve a higher turnout, with greater participation of people in the electoral process. There are countries such as North Korea in which there is 100 per cent turnout, although we know

why that is. Regardless of recent comparisons, I am sure that it is not the Scottish Government's aim to replicate North Korea's efforts, even if it is granted independence.

There is a proportion of people on the electoral register who, for one reason or another, should not be there. Indeed, the Electoral Commission told me that it was previously suggested that only 85.5 per cent of the records on the electoral register are accurate. There are many reasons for that, most of which are genuine.

I welcome the consultation, although I think that it is part of a wider effort. Many other factors must be considered if we are to breathe life back into our local democracy.

15:48

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** Mr Buchanan mentioned the work that John Wilson and Anne McTaggart have done on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. I will not go over that work in any depth, because they will have a fair amount to say on the subject.

I am pleased that the committee chose to look at voting. Beyond that, in respect of the committee's current workload, I hope that the community empowerment bill will result in increased participation. The bill will be extremely important in getting people to participate locally.

Mark McDonald, Anne McTaggart and I recently took part in a whistle-stop tour to Germany, Denmark and Sweden. I can never get over the fact that when we talked to local politicians in those countries about participation and community engagement, they found it difficult to comprehend what we meant by community engagement because it seems that it just happens in those countries. That is the kind of attitude that we need.

That is not to say that everything in the garden is rosy in those countries, because turnout is reducing there, too. However, their turnout rates are still much higher than they are here, particularly for local government elections. There was a lot of concern in Germany about putting the local government and European elections together. There was a bit of fear that the local government turnout would reduce. It is interesting, but I have to say that I have not checked the turnout and results; I should probably do that.

It is vital to leave no stone unturned in trying to make the voting process easier. I have believed for a long time that 16 and 17-year-olds should be given the right to vote; I am glad that that is happening in the referendum and I believe that it should happen in every election. Sometimes there is a disconnect for young people. Ms Boyack talked about going into schools and talking to kids;

most of the time, younger kids are particularly enthusiastic about the process, particularly if a member holds a wee vote while they are in the school. Something happens at a certain point and I think that if we allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote at every election, we could keep people engaged that much longer.

**Cameron Buchanan:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Kevin Stewart:** I do not have time. I am sorry.

A universal postal voting pilot is an immensely good idea. We should also be looking at online, telephone and app voting. Mr Buchanan talked about integrity and we have to ensure that folk trust the system. Folk can sometimes be a bit suspicious about new voting methods.

We must ensure that every single thing that we put in place is robust. We do not want to see a situation like that in the Robin Williams film "Man of the Year", in which comedian Tom Dobbs is elected as President of the United States because of faulty Delacroy voting machines. We have to test and ensure that the system is absolutely robust, but we have to do it because we have to increase participation.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A modest amount of time is available for interventions, but it is very small.

15:52

**Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** I think that it was Billy Connolly who said:

"Don't vote; it just encourages them."

At the Local Government and Regeneration Committee this morning, I mentioned to the Minister for Local Government and Planning how in Orkney and Shetland, for example, voting in local government elections is a bit higher than it is on the mainland. They do not have political parties.

For me, that is the starting point. All political parties and groups need to take some responsibility for how people feel. I accept that Tavish Scott was elected in Shetland, but generally in local government, the candidates are independents. Political parties need to take some responsibility for the way in which we campaign and organise, the way that we tend to avoid answering questions directly and the way in which we campaign against each other.

The council tax is a classic example of that. In my by-election, I was forever being accused of saying things that I had not said about the council tax. All that we do is turn the public off. A fundamental issue is the political parties themselves. The public have had enough of us

and we really need to reform how we do our business.

In evidence to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, Professor James Mitchell said:

“When we look at turnout and participation in elections for different levels of government across liberal democracies, we find that turnout is far higher in elections for levels of government that have more power.”—[*Official Report, Local Government and Regeneration Committee*, 14 May 2014; c 3490.]

We need to look at that area. In local government, social work and education will take up something like 76 or 80 per cent of the budget. When we talk about devolving those services and the other statutory services around them to communities, we are talking about the margins of local government budgets.

We need to have an honest discussion about how local government is funded. At the Local Government and Regeneration Committee meeting this morning, I asked the Minister for Local Government and Planning whether he would accept that, once we get past the referendum, regardless of its outcome, we could perhaps get everyone in the chamber to start to come together and have a serious debate and discussion about what local government looks like and, more crucially, how it is funded.

There are major pressures. Without getting into a debate on local government finance and its funds, we know from demographics and the number of young people who are coming into care in local authorities that the demands on local government services are growing. Regardless of the political colour of the Government in the Scottish Parliament, or in any other place for that matter, we need to have a serious and grown-up discussion with local government and local communities about how local government is funded. I hope that we can start to have that discussion once we get past the referendum—I accept that it would be difficult to have it before then.

I agree that we need to look at all the other technical issues to do with improving voting, but there is something more fundamental at the heart of why people are not voting.

I support Sarah Boyack’s amendment. I am sure that many people in the Parliament who have campaigned will have seen for themselves, when they have gone out with an electoral register and started to knock on doors, that in many streets in areas in which there is higher deprivation household after household is not on the electoral register. It is right to flag up that point. I hope that the minister will take that on board and that we will have consensus at the end of the debate.

In conclusion, we should look at all the other things that have been talked about, but much more fundamentally, let us look at ourselves, political parties and how we finance local government.

15:56

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):**

Although the consultation looks at different methods of voting, I want to underline the point that is made in paragraph 2.12. It says:

“the Electoral Commission has previously recommended that a new model of multiple voting methods should be developed”.

That should certainly include the traditional method of physically voting on a piece of paper in a polling place. I am happy for there to be additions and alternatives to that—we already have some—but improvements could be made, especially in the location of polling places. I would like to focus on polling places in the short time that is available to me.

We have a number of issues in my constituency, some of which I have raised with Glasgow City Council. I have seen some movement, but on the whole, the council has been unresponsive.

One of my wards is Calton, which is a very mixed area. There is a lot of new housing—mainly flats—around the High Street, Glasgow Cross and St Andrews in the Square, which some members may be familiar with, but there is no polling place in that area. The residents who live there tend to look to the merchant city and the city centre for work and leisure opportunities; they do not look further east into traditional Calton. However, they are expected to vote in a polling place in a building that is located outside their area; more than 4,000 electors are meant to vote there.

Over time, attitudes may change. I like to think that they will change and that people will be more relaxed about going to different parts of the city, but the current reality is that we expect voters there to vote in an area that they are not familiar with and in which they may not feel comfortable. I accept that the distances in miles in the city are not as great as those in rural areas, but there is an issue in Glasgow and, I suspect, in other cities. People may be reluctant to travel to certain areas because they are unfamiliar with them or whatever. We want to make it as easy as possible for people to get to the ballot box.

The issue is not just staffing and resources. An additional polling place could not be found where I consider it is needed. There is a contrast with Barlanark, where I stay. There are two primary schools there that are across the road from each other; one of them has a community centre attached to it. Logically, I would have thought that

the community centre would be the place for everybody to vote in, but the two schools are completely closed on polling days and each of them is a polling place. There were fewer than 3,000 electors—in fact, there were 2,819—at the last count there. With a 17 per cent turnout, they had 476 people between them in the European elections. The community centre is not being used, although it seems to me the obvious place to consider.

On the wider issue of polling places, clearly there is resistance from parents to schools and nurseries being closed. Related to that is the fact that we expect people to go into a building that is often quite large and maybe not very welcoming, and which is completely quiet on polling day apart from the few people who go in to vote. Frankly, I do not find that a very attractive setting and nor do a lot of people. I would draw a comparison with people visiting libraries, which has also been a problem over the years. To be fair to Glasgow Life, it has made inroads into that by changing the locations of libraries, which now often share a building with a swimming pool or a cafe where information technology is available. That means that there are lots of things to draw people into the building where the library is.

For legal reasons it might not be possible at the moment to do this, but we should think about moving polling places in such a way. Instead of bringing the people to where the ballot boxes are, let us take the ballot boxes to where the people are. Could we do that in shopping centres, supermarkets or coffee shops? What about giving people a voucher to have a decent coffee if they have voted rather than fining them if they have not, which is maybe the negative way of doing it?

With regard to Labour's amendment, I say again that empowering local government and empowering local communities are not the same thing. We need to move power down to the local communities.

16:01

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** If it is any help to John Mason, we did not use any schools at all for the recent European elections. I take Mr Mason's point about parents being darned annoyed when their kids are not at school. For some elections, we now use community halls, sports facilities and other places. However, I was not quite sure about Mr Mason's point about buying everyone a cup of coffee before they vote. There used to be a law about treating, but I do not know whether it is still on the statute books. However, I am sure that Mr Mason was not suggesting doing something like that, and I take his point.

I hate to tell Alex Rowley this, but I was actually a Liberal Democrat when I was elected to Shetland Islands Council. However, he is absolutely right, because there are no political councillors in my part of the world at the moment, nor are there any in Orkney. However, it is a judgment call, is it not? Alex Rowley and, indeed, the minister represented their parties with great distinction at local government level, but they probably knew what they were going to achieve when they went to take policies through their councils. I have to say that, at times, my own council does not necessarily know at the start of a full council meeting what is going to happen, whether the meeting is on the school estate, funding for elderly people or whatever. I guess those are the choices that we have.

When Alex Rowley was making his observations, it struck me that another aspect is encouraging younger people to stand for election rather than just encouraging them to vote. We have the youthful Mr Mackay here, and he was a young man when he was first elected to a council. I was 27 when I was first elected to Shetland Islands Council and I was 20 years younger than anyone else in the council chamber, which I think was a shocking indictment—certainly in Shetland—of our ability to attract a younger generation to stand for election and have a role in that sense as well.

I absolutely take the point that the minister made in his introduction about the result of the European elections and what that meant. However, were we not very different in terms of how the European elections worked out? At least we kept our debate to the rights and wrongs of some of the big issues, whereas some of the parties that were elected across Europe have some pretty unpleasant sides to them. Indeed, when I look at Greece, I think that there is some trouble in store.

I observe to all my political colleagues across the parties that the only party here that really made Europe the big issue was the party that got hammered in the elections. It therefore does not automatically follow that it will do a party any good to take on the issue that is being debated in the election. However, I think that what happened to that party was because of other and different reasons rather than because it felt that the issue was about Europe.

I agree that what is important in this debate is to concentrate on what we can do to engage and encourage more people to vote at a local level. There have been many good ideas on that in the debate so far. I will give the minister three brief examples that I think are worth considering.

The first example is on John Mason's point that the issue is not just local elections but local

communities. The land reform review group published its report just the other week, and it set out a path for how local communities can have more control over their areas. That is a very different approach to the one that we have seen in recent times, to which Cameron Buchanan referred. As a member of a party that favours radical land reform and that took the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 through in the first session of the Scottish Parliament after 1999, I think that the review group's work is important. We in this Parliament have the opportunity to help create strong and engaged local communities.

One of the other two examples for the minister is local income tax. He and I probably share the same views on that, although he is probably not allowed to say so at the moment. However, as Alex Rowley rightly said, when we get past the referendum, whatever the result, we might get back into the real, proper debate about how we fund our local councils, because they do not have financial accountability.

In truth, councils did not have a lot of financial accountability in 1999. I am not for a minute arguing that the situation was perfect then. Sarah Boyack and I shared a lot of ministerial time and she will remember a lot of the debates. To be frank, we did not make much progress in that time, but the situation has got worse since then.

Of course I do not expect Derek Mackay to agree with me on this, but I am not making a political point; I am just observing that, in a practical sense, the councillors whom I elect at home, in my part of the world, now have less financial accountability than they have ever had before. I think that all of us who come from a local government background want to see that reversed and changed. Maybe we can genuinely have that debate in the future.

My final point is on centralisation. It is important to try to make some progress on rebalancing where the powers sit. That is a live agenda for all of us. I would like our councils to have more responsibility, but that goes hand in hand with the financial accountability that I suspect we all crave.

16:05

**John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome this debate as it deals with many of the issues that the Local Government and Regeneration Committee examined as part of a short inquiry into the 2012 Scottish local government elections, with Anne McTaggart and me acting as reporters. I take this opportunity to thank the organisations and individuals who provided evidence during that investigation, which allowed us to draw up our report.

We made a number of recommendations for the Scottish Government on change and, more important, improvement to the election process. The committee supported advances in voting methods—the minister outlined some of those today—while recognising the need for thorough security to be in place in any voting system that is introduced.

As has been mentioned, a voter turnout figure of 39.8 per cent was recorded in the 2012 local government elections. That was the lowest voter turnout since unitary authorities were created, but the elections were the first decoupled elections since 1995. The committee endorsed the Electoral Commission's position that discussions should take place between local authorities, political parties and the Electoral Management Board for Scotland regarding local restrictions on the display of election posters. We heard in evidence that there may be issues about the lack of publicity around election day, particularly in relation to the banning of electoral material on lamp posts and billboards.

Furthermore, the Electoral Commission has commissioned research on an alternative voting day, which it has been suggested could be on a Saturday. Research conducted by ICM on behalf of the Electoral Commission highlights the many reasons for people not voting, with 24 per cent identifying a lack of time and/or being too busy to vote. Those reasons were found to be top of that poll.

At the 2012 Scottish local government elections, 16,742 postal votes were rejected. As they accounted for 4 per cent of the total return, the high level of rejection of postal votes is clearly a matter of concern. Furthermore, voters were not notified that their ballot paper had been rejected. That matter needs to be addressed as a priority, especially in respect of ensuring best practice in the verification process.

Good examples of engagement with the wider public are being applied. In written evidence to the committee's inquiry, Dr James Gilmour from the Electoral Reform Society mentioned the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland visiting secondary schools to get pupils to register on the electoral roll. That has already been mentioned in this debate, and perhaps it should be taken forward to ensure that we get young people on the electoral register.

There are also significant aspects when it comes to voting itself. In particular, the ordering of ballot papers is an issue. There is considerable evidence of alphabetical voting, with about 60 per cent of voters in the 2007 local government elections giving their first preference to a candidate who was higher up the paper, as identified by Curtice and Marsh in their report in

2008. The committee's report recommended that some form of ordering should be looked at in time for the 2017 Scottish local government elections. I cite Ron Gould's suggestion that ordering for each ward should be determined by a ballot of all candidates. I always find that the publication "Scottish Council Elections 2012: Results and Statistics" by Bochel, Denver and Steven, published by the University of Lincoln in 2012, offers useful context and analysis of the turnout.

When we discuss local government elections, we should be aware of a number of other issues that need to be taken forward. I welcome the work that the Scottish Government is doing in relation to its consultation. We must get the right message to the electorate. We must ensure that all the systems that can be put in place are used to maximise the vote, whether that is in local government elections, Scottish Parliament elections or any other elections in Scotland. We must look to the future and find systems that will actively engage with voters and ensure that they turn out.

16:10

**Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am keen to contribute to this debate on delivering improvements in the participation in and the administration of local government elections, given that I am a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, that I was previously a Glasgow city councillor and that I have a huge interest in encouraging people to vote.

From my experience, I, too, recognise the pattern of chronic disengagement of communities from their local representatives. I am deeply concerned by the 20 per cent fall in turnout at local government elections since 1999. I fear that that trend could continue if we do not take action to address the problems that we face.

It is well documented that a low turnout such as we have experienced in recent years could lead to a democratic deficit in local government. The result would be an absence of democratic accountability and a weak mandate for local councillors to assume any control over the decision-making process.

The only way around the depressing lack of engagement with local government is to hand over real power and influence to authorities across the country. If people understand that their local council has the ability and—crucially—the resources to bring about change in their community, they will understand the value of their vote.

What is needed is a radical approach that provides for local government in Scotland and affords opportunities for community development

and the empowerment of ordinary people in the decision-making process. Local government should be outward looking and should seek to engage communities at every stage of its processes.

I firmly believe that a system that establishes a clearer distinction between the roles of central and local government in determining council budgets should be put in place. That would allow local authorities a fairer budget settlement and make far clearer to ordinary electors the role of local government. Only when people know who and what they are voting for and why they are voting can they communicate the value of local government elections and their impact on communities.

Another issue that requires urgent attention is the participation of women as candidate councillors. Fewer than one in four councillors are women; that is lower than the rate for women among MSPs and MPs. It is for all political parties and local government to reverse the trend. We must have a system of local government that truly reflects the diversity of the people whom it claims to represent.

In local government, we have seen a decline in voter turnout and participation, a growing gender gap in elections and an unassessed inequality in relation to voting by younger and economically disadvantaged citizens, which my colleague Sarah Boyack mentioned. We must work together to address each of those points in order to improve participation in elections and the administration of local government.

We should increase voter turnout by enfranchising 16 and 17-year-olds and providing better public access and information. We should seriously consider introducing alternative voting methods, including proxy voting, postal voting, electronic machine voting, online voting and telephone voting, to facilitate the accessibility of elections. Through those proposals, we may achieve greater efficiency, transparency and accountability in Scottish local government.

16:14

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I take on board the point about ensuring that we get people registered to vote. That is critical, but we also need to ensure that electoral registers are kept up to date. When I was knocking on doors during the recent Dunfermline by-election, I found that there are people who are listed against an address who have not lived there for between five and eight years. It is good to get people on the register, but we must ensure that the names of people who are no longer resident are taken off

the register, because the issue has an impact on, for example, turnout and participation.

The discussion about voting methods is important. A good example that can be used to highlight the impact that alternative voting methods can have is the citywide referendum in Aberdeen on 1 March 2012 on the proposals for regeneration of Union Terrace Gardens. I do not want to reopen the debate about the merits of that proposal, because it is in the past, but it is worth looking at how the vote was conducted. There was an all-postal ballot, which was augmented by phone and online voting. More than 86,000 votes were cast, which represents a turnout of some 52 per cent.

If we fast forward a couple of months to the local government elections, turnout was 33.7 per cent—just a short space of time later. That tells me that the provision of an all-postal ballot, augmented with phone and online voting, boosted voter turnout. I know that the referendum in March 2012 was on a single issue, but I think that there would be merit in considering whether the approach could be replicated, given the difference between turnout in the referendum and turnout in the local elections.

In a survey, the Electoral Commission found that 52 per cent of respondents who had not voted said that that was due to

“circumstances preventing them from doing so”.

In the constituency that I represent, the proportion of offshore workers is high, as I suspect that it is in the constituencies that Kevin Stewart, Tavish Scott and other members represent. Offshore workers often find themselves rotated on to the rigs during an election. For them, postal voting and proxy voting are important, but the requirement to arrange such a vote can be an issue for many people—I have had to chase people to get them to sign up to a postal or proxy vote, so that their vote can be counted. A move to something along the lines of universal postal voting or online voting, which would enable people to cast their vote from the rig, would enable more people to participate in elections.

It would benefit the minister to seek advice from Crawford Langley, who was the returning officer in the referendum on Union Terrace Gardens. On the potential for voter fraud or multiple casting of votes, Crawford Langley identified in his report that out of 86,000 votes there were 74 cases in which a person voted both electronically and by post. A tiny minority of individuals had done that, and in many of those cases the person had written on their ballot paper that they were posting it after voting online simply because they wanted to be sure that their vote would be counted.

Let us not forget that in the current system anyone can walk into a polling station, claim to be Betty Smith from number 5 and cast a vote, without having to produce identification. There is already the opportunity for voter fraud.

I agree entirely with what Tavish Scott said about encouraging more young people to stand for election. I was elected to Aberdeen City Council at the tender age of 26. I was by no means the youngest councillor at the time; we had a councillor who was elected at the age of 18 and who became the depute provost of the city. The reaction to those elections caused me great concern that young people might be put off politics. We were castigated as kids who were not mature enough to make decisions on behalf of the people. If we want young people to get involved in politics and stand for election, we must make them feel that they will be valued when they participate. We must look carefully at how young people's participation is reacted to by not just the media but political parties.

There is much to think about, and there has been a lot of constructive input in the debate.

16:20

**Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab):** The outcomes of local elections shape our lives in many ways, from how our local schools are organised to when our bins are collected, yet an increasing number of people are opting not to take part in our local democracy. The 20 per cent drop in the turnout for local elections since 1999, which colleagues have talked about, is a huge concern, and it is vital that measures are taken both to halt and to reverse that decline.

Derek Mackay and Sarah Boyack have highlighted the fact that the level of participation is falling fast among the young and the poorest voters. That is of huge concern. It is an issue not just for local elections but for all elections, and we will address it only with radical solutions. We have all knocked on doors and been told, “I never vote because politics doesn't affect me” or, “I don't know anything about politics.”

The issue is not just voter apathy. Many people have such busy lives that they are not able to get to the polling stations on election day. As John Mason said, many polling stations are in the wrong place. We must do a lot more to make voting as easy and accessible as possible. Moving to universal postal voting and same-day registration may help, but there are lots of other avenues that we can go down.

It is sometimes hard for voters to tell that there is an election going on. During the European Parliament elections, I knocked on quite a few doors on election day and people told me that they



had no idea that an election was being held on that day. The fact that election posters on lamp posts are banned in many areas may be a bonus for party workers, but it is certainly not a bonus when it comes to raising awareness of elections. With many of us targeting core voters and swing voters, less time is now spent on persuading the reluctant or cynical to get out and vote. I therefore welcome the Electoral Commission's recommendation that discussions should take place on how we can better publicise the 2017 council elections, and I hope that those discussions can be progressed.

If we are to engage young voters, it is absolutely vital that politics and elections play a much bigger part in the school curriculum. That has been proposed by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, and I hope that the Scottish Government will do more work to make it a reality. The IPPR report "Divided Democracy: Political inequality in the UK and why it matters" suggests that voting be made compulsory for voters—an idea that my colleague Cameron Buchanan mentioned. The report argues that if young people vote in their first election they are more likely to vote throughout their lives, and if more young people vote, their voices will be more difficult for politicians to ignore. That is also an issue that we need to explore.

Like all members, I spend a lot of time visiting schools and speaking to schoolchildren about democracy and the work of our Parliament. I hope that, when it is their turn to vote, we will see a change, as the young people that I speak to are informed and interested in politics. Most of the young people that I speak to on their doorstep about the referendum are also really excited about being able to cast their vote for the first time on 18 September.

However, it is a lot easier to enthuse people to vote in an election that has the power to change their lives radically, for better or worse. It is harder to get people to the local government polls when many people see councils as being just about bins and street lights rather than as having the power to shape and change our local communities. It also does not help that many councillors simply do not look anything like the communities that they represent, as Anne McTaggart said. Although progress has been made, the fact is that women and young people, in particular, remain seriously underrepresented on local councils across Scotland. All political parties need to take action to address the issue, which is unhealthy for democracy. Three out of four of our local councillors are men. The image of councillors being pale, male and stale may be a generalisation—I mean no offence to Richard Lyle—but it is often the reality. A recent report by the Asda mums index found that only 2 per cent of

mums feel politically represented. That is not good for democracy. Whether they are on the councils, here at Holyrood or at Westminster, our elected representatives need to better reflect the communities that they serve.

We often hear SNP members say that one of the bonuses of independence will be that we will get the Government that we vote for. The reality is that, in many elections, the majority of people do not vote at all. We spend a huge amount of time in the chamber debating whether we should be part of the UK and we do not spend enough time looking at where the power should lie here in Scotland. Therefore, although I welcome the report, I hope that it can lead to change. We need to renew our local democracy and be more ambitious about putting power back into our local communities and into the hands of local people.

16:24

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Up until the uncoupling of the 2011 and 2012 Scottish Parliament and council elections, the turnout for local government elections was relatively high. Although the decoupling of those elections was necessary in the wake of the many serious failings that haunted the 2007 elections, only 39.1 per cent of the electorate turned out to vote in the 2012 council elections—a drop of 13.7 per cent on the turnout in 2007. Indeed, in the previous three elections, voter turnout was slightly lower for the council elections than it was for the Holyrood elections. I am not entirely sure why there is such a difference between parliamentary elections and local authority elections. Perhaps it shows a mistaken lack of belief in the relevance of local government.

We must work towards a solution to ensure legitimate authority. There is a famous saying that goes, "If you don't vote, you can't complain about what you get," although people will complain anyway. The problem is that a lack of turnout results in a certain lack of legitimacy for any council or Government.

One very important part of the consultation is the proposal to extend the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds. I firmly believe that if someone is old enough to work, to pay tax, to get married and to join the army, surely they are old enough to make a reasoned decision on their country's future. At that age, young people will have a vested interest in the outcome and what it will mean for their education or their employment prospects. I understand the argument that there are some immature teenagers who would not take that responsibility seriously, but I think that they would, most likely, form part of the electorate that do not turn out.

I still think that that is a real shame, and I believe that the solution is to have more interaction with students in and out of school. By being more proactive, we can reach them with more information. I hope that that would increase the level of interest in local and national politics, which might provide a sustainable boost to turnout at elections. Perhaps we can enthuse and inspire future generations to participate in politics. However, a key barrier to that idea is the fact that schools have—quite correctly—strict guidelines on access and impartiality. How we manage that reasonably is a challenge.

The consultation also looks at alternative voting methods for local council elections and provides four very interesting proposals, including universal postal voting, telephone voting, online voting and electronic machine voting, all of which have their good and bad points. The suggestion on universal postal voting is particularly interesting, because it removes the argument that people did not vote because they did not know that there was an election, and it enables people to vote from the comfort of their own homes.

However, there are two significant problems with universal postal voting. First, there is an issue with security and how confident people could be that each vote was cast by the registered voter for whom it was intended. Secondly, would voters mistakenly bin the forms or put off the task and just forget about it? That said, I acknowledge that postal voters are more likely to vote. That was shown at the 2010 general election, when 83 per cent of postal votes were returned, whereas only 63 per cent of those who could vote only at the polling station did so. It could be argued that those who registered for a postal vote were more likely to vote because they had gone to the trouble of arranging it.

Electronic machine voting does not do much for turnout, but it provides faster results. Arguably, it could reduce the number of spoiled ballots, but given the failed use of electronic counting machines in 2007, I would be cautious about the use of machines, which could suffer from unforeseen system errors and might lead to an election being invalidated.

I believe that the future may lie in online and telephone voting, although there are concerns about the security of those methods, especially online voting. The increasing threat of cyberterrorism and malware is becoming ever more present, and it represents a massive problem.

Overall, social media has re-energised politics and has brought politicians to the people. Perhaps we need to bring elections to them, too—perhaps we should hold the world's first ever pilot of hashtag voting.

In conclusion, I am in favour of extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year-olds, but we need to engage with them more to ensure that they are adequately informed when they come to vote. The key idea that we should be focusing on is making registration and voting more accessible by taking polling day to the people.

16:28

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** Local government elections are vital, and this Parliament must do everything that it can not only to improve the way in which those elections are run, but to increase participation in them.

The 2007 elections were marked by scandal. Both the Scottish Parliament election and the local government elections had a much higher rejected ballot paper count than was expected. For example, in 2003 only 0.77 per cent of local government ballot papers were rejected, but in 2007 that increased to 1.83 per cent. The 2007 local government elections were also the first local government elections at which the single transferable vote was used.

Further issues with electronic counting led to Scottish Parliament and local government elections being decoupled, but in the 2012 local government elections, the rejected ballot paper count was still 1.71 per cent, which shows that there are still issues with voters' understanding of the STV system.

The decoupling of the elections has also led to a dramatic fall in participation. In 2007, the turnout was 52.8 per cent, but in 2012 it fell to 39.8 per cent. In other words, 60.2 per cent of those who were registered to vote did not feel that it was important enough to turn up. That should concern us all.

In the Labour Party, we strongly believe in initiatives to increase citizen participation in local issues and, ultimately, the best way of achieving that is by re-empowering local government. Throughout the SNP's time in Government, there has been massive centralisation of local government. Instead of citizens being empowered, their power is being taken away, local democracy is decreasing and local people feel disconnected from the process.

Through our devolution commission, we have argued for a radical agenda for local government and community re-empowerment, including but not limited to an adjustment of powers and responsibilities to suit local circumstances, fixing the broken system of local government finance and allowing authorities more scope to influence economic development. By moving power further down the chain and empowering local people and

local government, we can better target the disconnect that is felt at local levels.

However, we must also work to ensure that voting systems move with the times and make citizenship education part of the school curriculum through personal and social education. Although I hear that that can happen, it is not currently required in curriculum for excellence.

As for modernising the voting system, we have a range of options including online voting, telephone voting, universal postal votes and even mandatory voting. I am not suggesting that we move wholesale to one system or another, but that we look at whether more systems can be utilised in conjunction with traditional polling places to make voting more flexible and accessible. Although some of those methods raise security issues, I note that people are happy to use online banking systems, and I imagine that they would find online voting acceptable.

There is no quick fix to the issues that have been presented this afternoon, but I would like this Government to start increasing participation by re-empowering local government and local communities, by making citizenship education a requirement in curriculum for excellence and by setting up a programme to trial new voting systems to ensure that results in future elections are truly representative.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

Thank you very much. Mr Paterson, I would be grateful if you would refrain from turning your back on the chair and chatting while other members are speaking.

16:32

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I first stood in a local government election in 1974. It was in Orbiston, Bellshill; I was eventually elected in 1976, and then won 10 local council elections in a row, mostly under the old system. In 1976, when I was first elected, more than 3,000 people—two thirds of the electorate—voted in my local Orbiston ward, but that number has been falling steadily ever since. Indeed, in the most recent local elections in 2012, the poll in the Bellshill ward was only 36.36 per cent. In other words, 36 years on, voting has fallen by nearly half. Turnout in North Lanarkshire was only 37.7 per cent, while turnout across the whole of Scotland was over 39 per cent. There might well have been extenuating circumstances—it was, for example, the first time that council elections had been decoupled from the Scottish Parliament elections—but that does not change the fact that something must be done to improve the figures and re-engage the public.

We must remember that elections are for the people, not for politicians. They are the

cornerstone of our democracy. It is clear from both the low turnout for the recent European elections and the projected 80 per cent turnout for the upcoming referendum that the people of Scotland are happy to vote for something that they see as important. We must therefore ensure that the interest, engagement and enthusiasm that the current referendum debate has produced are capitalised on and not lost after 18 September.

I am not the most technologically savvy person, but it is clear to me that electoral processes have not kept up with recent technological developments. It is my belief that technology must be embraced in elections and that people must be allowed to vote via text, email or the internet by means of an election app or a mobile phone election app—or even while shopping.

We already allow postal votes, and postal voting applications in North Lanarkshire have risen from just over 2,000 to more than 10,000 in the past few years. The procedure for applying for a postal vote has changed over the years—people no longer need a doctor's line or signature to confirm that they are too unwell to vote at a polling station. They can now fill in a simple application form, date and sign it, and put down the elections for which they want a postal vote. I therefore see few difficulties in implementing safeguards to allow an electronic type of voting, which will help to encourage many people to vote from their armchairs.

Many young people vote for their favourite hit tune in the top 100 every Sunday by downloading it online. Why should we not allow them to download their favourite political party at election time? Are political parties scared of losing control of the way in which people vote? Political parties like to control voting intentions by various means such as polls, canvassing, targeted leaflets and doorstep canvassing to get their vote out.

Wherever possible, young people should be encouraged to engage in the political process. That is already being done to a great extent by allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in the independence referendum on 18 September, and I am encouraged to hear that the Scottish Government is seeking views on a general extension of the vote to that age group.

However, technology alone will not solve the problem. As studies have shown, internet voting simply means that those who would have voted anyway vote by a different method. I find it hard to believe that, in this day and age, it is not possible for a member of the public to turn up at a polling station, legally register and vote all at the same time. That system is being implemented in some areas of America, and the evidence suggests that same-day registration increases voting turnout significantly.

Ordinary people have many things going on in their lives. They are not politicians, and they are not committed to the political process as we are. We must bring back the old saying, "Power to the people". I welcome—as members of all parties should—the Scottish Government's consultation document, "Scotland's Electoral Future: Delivering Improvement in Participation and Administration", and its commitment to improving the quality of democracy. As with all consultations, it is important that everyone supports what is being done.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That brings us to the closing speeches. As I am sure members will know, all members who have participated in the debate should be back in the chamber for closing speeches. I call Cameron Buchanan, who has five minutes.

16:37

**Cameron Buchanan:** Is my friend Dick Lyle suggesting that we sing while we vote?

On the whole, the debate has been quite constructive. We all agree that we must make it easier for people to participate in our local government elections, and many members have focused on specific areas such as European elections, polling places, the electoral register and online voting.

John Wilson raised the issue of postal voting. A number of pilots have been rather successful, but the forms are too complicated, and the evidence has shown that there is a disturbing number of spoiled postal ballot papers, which should not happen. We should simplify the postal voting forms. We must also bear in mind that there is a marked difference between a pilot and a full-scale roll-out, and we should be aware of the potential difficulties in carrying out a poll on such a large scale.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we must ensure that robust procedures are in place to protect the integrity of the vote, including security measures. We must be confident that people are able to exercise their right to vote free from coercion.

A lot of people like going to the polls to vote, and I agree with my colleagues that it is important that we find voting places that are voter friendly—without, of course, necessarily giving voters a cup of coffee to bribe them for their vote. In Edinburgh, many schools that are used are cold and miserable in winter, which puts people off voting, but the libraries next door are not used. I spoke to someone about that, and they said that it is because there are no janitors and they cannot get people to man them. We need friendlier places to vote, and we should be prepared to think about

which current voting places might be unfriendly. However, if we make any changes, they cannot compromise the way in which we conduct our vote.

Another aspect that many members mentioned is the need to ensure that voters understand the voting system. They need to know what they are voting for and understand the responsibilities of local government, which is not always the case. We all know that, when we go round the doorsteps, whatever the election, people talk about things that are not necessarily relevant. If it is a local election, they talk about Europe; if it is a European election, they talk about local stuff. We have to try and engage with them on those aspects.

This is my opinion, but I am very much in favour of 16 and 17-year-olds being allowed to vote. We should encourage that. After all, as colleagues have said, they can do everything else, so they should be allowed to vote in all elections. I really think that we should get that done. *[Applause.]* I am not sure that my party necessarily agrees with that, however. *[Laughter.]* I can say it here and I cannot be corrected. It is right to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote because, after all, it has been proved that most of the enthusiasm is among the young people. When I get out there, I find that they are keen. Some people in council estates and so on are just not engaged, but the younger people seem to think that voting is relevant. To be fair, it is novel for them, too. I am all in favour of that.

One key aspect of the new curriculum for excellence is developing responsible citizens. Encouraging democratic participation should surely play a large part in our children's education. As Sarah Boyack said, it is children in school who really engage. When schools visit the Parliament, it is the 10, 11 and 12-year olds who really like it and who are keen to know what is happening, even in a non-political way. That is important. I noticed with interest the comment of Dumfries and Galloway Council that the education system could help to embed the importance of voting from an early age. That is key.

In considering the curriculum for excellence, we have to move beyond the perfunctory voter information campaign drives and dry leaflets. Schools must consider the role that they play in the process with children from a young age. We make the stuff too dry and complicated.

As I said in my opening remarks, the consultation is part of a wider process. Sarah Boyack's amendment, which I will definitely vote for, is correct that, if we are to genuinely re-engage the public with local government, we must make it relevant. However, the consultation is about what we can do to improve the process of

voting and make it easier for those who already want to take part.

An important message from the debate is that there are no quick fixes. It is interesting to note that, in Belgium, where voting is compulsory, turnout had been at 89 per cent but the figure dropped for the European elections because people did not think that it was relevant and just spoiled their ballot papers. They went into the polling station and either tore up the paper or wrote rubbish on it, as sometimes happens here. I try to persuade people that spoiling their ballot paper is a waste, because nobody pays attention to it. People think that they are making a protest vote, but we do not put those protests aside—they just go straight into a bucket. We have to persuade people that there is no point in going to vote and spoiling their ballot paper.

A good deal of work needs to be done to engage the public. It might take quite a bit of time for that work to bear fruit, but it is important that we do all that we can to make the system easier while preserving the integrity of local government voting. Fraud is an important issue. We all know that people go round houses and say, “I’ll fill in the ballot paper for you.” There might be about six ballot papers, and they are all filled in. That is part of the problem that we might never get round.

I do not know whether online voting will work. It should work, but I must say that I cannot really see it working. People want the traditional method and the postal vote—they do not want too many complicated types of voting. When we had three types of voting in 2007, or whenever it was, that was a failure. There were masses of spoiled papers. In Edinburgh, it was a total disaster.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that you must come to a close, please.

**Cameron Buchanan:** I am just about to close now, thank you very much—that is enough.

We have to preserve the integrity of the vote.

16:43

**Sarah Boyack:** The debate has been really good, because we have been able to draw on members’ experience as former councillors, political activists and probably members of local community groups. There are lots of practical ways in which we could improve the voting process and the mechanics of voting. I hope that, by the end of the minister’s consultation, we will have a raft of suggestions on which there will probably be a degree of cross-party agreement. The only caveat is that it is the members who are most enthusiastic on the issue who are engaged in the debate and whether all our parties will sign up

as enthusiastically is another matter. We must try to persuade our parties that we need to change.

That has to be part of the backdrop to the debate. There are all sorts of issues to do with making voting easier and having more publicity. Some members of my party were overjoyed when posters were banned, but others thought that it would draw attention away from the day and that people would not know that it is voting day. I think that publicity is crucial. It might be done through posters, through the media or by local government or the political parties, but we need to lift awareness of voting.

Some very sensible suggestions have been made, particularly in relation to young people. When we think about it, the role of local government is fundamental to young people’s lives. Lots of the nuts and bolts of what local authorities do in service provision—schools and good-quality education; local buses; support for young carers; libraries; sports facilities; housing; licensing policy; and community safety—have a massive effect on young people’s lives. Maybe we need to do more to draw that out.

I think that we need a cultural shift, which is partly what I am alluding to in my amendment. It is partly about re-empowering local government; it is also about making the connection with communities.

There have been a lot of initiatives at council level. I have been to quite a few meetings of youth councils, but they seem to wax and wane over the years. If there is a champion for youth councils at council level, they will promote the youth council. What lessons can we learn from the work of the Scottish Youth Parliament in involving young people and having us shadowed? I have met my youth parliamentarians over the years and they bring an energy, a new perspective and a freshness to youth politics. We need to tap into that. We also need to tap into the youth organisations in our political parties.

We need to do everything we can to encourage our young people to stand for election, whether it is to fight a winnable seat or to fight for the cause. It is important to give young people that experience, give them the responsibility, give them the profile and trust them to get involved. That goes for both our youth and our student movements. There are particular challenges in getting our student movements involved, but we need to do more to make such involvement work.

This has to be about making local government more accessible and more empowered to take decisions closer to people and to make the connections. We could say that the establishment of the Scottish Parliament with a more proportional voting system was designed to do the same thing,

yet in our elections we struggle to get turnout much above 50 per cent. There is therefore a major challenge. Empowerment is part of the issue and we might have a wider debate about that, but we could do more. We need to focus on what we can all do politically in our different parties.

A strong message came from the Electoral Reform Society's research, which focused on the large number of people who actively choose not to vote, a point that was made particularly well by Cara Hilton. The issue is not just that they are not aware of it but that they actively choose not to vote. They do not trust politicians of whatever level of elected representation and they do not trust our parties. We, as political parties, have to re-engage with them. At the local level, that is something that we all need to do. We need to ensure that we get more effective engagement. We need to consider best practice to make politics more relevant.

We need to focus on involving people not only at election times, although that is crucial, but between elections. That was one of the things that I was keen to promote in the review of the Labour Party that we conducted after 2011. We had lots of ideas because we had to go back to first principles and ask how we did things. It certainly focused our interest on representational politics, in terms of having more women—Anne McTaggart mentioned that—more young people and more people from ethnic minority communities. There is a lot more that all political parties could do to make those connections. If we do not do that, people will not be connected and they will not see the relevance of voting.

The points that were made by Tavish Scott and Alex Rowley need to be addressed by all of us. That will probably have to be done in the aftermath of whatever happens in the referendum, but we need to start talking seriously about how we make local government finance work more effectively. It is unfinished business for all of us. It is essential if we are to see local government empowered to be more than a service provider. That is where some of the tension has arisen with regard to centralisation. When we pass laws here because we do not want postcode lotteries, that leads to tension. We need to be up front about that and debate the consequences of that while still trying to push power to local authorities and communities—it has to be both.

There must be a culture shift, and we all have to be involved in that at Parliament, council and community level. There will be tensions, of course, and we need to own up to them when they arise. However, local government finance, powers for our local communities, land reform changes and the community empowerment changes that are needed are part of that process. It might be about co-operatives and community ownership. It is

about making those connections in local groups and then pushing them through into mainstream politics.

I want to end on a quote that highlights the social justice perils of us not being engaged and deals with the disconnection of people from low-income backgrounds in particular. The IPPR analysed the 2010 general election and the cuts that followed it. Its examination of the 2010 spending review showed that

“those who did not vote in the 2010 general election faced cuts worth 20 per cent of their annual household income, compared to 12 per cent for those who did vote.”

In that way, it argues,

“unequal turnout unleashes a vicious cycle of disaffection and under-representation among those groups for which participation is falling”

and to whom politics seems to have less and less to say. We all need to take that to heart. We have debated local government expenditure and the long-term impact of the council tax freeze in other debates, but we should also consider the social justice aspect of the fact that the people who vote are most likely to be represented best. We must address that democratic deficit. We need to ensure that we are open and more committed to making local elections and local politics meaningful. That is also relevant to the Scottish elections. It is an issue across western democracies.

I hope that the minister will accept our amendment. It is promoted in good faith. There are some key issues that need to be addressed in addition to the technical ones.

16:51

**Derek Mackay:** This has been a very constructive, well-informed and helpful debate for developing our work.

The Government intends to accept and support the Labour amendment. I also like Sarah Boyack's description of those who have contributed to the debate and are present. I was going to describe us as political anoraks, but I far prefer the description “most enthusiastic members”, who can contribute to the debate and contribute ideas.

The tone of the debate and the speeches that have been made in it will help to fuel the continuing work. Some people would ask why we are embarking on work so early for council elections that are some way away, but the Gould report taught us that we have to make preparations in advance. To have confidence in the electoral system, we should first and foremost engage—in a cross-party style—with wider stakeholders, and then make preparations for an election that can inspire confidence because of its

transparency and the preparations that have been made. We have learned the lessons of previous elections, and I am mindful of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's work that has helped to bring us to that point.

I will respond to some specific questions. There will be a new online registration process that will be quicker, convenient and more secure. I think that that will be welcomed. Another technical point was made on rejected postal votes. For the first time, the electoral authorities will write to people whose postal votes were rejected to explain why that was the case. It is welcome that people will be made aware of that, and it will also be the case for future elections.

Sarah Boyack and other members covered pertinent issues about geographic areas. Social class may well be an issue. I am mindful of the fact that, when we moved from door-to-door registration to a different process, many thousands of people were taken off the register. That has had an impact, and there is no doubt that the extent to which areas and individuals are seen to be well off seems to be a factor. We need to make it easier for people to register and, as Mark McDonald said, to stay on the register. Much work is being done on that.

It is important that we continue with probity and security, but we also need to remove the mystique from the polling place. I remember the time when there was a police officer outside every polling place and there might not have been disabled access. Even at the European elections a few weeks ago, someone asked me whether they needed their passport to vote, so there is an issue with awareness of how easy it is to vote. We should not necessarily highlight—as Mark McDonald perhaps did—how easy it is to commit impersonation by walking in and pretending to be someone else, but we need to do something to raise awareness of how easy it is to cast a vote.

On young people, we will engage further with Young Scot and others at an event in the Scottish exhibition and conference centre, which might not be as popular as the major attractions that normally attend the centre, but it will be important to engage with young people and to take forward that strand of work, as well as others on gender. We have agreed that councils and other places of decision making should more accurately represent and reflect the communities that they have to govern, thereby bringing the governors closer to the governed.

Parties also have a duty to recruit more women to stand, and they have a duty to put them up as candidates in elections.

The issue is much wider than administration of voting. John Mason helpfully covered issues of

convenience and I am sure that Cameron Buchanan, who raised a number of issues, will welcome the fact that the Electoral Reform Society is on the stakeholder group and is contributing to the on-going debate. We believe that proportional representation through STV has stimulated better representation in local government, but it comes with challenges, and we do not support compulsory voting, for the same reasons as Cameron Buchanan. The issue is bigger than the administrative and bureaucratic issues, although they must be addressed. We will consider good practice and we will continue to consult.

Tavish Scott helpfully covered empowering local communities, financial accountability and rebalancing power. The work that we are undertaking with the island areas ministerial working group is trailblazing and will help the rebalancing power agenda. I think that it will be warmly welcomed, because it will focus on what we can do. Incidentally, I appreciated Tavish Scott's comment about my being a relatively youthful minister, because I get that less frequently as the years go on.

Richard Lyle covered his election in 1976. I was not yet born then—

**Members:** Oh!

**Derek Mackay:** I know. That was a low blow.

I appreciated Richard Lyle's commentary on how systems have improved over the years. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Excuse me, minister.

Far too many conversations are going on, particularly at the back of the room. Could members resume their seats?

**Derek Mackay:** There is in Parliament far too much consensus on how we conduct elections— but that is to be welcomed.

John Wilson helpfully pointed out a number of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's recommendations that the Government has been able to take forward, some of which I identified. I am sure that it was not out of personal interest that Mr Wilson mentioned the ordering of ballot papers.

**Sarah Boyack:** Along with many colleagues, I am sure, I welcome the announcements that the minister has made today. Will it be possible for him to put them together in one package, so that we can disseminate the information across our connections and networks?

**Derek Mackay:** I will be happy to do that. I will update the Local Government and Regeneration Committee as we continue the process of engagement and consultation on what we have

committed to do, which includes looking at the ordering of ballot papers and randomisation.

Anne McTaggart's contribution was helpful. I would not agree with many of her points on finance and budget settlement, but she was absolutely correct on turnout and encouraging more women to participate and become candidates.

Mark McDonald made a helpful point about Aberdeen City Council's referendum. He put aside the issue on which the referendum was held and pointed out that it was conducted through an all-postal ballot and turnout was 52 per cent. The turnout for the local government elections—for those who would actually make the decision—was not 52 per cent but 33.7 per cent. That made the point about alternative voting methods, on which we have found so much welcome consensus today.

Kevin Stewart covered votes for 16 and 17-year-olds. To our surprise across the chamber, there was consensus: all parties support votes for 16 and 17-year-olds in not just the referendum but in every election. That will be welcomed by 16 and 17-year-olds across Scotland. That is where the parties' spokespeople now are. Cameron Buchanan might have some explaining to do to the Conservative Party, but we welcome that conversion of the Opposition spokesperson.

**Cameron Buchanan:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Derek Mackay:** I think that Mr Buchanan will need to explain it to the whips later—I have only 40 seconds left.

There is increased confidence in new and different methods of voting, which we have to consider closely and carefully as we seek to improve participation in our democracy and elections. We need to look beyond the issue of turnout and we must inspire people to vote, so that they have confidence in the electoral systems and so that we can ensure that we have a healthy and thriving democracy that builds on the momentum that we have right now—on whichever side of the referendum one stands—and which engages the people of Scotland in Scotland's electoral future.

## Business Motion

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-10272, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 17 June 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motion

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Finance Committee Debate: Written agreement on the budget process

*followed by* Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Standing Order Rule Changes, Budget Process

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Asylum Seekers and Refugees, The Need to Create a More Humane System

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 18 June 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Culture and External Affairs;  
Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

*followed by* Scottish Labour Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 19 June 2014

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Buildings (Recovery of Expenses) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Historic Environment Scotland Bill



*followed by* Financial Resolution: Historic  
Environment Scotland Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 24 June 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 25 June 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Education and Lifelong Learning

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Housing  
(Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 26 June 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

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

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motions S4M-10270 and S4M-10271, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Care and Associated Professions (Indemnity Arrangements) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the HGV Speed Limit (M9/A9 Trunk Road) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-10262.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10262, in the name of Derek Mackay, on local government elections, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-10262, in the name of Derek Mackay, as amended, on local government elections, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes with concern the trend toward low turnout in elections across Europe, and welcomes the Scottish Government's recent consultation, *Scotland's Electoral Future: Delivering Improvements in Participation and Administration*, and its commitment to engage with stakeholders following the consultation, build on examples of best practice and develop a strategy to increase democratic engagement and public participation in future local government elections; notes the urgent need to reconnect politics and voters, particularly young people and those from less affluent areas, who are the least likely to vote, and believes that increased citizen participation on local issues is ultimately best achieved by re-empowering local government and local communities".

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-10270, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Care and Associated Professions (Indemnity Arrangements) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-10271, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the HGV Speed Limit (M9/A9 Trunk Road) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

## Scotland's Secret Bunker

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-10114, in the name of Roderick Campbell, on Scotland's secret bunker reopening. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated.*

That the Parliament notes the reopening of Scotland's Secret Bunker in time for its 20th anniversary celebrations, following a recent series of upgrades; understands that the bunker, which became operational almost 61 years ago, only opened as a tourist attraction in 1994 after been bought in 1993; believes the attraction to be one of the most popular tourist destinations in North East Fife and welcomes tens of thousands of tourists every year; understands that the latest upgrades will allow visitors to access never-before-seen areas; considers it fortunate that the use of the bunker now is for tourism and that its use as a nuclear shelter was never required; congratulates the owners on providing what it considers to be an excellent education resource, and hopes that it continues to thrive so as to allow future generations to learn about the Cold War.

17:03

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** If I may, I would like everybody briefly to imagine what the world would have been like had certain events in history taken a different turn. What if the Cuban missile crisis and, specifically, the boats of the Soviet Union that carried intercontinental ballistic missiles had taken a different turn in 1962? What if tensions between India and Pakistan had escalated further than any of us dared imagine? What if the world, instead of peacefully retreating from the cold war, had engaged in nuclear war?

For years, we knew that the world was prepared for nuclear war but only since the end of the cold war have we learned just how prepared we were. While the British Government might have had the capacity to order a nuclear strike, it is only in recent decades that we have learned exactly how it would have operated—in underground facilities such as Scotland's secret bunker at Troywood near Anstruther.

In addition to Troywood, we now know that there were bunkers at Barnton quarry near Edinburgh and at Cultybraggan near Comrie. A vast number remain unknown or closed to the public, making Scotland's secret bunker, for the moment, an unrivalled tourist attraction in Scotland.

Situated 100ft underground, the bunker hosts 24,000 square feet of accommodation that would have become home to members of the British Government, specifically the Secretary of State and Minister of State for Scotland, had the country been subjected to nuclear strikes. A 3 tonne blast door at the end of a 150m tunnel, secluded

underneath an ordinary-looking farmhouse in rural north-east Fife, hosts what would have been the command centre and living quarters of people who were considered to be essential personnel in Scotland. In the past, they would have included such people as secretaries of state Arthur Woodburn, Willie Ross or Malcolm Rifkind, in a room containing no less than a substantial box of King Edward cigars. Other bunker inhabitants would have included up to 300 other personnel including civil servants and members of the emergency services. With concrete up to 3m thick, reinforced by inch-thick tungsten rods every 15cm, there is a peculiar irony to watching public information messages inside the museum that inform people how to turn their homes into fallout shelters by using dining tables and sofa cushions if they cannot access the more luxurious and sturdy options of sandbags and planks of wood.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the opening of the bunker as a tourist attraction following an extensive refurbishment that has included opening access to previously unseen areas of the bunker. James Mitchell, owner of the bunker and the Barnton quarry nuclear bunker, recently said that its reopening would

“help bring the bunker to life for our visitors”

following investment in a series of information screens throughout the museum that will soon go live. He has also spoken of how the bunker shows

“just how recent and real the threat was, and just how prepared we were.”

Initially serving as an early warning radar station to warn of attack from the USSR, the R3 type bunker was built in 1951 and used by the Royal Air Force as a Rotor station between 1953 and 1956. When the technology became redundant, the Ministry of Defence mothballed the site for two years before the Civil Defence Corps moved in between 1958 and 1968. After the withdrawal of the Civil Defence Corps, the MOD established Troywood, as the bunker is known, as a regional Government headquarters before it was finally decommissioned in 1993. The bunker is therefore different from the Cultybraggan bunker, which was completed in 1990 specifically for the purpose of being a nuclear shelter.

The RAF, Civil Defence Corps and the Royal Observer Corps all occupied the bunker at Troywood at one time or another, and the ROC had a long, distinguished history in the bunker. It was therefore with “anger and disappointment” that Air Commodore GM Boddy announced the standing down of the ROC in September 1991.

I associate myself with the comments made by James Mitchell in relation to the reality of the risk that once faced this country and the world. Having visited the bunker, I know that it is remarkable to

see the preparations that were in place and just how seriously the world took the concept of mutually assured destruction during the cold war. As an example, a previously classified document from the Joint Intelligence Committee in 1967 is on display. It notes that Pitreavie, Rosyth, RAF Leuchars and Troywood, all in Fife, were four potential targets for the USSR. The committee suggested that an attack on Troywood would require four 1 megaton bombs, and to destroy all four targets would require 12 0.5 or 1 megaton bombs, which would have been the equivalent of dropping 1,100 Hiroshima bombs. More frightening is the approximation that a 1 megaton strike on Torness power station would have rendered Fife and the Lothians uninhabitable for centuries.

Interestingly, Scotland’s secret bunker is not the only bunker that has been opened as a tourist attraction. There are plans to open the Barnton quarry bunker in the near future, and there are other similar tourist destinations in England. Cultybraggan, on the other hand, will be used for data storage.

I am delighted that Scotland’s secret bunker, which hosts tens of thousands of tourists every year, has thrown open its blastproof doors to the public for the 20th year in succession. Even after all this time, it is still able to unearth new treasures of interest. There is more to be uncovered and the museum is always on the lookout for any information or loans of materials that could be used in its displays. That said, it is interesting to note that there are doors in the museum that are still sealed to the public because what lies behind them is classified under the Official Secrets Act. They are so well sealed that even the catflap for the resident cat, Cleo, cannot be opened.

The museum contains a cafe that is certainly atmospheric. It has the feel of the 50s and 60s, down to the music of Ketty Lester and Jim Reeves. When I was there with some somewhat younger members of the public, they had no idea who either Ketty Lester or Jim Reeves were; time moves on.

I believe that the thought of nuclear war is so alien to many people who were born after the fall of the Berlin wall and the dissolution of the USSR that nuclear war resembles more closely what happens in the scripts of video games such as “Call of Duty” than the real world. Times have changed. Since July 1994, the bunker has even played host to weddings.

Artefacts—that is what they now are—such as Scotland’s secret bunker serve as a valuable reminder that the world balanced precariously close to nuclear disaster and that it was prepared for nuclear disaster. Mercifully, Troywood was never used for its intended purpose.

I hope that the upgrades will help the secret bunker museum to boost its tourist numbers this season and in future seasons, and that it will continue to serve as one of the most fascinating premier attractions in North East Fife. I say to members who have not been there that it is well worth a visit.

I thank everybody who stayed for the debate.

17:10

**Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** I congratulate Roderick Campbell on lodging the motion and securing the debate. I also congratulate James Mitchell and everyone who has put in their time and resources to restore the bunker and make it a major visitor attraction for not just Fife, but the whole of Scotland.

I look forward to visiting the attraction and to seeing what has been achieved there and what can be learned. I am very interested in the use of information and communications technology as a tool for getting history across and engaging young people in looking at the history that surrounds the bunker. I know that other visitor attractions in Fife want to try to update the tools that they use to get their message across.

As Roderick Campbell said, the Cuban missile crisis and other such events are very much in history, but we can learn much from them, and they can perhaps tell us much as we try to look forward to what kind of world there will be. I have always campaigned for and believed in multilateral disarmament, and we have made progress in that area. We need to continue to take forward multilateral disarmament policies, but the bunker's history is important in looking at lessons for moving forward.

I welcome the investment in and the reopening of the bunker, which, as I have said, is a major tourist attraction for not just Fife but Scotland. Fife is good to visit and stay in. We have a whole load of facilities and resources. People sometimes associate tourism in Fife with St Andrews and the north-east of Fife. The bunker, which is in the east neuk, will be a welcome contribution to what is available in North East Fife, but as soon as people cross the bridge, they are into a major tourism capital and kingdom. There is so much in Fife. It now attracts more outdoor visitors than most parts of Scotland attract. Lochore meadows is based in my constituency. The country park there is a major visitor attraction, with more than 460,000 visits per year. The Fife Coast and Countryside Trust now maintains the Fife coastal path. A person can kick off from Kincardine, walk right up the path and visit the bunker on the way.

There is a key point that I have always made about all those tourist attractions. How do we

ensure that we maximise the opportunities that exist? If we look at the economic strategy for Fife, we see that the tourism sector is really important, but we must consider how to maximise the opportunities, encourage developments and investment, such as in the bunker, and congratulate people on that. We must ensure that we have been able to pull together all the attractions and looked at how tourism can become truly a key part of the Fife economy that offers opportunities through training, skills development and jobs. We must encourage small and medium enterprises to set up to take advantage of the opportunities to attract more people into Fife.

It is important that we link up with our neighbours. I am a big fan of the city region agenda, and colleagues from the City of Edinburgh Council have told me that they are keen to see more opportunities in the summer for people to visit a much wider area than just the city of Edinburgh. The secret bunker will be a very welcome addition as a visitor attraction, but we need to ensure that we link up so that the councils in Fife, Edinburgh and neighbouring areas are working together to ensure that the wider city region and the beauty of Fife are part of the visitor attractions for people who come to Scotland.

Again, I congratulate Roderick Campbell on lodging the motion and securing the debate. I congratulate all those who have been involved in putting together the great visitor attraction of the secret bunker, and I welcome it on behalf of Fife.

17:15

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** The notion of promoting secret bunkers is one that—I must admit—causes me a degree of amusement. It may say much about my personality, but I never cease to be tickled by a van that I invariably come across when journeying to and from the Parliament when I am in Edinburgh. It sits there, emblazoned with promotional details of the secret bunker and indicating, among other things, that it is located near St Andrews; and I think “Well, it ain’t much of a secret any more, is it?” As I said, perhaps that just says something about my view of the world and—Lord knows—any source of humour to be found around the Easter Road area of Edinburgh these days is to be welcomed.

In all seriousness, though, I congratulate Rod Campbell on securing this debate on the secret bunker at Anstruther, because it highlights the important issues of bringing to the attention of younger people what is out there for them to visit and of educating them in a way that resonates. Scotland has its castles, its nature reserves, its museums and its galleries and many of us marvel at those, but when you are a kid you want something a bit different that chimes with your

world. I was reminded of that just last Monday, when I helped to host a visit to the Parliament by a group of young pupils from Inverbrothock primary school in Arbroath. It turned out that their trip to Edinburgh had also involved stopping off at Our Dynamic Earth. I asked one of the youngsters what the best part of their day had been. As we know, kids tend not to be overly diplomatic.

Although Rod Campbell's constituency and mine are separated by the River Tay, people from each will travel to the other for a day out. In between the two areas there is, if you are a youngster, a great stopping-off point in the shape of the Dundee Science Centre. It is also a great stopping-off point if you are an adult; I certainly enjoyed my visit there. Attractions such as the science centre and the secret bunker are not only a fun day out, but educational; they provide children with information in a fashion that will not be forgotten in a hurry, which is what matters. So often, children are bored by sterile presentations of history, but bring it to life and they will engage.

It is so important that children learn about events such as the cold war, so that they understand where we have come from and, quite frankly, the dangers posed by still having nuclear weapons in the world. We should all, of course, be thankful that the nuclear bunkers never had to be used for their intended purpose. We should also welcome the fact that many of the 1,600 or so nuclear monitoring posts that were established are now being put to peaceful uses. While some, such as the Troywood bunker, have been turned into education resources, bunkers throughout Scotland have found different uses.

For example, the bunker under Carruthers house in Dumfries has been used multiple times in emergencies, including during the 1988 Lockerbie disaster and in 2001 during the foot-and-mouth crisis, and for contingency planning when bad weather has hit in recent years. The bunker at Raigmore in the Highlands has been used to co-ordinate responses for numerous disasters, such as the flash flooding in 2002 and when a container holding detonators exploded in Inverness in 2010. The old bunkers have proved their worth over the decades, although not in their intended manner, and we should all be grateful for that.

Despite the fact that 1,600 of the monitoring rooms were built, I have not been able to find any evidence of one in my constituency, but that might of course be because it is still a secret. However, whether they are acting as a museum or a control room for emergencies, it is good to see those facilities being put to some productive use. I particularly welcome examples of their becoming tourist attractions. In an increasingly competitive market in which Scotland is hindered by not being able to look at reducing air passenger duty and

VAT on tourism, we need every advantage that we can muster to entice visitors here. North-east Fife, like Angus, has its top-drawer golf, heritage and scenery attractions, and the Victoria and Albert museum of design will be between the two areas. However, things like the secret bunker are that little bit different and offer that wee bit of novelty, helping to ensure that Scotland stands out from the crowd.

Although the secret bunker may not be so secret now, it is certainly special. I congratulate it on its reopening and I thank Rod Campbell again for securing the debate.

17:19

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I join others in congratulating Roderick Campbell on lodging his motion and securing this evening's debate.

Scotland has many great visitor attractions, but only one secret bunker that is open to the public. Graeme Dey expressed wry amusement about the publicity around the secret bunker. Likewise, I always think that it is one of life's great ironies that, as I drive up the M90 motorway through Fife—a journey that I make several times a week—I see signs to "The Secret Bunker", which is obviously not so secret after all.

For 20 years, as Rod Campbell pointed out, the secret bunker has provided Scotland and Fife with one of our most unique and exciting visitor attractions, so I join colleagues in welcoming its reopening. Those who came before me spoke at length about the impressive refurbishment of the bunker, but it is worth stating again just how substantial the structure is. It lies 300 feet below ground and its entrance is hidden by a farmhouse. The bunker is a vast labyrinth of tunnels that cover an area the size of two football pitches.

As part of a variety of improvements, visitors will now be able to see a remodelled British Telecom room and the specialist equipment that was needed to feed an astonishing 2,800 phone lines to the bunker. Formerly closed rooms are to be opened and a number of information screens have been added, as well as an audio tour to improve the visitor experience.

As we heard from Alex Rowley, tourism is a hugely important industry to Fife. In 2012, tourist expenditure in Fife was worth £313 million and tourism contributed 6,000 full-time jobs, with 2.8 million people enjoying 6.1 million days in the area. It is famed for its castles, fishing villages and golf courses, but the secret bunker gives Fife—and particularly its area of Fife—another weapon in its armoury to attract visitors.

Despite the fact that the bunker today looks almost identical to when it first opened, its role has changed dramatically over the years. On its construction in 1951, it operated as a military command centre and it would have served as the base for the Scottish Government in the event of a nuclear attack. It is hard for the post-cold war generation to imagine how close the world came to nuclear Armageddon in the 1960s. The Cuban missile crisis and nuclear arms proliferation put the globe on the brink of all-out war.

Scotland played a key strategic role during the cold war, welcoming US submarines to Dunoon. Recently declassified documents show that the UK Government was preparing for nuclear attacks that would target Glasgow as the UK's second city, RAF Lossiemouth and the Holy Loch marine base. As a result of the Communist threat, a number of subterranean fortifications were built throughout Scotland. Many survive to this day, but at present the secret bunker in Fife is the only one to have opened as a visitor attraction.

The cold war forms a key part of the history curriculum at both national 4 and 5 levels, and the secret bunker gives today's students the opportunity to witness at first hand some of the preparations that were made for war. It is worth reflecting on how fortunate we are that the secret bunker never had to be used for its intended purpose, that the world survived the worrying period in its history that was the cold war and that we live, I hope, in happier times.

Fife has many historic attractions but nothing quite like the secret bunker. Inside it, history comes alive and visitors are offered a distinctive insight into the macabre world that was the cold war. The bunker has huge importance to Fife's culture, economy and education and I join others in wishing it success for the next 20 years.

17:23

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** I, too, congratulate Rod Campbell on securing this debate, and I congratulate him and other members on their informative speeches. I add the Scottish Government's congratulations to Scotland's secret bunker on reaching its milestone 20th anniversary as a tourism attraction.

I am sure that I am not alone in welcoming the fact that, as Graeme Dey pointed out, the secret bunker is now not so secret and is a key attraction in the east neuk of Fife, with VisitScotland featuring it in its marketing of the area. It is heartening that its original purpose as a place for government to continue in the event of a Soviet attack was never required.

There have been a few references to the Cuban missile crisis. Those who are interested in that period might be interested in the role of the Scot Paul Henderson Scott, who was serving in the British embassy at the time. He was on the last flight into Havana, and his account in his autobiography is something that people may be interested in.

The ability to see the potential of an abandoned military bunker that was classified as secret until the end of the cold war to be an educational tool and visitor attraction illustrates the innovation, ingenuity and dedication that exist in Scotland and which help to make the tourism industry as diverse and welcoming as it is. As the Parliament has noted, it is welcome that the bunker's owner, James Mitchell, has seen fit to invest further in upgrading the bunker as an important cold war exhibit. As Murdo Fraser pointed out, parts have been refurbished and access to the massive subterranean building has been increased to help visitors to get a better feel for the important role that the building had and to be grateful that it was never needed.

We should support Mr Mitchell in his endeavours to turn another bunker—the one that would have been the ministerial headquarters here in Edinburgh—into a visitor attraction. I understand that he is restoring the derelict bunker under Corstorphine hill and that he plans to open it in 2016.

As has been said, we all want to attract more visitors. Scotland has a unique appeal. The east neuk of Fife, where the bunker sits, is a microcosm of the diversity that tourism in this country offers—from picturesque harbour villages to award-winning blue flag beaches, a wonderful natural larder and historic golf courses that emphasise Scotland's place as the home of golf.

As well as the bunker, there are various attractions that help to tell the area's story. In the wider Fife area, Scotland's fishing industry is celebrated at the Scottish fisheries museum in Anstruther; history is celebrated through the National Trust for Scotland's Kellie castle; and there is motorsport at the Crail raceway. As Alex Rowley said, the fabulous Fife coastal path links all the communities together. He mentioned the Lochore site, which is in his constituency.

As we know, Anstruther is famous for its award-winning fish and chips and for Fife's first artisan cheese, the Anster. They will be celebrated as part of the year of food and drink next year. Fife also has impressive marinas, which service the growing popularity of yachting and marine tourism.

Nearby St Andrews, which is in Rod Campbell's constituency, has played host to successful conferences. For example, the biblical literature

conference that was held last year underlines the benefit from business tourism. It was actively supported by the VisitScotland-administered conference bid fund.

Scotland abounds in the experiences that the east neuk offers. Our international visitor spend rose by 20 per cent last year and generated almost £1.7 billion. There were 2.4 million visits to Scotland from overseas in 2013, which were up 9.8 per cent on 2012. In the UK, Scotland was in second place after London for total holiday spending. Tourism is clearly a key economic sector for Scotland. We recognise that the sector is an engine for growth and job creation.

Lonely Planet named Scotland one of the top three countries to visit in 2014, which has enhanced our profile. Alex Rowley was correct to say that we do not want visitors just to come to the capital city, although he missed out West Lothian when he talked about capturing tourists and encouraging them to visit the wider area.

Tourism has a ripple effect and provides opportunities to showcase Scotland as a place to live, learn, invest in, buy from and visit again. We value the tourism sector and we are working with the industry on a range of issues to increase its attractiveness and competitiveness.

Tourism is a key employment sector, especially in rural areas, and nowhere is that felt more keenly than in parts of Fife. The impact is important and we must ensure that people have the skills for the sector and are encouraged to develop careers in tourism.

The east neuk is actively participating in homecoming Scotland. At the end of this month, the east neuk festival will celebrate its 10th birthday with 10 days of music, literature and family events and art. The festival will reach out to the world as international artists gather in that beautiful coastal spot.

This is a great year for Scotland with homecoming, the Ryder cup and the Commonwealth games. A huge range of events is taking place to contribute to that. I encourage every area not just to celebrate the events that are taking place as part of the year of homecoming but to look ahead, as Fife is doing, to the year of Scotland's food and drink, the year of innovation, architecture and design and, in 2017, the year of history, heritage and archaeology.

Attractions such as the secret bunker are an important part of the overall tourism patchwork. They commemorate and celebrate our history and culture and they tell interesting stories, which people do not know about. The story that the secret bunker tells is particularly attractive to children, who are always interested in secrets—that is a marketing tool that the bunker can use. I

remember being up on the London Eye with my son when he was about seven. He had a map of everything that could be seen from the top, and it was the MI5 offices that really excited him. An attraction called “the secret bunker” can certainly attract young boys, in particular, and their families.

Tourism generates £10 billion of economic activity in the wider supply chain and contributes £5 billion to Scottish gross domestic product. The secret bunker's contribution to the local economy is part of that story, but it is also contributing in the context of our heritage and culture and the unknown stories that need to be told. The further investment in the secret bunker and developments at Corstorphine is to be commended, and it illustrates the willingness of the tourism industry, and James Mitchell in particular, to continue to grow a vital part of Scotland's economy.

*Meeting closed at 17:30.*





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