



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 30 September 2014

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 30 September 2014

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, for which our leader today is Mr Jamie Stuart, who is an elder of High Carntyne parish church and author of “The Glasgow Gospel” and “A Glasgow Bible”.

Mr Jamie Stuart (High Carntyne Parish Church): Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament, I thank you for this opportunity to address you. For most of my life I have cherished our Scots language. I believe that it has power and eloquence, so I offer you, from the guid book, 1 Corinthians, chapter 13.

“I may speak wi the tongues o men an angels but if I hiv
nae luve
In ma hert, I’m just a noisy gong or a clangin cymbal.
I may hiv the gift o prophecy,
An ken aw aboot life’s mysteries; I may hiv faith
Strang enough tae shift mountains—but still in aw, hiv
nae luve
In ma hert—I am nothing.

I may dole oot aw that I possess,
An even gie up ma body tae the flames,
But if I hiv nae luve in ma hert,
I am nane the better o it.
Luve is aye patient an kind;
Isnae aye graspin; it disnae blaw
Its ane trumpet.
Luve has guid manners—very guid manners
Luve disnae gloat ower ither folks sins, but rejoices wi
the truth.
Luve kens nae limit tae its endurance,
Nae end tae its trust, nae fadin o its hope: it will exist for
aw eternity.
Luve will not fail.

Dae we hiv prophets? Their day will be ower.
Are we carried awa wi tongues? They will cease.
Is there knowledge? It will vanish awa.
For we ken noo in pairt, an we prophecy in pairt;
But when perfection comes, the partial will finish.
When I wis a bairn, I had the speech o a bairn, the mind
o a bairn, an the thochts o a bairn;
But noo that I am grown tae manhood,
I have pit awa bairnlike things.

For just noo we can see an hear jist a wee bit aboot
God;
But wan day we will see him in aw his glory; aye, face
tae face.
I ken noo in pairt, but wan day I shall ken it aw, even as
god sees intae ma hert richt noo.
There are three things that bide forever;
Faith, hope and luve;
An the greatest o the three is luve.”

Amen. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: I think that we will get him back another time. *[Laughter.]*

Topical Question Time

14:04

Fracking (Removal of Right to Object)

1. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government regarding the removal of the right of householders in Scotland to object to fracking taking place beneath their homes. (S4T-00796)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): On 14 August 2014, the Scottish Government formally responded to the UK Government's consultation on underground drilling access rights. The Scottish Government formally opposed the UK Government's proposals to remove landowners' rights in respect of drilling under their land on the basis that matters of such gravity should be a decision for the people of Scotland through the Scottish Parliament.

Angus MacDonald: A significant number of my constituents are concerned about the dash for gas being pursued by Westminster and are extremely disappointed that the UK Government is disregarding their views. Riding roughshod over public opinion and removing householders' rights without adequate debate is not good government. With 99 per cent of respondents to the UK consultation objecting to the plans, will the cabinet secretary assure me and my constituents that the Scottish Government will continue to look at the issue of unconventional gas extraction in a cautious, considered and evidence-based fashion, as opposed to the UK Government's gung-ho attitude?

John Swinney: I give Mr MacDonald the assurance that the Scottish Government will continue what we have been doing throughout our handling of the issue, which is to look at the issues that are raised by unconventional gas opportunities through an evidence-based and led process. That is demonstrated by our appointment of the independent expert scientific panel, which reported in July. It is also evidenced in our decision to strengthen planning policy with five new measures relating to hydraulic fracturing, including the requirement that developments should proceed only if communities and the environment can be protected. We will continue to take that approach.

Angus MacDonald: Given that the UK Government has ignored the representations made not only by the Scottish Government but by 99 per cent of the respondents to its consultation,

does the cabinet secretary agree that all the powers relating to unconventional oil and gas should be devolved, as was suggested only last week by Andrew Tyrie MP, chair of the Treasury Select Committee?

John Swinney: Mr MacDonald will not be surprised to hear that I am a supporter of all the relevant powers being devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The UK Government's response to the consultation highlights the necessity for decision making by politicians to be taken in accordance with and in proximity to the aspirations, outlook and perspective of the people they affect. It is a matter of regret that the UK Government's decision has not followed the overwhelming evidence base that was submitted to its consultation.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): As the cabinet secretary knows, the Scottish Government has overall power over planning, which has enabled it to prevent the development of the nuclear industry. In relation to devolved planning issues, how will the Government take forward the detailed guidance to ensure that it is robust and that it recognises the environmental concerns about unconventional gas extraction of my constituents in South Scotland and of people across Scotland?

John Swinney: I recognise the issues that Claudia Beamish raises. An indication of the Government's approach was given in the formulation of the national planning framework and the Scottish planning policy. Sections 245 and 246 of the Scottish planning policy give further detail on how the Government will proceed in developing some of the further guidance.

Individual planning applications are considered case by case. A case is with reporters. The issues that are relevant to the Scottish planning policy will be implicit in that determination.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I am reassured by the minister's answers. Can I have an understanding from the minister that, when we progress the issue, our decision-making process will be evidence based and we will not give into the misinformation and the conspiracy theories that seem to abound among those who oppose fracking for no other reason than that they believe it to be a dangerous or bad idea? This is a huge opportunity for Scotland. Will he assure me that this will be done using common sense?

John Swinney: I simply reiterate to Mr Johnstone the answer that I gave to Mr MacDonald: the Government will continue in a considered and evidence-based way. That is how we have structured our approach to the issue, and that is why it is regrettable that the UK Government has taken the decision to overrule the

legitimate rights of individuals to raise concerns, which apply throughout the planning process.

The work that the expert scientific panel on unconventional oil and gas did for the Scottish Government was highly informative on steps that need to be taken to handle the issue. I recognise Mr Johnstone's enthusiasm for the issue, but we must be mindful that many, many people in our country have concerns about unconventional oil and gas opportunities and want to be assured that proper and due process will be applied in all circumstances. I confirm to the Parliament that that will be the case.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It is pretty extraordinary to hear concerns about adding to stocks of fossil fuels described as "conspiracy theories".

Given that 99 per cent of consultation respondents have more sense than that, and given that opinion polling shows stronger opposition to the measures in Scotland than in any other part of the UK, surely what matters is not just whether the decision is made in Westminster or Holyrood but whether the decision is made at all. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that if the power to make the decision is brought to Holyrood, his Government will oppose the action that the UK Government has indicated that it supports for the UK as a whole?

John Swinney: I can say to Mr Harvie that the Scottish Government does not support the removal of householders' rights to object to oil and gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing beneath their homes. We have been clear about that, and if we had the opportunity to do something different, we would take the opposite step.

On the wider issue, we have said that a variety of complex issues have to be wrestled with, which is why we take an evidence-based and considered approach to the resolution of all the issues. That is what I think that people expect of Government.

The UK Government's decision to ignore the evidence in the response to the consultation and to proceed to remove householders' rights of objection is regrettable and will fuel rather than address the unease that has been expressed about the issues.

Commonwealth Games (Policing Costs)

2. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on Police Scotland's decision not to make details of the cost of policing the Commonwealth games public. (S4T-00797)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): Police Scotland has not made a decision to withhold the cost of

Commonwealth games policing. The process of finalising the figures on the use of the Commonwealth games safety and security budget is on-going and, as a result, it would be inappropriate to release figures at this stage.

Police Scotland is clear about the need for transparency and accountability on the spending of public money and has assured the Scottish Government that when the figures have been finalised, details of the safety and security budget will be published without prejudice.

Alison McInnes: The Scottish Police Authority's finance and investment committee is meeting in closed session as we speak and is receiving an update on the cost of Commonwealth games policing. It does not matter how often the SPA meets in public; it is by looking at what it chooses to hide and what it opts to receive in private that we can test whether it is meeting its obligations.

Knowledge of how money is spent is key to maintaining confidence. When will the public be told the final cost of security for the games?

Shona Robison: It is worth reminding the member that Police Scotland's line of accountability for the safety and security budget is to the Scottish Government.

The SPA considers papers in private when figures are not finalised. The figures that we are talking about are not finalised; they will be finalised as soon as possible. Surely it would not be right to put into the public domain figures that are not finalised. I assure Alison McInnes that as soon as the figures are finalised, they will be put into the public domain. The SPA will of course be able to revisit matters, should it wish to do so.

Alison McInnes: Can the cabinet secretary give an early indication of whether spend came within the £90 million budget or whether overtime, time off in lieu and the movement of officers around the country were such that costs overran?

Shona Robison: Police Scotland is confident that the total spend will be within the £90 million that was allocated for safety and security. I put on record again our appreciation of the officers who were involved and of their great efforts during the Commonwealth games. They were a credit to Police Scotland and the country.

All overtime payments will be met from the safety and security budget. As I said, Police Scotland does not expect the total spend to exceed the £90 million budget that was allocated to safety and security.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her replies. I am sure that Alison McInnes will get some answers at the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, which she is a member of.

I am interested in picking up the cab sec's point about the work that the police did. They did a fantastic job during the Commonwealth games. Have her comments about the fine work that was done been relayed to all staff in Police Scotland?

Shona Robison: Absolutely. It is important to recognise that, as well as those on the front line, many officers and civilians were involved behind the scenes. I sent a personal thank you to all the agencies that were involved and asked for it to be relayed across the board to those who helped to deliver the most successful Commonwealth games ever, as the Commonwealth Games Federation described them.

The dedication of not just our police officers but the fire service, the health service and the Scottish Ambulance Service—all those important services were first class—helped us to deliver a Commonwealth games that was not just fantastic but safe and secure. Everybody appreciates that.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Police Scotland did an excellent job, but is the cabinet secretary aware that serving police officers have contacted many MSPs about what they consider to have been the unreasonable demands that were placed on them to ensure that the Commonwealth games were policed? Ethical issues could be raised. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that Police Scotland has put in place a process for whistleblowers to ensure that any potential ethical or criminal wrongdoing is highlighted and that appropriate action is taken?

Shona Robison: The vast majority of police officers saw it as a once-in-a-career opportunity to be involved in such a fantastic event as the Commonwealth games.

I have already dealt with overtime payments. The plans for TOIL and rest days were put in place with the Scottish Police Federation's support and allow officers extended time to take any outstanding rest days that they might have accrued. Some of the practicalities have been dealt with.

If an individual officer feels that undue pressures were put on them, that would be a matter for Police Scotland. I would hope that such cases would be very much in the minority, because the feedback that I have had from the vast majority of officers is that being involved was a pleasure and a delight. It was hard work and we appreciate the efforts that were made to deliver a safe and secure games, but I think that the vast majority of officers will remember them for some time.

Iraq (Humanitarian Aid)

3. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): Before asking my question, I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests. Last

summer, I spent time in Kurdistan as a guest of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which may be relevant to my question.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it will support humanitarian efforts in Iraq in light of the United Kingdom Parliament's approval of air strikes in the country. (S4T-00793)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): The brutality of the so-called Islamic State, or Isil, is beyond question. The Scottish Government supports international efforts to support the people of Iraq, Syria and the wider middle east, which is possible only through a long-term strategic approach that is led by regional partners and which includes tackling radicalisation at home and abroad and making efforts to cut off Isil's sources of finance and weaponry.

The international humanitarian crisis continues, and we define our response to such situations case by case, usually related to the launch of a Disasters Emergency Committee appeal—for example, the Government gave £200,000 to the DEC's Syria appeal.

We will continue to monitor the situation carefully and, when appropriate, we will offer support. We have written to the UK Government to that effect.

Bob Doris: I believe that there is a role for air support from the international community to relieve a devastating humanitarian crisis and to help communities in the Kurdish region of Iraq and beyond, including in Syria, to defend themselves. Furthermore, had the Iraqi Government not blocked earlier efforts of the Kurdish regional government to properly arm its Peshmerga, the situation might never have got so dire.

Unfortunately, on Friday, the UK Government gave an open-ended commitment on Iraq for years without any real consideration of future peace and stability. Will the minister make representations to the UK Government, putting the case for proportionate and targeted use of air support specifically for the purposes that I have outlined as well as making a strong case that any future peace plan must include support for the Kurdish regions in both countries, supporting stable, democratic self-government and ensuring that they have the capacity to defend themselves in the future, thereby averting future humanitarian crises?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): You are well wide of your first question, Mr Doris, which I understood was about humanitarian efforts in Iraq.

Humza Yousaf: During Friday's debate in the House of Commons, my colleague Angus Robertson said that the UK must not equivocate in its support for the Kurdish regional government, which must be supported. The Scottish Government supports that view. However, military action against Isis must be carried out within a long-term strategic plan that includes a plan for peace. What we were presented with by the UK Government was lacking in those elements. An open-ended bombing campaign alone will be counterproductive.

On the Kurds in Syria, the global community must redouble its efforts to find a long-term solution to the civil war in that country. A political solution must be found alongside any military solution, and it must be based on a human rights approach that protects the rights of all communities, including Kurds, in Syria. As a Government, we will support action within a long-term, strategic plan—a plan for peace is legal within the international framework—and our strong preference is that such action be led by regional partners. The First Minister will write to the Prime Minister this week to highlight the Scottish Government's concern about the UK Government's vote for military action against Isis without a specific timescale, without a plan for securing peace and without a long-term, strategic vision.

The Presiding Officer: I call Lewis Macdonald. I ask you to keep your question to humanitarian efforts in Iraq, Mr Macdonald.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Certainly, Presiding Officer. For the avoidance of doubt, will the minister confirm his position on the UK Government's provision of assistance of all types to the Kurdish population of northern Iraq?

Humza Yousaf: We support the provision of support and training to the Kurdish regional government. We understand its needs. However, any military action must not only have a legal basis—we know that it does—but be part of a long-term, strategic plan that includes a plan for peace and an exit strategy. That was missing from what was voted on on Friday. The vote on Friday did not separate actions to support the Kurdish away from the general situation in Iraq; we had to look at the action as a whole, and we could not support that action because we think that it would be counterproductive as opposed to helpful to the people on the ground, be they Kurds in Kurdistan or the wider Iraqi population.

The Presiding Officer: I call Patricia Ferguson to ask a question on humanitarian aid in Iraq.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): What humanitarian support is

the Scottish Government providing to Iraq, and has it offered to support the efforts of the UK Government in that respect?

Humza Yousaf: I wrote to Hugo Swire, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on that very point. The Scottish Government is willing to provide any assistance that it can. Currently, Iraq does not come within the terms of our international development budget, but I am more than happy to discuss with members how we might offer such support. That offer was made to the UK Government back in August and continues to be the case. I am sure that, when the First Minister writes to the Prime Minister, he will reiterate the Scottish Government's willingness to help with the humanitarian effort wherever we can.

Housing

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-11023, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on housing supply.

14:25

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Each new house that is built in this country, irrespective of tenure or type, makes a difference to people's lives. That is why housing is, and remains, one of this Government's highest priorities.

Challenging economic conditions and budgets continue to reduce our scope for action and to depress house building activity. Despite that, this Government has outperformed the record of previous Scottish Administrations, and our rate of new house building per head of population continues to outperform the rate in other parts of the United Kingdom. Since 2011, we have delivered more than 21,000 affordable homes, and we are more than two thirds of the way towards our five-year target of providing 30,000 additional affordable homes.

Unlike Westminster, the Scottish Government is committed to preserving and expanding Scotland's social housing stock as part of creating a fairer society. We are making best use of our existing housing stock by abolishing the right to buy. More than 15,000 of the 21,000 additional homes that we have already delivered are for social rent and can be homes for life. Since 2009, with the help of Scottish Government funding, more than 4,000 new council houses have been delivered. Given that the previous Scottish Labour-Liberal Administration built just six council houses in the four years to March 2007, that is truly a transformation in council house building.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): The minister mentioned that 4,000 council houses have been built in the past few years, but in the final year of the Liberal-Labour coalition—2007—alone, 4,100 housing association houses were built.

Margaret Burgess: I remind Jim Hume and everyone else that the figures are very clear. Under this Administration, more housing association houses and more council houses have been built than under any previous Administration. The facts stand for themselves. I will quote the figures as I move on. Over the seven years of our Administration, we have built more social housing than the previous Administration built. That cannot be disputed.

In addition, affordable homes are being delivered across Scotland using new, innovative

financing approaches. I have seen at first hand the positive difference that that is making across the country. It has been a great pleasure to meet families across Scotland who tell me how delighted they are to be living in a new high-quality national housing trust home.

The Scottish Government plans to spend more than £1.7 billion to deliver our target of 30,000 affordable homes during this session of Parliament, and the investment that we have provided since April 2011 has already passed £1 billion.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): In its briefing for the debate, Shelter Scotland calls on the Government

"to commit at least an additional £200m in this year's budget to social rented house building",

which it says would

"go a long way towards meeting the existing ... target of ... 30,000 affordable homes".

Is that an issue on which the minister intends to push the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth?

Margaret Burgess: We have set a target of providing 30,000 affordable homes during this session of Parliament, but we have ambition for housing in Scotland; the target is a baseline target that we hope to exceed. In setting that target, we have taken the housing sector on board. We are always looking at new ways to increase the housing supply, because that is what we have set out to do. We have ambition for housing in this country.

As well as providing much-needed homes for people the length and breadth of Scotland, housing supports an estimated 8,000 jobs each year. The latest statistics confirm that we remain on track to deliver on our current target by March 2016. We will continue to give priority to housing supply by maintaining our commitment to the delivery of affordable homes. As I said to Mary Fee, the existing 6,000 per year target is not the height of our ambition, but a baseline that we hope to exceed.

We are also committed to improving housing quality. Initiatives such as the Scottish housing quality standard and the energy efficiency standard for social housing will continue to improve the quality of the social rented sector. We know, for example, that over 90 per cent of social rented properties now have insulated lofts. Such measures are vital in helping to reduce carbon emissions and, critically, in tackling fuel poverty. I am delighted to announce today £4.5 million of grant funding to 24 councils and registered social landlords to enable them to retrofit energy efficiency measures in their stock. That investment

will mean that a further 1,677 households across Scotland will benefit from warmer homes that are cheaper to heat.

We are turning our focus to the private sector. We aim to consult in spring next year on proposals for the introduction of energy efficiency standards in the private sector. The Government's focus is on taking the actions that are right for Scotland's economy and housing markets. As part of that, I am clear about the importance of working to ensure that Scotland can boast a strong and sustainable private house building industry. I am under no illusion about the scale of the challenge that the industry has faced in recent years and, indeed, that many house builders continue to face.

In response, the Scottish Government has taken a range of actions to support activity, to bring forward much-needed new homes and to protect jobs. We have developed and backed innovative new partnership approaches, such as the my new home scheme, and we have unlocked new sites through the house building infrastructure loan fund. We have invested a very significant £275 million in our help to buy Scotland scheme, including an additional £50 million of funding allocated this financial year. Since the launch of help to buy Scotland last September, it has been a huge success, and is clearly meeting its aim of boosting effective demand for housing. More than 3,000 houses have already been bought through the scheme, and many more will be supported through the remainder of this year and next.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): Can the minister confirm whether any money is left in the budget for help to buy or whether it has all been spent, as some reports suggest?

Margaret Burgess: The budget for this financial year for help to buy has been spent, but the Scottish Government has agreed to back every application that was received before the cut-off date, which I think was in August. However, builders are taking applications for the next round of funding, and £100 million has already been committed for the next financial year, so applications are still being taken.

Since 2007, the Scottish Government has also helped more than 8,700 people to access home ownership under its low-cost initiatives for first time buyers shared equity schemes. We are doing what we can to support the house building industry and to encourage people into home ownership, both in the social rented sector and through other tenures.

I want to say a bit about homelessness. As Minister for Housing and Welfare, I am proud that all unintentionally homeless people now have a legal right to settled accommodation. However, it is far too important an issue for there to be any

complacency about it, so we continue to focus on helping local authorities and their partners to prevent homelessness before it occurs. Homelessness has been falling in Scotland. In 2013-14 homelessness applications were 8 per cent lower than they were in 2012-13. I am pleased that those reductions have continued in the latest quarterly statistics to June 2014, which were published only this morning.

Local authorities have identified work in taking forward the housing options approach to homelessness prevention as the main reason for the reduction in applications. The Scottish Government continues to support the local authority led housing options hubs in developing their strategies around homelessness prevention. We have provided £800,000 to the hubs over 2010-2014 and are providing a further £150,000 of on-going support funding for 2014-15. Over the past year we also saw a further drop in the number of households in temporary accommodation and, crucially, a decrease in the number of children in temporary accommodation. The latest quarterly statistics released today show continuing reductions in those areas.

However, all of what we do is happening against the background of UK welfare reform, which poses a threat to the progress that we have made. We are engaged in work with our partners to measure the impact on local authorities by costing what is required to deliver a reasonable standard of temporary accommodation, which has been affected considerably by welfare reform.

As well as supporting people into sustainable homes, the Scottish Government is protecting vulnerable tenants from the impact of the most damaging welfare reforms. We have invested £55 million over two years in mitigating the bedroom tax, thereby protecting 71,000 households that have been affected by that iniquitous and unjust measure.

The bedroom tax also threatened the financial security of the social landlords who are such an important part of our housing supply programme, and this Government's policy to provide secure sustainable homes for the long term.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 will help to improve housing in the social, private rented and owner-occupied sectors, and will benefit individuals, families and communities across the country. The legislation was developed in close consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and, as passed, it commanded the broad support of the Parliament. In building that consensus, the Government demonstrated its commitment to working with stakeholders; I intend to continue that dialogue as we develop secondary legislation and draft guidance to implement the provisions in the act.

The strategy for the private rented sector that the Scottish Government published in May last year sets out our vision of a sector that provides good-quality homes and high management standards, that inspires consumer confidence, and that encourages growth by attracting increased investment. As part of the strategy, I established a stakeholder group to examine the suitability and effectiveness of the private rented sector tenancy regime. The group reported in May and recommended that the current assured and short assured tenancies be replaced by a new private tenancy. I accepted the recommendation, and I plan to consult this autumn on proposals for a new private tenancy, with the twin aims of greater security for tenants and proper safeguards for landlords, lenders and investors.

As I confirmed during Parliament's stage 3 consideration of the Housing (Scotland) Bill, that consultation will also explore issues relating to rent levels. Rent setting forms part of the existing assured tenancy system, so it makes sense to consider it and how it might work as part of our proposals for a new system. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, I intend to introduce a bill during the current session of Parliament to establish a new tenancy regime.

The Scottish Government has focused on the current housing challenges and on what is important in the long term. I assure Parliament that equally important is our collaborative approach, whereby we work with housing organisations as delivery partners. We have strong partnerships with councils, housing associations, tenants groups and the wider housing sector, and we will continue to listen to key players and respond to what they need from Government. The Scottish Government is whole-heartedly up for that challenge.

In November, we will hold a Scottish housing event that will bring together a large number of housing stakeholders—more than 300—to focus on the delivery of the Government's housing strategies. That will ensure that we have effective actions that are designed to meet current circumstances, and that we have a five-year plan for delivering those actions.

I thank all the stakeholders for their input to the work. Together we can make a lasting difference to people's lives and to communities across Scotland. In the time for which I have been in my position, I have come to believe that stakeholders also have that view and that vision for Scotland. We all want to get the very best and ensure that everyone in Scotland can live in a warm and safe home that they can afford, and which is suitable to their needs. That is the Scottish Government's vision for housing in Scotland, and we will continue to strive to reach it. I am aware that that

might not be consolation for those who have not yet got a house, but we will strive for that. Our ambition is that everyone has a house that meets their needs.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that housing is and will remain a high priority for the current administration; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government plans to spend over £1.7 billion on affordable housing in the current parliamentary session, which will support an estimated 8,000 jobs each year, and has delivered 21,322 affordable homes, including 15,088 social rented homes; notes that Scotland is outperforming other parts of the UK, with the rates of all home completions and social housing completions much higher than the equivalent in England or Wales; acknowledges that the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 will protect the existing stock of social rented homes by ending the right to buy and enable social landlords to do more to help people in need of social housing; welcomes these achievements by the Scottish Government, despite the drastic reduction in its capital budget over the current spending review period as a result of the UK Government's spending cuts, and calls on the UK Government to increase capital spending so that the Scottish Government can make a greater investment in housing.

14:38

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): With the referendum decisively concluded, we thank the Scottish Government for bringing today's motion to the chamber. We have had debates on the most recent housing bill and debates that Scottish Labour has brought to the chamber, but this is the first housing debate that the Minister for Housing and Welfare has secured since her appointment two years ago.

I welcome the Scottish Government's new-found focus on housing, now that the Scottish people have overwhelmingly supported our place within the union. We now owe it to the Scottish people to work together to take the country forward and to tackle the issues that our people face.

The Government motion highlights a £1.7 billion spend on housing, despite a huge cut that is greater than the cut than has been imposed by Westminster, and it compares Scottish house building rates with those of England and Wales. I thought that now that we are past 18 September, we would be rid of the constant comparisons across all portfolios of Government, not just in housing.

The motion "acknowledges" the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014. I go back to what the minister stated in June when the bill was passed. Referring to the Government's housing strategy, "Homes Fit for the 21st Century", the minister said that it

"included a number of measures that required legislation, and the bill fulfils our commitment."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2014; c 32810.]

If the bill fulfils a commitment, it only goes to prove that, as Audit Scotland and Homes for Scotland have suggested, there is no direction or vision for housing. Therefore I cannot support the Government motion and find that our amendment exposes the reality of housing in Scotland today.

It is clear that demand for housing is rising across all sectors. A higher population places a massive burden on many services, yet few of those are as crucial as the right to housing. Over two seven-year periods—one in which Labour was in Administration, in 1999-2007, and the current Administration—Labour's record on house building far outstrips that of the Scottish National Party.

Margaret Burgess: Mary Fee should be clear when she is referring to house building that, under the Labour Administration, less social housing was built and there was less commitment from the Government. She is talking about private house building in the previous session. We are still outperforming the rest of the UK in house building in Scotland, even after the recession. The member is talking about pre-recession, private house building.

Mary Fee: Under Labour, from 2003 to 2007, nearly 20,000 public sector and housing association properties were built. Housing supply increased by an average of 27,000 homes a year. Last year, the SNP built 14,781 homes—the lowest number since 1947—and fewer social rented homes came to the market in 2013-14 than in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011. If the minister chooses not to believe me, those figures are from the Scottish Parliament information centre.

I acknowledge that Labour could have gone further on social housing and I give credit to the Scottish Government for the level of social housing that it has built in a period of global recession and recovery. However, the fact remains that Scotland is facing a housing crisis, whether the SNP wants to hear about it or not. The rising housing demand is anticipated to continue for the next 20 years. Many experts in the field stress that a renewed focus is required.

The recent Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors Scottish housing commission report, "Building a Better Scotland", is a striking read. In his opening remarks, Tom Barclay, the commission chairman, states:

"Our analysis suggests that it could be more than 20 years before there are enough new homes to meet the projected increase in households in any one year."

The single illustration on that same introduction page highlights why Scotland is facing a housing crisis. I recommend that members who have not done so read the report and get a full flavour of what I am talking about. House building across all sectors remains at record low levels. While the

SNP celebrates a 5 per cent increase in new house completions in 2013-14, reality shows that new housing supply is 42 per cent less than it was before the recession.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): Will Mary Fee take an intervention?

Mary Fee: I would like to make a bit of progress, then I will come back to the minister.

I commend the Government for the level of house building that it has achieved in 2013-14.

I previously mentioned the recent housing bill and would like to give it another brief mention. The right to buy was rightly ended with the passing of that bill, although Scottish Labour remains concerned that it will not cease for another two years. Sales of council houses have risen by 26 per cent over the past year, and we expect that rise to continue until the right to buy is finished.

Demand for housing remains a serious issue for local authorities. Recent freedom of information requests show that waiting lists for social housing have increased in 10 of 28 local authorities over the past five years. Areas including Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Dundee, Fife, Midlothian, Moray and Perth and Kinross are experiencing longer waiting lists than in 2009, and the majority of those authorities are SNP controlled. That situation emphasises the strong link between high demand and low supply that we are witnessing, which is why the sector is warning us about future supply.

The RICS housing commission report states with regard to the regeneration of communities that:

"The rate of improvement to social housing is falling, and neighbourhood renewal schemes are small in scale in contrast to a decade ago".

Building and renewing communities is, and will continue to be, a focus for Scottish Labour up to 2016 and beyond. Investment in Scotland's housing and communities has always been a central priority for Labour because of the jobs and apprenticeships that it creates, and the clearly stated benefits that a safe home provides for people in our neighbourhoods—

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will Mary Fee give way?

Mary Fee: No. I am sorry. I have quite a lot still to get through.

Labour will ensure that 200,000 homes are built across the UK by 2020, and we seek to emulate that with a similar programme in Scotland, using the powers that we currently have.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Will Mary Fee give way?

Mary Fee: I will, very briefly.

Maureen Watt: The website for the Lyons housing review states that Labour's plans

"to increase the supply of new homes"

by the figure of 200,000 that Mary Fee mentions apply

"in England".

However, Scottish Labour's "Together We Can" document states that Labour will build

"200,000 new homes... across the UK."

Which is it?

Mary Fee: The UK Labour Party will ensure that 200,000 new homes are built across the UK. As I said, we seek to emulate that with a similar programme in Scotland.

A number of new powers are coming to the Scottish Parliament under the Scotland Act 2012, and further devolved powers are coming, too. We will seek to maximise investment in housing by using those powers innovatively.

The 2008 rural homes for rent scheme, at a cost of £5 million, has produced some innovative methods of design, as I know from my visit last year to a development near Lockerbie that the minister has also visited. I was shown a house that used the Passivhaus system, which is an energy-efficient system that creates extremely low-energy homes. I was stunned to learn from one occupier that the annual bills come in at approximately £100. The system, although it is costly to build, is a great example of how innovation can reduce fuel poverty.

The RICS housing commission joined Audit Scotland in calling for clearer presentation of Scottish Government housing budgets, and referred to housing expenditure as "opaque".

Last year the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers, the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Shelter Scotland co-published "A Housing Report for Scotland: An assessment of the Scottish Government's performance against its housing pledges". The report critiqued the Government's plan to establish a housing investment bank in 2021, stating that the plan is

"extremely long term and provides no optimism for any finance provision in the next three years when the requirement is greatest."

Those points show that, although we need more innovative funding for new housing, the plans must be realistic and clear to those involved. CIH

Scotland helps to illustrate the clear need for innovative methods of funding and transparent budgets by mentioning the multiplier estimates, which show that

"every £1 million spent on housing investment generates a £2-3 million increase in gross output across the economy as a whole."

Another key issue in housing supply concerns the use of the private rented sector. We know that the share of the sector has increased in the past decade, and that private renters now spend 23 per cent of their income, in comparison with 13 per cent a decade ago. My colleague James Kelly will pick up many of the issues in relation to the private rented sector, so I will not say any more on it.

There has been a 34 per cent reduction in the number of homelessness applications in Scotland, but there were still 36,000 homeless people applying for a house in 2013-14. The decrease can be linked to the introduction of the housing options model and a renewed preventative approach by councils, rather than to any significant change in the underlying causes of homelessness.

We heard in evidence to committee concerns around the varying interpretations of the housing options model, which could mean that homelessness is unreported, so although the change is positive, we need to be clear that the model is working.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I am afraid that you need to draw to a close.

Mary Fee: In the private rented sector more people are presenting as homeless, with an 18 per cent rise in the number of homelessness applications last year.

In conclusion, I repeat that we are facing the biggest housing crisis since the end of the second world war. We are happy to work with the Government in any way that we can to address the crisis.

I move amendment S4M-11023.1, to leave out from "is and will remain" to end and insert:

"supply is not meeting the demand that Scotland faces; notes that the Scottish Government has failed to make tackling the housing crisis a priority and that, in 2014-15, the budget for affordable housing is over 25% less than it was in 2008-09; acknowledges that, in 2013, the lowest number of homes were built since 1947 and that, if the current reduction in house building continues, it will result in a shortfall of 160,000 homes by 2035; acknowledges that public sector housing stock has also decreased by nearly 600 homes in the year to 31 March 2014; further notes that the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 was a missed opportunity to tackle the housing challenges that the people of Scotland face, including the housing shortage and reform of the growing private rented sector, and calls on the Scottish Government to produce a national housing action plan to ensure that these matters are fully addressed."

14:49

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Mary Fee began by welcoming the fact that the minister has brought forward a housing debate for the first time in two years. It is only fair that I join Mary Fee in thanking the minister, because nothing highlights the fact that the Government is treading water better than its decision to bring a debate on housing to the chamber on the back of such a lamentable record on the subject—although, if rumour is to be believed, perhaps the recent housing statistics are the best of a very bad lot that are waiting to see the light of day.

The statistics that were released in August speak for themselves. Housing association construction has fallen year on year since 2009. Between 2012 and 2013 alone, housing association construction fell by an astonishing 743 units. With an ageing demographic in Scotland, we might have expected a more sophisticated housing response. Instead, we see a fall in the number of sheltered houses and only a marginal increase in the availability of very sheltered housing. Gone are the days when no newspaper was complete without a picture of Alex Neil, resplendent in his hard hat and high-vis jacket, breaking turf or cutting a ribbon somewhere.

The fact is that it is all going wrong. The independence debate might have taken attention away from the day-to-day issues that are so important to the lives of the Scottish people, but facts are chieftains that winna ding, and no matter how the housing minister and the well-whipped cheerleaders behind her spin the Government's record as some kind of success story, the reality is that the Government has failed with one of the most important portfolios under its control, and it is those who are languishing on housing waiting lists who are paying the price.

The minister spoke at some length about what she described as “innovative financing approaches” and went on to talk about the national housing trust. According to the NHT website, fewer than one third of local authorities and just 15 developers have opted to take part in the NHT. The Scottish Government optimistically suggested that phase 1 alone of the NHT would deliver 1,000 houses, yet here we are much further down the line and we are informed via the same website that just 675 units have been completed.

Perhaps we should look to an earlier Convention of Scottish Local Authorities report on the NHT to find out why its performance is so disappointing. That report states that

“The NHT Model is Contradictory”

and

“does not meet a number of councils' Affordable Housing Policies or Local Housing Strategy requirements.”

It continues:

“Some councils regarded the NHT as a short-term fix and could lead to difficulties when the developer decides to sell the units and the tenant does not exercise their right to buy.”

There's an irony! The SNP falls over itself to end the right to buy, yet its flagship housing policy may hit the rocks if tenants do not exercise their right to buy the home that they have been renting.

The report also states:

“The number of legal documents associated with the NHT made the process complex from both a council and developer perspective.”

It continues:

“Councils regarded the exit strategy for the sitting tenants as weak.”

That comment should sound a warning to the Scottish Government. The fact is that those who enter a tenancy agreement for an NHT home will, in some cases, have it for just five years. What happens to them after that? Will they become just another homeless statistic?

The national housing trust is not the only initiative that has not had its troubles to seek. The Scottish Government's help to buy scheme, which plodded into existence with all the speed of a very slow thing with a heavy weight of expectation on its back, was no sooner introduced than there was a highly publicised shortage of bricks. That no doubt helped to deflect attention from the real story, which was of course that the scheme had run out of money, leaving some would-be home owners in what must have been a deeply distressing limbo, part way through their house purchase.

Margaret Burgess: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No—not at this stage.

The Scottish Government remedied the situation to an extent, but it was clearly warned in advance by the industry body Homes for Scotland that the scheme was not adequately funded. Although help to buy might be a sound scheme in principle, it seems clear to me that the danger of a sudden cash shortage, with the disappointment that it brings to buyers and the associated knock-on effect on builders who might then find it harder to sell the homes that they are building, was easily foreseeable.

The minister ignores all that at her peril and, from the answers that we got earlier, it appears that the limited, defined funding that will be available in the next financial year may well cause a similar glut in applications, with the same level of disappointment at the end.

Derek Mackay: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Alex Johnstone: No, I have to get through a lot before I get to the finish.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is concluding now.

Alex Johnstone: There is a solution. It does not have to be this way. Of course, it is easy to spin failure as success, use the “a big boy done it and ran away” defence and finish the debate with “Wha’s like us?” The Scottish Government motion blames Westminster—as always—for the shortage of funds, but the minister knows only too well that money is out there. I know for a fact that pension funds and investors are standing waiting with their cheque books open, ready to invest in affordable housing.

Maureen Watt: Will the member give way on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is closing.

Alex Johnstone: I commend Aberdeen City Council and the City of Edinburgh Council for having actively moved towards using that kind of investment to deliver substantial numbers of affordable homes and all the jobs and training that those opportunities bring.

The SNP should acknowledge the plain truth that the housing shortage will not be remedied by Government funding alone, and it must look outside its narrow socialist parameters to take the opportunities that exist.

I move amendment S4M-11023.3, to leave out from “is and will remain” to end and insert:

“, as evidenced by its treatment in previous budgets, has been a low priority for the Scottish Government and that this is demonstrated by the sharp fall in housing association construction, the fall in sheltered housing numbers against an ageing demographic and only a modest increase in public authority construction; believes that spurious comparisons with other parts of the UK, where needs and priorities are not comparable, are simply an attempt by the Minister for Housing and Welfare to deflect attention from the failures of the Scottish Government to deliver a comprehensive housing policy that delivers homes and sustainable communities; further believes that the Scottish Government’s obsession with public spending and public borrowing as its preferred means of funding affordable housing has blocked progress toward private and institutional investment in the sector, which by now should have provided tens of thousands of affordable homes for rent in the highest pressure areas of Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to stop blaming both a housing policy of the 1980s and the UK Government for its apparent inability to meet its housing obligations while people languishing on housing waiting lists pay for this failure.”

14:56

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I have said before, and make no apologies for saying again, that tackling Scotland’s housing crisis is one of the biggest challenges that the Scottish Government faces and one of the most dominant concerns in the lives of many families in the country.

The challenge is not to be underestimated. Audit Scotland’s projections reveal that more than 500,000 new homes will be required over the next quarter of a century simply to meet demand. We are simply nowhere near to satisfying that demand. In our communities, there are more than 170,000 people on local authority waiting lists. Shelter has estimated that Scotland requires at least 10,000 new social rented homes each year to tackle that backlog.

Derek Mackay: Will Mr Hume take an intervention?

Jim Hume: Of course.

Derek Mackay: I thank Mr Hume for being so kind as to take an intervention.

Will the Liberal Democrats do what the other Opposition parties have failed to do and, in their submission to the budget process, demand that the Scottish Government allocate more money to housing? In successive budgets, the Labour Party and the Conservatives have failed to do that.

Jim Hume: I will always stand up for getting more money into Scotland, and I echo what Mary Fee said about new powers coming to Scotland, which will help us to deliver housing.

Social housing completions have declined every calendar year since 2009, with the total number of completions last year being 30 per cent of the number five years ago. Housing policy experts talk of at least 10,000 homes for social rent being needed each year, but the number has now fallen below 4,500.

Given that reality, it is difficult to take the Government’s motion seriously. It is a little self-congratulatory in tone and paints a distorted picture of a Scotland where everything is rosy when it comes to housing policy. That simply is not the case.

The minister’s motion states:

“housing is and will remain a high priority for the current administration”.

I welcome that commitment, but those words do not chime with the Government’s actions. If housing truly was a priority for the Scottish Government, it would have merited greater coverage in the 670-page tome that was the white paper than the cursory three-page mention that it

received. Those three pages were big on constraints but rather vacuous on fresh ideas on how to tackle Scotland's housing crisis. Judging by the minister's speech, not much has changed.

If housing was a high priority, the debacle that we witnessed in July, when, as Alex Johnstone said, the help to buy scheme ran out of money just three months into the financial year, would not have been allowed to happen. That scheme has been vital in giving thousands of first-time buyers throughout the country a leg up on to the property ladder. For many, it is the only affordable option for becoming a home owner but the door has been slammed shut for anyone wanting to access it until next April, when the budget for next year's scheme will be nearly 30 per cent less than that for this year's scheme.

The situation is no easier for those who are trying to access social housing. Under the SNP's stewardship, there are now 11,000 fewer properties in the social rented housing stock, at a time when demand for homes for social rent continues to increase. The ending of the right to buy from 2016 was a welcome inclusion to stop the haemorrhaging of public sector homes into private ownership but, of course, it was somewhat overdue.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jim Hume: I have to make some progress.

As I said, there are more than 170,000 live applications from households wanting a council house. That is before we even consider the hundreds of thousands of applications that exist on housing association waiting lists.

However, the real story—which amounts to a damning indictment of the lack of progress that has been made on social housing—can be seen in the length of time that families are waiting to access a home for social rent.

Earlier this year, I asked every local authority in Scotland that still manages its housing stock how long people had been on their waiting lists. The answer was that more than 33,000 households had been waiting for more than five years.

When I asked how many had waited for more than 10 years, I discovered that just over 13,000 households had. That is roughly the same number of households as are in Clydebank. That is 13,000 households that reached a decision over a decade ago that their current living arrangements were no longer suitable but who likely could not afford to rent in the private sector. That is the school leaver without a partner who wants to leave home for the first time, the family who have outgrown their current home or, perhaps, a couple who are having to deal with antisocial behaviour. The key

point is that those people, those couples and those families joined waiting lists before the SNP's management of housing in Scotland began and have remained on those waiting lists for the past seven and a half years. That is a sorry record that I fear did not enjoy the full attention that it deserved from the Scottish Government and its resources as it pursued its agenda of independence in these past few years.

Unfortunately, and not surprisingly, I will not be supporting the minister's motion. It is far too self-congratulatory when the Government should actually be concerned at the lack of progress that has been made, the decrease in housing stock in Scotland and the challenges that are before us.

I move amendment S4M-11023.2, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"is concerned by the lack of progress made by the Scottish Government on housing since 2007; notes that over 13,000 households have been waiting for a decade or more on local authority housing lists for a home; further notes that there are 11,000 fewer houses available for social rent since 2007; welcomes the decision of the Parliament to end the right to buy under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, and commends the commitment in the Liberal Democrat *Pre-Manifesto 2014* for the UK general election to setting out long-term plans for capital expenditure to ensure that investment in infrastructure, including housing, continues to rise both in absolute terms and as a share of the economy."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now turn to the open debate. I ask for speeches of a maximum of six minutes, as we are quite tight for time.

15:02

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this important debate. I think that we all want there to be a mix of housing tenure, with good-quality social housing at its heart rather than being a safety net for those who cannot afford to rent or buy, as it has been allowed to become.

Investment in housing is critically important to our economy and our society, which is why it is and will continue to be a high priority for this Scottish Government. However, people are entitled to ask where the evidence is to support that proposition. The evidence is surely in the £1.7 billion that the Scottish Government intends to spend on affordable housing over the current parliamentary session. It is in the estimated 8,000 construction and other jobs that will be created as a result of that investment. Most crucially of all, it is in the significant progress that is being made towards meeting the target of constructing, by March 2016, 30,000 affordable homes, including 20,000 homes for social rent.

The Scottish Government's record is a good one. It has already invested £1 billion in affordable

housing and has delivered more than 21,000 affordable homes, including 15,000 for social rent, since 2011. The number of council houses that are being built is now, in the year to March 2014, at a 25-year high.

James Kelly: Mr Eadie rightly stresses the importance of considering evidence to support the Government's claims about its record. Surely he must be concerned that investment in this year's budget is running at £341 million, when it was £605 million in real terms in 2009-10, for example. The budget is almost two thirds less than it was in 2009-10. Surely that shows a tailing-off in the investment.

Jim Eadie: The fact is that the Scottish Government has to live in the real world, where the swingeing cuts that have been imposed by Westminster have impacted on our budgets and on housing supply.

Despite that, the Government's record is a good one and, as the minister reminded us, the Scottish Government has built more housing association homes and more council houses in Scotland than the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration. The council housing record speaks for itself. More than 4,000 council homes have been delivered through the council house building programme since 2009.

In September last year, David Bookbinder, the head of policy for the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, recognised the contribution that the Government is making. He said:

"In difficult financial times, it's great news that the outline 15/16 budget of £390m not only consolidates the numerous increases we've seen to the existing budget, but also represents an increase of around 21% on the average annual spend of £323m within the current programme."

We have had a number of contributions from the front benches. Mary Fee, to her credit, gave a qualified welcome to the progress that has been made and even recognised that the previous Labour/Lib Dem Administration could have done more on social housing. The Conservative amendment talks about "a comprehensive housing policy" but fails to understand that it is not possible to deliver a comprehensive housing policy that meets housing need if the policy is wholly reliant on the private rented sector and still hankers after the sale of council houses, which, of course, removed more than 450,000 properties from the social rented sector. The continuing depletion of social housing stock was unsustainable and I am glad that the Parliament acted to end the right to buy.

I have a high personal regard for Jim Hume, but, quite frankly, the Liberal Democrat amendment is staggering—indeed breathtaking—in its hypocrisy. It lauds Liberal Democrat policy in the most

shameless and self-congratulatory fashion—to use Jim Hume's term—while omitting to mention that the Liberal Democrats are in a coalition Government that has cut the Scottish capital budget by 26 per cent.

Jim Hume: Will the member take an intervention?

Jim Eadie: I would like to but time does not allow—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Jim Hume may make a brief intervention. There is very little time in the debate.

Jim Hume: The member has painted a very black picture but does he not recognise that £290 million came through the Barnett formula when the UK Government did its buy to rent and help to buy schemes? That has helped to fuel—

Jim Eadie: If he was being fair-minded, Jim Hume would recognise that that money has come on the back of significant cuts to the Scottish Government's budget and does not restore those significant cuts.

Questions still remain for the Labour Party about how it intends to deliver on the pledges that it has made. How many of the 200,000 homes to be built by 2020 will be built in Scotland? How will it be possible to deliver that pledge when Ed Balls has said:

"In our manifesto there will be no proposals for any new spending paid for by additional borrowing?"

We need further clarity on how the Labour Party intends to deliver.

I turn to the issue of wider powers. This debate cannot be held in isolation from the wider debate that is now taking place about the additional financial powers that should come to this Parliament. We need those powers to increase flexibility and to bring about an appropriate financial framework to support housing investment in new and innovative ways. We need them to remove some of the barriers to investment in social housing, such as the UK Treasury rules. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has referred to those rules and is on record as saying that the available schemes are not appropriate for most Scottish housing association projects.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies has also observed that, under the current devolution settlement, the Scottish Government is bearing the cost of greater investment in social housing while some of the benefits of that spending accrue to Westminster in the form of lower housing benefit payments.

We need those additional powers. Let us unite to achieve them for the Parliament and let us unite

in calling on the UK Government to increase capital spending so that the Scottish Government can make the greater investment in housing that we all wish to see.

15:08

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): When I look at Margaret Burgess's motion, I wonder who would not agree that we should welcome 21,000 affordable homes and 15,000 social rented homes. Given the housing crisis that we have in Scotland, I am sure that we would all welcome any investment in housing. The problem with the motion, however, is that it really just congratulates Margaret Burgess and the SNP Government on what they have done, while failing to look at the issues.

Let us look at the facts: more than 150,000 people are on council house waiting lists across Scotland; 4,000 children in Scotland are currently living in temporary accommodation; 36,000 homelessness applications were made to Scottish local authorities in 2013-14; and an estimated 65,000 households in Scotland were living in overcrowded homes in 2012. Those are big figures, but what we should remember in this Parliament and in this debate is that those are real people in every constituency across Scotland.

I was in Rosyth this week and met a family who are living in an overcrowded home. Three bedrooms were packed into one room. The council has told them that the house is too cramped, which is why they have condensation and why they are having to throw out mattresses, for example. There are people living in those types of conditions in unsuitable housing across Scotland. We should remember that we are talking about real people.

John Mason: The member describes real problems, which I see as well. Would he and his party commit more funding to housing and take it off colleges or health?

Alex Rowley: Shelter and other housing groups are saying that we need to build at least 10,000 social rented houses per year. I for one will be campaigning to achieve those kinds of targets. I will go on to say a bit more about that.

Yes we need to look at more funding. As Jim Eadie said, more powers are coming down. More capital expenditure is becoming available, and the current negotiations will result in more.

I draw to the Parliament's attention a paper that has been circulated by Unison Scotland, which puts forward an idea about local government pension funds in Scotland, which are currently valued at £24.1 billion. Unison makes the point that we should invest those funds over a 25-year

period in public works and public services such as providing council housing. There are ways of raising the money, both through the councils themselves and through the Parliament. Indeed, Fife Council ran a partnership with tenants, raised the rents and is now building 2,700 houses over five years.

While congratulating herself, Margaret Burgess does not congratulate the councils across Scotland that are coming up with innovative schemes to build houses. If we are ambitious enough and we have the political will and drive to tackle this issue, we should be able to come up with a lot of ways of building houses.

There are currently 23,000 private sector long-term empty houses across Scotland. Work could and should be done to start to look at that issue. My point about the lack of ambition in the motion and from the Government is that, instead of simply congratulating itself on what it has achieved, it should start to set out a clear national housing strategy for Scotland, with clear action and targets, authority by authority and area by area.

Even if we were to come up with the funding through the Unison proposal or through the powers that are coming to the Parliament, there are other obstacles in our way. This Government should be talking to every local authority across Scotland. We should ask for an audit of all land available for building council and social rented housing. We should be looking at the planning system and the difficulties and delays in it. If there is one thing I learnt in Fife, it is that it was one thing to raise the money to build the 2,700 houses but quite another to put them in place.

We should be looking at partnerships with private developers. We should devise policies so that we are able to agree with private developers the number of houses that can be built in every housing development across Scotland as part of a new partnership. It should be about that vision. The benefits in terms of jobs, apprenticeships and giving people the housing that they need cannot be overstated.

It is a matter of having ambition and looking at new ideas such as the one from Unison Scotland. It is about saying that we will sign up to the principle of building 10,000 houses per year, as Shelter suggests. Nothing less will be good enough to tackle the housing crisis that we have.

15:14

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am delighted that the SNP Government is on track to deliver its manifesto commitment of 30,000 affordable homes, because few things are as fundamental as housing. We in the SNP can rightly be proud of that.

Jim Hume: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike MacKenzie: No, not yet.

I wondered whether we were going to hear the Labour Party's ideological opposition to the idea of shared equity or shared ownership housing, because that is what we heard in previous housing debates. However, Labour members seem to have changed their mind. Now they are fans of private ownership and they bemoan that the help to buy scheme does not have enough money. They have gone from opposition to private ownership, shared equity or shared ownership of any kind to being fans of it. Not only that, they want to claim credit for the pre-credit crunch level of private building, which is extraordinary.

In order to properly tackle our housing problem, we need to build about 30,000 houses per annum, of all tenures. I would welcome what I thought I heard Mary Fee say this afternoon: that the UK Government is committed to building about 20,000 houses in Scotland—our pro rata share of the 200,000 that she talked about. Or are we no longer part of the UK? Did I misunderstand the referendum result?

Twenty thousand or so social houses built by the Labour Party—I wonder whether that is living in the real world. Even at current housing association grant levels, that would amount to expenditure of about £1 billion per annum. Maybe we should believe Mr Rowley, who talks about 10,000 houses per annum.

I am not sure what the Labour Party is saying with its vision, but one thing is very clear: it is an unfunded vision. The Labour Party will not explain where the money will come from. We are told by its UK bosses, Ed Miliband and Ed Balls, that it is going to continue austerity, so the Labour Party needs to sign up and tell us how it is going to fund its grand vision for housing and what funding areas it would cut to provide it. I suspect that we will not hear any answer from it on that point.

Voters will not forget that, although the Labour Party talks about its grand vision, in its long periods in office here and in the UK it lacked the political courage to end the right to buy. In all its years in office it failed to tackle that problem. It is little wonder that Labour members are leaving their party in substantial numbers. Maybe Alex Rowley would like to contemplate that one reason why councils are now beginning to consider—at long last—building council houses again is that this SNP Government ended the right to buy.

Tackling our housing problem is not merely the preserve of the housing minister. I agree with Mr Rowley that it also takes us in to the territory of planning, and I am glad therefore that the planning minister is continuing to modernise our planning

system and work towards changing its culture. Land is a basic requirement for housing, and in a country in which less than 6 per cent of our land is built on and which has the second lowest population density in Europe, it is ridiculous that the planning system creates such high housing land prices. As a consequence, far too much of our money goes into the acquisition of land and not nearly enough goes into the fabric of our buildings. If we are to improve the quality of our buildings, in both their design and their construction, we need to deal with that aspect of the planning system, which acts against and not in favour of the public interest.

Just as bad is the necessity that the planning system creates for developers, both public and private, to accumulate vast land banks in order deal with the uncertainty created by the planning system. Let us imagine if, in order to function, the car industry had to buy 10 years' supply of steel in advance and store that in a field—what a shockingly inefficient use of resources that would be. Therefore, the requirement for local planning authorities to produce up-to-date local development plans every five years and to identify and continually update an effective supply of housing land is a big step in the right direction.

In squeezing maximum value from our diminishing budget and building 30,000 new homes over the lifetime of this session of Parliament, in reforming our planning system and in ending the right to buy, this SNP Government is responsibly tackling Scotland's housing problem and will continue to do so.

15:20

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

There is agreement among many of us in the chamber that we must have more and improved housing as a priority, so the question for debate is largely about resources.

It is perfectly reasonable for Labour and the Lib Dems to state, as they have in their motion, amendments and speeches, that there is housing need—we all agree with that. However, it would be good to hear from them where they want to cut resources from to go into housing. Shelter mentioned that it wanted to see a commitment of £200 million a year, but I do not think that we have a commitment from any of the other parties about where that money would come from. Would they cut the college sector or the health budget?

Jim Hume: Does the member not agree that, as James Kelly said, the housing budget cuts are disproportionate to any austerity cuts that he may refer to?

John Mason: My point is that Jim Hume is welcome to propose that more money goes into

housing, but he must tell us where that money will come from.

I accept that there is an argument that the health budget could be reduced because if people were living in better housing and had to spend less on warming their houses, not so much money would need to be spent on health. There are arguments to be had, but let us have those from the Opposition parties, rather than just a pie-in-the-sky hope that we can get £200 million from goodness knows where. They are perfectly entitled to make the arguments—indeed, they would have more credibility if they did—but they cannot expect to have more money in housing with no transfer of resources from elsewhere.

The Conservatives amendment takes a slightly different line. It suggests that we do not need more public spending; in fact, the Conservatives tell us that we have an obsession with public spending.

Alex Johnstone: Yes, that is right.

John Mason: Thank you.

The Conservatives suggest that there should be more “private and institutional investment”. I do not know exactly what is meant by that. Does that mean more lending from private sources? That is happening: housing associations borrow from a variety of sources, including banks and building societies, although they are not as keen to lend as they used to be. Perhaps that means, as others including Alex Rowley and Alex Johnstone have said, pension funds investing some of their funds. There are moves in that direction. However, certainly in the west of Scotland, few associations other than Glasgow Housing Association are large enough to take on the large size of investment required if a pension fund is to invest.

Social rented housing finances are not that complicated. Rent levels are linked to the loans taken by the housing associations or councils, so the more grant or housing association grant available, the lower the loan needs to be and therefore the lower the rent has to be in order to cover all the costs. That also means that housing benefit is lower, which is a cost saving to Westminster.

In the private rented sector by contrast, there are no grants and rents are inevitably higher. As a result, the housing benefit or local housing allowance bill is higher, too. Therefore, I remain unclear what the Conservatives’ desired model is. As I say, pension funds were mentioned. However, in practice, those are just another form of borrowing—they are another way of bringing in money—and the pension funds need a return just as the banks and building societies do.

Alex Rowley: Does the member not recognise that the Tory answer is to leave housing to the

market? That is why Tory policy will never tackle Scotland’s housing problems.

John Mason: I totally agree with that, but the member and his colleagues need to explain a lot more clearly how they would use the pension funds and how that would make such a big difference, if the amount of grant that is available is limited by the budget.

The private rented sector has been debated at some length in the Parliament, so I will just say that we need to keep an eye on it, because it is growing, even in constituencies like mine. I am sure that we will hear more from members who represent constituencies in which the sector is much larger.

In my constituency, there is good news. For example, the Commonwealth games village is being transformed into a mixture of accommodation, including a care home, social rented housing and bought housing. A fair number of constituents have told me that they would like to live there, if I can just get them a house.

Just last Thursday I was at Parkhead Housing Association’s annual general meeting. We heard about new developments, such as the development at the site of the old Parkhead fire station, for which the association had received housing association grant. The interesting point was that the association did not need to borrow, because it had sufficient funds of its own to make up the difference.

It is clear that there is a wide range of housing associations, which are in a wide range of financial states. All associations should have reserves that are ring fenced for future maintenance, which should not be used for development programmes. However, if associations have free reserves, they should certainly be encouraged to use them.

The two developments that I mentioned—the games village and the old fire station—were brownfield sites. Housing associations are to be commended for wanting to build on such sites, which are close to existing communities and usually have existing public transport and other services. Our urban regeneration company, Clyde Gateway, has been doing extremely good work in rehabilitating brownfield land, and we very much appreciate the Government funding for that.

By contrast, I find it disappointing that much of the private sector insists on wanting greenbelt or green-space land for housing. Glasgow has very limited green land within the city boundary but many areas of vacant or derelict land, especially in the east and the north. In my area we used to have open fields east of Baillieston, before we got to Bargeddie in North Lanarkshire. Now, more and more housing fills every green space. I accept that Coatbridge may be a very nice place, Deputy

Presiding Officer, but I am not keen for Glasgow and Coatbridge to become one long, grey, urban sprawl.

That is probably where I should finish. I welcome the end of right to buy.

15:27

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): The shared desire of members across the Parliament to ensure that every Scot enjoys the security and stability of a decent home should provide us with a platform from which to reach political consensus on housing. It is unfortunate that agreement seems more difficult to achieve in practice. The motion that is before us leaves me intrigued as to whether or not the Scottish Government, which called for the debate, recognises that there is a problem with housing supply.

Just this summer, the independent Scottish housing commission, which the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors led, concluded that Scotland faces

“an inadequate and inelastic supply of housing”.

The commission’s chair said:

“The imbalance that exists between supply and demand for housing remains an on-going problem”.

Audit Scotland, in its comprehensive report, “Housing in Scotland”, which was published last year, concluded simply:

“The supply of housing is not meeting current levels of need. The number of new private homes built in Scotland has more than halved in recent years while the population is increasing.”

In relation to council or housing association property, Audit Scotland went on to identify

“a shortfall of almost 14,000 homes”

in the past decade alone. My worry is that if we find it difficult to accept or agree on the extent of the problem, it will be even more tricky to coalesce around potential solutions.

I want to consider three areas in which I hope that there is room for agreement on how we might jointly address Scotland’s housing needs. Although I flagged up supply as our main problem, the first of those areas is an initiative that focuses on increasing demand: the help to buy scheme. The minister might be aware that I was relieved when two constituents of mine, who applied for support under the scheme at the time when it ran out of money, had their application approved, after several weeks of anxiety. They were among the last people to benefit from the programme this year.

My constituents’ experience illuminated questions that were already being asked about

how competently the scheme has been administered. For example, it has been pointed out that the minister’s spending all the money that she was allocated in the first three months will hardly have helped to smooth the boom and bust cycle that so plagues the housing market. In addition, the fact that the scheme appears to have been run on a first come, first served basis worries not just many people in the housing industry but the young couples and families who are desperate to buy their first home but unable to do so. Little or no attempt appears to have been made to ensure that the millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money that are behind the programme have gone to the most deserving or those who most need support. I am aware that further funding will become available next year, and I would welcome an assurance and perhaps further detail from the minister on the lessons that have been learned.

The Scottish Government’s role in approving or overruling local planning decisions has raised huge concern in my constituency and, I am sure, in many other areas. Ministers do not appear to be able to give residents the confidence that they seek that ministers have struck the right balance between national objectives and local control.

East Renfrewshire residents were part of a lengthy public consultation on a five-year local development plan, but some developers are ignoring much of the land that the local authority identified and democratically approved for housing and are instead making speculative bids for green-belt sites that they believe can be sold on at vast profit. The tactic seems to be that if developers make enough such applications, even though the local authority will knock them all back, the Scottish Government will approve one or two on appeal, which makes the exercise worth while.

I need hardly tell members that the applications are not for affordable housing or for homes for social rent. What is worse is that neighbourhood after neighbourhood feels threatened by speculative development, and residents have little or no confidence in the protection that the green belt previously offered.

East Renfrewshire Council has just received an application for an enormous and entirely unwanted housing development on green-belt land that surrounds the village of Waterfoot. Ministers could grasp that application and others like it as an opportunity to send a clear message to residents that there is no place in our planning process for such speculative development. They could put aside their centralising tendencies and support our local authorities and democratic processes.

Most important is housing for social rent. Just one story of the many that I could tell, which I suspect is being repeated the length and breadth of the country, is of a young constituent—“young”

is a relative term, as he is in his 30s—who is bringing up two kids on his own. He was born and raised in East Renfrewshire and both his children attend local primary and secondary schools but, following the family split, he now finds himself in unaffordable private rented accommodation in Glasgow and is having to downsize again even further afield. He has few points to push him up the housing list and, as Eastwood has only a few hundred council houses, he has virtually no chance of securing a home there.

We know that East Renfrewshire Council is just one of up to a dozen local authorities whose waiting list for a council house has increased over the past five years. An estimated 150,000 people are in that predicament nationwide.

Owning their own home is the goal of many people in this country, but it surely cannot be as important as having the simple right to a decent home as the overriding objective of housing policy in Scotland. Building more, safe, good-quality homes for rent will not just boost the public sector but improve affordability in the private sector and provide jobs and trade apprenticeships. We know that it will have a positive impact on physical and mental health and allow families to take advantage of educational opportunity.

Is it not time that the minister faced up to the seriousness of the situation, accepted that housing supply is a critical problem for all Scots who are looking for a decent home and reached out to Labour and other parties in the Parliament to find a practical solution?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are quite tight for time, so interventions will have to be contained within members' six minutes for speeches.

15:33

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): The greatest issue that my constituents bring to me is housing, whether they desire to get off the waiting list and secure a long-term home or whether they have issues with the quality of housing. This debate on the provision of decent quality housing for our constituents is therefore welcome.

I welcome the Scottish Government's record. Since April 2011, some £1 billion has been spent on affordable housing, as part of £1.7 billion that will be spent over the parliamentary session. That is supporting about 8,000 jobs each year, which is an achievement, especially when it is placed in the context of a 26 per cent cut to our capital budget. Those who call for a significant funding uplift would do well to recognise that difficult reality.

Despite that, we have seen over 4,000 new council homes built since 2007-08. I do not need to rehearse the number of council homes that were built in the last four years of the previous Administration, which was significantly fewer than 4,000—I think that it was six. We have also seen over 30,000 housing association homes completed since 2007-08, which is a significant rise from the seven-year period before that. To those who, like James Kelly, bemoan the level of investment in housing that we are seeing through the Scottish Government's budget, I say that that rise is the outcome of the Scottish Government's investment. The Institute for Fiscal Studies highlights the fact that the Scottish Government spends 85 per cent more per head on social housing than is spent in England and Wales.

Jim Hume: In a spirit of consensus, we must realise that we are living in different times. In the eight years up to 2007, just under 24,000 houses were built albeit that some of them were private. In the years since the SNP has taken power, the figure has been just under 16,000. Does the member not accept that there is now even more need, because of the circumstances, to concentrate on housing?

Jamie Hepburn: The Scottish Government has recognised the extra pressure by building some 12 per cent more housing association homes in the period of its Governments than were built in the seven years before. The Scottish Government has also moved to abolish the right to buy. It was interesting to hear both Mary Fee and Jim Hume welcome that policy but criticise its implementation. Mr Hume said that it is overdue. I would take such concerns more seriously if the parties to which Mr Hume and Ms Fee belong had done anything approaching what the Scottish Government has done on the right to buy in their long years of government.

I welcome the moves that are being made on the right to buy. Many families feel that they have benefited from the right to buy. People in my own extended family took that opportunity—I am not being critical of them, as it is understandable that they did so. However, what might constitute success for those individual families has constituted a failure of public policy considering the scale of the waiting lists that we now have. Other members have mentioned that issue—I will not repeat the numbers. The reduction in the social housing stock and the fact that councils were not able to invest their receipts in replacement homes has contributed massively to the backlog of people who await a new home.

We must also recognise that the right to buy has not always been a success for those who bought their council house. They were sold all the advantages of home ownership but also face the

disadvantages of home ownership, such as the cost of maintaining a home. Too many houses in Scotland have fallen into a substandard condition, and in my experience—certainly, in my constituency—the situation has often been exacerbated by the disinterest of private landlords who are willing to take the rent but unwilling to pay to bring homes up to a proper standard. I have constituents who are living in what can only be described as slum housing. We should be ashamed that anyone in Scotland is living in such places in the 21st century, and one of the driving factors has been the failure of the right to buy.

The SNP has been charged with being ideologically motivated in wanting to see the passing of the right to buy—as if the policy itself was not ideologically motivated—but its abolition is a practical move. We have now seen over 4,000 council homes built since 2007-08 and, for the first time in a long time, councils are willing to invest in public housing. We have a long way to go, but we are seeing the success of the measure that is being taken in abolishing the right to buy. New council houses are being built at two localities in Westfield, in Cumbernauld, and new council houses are going to be built in Kilsyth. Those homes are now available and will become available for people who would not otherwise have got a council home. That is happening only because of the measure that we are taking in relation to the right to buy, which is one of the most successful measures that the Parliament and the Scottish Government have taken.

I wanted to talk about the bedroom tax, but I do not have time to do that. We can talk about that in a future housing debate.

Housing is very safe in the hands of the Scottish Government.

15:39

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good afternoon, Presiding Officer. It is an honour to speak about housing supply, as housing is by far the most common issue in my surgeries for constituents.

The basic fact is that demand for housing is going up and the current Scottish Government has failed to keep up with it. The SNP should not celebrate the 5 per cent increase in new house completions in the last financial year, because the reality is that the supply of new housing remains well below pre-recession levels; in fact, it is 42 per cent lower than it was in 2007-08. That is not poor, it is shameful, and we all—I include myself—have a responsibility to address that shortfall as a matter of urgency.

In addition, there are more than 150,000 people on social housing waiting lists. Homes for Scotland

has declared that we are experiencing the biggest crisis in housing in Scotland since the second world war. Unfortunately, that is happening on the minister's watch.

The SNP Government needs to look at the whole picture, not just small parts of the problem. It needs to have a renewed emphasis on meeting housing needs. Greater financial support must be provided and there must be a strategic focus on the housing sector to encourage the building of a wide range of housing, which could include guarantees that a percentage of larger homes will be built to fit the needs of the citizens of today. Time and again, we come across the serious issue of large families not being accommodated.

I am approached by constituents from across the housing need spectrum, from single people who feel that they will never be able to afford to move out of their parents' home to large families who are living in incredibly cramped conditions. I know of families whom the council has assessed as needing a four-bedroom house when the last time a house of that size was available in their preferred area was more than a decade ago. Meanwhile, they continue to be subjected to water penetration, dampness and overcrowding. There are serious issues that are not being addressed that need to be addressed.

More and more housing developments are small developments. On paper, the fact that we have built a certain number of homes looks good, but the reality is that a large segment of our community—the most needy—are not being catered for. Such people cannot really afford to go into the private rented sector, but they are being forced to do so because of the dire shortage of social housing.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that one in four of those in poverty lives in the private rented sector. The number of households in poverty in that sector has doubled in the past decade to 120,000, while the number of households in social housing has almost halved. That gives an indication of the pressures that the housing associations are under.

The Government needs to tackle fair rents in the private rented sector now. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 was a missed opportunity to tackle the housing challenges that the people of Scotland face, including the housing shortage and the need for reform of the growing private rented sector. Now that we have got distractions such as the referendum out of the way, the minister is back on the job and we have had the positive sign of a slight increase in the supply of housing, we need to focus on getting Scotland's housing supply right and to do what we all came here to do, which is to work for the people of Scotland.

It is very easy for the Government to claim that it has done a good job and to say that the housing sector is safe under the SNP, but the reality is quite different. We have people who are not being catered for. Young children are being exposed to cramped and poor conditions. They suffer bad health, which impinges on their educational aspirations as well as their health.

Some people say that they would not tolerate such things or allow them to go on, but they are actually happening on the ground. Today, I invite the minister to visit the housing in Glasgow in which some of my constituents stay to see the conditions that they are living in. It would give her a flavour of the reality of life on the ground. I said to the housing minister once before that she thinks that everything is hunky-dory out there—it is not. Just taking her to one or two houses would drive home the message about the real hardship that people are facing. If the Scottish Government wishes to claim that housing is good in its hands, I would ask the minister to visit those houses and see whether she can offer a solution to those people who desperately need one.

15:45

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. As we know, the debate is on an important issue that starkly highlights the decisions taken by the Scottish Government in comparison with the policies of the UK Government and previous Scottish Administrations. The Scottish Government has set ambitious targets for increasing housing supply, and it is good news that those targets are not only being met but exceeded. Nearly 35,000 social houses were completed between 2008 and 2014, which is up 28 per cent on the period from 2001 to 2007, when just over 27,000 homes were completed. In addition, council house building figures were at a 25-year high in the year to March 2014, with 1,140 new council homes built in Scotland. More than 4,000 homes have been delivered through the council house building programme since 2009.

We need to remember that that has happened while the UK Government has been slashing Scotland's capital budget by 26 per cent. The priority that is given to social housing in Scotland is in stark contrast to the situation in the rest of the UK. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has highlighted that the Scottish Government spends 85 per cent more per head on social housing than England and Wales do. For example, in the year to the end of December 2013, the social sector new-build completion rate in Scotland was 82.7 per 100,000, compared with 41.8 in England and 24.0 in Wales.

Mary Fee, in her opening comments, appeared to criticise the Scottish Government for comparing

its policy with that elsewhere. However, surely a Scottish Government of whatever colour should be looking at what is happening elsewhere—in these islands or anywhere else in the world—to compare and to learn lessons.

Mary Fee: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Stuart McMillan: In two seconds.

We should be doing that in all policy areas, rather than having the silo mentality that Labour appears to have.

Mary Fee: The member commented on the comparisons that the Government makes. My problem is that they are always framed as something being Westminster's fault—everything that happens in Scotland is Westminster's fault. I have never heard a comparison being made that reflects good practice in another area of the country that we could use up here for our benefit; the comparison is always done in a critical sense.

Stuart McMillan: I suggest that Mary Fee look at some of the evidence that we receive in the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, where we hear of positive practice that goes on. Both positive and negative comparisons are made. However, as I said, the priority here is in stark contrast to that elsewhere.

It seems clear that when Labour is in power it fails on social housing, particularly council housing. As we know, the Labour Administration in Wales has built only 20 council houses in the past seven years, and the last Labour-Lib Dem Administration here could build only six council houses in its last four years in office. If anything underlines Labour's failure on council housing, it is the record of its own Administrations.

Alex Rowley, who has unfortunately left the chamber for the moment, asked for the Scottish Government to have a housing action plan and place demands on local authorities. That is in stark contrast with what we hear regularly in the Local Government and Regeneration Committee when Labour representatives come before us. I found it strange that Alex Rowley made those comments.

Increasing the supply of social housing is important, but so too are any moves to improve the condition of existing social housing. The quality of Scotland's housing has important implications for health, education and other social outcomes, as we heard earlier in the debate. The Scottish Government is to be congratulated on providing £60 million of investment in the home energy efficiency programme for Scotland, which enables local authorities and social landlords to install energy efficiency measures such as solid wall, cavity and loft insulation in their communities.

My final point concerns the Conservative amendment. Alex Johnstone, in typically robust fashion, attempted to defend the indefensible. His comments about private moneys indicated to me that the Tories want to privatise social house building in Scotland. Pension funds were mentioned, but maybe the Tories' plan is to obtain private finance from companies that wish to involve themselves in fracking. That would certainly make it easier for that activity to occur, since they would not object to it taking place under their homes. I hope that Alex Johnstone will clarify that point when he concludes for the Tories later in the debate.

Despite the capital budget cuts that the UK Government has undertaken, which were planned by Alistair Darling and are being implemented by George Osborne, the Scottish Government still plans to spend more than £1.7 billion in the current session of Parliament to deliver 30,000 affordable homes. The UK Government and the UK parties that have signed up to more austerity and attacks on the poor have all said that they will not increase capital spending. That attitude is holding back even more investment in affordable housing. I therefore back the motion in the minister's name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I call Gordon MacDonald, to be followed by Sarah Boyack. You have up to six minutes, as we are tight for time.

15:51

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): There is, no doubt, a need for new affordable housing in this country. However, we need to recognise that there are tens of thousands more homes in Scotland than there are households. Some 107,000 houses in Scotland are either empty houses or second homes, and while the Scottish Government has tried to tackle those issues, it has been against the backdrop of a cut in our budget.

The City of Edinburgh Council and housing associations built more than 1,200 new social rent, mid-market rent and low-cost home ownership homes across the city in the year to March 2014. They were part of the 15,957 new homes that were delivered in Scotland in that year, which represented the first increase in house building since the recession of 2007-08. The figures include 10,686 homes from private house building, but there is now a greater demand for social housing due to the changes in mortgage lending and the increase in private rents.

Younger home owners face loan-to-income ratios of four to five, which means that those who earn the average salary of £26,000 per annum cannot afford a new home in the capital. Private

tenants have seen their rents increase from 18 per cent of their income a decade ago to 23 per cent today. Recognising the increased demand for new affordable homes, the Scottish Government has invested £970 million over the three years to March 2015. Over the five years to March 2016, £1.7 billion will have been spent on affordable homes. The Scottish Government has delivered 21,000 affordable homes since 2011, taking it two thirds of the way towards meeting the five-year target of 30,000 new affordable homes.

Edinburgh anticipates that, to 2020, just under 10,000 new homes will be built across the city. However, many residents in the west of the city, in both my constituency and Colin Keir's, are concerned that the current infrastructure cannot cope with that level of house building. I have spoken before about traffic congestion and air quality issues on the west side of the city, and in my view there will be further deterioration with the house building that is planned for Fife and West Lothian. However, that is a planning issue. I want to focus on what changes could help my constituents, who are facing numerous speculative housing developments.

The housing grant that is given to RSLs and councils for them to build new homes varies depending on whether the setting is urban, rural or a remote part of the country, and also on the energy efficiency standards of the new development. It would be helpful for the provision of new homes in Edinburgh if the grant was adjusted to reflect the type of land that is proposed to be developed. Brownfield could attract a higher level of grant than greenfield, and productive arable land would receive the lowest level of all. Arable land is only 15 per cent of the land mass of Scotland. Given that the UK is only 68 per cent self-sufficient in feeding its population, it does not make sense that we allow good arable land to be built on. We cannot reinvent arable land, therefore we should have policies in place that discourage development in those areas.

I believe that that would tackle the issue that we have in the west of Edinburgh, where speculative planning applications are being submitted by developers and landowners to build in Edinburgh's green belt. Landowners win in the current system because their land is worth more to sell with planning permission. Developers prefer greenfield developments as they achieve a price premium for a leafy suburb and, in many cases, have lower development costs. Large-scale developments need to provide 25 per cent social housing. It usually results in a joint venture with a housing association to build that element of the development, thereby qualifying for housing grant. Reducing the level of grant in greenfield areas or areas of good-quality arable land would make the

financial case more difficult and would hopefully push developers to consider brownfield first.

In Edinburgh, we have constrained sites where 24,311 homes could be built. The reasons that those sites are constrained vary, from expired consent to the fact that the developer is in administration or the development is not viable in the current climate. Increasing the grant for those sites will make the latter category more financially viable and will, to an extent, protect Edinburgh's green belt.

Although Edinburgh can provide good-quality employment, the cost of living, in terms of housing, is high. How can we tackle that? The Scottish Government has invested millions in upgrading the Airdrie to Bathgate railway line and the new Borders railway. We also have in the pipeline the future upgrade of the Edinburgh to Glasgow via Shotts line. The main Edinburgh to Glasgow line witnesses many people commuting from our largest city through to the capital to find work. We need a mechanism to encourage development along our railway network in the existing communities. That would help to support towns and villages that have suffered from unemployment for decades. We could use all the mechanisms that the Government has at its disposal to integrate housing and transport policy so that we do not replicate the problems associated with our other capital city.

15:57

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow Gordon MacDonald this afternoon because I, too, want to focus on Edinburgh's housing challenge. The solution cannot be just to export our families to the rest of Scotland, because, to be honest, that is what we have seen over the past few years. We need to have high-quality, affordable housing in the capital. We need quality housing and we need it where people want to stay; it needs to be accessible and of the right size. We also need existing housing to be in good condition. Above all—this is where I very much agree with Gordon MacDonald—it needs to be affordable.

The minister said that there has been a reduction in the number of homeless people in Edinburgh. However, if we look more closely at the statistics we will see that although there is a slight reduction in the number of homeless people, they are all staying a lot longer in temporary accommodation. We have a problem about the housing that people move on to when they are first made homeless. That is not just about the bricks and mortar; it is about the social support that people have.

I emphasise the sheer scale of demand. Our population is expected to grow by 25 per cent to the year 2035, but the average Scottish figure is 10 per cent. If we are to take our household increases, a 43 per cent increase is expected by 2035. That is a huge increase in demand, for which the capacity is simply not being delivered. In effect, that means 95,000 new households in the city. We need the right kind of housing but we also need sustainable communities—a mix of houses to buy and, crucially, of social rented housing.

It is a pity that the Minister for Local Government and Planning is not here—although I am sure that Marco Biagi will follow on this point—because he, too, should be involved in this process. It is not just an issue for the Minister for Housing and Welfare. The two ministers and their teams need to work together.

In particular, the Minister for Local Government and Planning needs to work with local authorities to ensure that, where they have planning policies to support the development of brownfield sites for local-needs housing, they are backed up by the Scottish Government's planning decisions and not frustrated in their ambitions to create sustainable communities. The recent Scottish Government reporter's decision on Luton Court drives a coach and horses through the council's approved local plan, and creates a real crisis across the city with regard to the council's influence over the right type of housing development.

We need new housing, and accessible homes for older people in particular. The number of older people is predicted to increase dramatically, and a particular challenge is that the number of those aged over 65 is expected to grow by 70 per cent.

When I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing in the chamber about support for care at home, he said that the methodology was being worked on. I emphasise that we are facing a real problem not in the future, but now. It is partly to do with care and partly about the accessibility of housing in which people live. Crucially, the problem is also the affordability and supply of the type of housing that can support older people for what could be 30 years of their life after they reach pensionable age.

With regard to the cost of housing, there are all sorts of substantial challenges for us in Edinburgh just now. The average house price in the privately owned sector is 38 per cent above the Scottish average, and private rents have increased by 26 per cent in the past seven years. Without enough affordable social rented stock, we have a huge problem with demand, and costs are increasing not only for houses to buy but in the private rented sector. That is leading to massive pressure in the cost of living for people and a crisis in the city. That is why Labour has signed up to a bigger

picture that includes freezing fuel bills and taking action on zero-hours contracts and the living wage.

A key part of solving the housing crisis and the cost-of-living crisis involves ensuring that the supply of housing is enough to meet the variety of needs that people have. Affordable housing must be at the top of the list so that people can afford to rent and to buy.

The demand is huge. In the social rented sector, there were 133 bids for every property that became available through the choice letting system. That is an average figure across all the houses that were available, and it gives us a sense of just how much of a shortage there is.

We are facing not a future problem, but a current problem. There has not been enough action so far, particularly in the private rented sector. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 was a missed opportunity, as we can see from the level of year-on-year rises in the cost of rents in Edinburgh. The average private rent in the city is £848 per calendar month. Costs are simply outstripping wages and people's capacity to pay for housing in the city. That will have a huge economic impact, as we will not be able to attract the people that we need to expand industries such as tourism and the banking and financial sector. We urgently need to deliver more affordable housing in the private and social rented sectors and for sale.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the member to draw to a close, please.

Sarah Boyack: There are three income streams. We need to sort out the systemic underfunding in local government, on which we need cross-party discussions as the Local Government and Regeneration Committee has recommended, and we need to transfer housing benefit to local authorities, as Labour's devolution commission recommended. Finally, on the point about investing pension funds, 25-year timelines suit the social rented sector and make it possible for that sector to invest.

We need a proper coherent strategy from the Scottish Government, and I hope that we will hear more about that in the minister's winding-up speech.

16:04

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): A month ago, when we were all getting to know our areas a little better, one of the volunteers in Edinburgh Central, who does not originally come from Edinburgh, casually referred to an area as

"those posh new flats at Westfield."

He was referring to Westfield Avenue, which is actually a Dunedin Canmore development of affordable housing. It is built to the highest possible standards, and powered by environmentally friendly CHP—combined heat and power—systems. It is generally an attractive place to live, and it is being expanded.

Outwardly, that new development is indistinguishable from the luxury flats at Quatermile on the old Edinburgh royal infirmary site. Today, the only difference between the new social housing and the new top-end housing in my constituency is that the private developments Hoover up the best locations and charge nine times the city's average salary for a one-bedroom flat. In between those two sectors, we have private equity backed, purpose built, corporate-run student housing that can charge up to £209 per week and which is inexplicably exempted by the council from the requirements for all other developments to include an affordable housing portion.

Some developments genuinely fall in between, but we know before they start that buy-to-let landlords will be the biggest customers, and the developers know that, too. As someone who is quite sceptical about the role of the private rented sector and its effect on tenants and communities—as Alex Johnstone observed about my speech on the recent Housing (Scotland) Bill—it is hard for me to face the fact that many of those homes would not exist without the purchasing power of the private rented sector.

The Homes for Scotland report "Building the Rented Sector in Scotland: Attracting new sources of funding to expand a growing market" looks into the contribution that the private rented sector can make to house building. I see in it the welcome claim that many new-build properties that are bought to let are bought with a view to selling on and, at that stage, most move into owner occupation. I therefore wonder—this is one of those notions that sometimes occur, rather than a fully formed policy idea—whether there might be value in trying to find a way to direct the purchasing power of buy-to-let landlords towards new build so that more of it happens. In the present situation, buy-to-let landlords tend to outbid young families and young professionals for the older housing stock, thereby creating some of the problems for Edinburgh that Sarah Boyack eloquently set out.

That is just a thought but, whatever help it might offer, looking ahead we cannot see anything in Edinburgh but that we need more houses. We are scheduled to surpass Glasgow in population in the 2020s. We have a greater need than most. Like the 19th-century Russian empire, Edinburgh's frontiers have continued to expand and gobble up

the surrounding areas—as any Leither will say, probably still with a little bit of resentment in their voice. Unless we can find ways of channelling private development into the brownfield sites in the city centre, more towns will go that way.

Members should note that I am talking about private development, because there has been an unhelpful conflation by Labour in its amendment and in its opening speech of private sector and social sector build. For example, the amendment talks about

“the lowest number of homes ... since 1947”.

The Scottish Government is broadly responsible for the number of homes that it funds, but the number of private sector builds is generally beyond our power.

This is one of those debates that does not send members towards philosophy; it sends us for spreadsheets instead, so I have some figures here. In the last two years under the Conservatives in 1996-97 and 1997-98, when the Conservatives ran house building in Scotland—or at least they set the budgets for it—the figure for private new builds was 17,700. In Labour’s time in office, the figure was 19,900. Since we took over, the figure has fallen to 11,400, which is no surprise given what happened in 2008 when, between quarter 1 and quarter 4, the total number of new starts across the UK fell from 29,290 to 12,010, which was a drastic fall. We all know what happened in 2008, and the private market is still recovering from it.

However, the SNP has a good record on social housing, with the numbers getting higher. Under SNP budgets, the average number of builds has been 4,366, compared to 3,685 under Labour, while the average number of local authority builds has been 763, compared to 49 under Labour—although, of course, that hides the three years in which Labour did not manage to build any. Therefore, I say to Labour that we do not disagree that more houses should be built. If Labour members can think of a way to produce £200 million, they should please bring it forward. Nobody will fight off those ideas, but wishing does not make it so.

Let us look at the Shelter claim. The figure of 10,000 houses is probably quite a reasonable assessment of where we need to get to ultimately, but at what year in the Labour Party’s governance of Scotland did we reach 10,000? I do not think that we even got close. The highest figure that I see is 4,698 in 2005-06. People in glass houses should not throw stones.

Sarah Boyack: Will Marco Biagi give way?

Marco Biagi: I am out of time.

There has been high investment by the Government. Because of the ending of the right to buy, we have more local authority housing. Planning changes, regulatory reform and council tax changes will help to stimulate more private development. However, anybody in the other parties who has ideas would be welcome to give them.

16:10

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Housing is important to people in communities. It is incumbent on us to provide well-planned, good-quality housing because it contributes to strong resilient communities, and promotes economic growth within them. Good-quality housing can have a positive impact on people’s quality of life and reduce additional costs in other public sector budgets, for example in the health service.

I remember that houses that were built in my area in the 1970s had flat roofs. Flat roofs in Scotland? What madness. Getting the housing supply right in Scottish communities would ensure more than just access to good housing for all; it would contribute to achieving the Scottish Government’s overall purpose of supporting sustainable economic growth, and it would help us to achieve the country’s full potential through better education and employment opportunities, healthier lives and a more prosperous and equal society.

Many bodies contribute to housing in Scotland, including the Scottish Government, councils, financial institutions, landlords, regulatory bodies and the construction industry. All are interlinked, so changes to any one of those sectors directly affect the others, as do changes to external factors such as the strength of the economy. As part of that group of key contributors to the housing market in Scotland, the Scottish Government has continued to make affordable housing a high priority and has set ambitious targets for housing. Progress has been made and the Scottish Government has made clear its commitment to deliver at least 30,000 affordable homes, of which two thirds will be for social rent, including 5,000 council houses, during this parliamentary session.

The Scottish Government has continued to increase the budget for affordable homes and will have invested £970 million over the three years to March 2015, at which time it plans to invest a further £391 million. That brings the amount that the Government will spend on affordable housing during the parliamentary session to more than £1.7 billion.

That means that North Lanarkshire Council will invest £38 million in a three-year programme through to 2014-15, and a further £50 million in

2050-16. As a former councillor in North Lanarkshire, I remember that we did not build a single council house for years.

That commitment to building affordable housing has not only benefited those who are looking to buy one of the homes, but has helped to stimulate the Scottish economy by giving a boost to the construction industry, thereby creating countless jobs and providing a valuable income to those who need it.

Ken Macintosh: Will Richard Lyle give way?

Richard Lyle: No, I will not.

That boost to the construction industry is helped by the Scottish Government's commitment to boosting the demand for home ownership through help to buy schemes. From the launch of the help to buy Scotland scheme in September 2013 to May 2014, there were 1,220 confirmed sales and 3,749 approved applications for the scheme. Those figures are reassuring and show that the scheme is being used to help people to get on the property ladder and to further boost the house building market.

The benefit of those policies can already be seen, as last year brought the first increase in new housing supply since before the recession, with the number of new homes in Scotland rising by 7 per cent in the year to March 2014. The figures show that 15,957 new homes were delivered in Scotland in the year to March 2014—an increase of 1,062 new homes on the previous year.

Even with that increase I—like every other member in the chamber—recognise that the house building industry continues to face a number of challenges. I am pleased that the Scottish Government is still committed to growing the industry, and am satisfied that it remains committed to an investment-led recovery despite those challenges and in spite of the 26 per cent cut to our capital budget. The Government's investment of more than £8 billion over the next two years will support about 40,000 full-time-equivalent jobs throughout Scotland.

To protect Scotland's social housing, the Scottish Government legislated to abolish the right to buy. That alone will keep up to 15,500 homes in the social sector. The legislation will protect the investment that has been made in social housing over many generations. With the removal of the right to buy, social landlords will now have the confidence to build new homes.

I believe that, despite the challenges that face the house building sector, we are heading in the right direction. The initiatives that have been introduced by the Scottish Government have provided an environment in which the industry can grow with confidence.

Housing has always been an emotional subject. In my many years as a councillor, I was able to help nearly 5,000 people gain council houses. On referendum day, I was humbled by a constituent who thanked me for changing her family's life by helping her to secure a council house many years ago. Yes—we can all work together to secure more housing. Let us do it.

I remember that, in the 1970s—which many here today will not remember—the Labour Party and the Tories continually outbid each other on how many council houses they could build. Let us all work together to build a better type of council house and a better future for the people of Scotland.

16:16

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

The issue of housing supply and the provision of affordable housing is a particular concern in North East Scotland. Aberdeen has seen the highest increase in house prices anywhere in the UK outside London. Rents in the city are among the highest in Scotland, if not the highest. Those problems are not confined to the city, but exist in Aberdeenshire as well. Both local authorities have thousands of people on their waiting lists for social housing. The region as a whole is facing a critical situation in housing, with too many local people unable to get on the housing ladder and thousands on housing waiting lists.

Although the success of the oil and gas industry has undoubtedly boosted our local economy, that brings with it serious cost-of-living issues, and the price of housing is a key factor in that. For those in our community who do not benefit from the prosperity of that industry, it actually makes their situation all the harder. The high cost of housing locally has also made it more difficult for employers to recruit to the area. That problem is most acute in the public sector, which struggles to compete on wages. That has been particularly challenging for our local health services.

One way of addressing the city and shire's cost-of-living issues that has been suggested is an Aberdeen weighting in salaries. I understand that that is being actively considered by ministers, which is welcome. However, the provision of affordable housing and the right strategies from local government and Scottish ministers will also be crucial.

I am pleased that Aberdeen City Council's strategic infrastructure plan sets out proposals that will provide more than 2,000 affordable homes by 2017. That will make a welcome difference. New housing developments in the city will include the provision of affordable homes, which is a welcome change from what happened under previous

council administrations in Aberdeen, where commuted payments were accepted, rather than developers being obliged to deliver 20 per cent of new developments as affordable homes. Often, those payments ended up being returned to the developer. That system was failing the thousands of people in our city who desperately need affordable homes, so I am glad that a new approach is being taken now.

Aberdeen City Council is moving forward on affordable housing, but the policy decisions of Scottish ministers have, in contrast, served only to contribute to the critical lack of housing provision in the area—especially social housing.

Other members have talked about the impact of the cut in the housing budget; it was also a damaging decision to cut the level of the housing association grant. I am pleased that, ultimately, ministers realised their mistake and restored it to a higher level. Nevertheless, the effect of those policy decisions in the North East Scotland is evident in the falling number of new homes being built; there has been a significant reduction. In response to parliamentary questions that I lodged, the minister stated that the amount of housing association grant that was awarded in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire dropped by more than £1.8 million between 2012-13 and 2013-14. Additionally, Scottish Government figures on social sector new-build starts show that, in 2013-14, only 72 houses were being built in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, compared to 484 in 2007-08. Alex Johnstone said that there might be worrying statistics to come. I fear that he may be right.

The scale of the failure of Scottish Government policy to keep up with demand and address that situation is clear, because it is delivering far fewer new homes in North East Scotland than it did before now.

We often hear from SNP members about the delivery of local authority housing as though, important as it is, it is the only form of social housing that matters. The fact is that if someone is waiting for social housing or a house that they can afford, if they cannot afford the home they need and are living in overcrowded conditions or relying on the support of family or friends to put a roof over their head, what matters is getting an affordable home. It does not matter whether the council or a housing association provides it.

That is certainly where the Scottish Government is falling down when it comes to the situation in North East Scotland. What is clear from the figures that I have cited that were given to me by ministers is that in that area Scottish Government policy is not providing new affordable homes in anything like the quantity that we need. There can be no room for complacency or self-congratulation in the Scottish Government's approach to its work

on housing provision because such self-congratulation is simply not justified. Indeed, current policy is contributing to problems with housing costs and provision in North East Scotland.

As the referendum is now past, ministers have a chance to focus on the day job once more and for North East Scotland, which is an area whose economic importance ministers should know well, it is now vital that they concentrate minds and efforts on delivering the new and affordable homes that the region needs.

16:21

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Debates on housing in the Parliament are rarely consensual, with Opposition parties forever saying that the incumbent Government could be doing more. That is always done without recognition of the current austerity budget situation—a 26 per cent cut in real terms between 2010-11 and 2015-16. Those cuts were planned by Alistair Darling and implemented by George Osborne, and we wait to see where the further £25 billion of cuts from Westminster will fall.

In her opening speech, Mary Fee failed to say how many of the 200,000 homes that have been promised by Labour are for England alone or for across the UK. If the latter is the case, how many are planned for Scotland, and how are they to be paid for, given Labour's assertion that it is sticking to the Con-Dem coalition Government's austerity measures and does not intend to increase borrowing? Perhaps Mr Kelly will enlighten us in his closing speech. I do hope so, as a Westminster election looms and the voters deserve nothing less.

Mrs Fee does not like the fact that, despite the Westminster cuts, social housing completions between 2008 and 2014 were up by 20 per cent on the number of completions between 2001 and 2007, and 27,314 new homes were completed. In his intervention on my colleague Jim Eadie, Mr Kelly failed to recognise that this Government is doing more with less money. The Labour Party fails to recognise that a Government can do that by being smarter. Four thousand of those new homes were built with the Government's investment of more than £135 million in the council house building programme, which allowed the SNP administration in Aberdeen from 2007 to 2011 to begin a council house building programme for the first time in a generation, and to build good-quality, sustainable housing. Upwards of 500 units were built in Marchburn, Tillydrone, Cults and other parts of Aberdeen.

Of course we would all like to build more houses and reduce the time that people spend on waiting lists, but we have to live within the fixed budget from Westminster. No Opposition speaker has said where the money might come from, apart from Alex Johnstone. He mentioned the use of pension funds in Aberdeen. The Aberdeen administration includes the Tories—or is it now just one Tory? Have the others left? I am not sure; the picture might have changed since I stood up. The administration in Aberdeen rejected an SNP amendment that proposed using the pension fund to build double the number of houses and instead opted for fewer houses without saying where the money would come from. I say to Mr Baker that that shows great ambition from the Labour-led administration in Aberdeen. The reluctance to invest public body pension funds in the safe bet of housing is disappointing, given that it is public money.

Mr Rowley made a good point about trying to make private and social housing partnerships work. However, does he think that the current section 75 consents work in relation to housing?

Throughout Aberdeen construction is going on everywhere, including office blocks, business parks and housing. All that is happening despite the fact that—if we are to believe our opponents—the oil is about to run out. Yesterday, I visited a private development in Aberdeen. It is a development of more than 350 houses, but only 15 per cent are required to be affordable houses, and they are to be provided in phase 3, which means in three years' time. In the new town of Chapelton of Elrick, the affordable housing element is similarly very low and will come very far down the line.

In 2013, house building in the north-east accounted for 18.7 per cent of all house building in Scotland, but I agree with Richard Baker that far too much of it was high-end housing—not the affordable housing that people need to buy or rent. Do the Minister for Housing and Welfare and the Minister for Local Government and Planning believe that the section 75 system is working to provide the necessary affordable housing?

Housing associations throughout Scotland face a difficult situation, but it is not as difficult as that in England, where the Government contribution can be as low as £1,000 per unit. As with all borrowers, the main problem that housing associations face is the banks. The interest rate for borrowing has gone up substantially and the other terms and conditions are tougher, even when the housing associations are sitting on fairly substantial deposits.

Are housing associations served well by the section 75 consents when they do not really want small pockets of housing within large private

housing estates, which they find very difficult to manage?

To return to Mr Rowley's point, there is some good practice in some parts of the country. A couple of years ago, every house builder was facing a downturn, but I can think of one north-east builder that, in conjunction with the Government, built the affordable housing element of a housing estate first.

Gordon MacDonald mentioned the availability of land and the use of brownfield sites—I totally agree with what he said.

From the bottom of my heart I thank the housing minister, the justice secretary and the finance secretary and their civil servants for taking up my plea to use the vacant site of Craiginches prison for social rented housing for key workers, especially in the health service. I also thank Sanctuary Housing for taking that forward. That is the kind of innovative work—finding new ways of doing things—that this Government is getting on with, rather than griping from the sidelines as the Opposition amendments do. I support the motion.

16:28

Jim Hume: Many speakers have highlighted the housing crisis that we face. We can hardly say that this has been a consensual debate. Maureen Watt emphasised that, and then went on to make probably the least consensual comments of all.

Alex Rowley gave many facts. In particular, he quoted Shelter, which has said that 65,000 households in Scotland are living in overcrowded homes, which I agree is unacceptable.

Hanzala Malik said that there were more than 150,000 people on council house waiting lists. My own research through freedom of information requests found that there are 170,000 live applications for a council house, never mind the housing association waiting lists. Some 33,000 households are still waiting for a council house after five years and 13,000 households have languished on lists for more than 10 years. Since the SNP came to power, 11,000 fewer social rented homes have been available to let.

Ken Macintosh mentioned Audit Scotland, which said that we need an extra half a million new homes in the next 25 years, which is 20,000 per year. In 2007-08, we built just under 26,000, including private houses. In this past year—2013-14—the figure was down to 14,700-odd. There is a dramatic shortfall and it is inevitable that we are facing a crisis.

Jim Eadie, Mike MacKenzie, Margaret Burgess and Stuart McMillan all made us aware of the Scottish Government's flagship commitment to deliver 30,000 affordable homes in this

parliamentary session. As the minister's motion says, the Government has delivered more than 21,000 homes thus far, and it is successfully delivering on its new target. I say "new" because it is not the original target that was promised in the SNP manifesto. That commitment was to deliver 30,000 social rented homes in this parliamentary session, which is 6,000 a year—not the 4,000 a year that are being delivered. After the 2011 election, we had barely unpacked the boxes in our offices before that commitment was significantly watered down.

That is unfortunate when one considers that hundreds of thousands of people are on waiting lists for social rented housing and that thousands of first-time buyers now cannot access Government help and will likely have to delay their plans to purchase a property. The Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland has called for at least 5,500 homes for social rent to be delivered each year as, in its words,

"housing needs projections considerably underestimate actual supply needs".

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

Jim Hume: Sorry, I really do not have time.

We must not forget those who already have a home but whose living conditions may be substandard. Ken Macintosh highlighted that 65,000 households in Scotland live in overcrowded conditions. Living in such conditions with limited personal space and limited peace can lead to significant impacts on a person's health and wellbeing, as well as on family relationships. Unfortunately, the Scottish Government has done nothing to improve that situation, according to the 2012 Scottish house condition survey, which stated that

"The change in the number of households in dwellings below the bedroom standard in Scotland has remained more or less constant"

in the past 10 years.

Jamie Hepburn mentioned substandard properties. It was actually the Lib Dem-Labour Administration that introduced the Scottish housing quality standard to drive up the quality of dwellings that social landlords manage. However, it is clear that the Scottish Government has some work to do, because as recently as the end of March last year more than 100,000 properties in the public sector stock were still failing the standard. I have looked at the latest data available from the Scottish Housing Regulator, and it demonstrates that progress has been made, but it is projected that at least 2,400 properties will still fail the standard at the point when the commitment is due to be met. The majority of those failures—for poor energy efficiency and a lack of modern

facilities—are likely to be the responsibility of just two local authorities. What is the minister doing to ensure that those households are not left behind and do not have to put up with poorly insulated homes and a lack of all the mod cons that we take for granted?

Many speakers mentioned that the referendum is behind us, which I am pleased about.

On insulated homes, the minister mentioned that there will be an extra £4.5 million for retrofitting. That is good, but we need to look at standards for new builds. It is cheaper to make sure that new builds are up to standard than to retrofit them.

Mary Fee was quick to mention the new powers that are coming, which I hope will help us all to consensually work together to deliver better housing for everyone in Scotland.

Marco Biagi, Richard Baker, Sarah Boyack and Gordon MacDonald all mentioned the problem of the expense of inner-city housing and brownfield versus greenfield. There are other issues in more remote areas, which have not been mentioned. For example, in the context of planning, there is often a presumption against housing development.

Unfortunately, the Lib Dems cannot support the Government's motion, as it insults the intelligence of the tens of thousands of people in Scotland who are currently unable to buy a property, rent a social rented home or even escape an overcrowded home. We need to use as many routes to tackle our housing crisis as possible. I concur with the Labour amendment, although we cannot blame the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014; instead, we should blame this Government's lack of governance and prioritisation.

16:34

Alex Johnstone: Sometimes it becomes necessary in a closing speech to start talking about the fundamentals. Having listened to the debate, I think that it is time to do that.

I start by saying something very simple that I have said before in the chamber, so it will be of no surprise to many members: I am not a socialist. Some members may realise that that does not necessarily make me a bad person; conversely, I realise that many in the chamber who would describe themselves as socialists are in fact good people. However, that goes right to the very root of what we have been talking about. I am not a socialist, but I am a capitalist. I believe that the use, preservation and reuse of capital can deliver for us time after time.

Those of us who have talked about capital budgets and capital as if capital was something to be consumed do not understand its nature. It is

money that can be used more than once and, if properly invested, it will grow over time.

The idea that we should ultimately use Government bonds as collateral against borrowing that we use to build houses simply makes no sense to me. Houses should be collateral for their own borrowing. They have a value, and we should not build houses that cannot generate the resource that it costs to service that borrowing—resource that should be returned or recovered at the end of the borrowing period.

Public, affordable or social housing—whatever one wants to call it—is a perfect place for capital to be used properly. Therefore, it is so important that we get away from the tax-and-spend concept as the means of providing affordable housing and start to think about its value in cash, as well more broadly.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I will give way in just a second.

Mike MacKenzie asked where the money would come from, and John Mason asked what we would cut to build the additional houses. Neither of those questions needs to be asked if we understand better where capital can be sourced and how it can be used effectively to build what is vital for society and necessary for those who do not have a home. That can be done through private investment.

John Mason: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: I will take interventions from both members.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will have John Mason first.

John Mason: It is all very well talking about sourcing capital, but such capital is like a loan from which investors must get a better return. However, a grant cuts rent costs.

Alex Johnstone: That is exactly the case, but I know investors who are keen to invest at the rate of return that is available in the marketplace for affordable housing. That could be subsidised by local authorities to provide the necessary social element.

Mike MacKenzie: There is some merit in Alex Johnstone's suggestion about seeking alternative capital sources. However—this is what is of interest to me and I wonder whether he can explain it—in the free market capitalism that he describes and is a fan of, why has the market not provided a housing solution for us? Why is there such a grievous housing shortage?

Alex Johnstone: I am saying that I know investors who want to participate, and local authorities such as Aberdeen and Edinburgh are looking at the possibility of progressing that. They need the Scottish Government's encouragement and support in order to give them the confidence to go ahead with the deals. In many parts of Scotland, the opportunity to build houses is right in front of us.

Richard Baker, in particular, talked about the desperate shortage of affordable housing in Aberdeen. Let us look a little deeper at that. Aberdeen's economic success relies, in many cases, on immigrant labour from eastern Europe. Why is it so much easier to recruit from eastern Europe than it is to recruit from other parts of Scotland? The answer is simple: because of the availability of housing. If we cannot provide affordable housing in Aberdeen, why would anyone from one of Scotland's unemployment black spots choose to move to the north-east to take up the opportunities there?

A number of people, including Hanzala Malik and Jim Hume, mentioned overcrowding, which is a problem in social housing. Many, many people in Scotland are on waiting lists to get into bigger houses that can contain their families. We have been through a difficult period in Scotland during which we talked about the underoccupancy charge—or bedroom tax, as some people call it. The policy's objective was to free up the underoccupied houses that we know that there are in Scotland and to make them available for the people who need them most.

Okay, that phase is in effect behind us now, given that funding is in place to cover the cost. However, that leaves us with the problem of overcrowding. It is time that the Government began to talk to the other parties about how we might encourage people to vacate underoccupied property and deliver larger homes for those who desperately need them.

16:41

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): When I saw that we were going to debate housing supply I welcomed the debate, because housing supply is a major issue in many of our communities and constituencies. However, the Government motion and the minister's opening speech were self-congratulatory in tone and did not address many of the housing issues that we face in our areas.

As happens in such debates, members on all sides have deployed statistics to back up their arguments, but if the minister is to take anything practical from the debate, I hope that she listened to the experiences that members shared, which tell the real story of the housing crisis that we face

in Scotland. Mary Fee told us about the longer waiting lists in 10 of 28 local authorities. Alex Rowley shared the experience of a constituent who is staying in overcrowded and condensation-ridden accommodation in Rosyth. Ken Macintosh told us about a constituent who cannot find affordable social housing and is staying—with two kids—in private rented accommodation, the rent for which is unacceptably high. Jamie Hepburn talked about the slum conditions in some parts of his constituency. Hanzala Malik talked about families who live in overcrowded accommodation. Sarah Boyack and Gordon MacDonald talked about the need for more affordable homes in Edinburgh. Richard Baker noted the unacceptably high rent levels in Aberdeen.

Those are the issues that members shared, which provide a platform from which to find the way forward.

Marco Biagi: I am sure that we all recognise the problem. The Labour amendment

“calls on the Scottish Government to produce a national housing action plan to ensure that these matters are fully addressed.”

With the exception of an extra £200 million, can Mr Kelly suggest one measure that would address the problems that members have described?

James Kelly: If Marco Biagi will allow me to develop my speech, I will move on to that.

We should be exploring how we can tackle the issues and move things forward. To be fair, John Mason tried to do that. First and foremost, there is a drastic shortfall in supply, so we need to consider how we can build more homes and release funding. Alex Rowley talked about using pension funds—he said that the value of local authority pension funds is £24 billion. Surely the Government has to look more closely at the issue and consider how best to release some of those funds to support house building. What matters is not just hard money but the approach that is taken.

Mike MacKenzie: Part of the problem, but not the whole story, is that housing stock has been lost through lack of repair, which has meant that it has eventually had to be demolished. On that basis, does James Kelly support a reduction in VAT to 5 per cent or less on housing repairs and improvements?

James Kelly: Mike MacKenzie can make his suggestion at the appropriate time. We must tackle some of the issues for which we as a Parliament are responsible.

Some SNP members challenged us on how things could be funded. Now that the independence referendum has been settled, we have £2 billion of borrowing powers coming to the

Parliament, which can be used to deal with the housing crisis.

Labour has suggested devolution of housing benefit, which is worth £1.7 billion. We can look at how local authorities could use that better to support house building. Of that, £432 million goes to private landlords. Surely there must be a better way of supporting house building.

In practical terms, we must look at how we use the planning system and follow good practical examples. Alex Rowley spoke about the building of 2,700 homes in Fife. That was not just a case of punting in the money; that was all about how house builders were spoken to and how the best land for acquisition at the cheapest cost was identified. We must look at using examples of best practice from around the country.

We need to address issues in the private rented sector, where the number of properties has doubled to 386,000. The SNP did not support my amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill on security of tenure and tackling rent levels. The minister told us today that the stakeholder group that was set up in May has discussed some of the issues and is looking at taking forward some of them, and that a consultation will take place later in the year. Part of the problem with the SNP Government is that it makes slow progress on identifying issues.

Maureen Watt: Will James Kelly give way?

James Kelly: No. I have taken two interventions and I want to make progress.

Such issues must be addressed.

Ken Macintosh made reasonable practical points about the help to buy scheme. We heard that the money had run out by August and that anybody who has applied since then has not had access to the scheme. People will need to wait until next year, when new moneys will become available, but the £100 million next year will be less than was available this year. The Government needs to look at how the scheme operates. If a set amount of money is available for a year, how does it ensure that the money is released into the market throughout the year and how does it handle that fairly?

In recent times, there has been a lot of talk about a fairer Scotland. All of us in the Parliament want to achieve a fairer Scotland, but it is difficult to achieve that in housing when 150,000 people are on housing waiting lists. It is difficult to get a fairer Scotland when the budgets have been cut by 29 per cent, as Audit Scotland noted. It is difficult to get a fairer Scotland when people stay in accommodation for which rents are going through the roof.

There has been far too much self-congratulation from SNP members. We need more practical action. I hope that the minister has listened to some of the speeches and that she will outline a practical way forward to deal with Scotland's housing crisis.

16:49

Margaret Burgess: There has been a lot of agreement in the debate that housing is a very important matter and a priority for Scotland. There is certainly no complacency on my part or on the part of the Government. We have not suggested for a minute that everything in the garden is rosy. It is because of the demand for housing that, over this session of Parliament, we plan to invest £1.7 billion in affordable housing.

The debate is not about being self-congratulatory; it is about saying that we recognise that housing is important and a priority, because it has an impact on people's lives and communities, and that, out of our very limited resources, we plan to invest £1.7 billion—£1 billion of which has already been invested. When we receive criticism about the shortage of supply and the need for affordable and social housing, it is right for us to say that we have built more social housing than any other Administration.

Sarah Boyack: Will the minister take an intervention?

Margaret Burgess: I will take an intervention soon. A number of points have been made that need responses.

Although it is important for us to say that we are building more houses than previous Administrations did, I did not say that that was enough.

Sarah Boyack: Donald Dewar's ambition was not just to build new houses, but to regenerate, repair and maintain the thousands of houses in Glasgow that were substandard and not fit for purpose.

Margaret Burgess: Nobody is disagreeing with that. We are looking at the standard of housing and we are working on that as well. We have to strike a balance between new houses being built, houses becoming available at affordable rent and houses meeting the needs of communities.

The Scottish Government does not build the houses—it is not a landlord. A number of members mentioned the condition of some houses in their areas and suggested that I go and see them, but I am aware of what has been talked about because the same conditions apply in my constituency. In some instances, that is the result of years of neglect by local authorities, which have not brought properties up to standard. The

Scottish Government is not a landlord, but we are doing what we can to help, through Scottish Government resources, to ensure that houses are brought up to standard. If local authorities and landlords are not doing that, the regulator will report that.

Alex Johnstone talked about local authority pension schemes and the investors. The Scottish Government does not have any control over local authority pension schemes, but we can work with the scheme holders, the local authorities, financiers and others to encourage them to invest in social housing. We have done that and we are doing that just now. We are about to see the first models take off in the Falkirk area and with the Castle Rock Edinvar housing association. It is important to establish a model that others can follow. We have not been sitting back and doing nothing about that; we have been working very hard.

The Scottish Government has in its housing portfolio a financial innovation unit that works its socks off trying to get schemes up and running. That is not easy. It is not about—as Alex Johnstone suggested—an investor saying, "Here's the money. I'll build the houses." It takes a lot of partners—Richard Lyle mentioned the number of partners that are involved in getting a model off the ground. We think that we now have a model that will be an example for other pension funds and providers to follow. That is a step forward. We are always looking for ways to move forward.

There has been some suggestion that I am now back in the day job, but I have never been off the day job. I spend a lot of time looking at developments, talking to tenants and residents about what matters to them, which helps to shape what we do as a Government.

The private sector was mentioned, particularly by the Edinburgh members Marco Biagi, Gordon McDonald and Sarah Boyack. I am very aware that private rent levels are increasing in some parts of Scotland, in particular Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and we are not complacent about that, as I said during the passage of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. We will continue to support affordable rents and will work with the house building industry to increase institutional investment in building more new homes for private rent.

James Kelly: If the Government is not complacent about affordable rents, why has it not launched the consultation to look into the issue when it has had the whole summer to do so?

Margaret Burgess: I was going to come on to the point that James Kelly made that we are too slow in doing things. We believe in consultation—we believe in taking our stakeholders with us. We

want tenants and residents to be on board with what we do. That is why we asked them. We did not just fire out questions to them and say, “Here’s what we are consulting on.” We asked them for their views. We asked the group that we formed for that purpose. We are acting in what we think is the right way. Unless we keep our stakeholders on board and get our proposals right, they will not work for anyone. I do not think that it is wrong for us to believe in consultation. That consultation should be as wide as possible, because this is an important matter.

In addition, through Homes for Scotland, which produced the “Building the Rented Sector in Scotland” report, we have recently funded a private rented sector champion to attract new investment in the private rented sector. We are looking at every possible way of driving housing supply in Scotland, and we will continue to do so.

The devolution of powers from Westminster has been mentioned. As a Government, we have said that we will listen to anything that would improve the lives of people in Scotland. We will wait to see what we get, but we have not shut our minds to anything. It is extremely important that we increase housing supply in Scotland, but none of the Opposition parties has given us any indication of what it would do. We have heard the call for housing to get an additional £200 million per year and the suggestion that the targets be increased, but no indication has been given of how to go about doing that. We will meet our baseline target of providing 6,000 affordable homes per year in the current parliamentary session, and we hope to exceed it. I think that that is the right way to proceed. We have committed to that and we will continue to work towards it.

A number of criticisms of the Scottish Government have been made during the debate. I could not understand where the Liberal Democrats were coming from or where their figures came from; indeed, I could not understand any aspect of their argument. They have a brass neck to talk about increasing capital spending when their colleagues at Westminster cut capital spending and cut the Scottish budget. That must be recognised.

Alex Rowley made the point that action on housing involves not just the Scottish Government but local authorities and other partners. I made it clear at the outset that we cannot do this alone and that we must have the stakeholders—local authorities, housing associations, tenants, residents groups, developers, Homes for Scotland and homelessness organisations—on board with us. We consult everyone who is involved in housing in Scotland at every opportunity, and we will continue to do that. More important, we also listen to them, which helps us to shape where we

are going. Organisations such as Shelter produce evidence that we can look at and on the basis of which we can move forward.

I said that we will hold a major housing event on 18 November. All our stakeholders have been on board in the development of that event. We will continue to keep them on board, and they will help us as we develop our proposals on how to move forward on housing and how we deliver.

Hanzala Malik: Will the minister give way?

Margaret Burgess: I will not take any more interventions; I have taken several.

We have heard the bad stories of poor housing conditions. I recognise that that is a challenge for people who are still waiting for new homes. It is no consolation to them to hear us talk about people who have new homes. However, we must recognise the work that has been done. I have travelled throughout Scotland and have seen some of the initiatives that the Scottish Government has progressed.

I will give some examples. Melville Housing Association has developed new houses for social rent, which are very similar to the owner-occupied properties in the development—it is not possible to tell the difference between them—and the tenants are absolutely delighted with them. I spoke to an elderly couple in Doune who had got a new social rented house and they said to me that if, years earlier, they had planned what kind of house they wanted to live in in their retirement, the house that they had just got was what they would have wanted, and that they could not have got anything better. That struck home.

That is what we are trying to do for everyone in Scotland. We have that ambition for everyone: our ambition is that everyone should live in a house that they can afford, that is safe and warm and which meets their needs.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is decision time. There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Mary Fee is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alex Johnstone falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-11023.1, in the name of Mary Fee, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11023, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on housing supply, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 44, Against 71, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-11023.3, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11023, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on housing supply, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 15, Against 100, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-11023.2, in the name of Jim Hume, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11023, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on housing supply, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 4, Against 111, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-11023, in the name of Margaret Burgess, on housing supply, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 60, Against 52, Abstentions 2.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that housing is and will remain a high priority for the current administration; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government plans to spend over £1.7 billion on affordable housing in the current parliamentary session, which will support an estimated 8,000 jobs each year, and has delivered 21,322 affordable homes, including 15,088 social rented homes; notes that

Scotland is outperforming other parts of the UK, with the rates of all home completions and social housing completions much higher than the equivalent in England or Wales; acknowledges that the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 will protect the existing stock of social rented homes by ending the right to buy and enable social landlords to do more to help people in need of social housing; welcomes these achievements by the Scottish Government, despite the drastic reduction in its capital budget over the current spending review period as a result of the UK Government's spending cuts, and calls on the UK Government to increase capital spending so that the Scottish Government can make a greater investment in housing.

Talladh-a-Bheithe Wind Farm (Objections)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-10744, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on objections to the proposed Talladh-a-Bheithe wind farm and national planning framework 3. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes objections to the planned Talladh-a-Bheithe wind farm on Rannoch Moor from the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and the John Muir Trust; considers that, if granted, the Talladh-a-Bheithe project will be visually detrimental to an area of outstanding natural beauty and one that is included in Scottish Natural Heritage's wild land map; believes that the 24 turbines planned for two kilometres north of the Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon National Scenic Area will be visible from 30 Munros and Corbetts, including the popular Schiehallion mountain; understands that this case presents the Scottish Government with its first real test following the announcement of the Third National Planning Framework (NPF3), in which 19% of Scotland was identified as national parks and national scenic areas and therefore out of bounds to developers, and notes calls for the Scottish Government to reaffirm its commitment to preserving Scotland's precious natural heritage.

17:06

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

I start by thanking colleagues from across the Parliament who signed my motion and enabled this debate to take place. I welcome to the public gallery those who have come along to watch the debate, among whom are members of the John Muir Trust and people from the community in Rannoch. The trust, Ramblers Scotland and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland have all been vocal in support of the motion, as has the local campaign group, keep Rannoch wild.

I appreciate that it is unusual to have a parliamentary debate on a live planning application. I also appreciate that, in responding to the debate, the minister's remarks on the subject will be somewhat limited and that he will be unable to say anything that could prejudice the outcome of the planning application. However, this particular application raises important issues and I wanted an opportunity to highlight them and enable the Parliament to discuss them.

In my view and that of many other interested parties, the Talladh application represents a test case to determine whether the Scottish Government is serious about protecting our wild land. The proposal is for 24 turbines of 125m in a moorland area between Loch Rannoch and Loch Erich. Crucially, the turbines that are proposed for the site would be erected in an area that Scottish

Natural Heritage has identified on its map as wild land. Anyone who has visited the location will understand why it has done that. Rannoch Moor is at the very heart of wild Scotland, and there are views from more than 30 Munros and Corbetts that would be irreversibly affected if the application got the green light. I use the word “irreversibly” advisedly, because although the turbines might be temporary, the infrastructure that goes with them, such as the tracks—I understand that in this case there would be some 12.8km of access tracks—would be visible for a lifetime if not longer.

A few weeks ago, I climbed some of the hills to the north of Ben Alder. This area is as close as we get in the central Highlands to a true wilderness and it would be a tragedy to see it despoiled with an industrial development.

This debate is important for not only the communities in the area around the proposed Talladh wind farm, but the 41 other areas across Scotland that Scottish Natural Heritage identifies as wild land. Their unspoilt status is also now in question. I use the term “our wild land” deliberately. Scotland’s wild places are a gift to everyone in this country and they should not be sacrificed for the sake of some additional megawatts of renewable energy, particularly when existing and consented renewable energy projects are very close to reaching the 2020 electricity generation target.

The Talladh application is attracting a huge amount of interest both locally and nationally. The Scottish Government has received nearly 1,000 statements in opposition to the development, in contrast with just 23 in support. Those statements have come from all parts of the country; indeed, some are international. There is also, however, local opposition to the application. A recent survey that was undertaken by the Rannoch and Tummel community council showed that three quarters of local residents oppose the proposals. Many of those in opposition have livelihoods that depend on tourist revenue, earned thanks to the natural beauty of the area. For example, more than 30,000 people a year climb the popular Schiehallion mountain and walking tourism is a major contributor to the local economy.

Diana Gabaldon, author of the *Outlander* books—which are now a TV series being filmed in Scotland—has also voiced her opposition. She has said that we cannot put a price on our landscape and believes that, if approved, the development will be a “tragedy” and a “disaster” for wild Scotland.

In its submission on the application, Scottish Natural Heritage highlights the “significant damage” the development would have on the Rannoch moor peatlands and blanket bog—

features that have been identified as nationally important under Scottish planning policy.

SNH has also given a damning verdict on the diligence of the environmental statement attached to the application and believes that, if approved, the peatlands and blanket bog resource would be “permanently lost”. That is important because peatlands are carbon sinks, and destroying them to build wind farms is an illogical move that could result in higher rather than lower carbon emissions.

I will concentrate the remainder of my remarks on SNH’s wild land map and what that means. Just over two months ago, the Scottish Government released its third national planning framework, which included a commitment to protect 19 per cent of our landscape from onshore wind turbines. When announcing NPF3, the Minister for Local Government and Planning, Mr Mackay, assured the Scottish public that

“We have taken steps to ensure that no wind farm developments can go ahead in our cherished National Parks and National Scenic Areas, and we have strengthened the protection of wild land”.

However, the Talladh wind farm would be located just 2km north of the Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon national scenic area.

At the time, I cautioned that the guidelines do not go far enough, as developments would still be possible on wild land. In 2013, that was confirmed by comments from the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse, who said:

“Wind farms could be built—”

on wild land—

“but only if substantial mitigation were to be put in place”.—
[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 28 May 2013; c 1372.]

Many will have seen the recently published map from the John Muir Trust highlighting the visual encroachment of wind farms across most of southern and eastern Scotland and, indeed, increasingly in the Highlands. If approved, the Talladh wind farm would substantially add to the parts of Scotland from which wind turbines would be visible, and one of the last truly wild places in Scotland would join the long list of casualties that have fallen to the impact of wind turbines.

I would like to hear the minister say, in responding to the debate, that the site is unsuitable for a development of this nature, but I appreciate that he is prohibited from making that statement. Instead, it would be helpful if he could clarify the precise status of the SNH wild land map and in what circumstances renewable energy projects would be permitted on the wild lands identified.

The Scottish Government talks tough on protecting wild land and this application represents its chance to prove it. We have heard a lot from the Scottish National Party over the past week about honouring vows and promises. It is now time for the Government to honour its commitment to protecting Scotland's precious wild land.

17:13

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing this evening's debate. Although I am not a local member for the area affected by the wind farm proposal, the debate gives me an opportunity to revisit an issue that I raised in March in relation to the failure of NPF3 to set out how much we can protect our wild lands. In that debate, I noted that the NPF3 "Main Issues Report" of April 2013 stated:

"In addition to our nationally important, most scenic, landscapes, we also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes."

Yet for all of those welcome words, the core area of the wild land map was removed from NPF3. That was a grave omission and is one of the main reasons why the debate that Mr Fraser has brought before Parliament this evening has to happen.

If we do not recognise the need to protect our nationally important and scenic landscapes, those areas of Scotland will continue to fall victim to the onward march of the renewables industry at the expense of our natural environment. I make it clear that I am not opposed to wind farms in principle: I fully accept that they have a part to play in our future energy production capacity. However, I am far from convinced that the right balance is being struck between wind farm development and the protection of our wild lands.

As I said in March, I cannot agree with Scottish Renewables that NPF3 presents a significant risk and would create a barrier to the economic and environmental benefits that renewables could bring to Scotland. The reality is that our natural landscape, not the renewables industry, is at risk if we fail to ensure its protection. If we do not site wind farms appropriately, we will continue to lose more of Scotland's greatest natural assets.

If the plan for the proposed Talladh wind farm is approved, it will undoubtedly transform Rannoch for the worse. As Murdo Fraser said, it will adversely affect views of more than 30 Munros and Corbetts, with the wind turbines being visible from the west Highland railway line and the A82, which—as everyone knows—is the main tourist route through the west Highlands.

If a developer was to suggest building a multistorey building taller than Glasgow's Red

Road flats on Rannoch Moor, they would get laughed out of any planning committee, and yet there is a proposal to put turbines that are taller than those flats on that natural landscape because we have no proper control over the siting of wind farms in Scotland. The threat that a wind farm would pose to that particular Highland vista is concerning enough in itself, but the harm that would be done to rare bird species is equally worrying.

The proposed development is located almost entirely within an area of deep peat and priority peatland. The Scottish planning policy 2014 identifies the habitat as being "nationally important" and worthy of "significant protection".

Rannoch's reputation for natural beauty is the main driver of tourism to the area, and it is hard to see how that reputation will not be damaged. It is one of Scotland's last great wild land areas and the need to protect it will be a major test of Scotland's planning framework. If the land cannot be protected by using NPF3, what other wild land area can be protected? Which area will be next on the agenda for our renewables companies?

17:17

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, although I did not sign the motion because I cannot agree with it.

We should look at the history of the Loch Rannoch area over 300 years. It was a cattle-herding and small-tenant area that was swept away by the 1745 uprising—fortunately, the forfeited estates commission managed to save part of the black wood of Rannoch on the south side of the loch. As the Forestry Commission says, it is one of the largest areas of the ancient pine forest that once stretched across Britain and Europe, and which we hope to expand again.

Alexander MacKenzie, who compiled "The History of the Highland Clearances", was informed by a correspondent that in the 1830s a large amount of clearance took place along the north side of Loch Rannoch. The book details those places, some of which are in the Talladh-a-Bheithe estate.

People were removed, although there were still some families there, which brings us forward to the discussion in 1885 that preceded the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act 1886. The members for Perthshire, Banffshire, Bute and Aberdeenshire kept their areas out of the crofting law. The law ensured that there would be communities in those areas, as there still are in most crofting areas; it is a pity that Rannochside was not one of them.

Today's landlords know that shooting and fishing alone will not pay their running costs, hence they look for other uses of their natural resources and make wind farm applications. That is occurring in the context of a renewed concern for land reform, which I hope will lead to taxes on landowners of large properties, including Talladh-a-Bheithe. That is one example of income that could be generated in the form of taxes, which such landowners probably do not pay at the moment or perhaps pay in another country.

After the second world war, forestry and hydro schemes gave employment, but the local population kept dwindling. Today, just over 30 pupils are to be found in the local primary school and nursery. It is very likely that, under the current economic system, 99 per cent of those young people will leave their home area for education and careers and will never return. Should local people not benefit from the development of natural resources such as wind power? Should they not have the benefit of a cash source that is constant and that is not affected by potential cuts in local and national government funding, such as those that are threatened by the Tory-Lib Dem austerity programme, which is set to bite even deeper in the next few years?

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: No—I do not want to take any interventions.

We have a fragile community that should benefit under Scottish Government spatial planning guidelines, which aim to create a low-carbon place, a natural place to invest, a successful and sustainable place and a connected place. That is how the Minister for Local Government and Planning and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change see the issue. During consideration of NPF3, they told the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee that

“In their view the identification of land as a core area of wild land does not mean that there is a ban on development taking place, development can still take place as long as it can be done in a way that it is fully mitigated and the environment can be protected.”

The clinching factor is the inexorable pressure of climate change. The clearances removed the small farming economy, while the lure of the city robbed small places of their most basic services. Now, climate change, if unmitigated, could destroy the very scenery that some people talk about. I have climbed Schiehallion, Ben Alder, Meall a' Bhùiridh and many other hills in the area. We have to take into account the distance between many of those things and any proposed wind farm. It is a pity to pity the plumage and forget the dying bird. As far as I am concerned, the socioeconomic issues and the potential for a small community to

expand rather than dwindle must be looked at seriously.

17:22

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The proposed wind farm is not in my region and will not particularly affect my constituents on a daily basis, but the consequences of its approval, if it happens, will be felt far and wide. If the wind farm proceeds, it will be viewed as having met the conditions of the new planning framework and Scottish planning policy, which stipulate that

“any significant effects on the qualities of these areas”

must be

“substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation.”

How on earth can we design out the impact of 100m-plus high turbines against the background of one of Scotland's most rugged and wild landscapes? That is a very basic question that we have to ask.

I wanted to speak in the debate to highlight the concerns of my constituents about their landscape, which is very different from that around Loch Rannoch. For the people of villages such as West Calder, Kirknewton, Addiewell, Longridge and Fauldhouse, their landscape is just as cherished. It is an insult, whether it comes from planners or whoever, to infer that their natural heritage has any less value than any other natural heritage.

At this point, it seems appropriate to refer to a letter that I have kept for around 15 years. It is the evidence that was presented by Mrs Mary Allison of Blackridge in West Lothian to a planning inquiry into an opencast coal application that affected the village that she grew up in. Mary's contribution is as relevant today in relation to wind farm development as it was then in relation to opencast development, so I would like members to listen to what she said.

Of the so-called experts who are paid to provide evidence to any inquiry, she said:

“Many of the presentations (heard prior to mine) have the lure of scientific objectivity. However, I would contend that these presentations do not give us answers. They provide a collection of research facts which are neither wrong or right, they are simply facts that have no meaning until we bring our values and judgements to their interpretation. The developer”—

we can say the wind farm developer in the scenario that we are discussing—

“has a set of corporate values, the government has a set of political values, the community a set of community values. None of these are of value free, neutral or objective. We see each in a different light because we stand to gain or lose different things from the proposal. I would contend that the community can only lose—any economic gain will be

short term whilst the longer term consequences will be negative."

Speaking of her community, Mary—a senior research fellow—said:

"These landscapes and experiences are what gave me my sense of place in the world—where I came from, the communities that made me. These are valuable to me and could never be recreated."

That is the same irrespective of where we live. Beauty and the value that we place on our community are in the eye of the beholder. I love the Five Sisters shale bing in West Lothian just as much as I love the landscape that we are discussing. We might be here to debate the construction of a wind farm on Rannoch Moor but, as of today, 12 wind farms housing 83 turbines have been given approval to go ahead and are operational in West Lothian.

The problem with the Scottish Government's wind farm policy is overconcentration, which I fear may happen with the wind farm at Talladh-a-Bheithe. When one application succeeds, the developers pile in with a whole lot more applications and communities feel under siege. It is a free-for-all, and I fear that it will get worse under the new planning policy.

That is not to dismiss the necessary move towards renewable energy. It is vital that Scotland plays its part in reducing carbon emissions. However, one of the main issues is ownership. The application that we are discussing is by Eventus BV, a Dutch company—probably a Dutch multinational. The applications in my area come from Spanish, French, Italian and Danish multinationals. A recent one came from an Austrian prince. None of those wind farms is owned by the community, local government or the public sector. Therefore, the money flutters off to the boardrooms of Madrid, Paris, Rome, Copenhagen or wherever.

We need a national spatial plan that avoids overconcentration and the ruination of natural landscapes such as Rannoch Moor while ensuring that, when we have wind farm development, communities are rewarded for wind technology being applied in their area. We need a plan that takes into account everybody's views in Scotland. Each voice should be heard on an equal footing and each community's view should be respected.

The Scottish Government must be careful, because its imbalanced and mismanaged pursuit of renewable energy targets is turning people against renewable energy. That is very dangerous. What I can say is that some of the applications in my area are as likely to turn people against wind farm development as the Talladh-a-Bheithe application is in Rannoch.

17:28

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): As has been mentioned, the Scottish ministerial code is clear that I must take particular care to avoid conflicts of interest when dealing with planning matters, including the granting of energy consents.

This is the second time in recent months that a members' business debate that focused on a live planning application has come forward. It is well-known that ministers cannot comment publicly on live planning applications because that could prejudice the final decision. Therefore, I have concerns that such debates have been conducted.

I should also make it clear that the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, who cannot attend today, takes decisions on applications under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and, rightly, as the code states, I cannot publicly express an opinion on a particular case that is before ministers for decision.

Following the debate, I will write to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to seek its views on whether the guidance on motions and amendments can be reviewed in the light of Parliament's accepting for debate motions on live planning applications.

No current planning decision should be considered as setting a precedent. Future proposed developments will be assessed on their own merits, given the unique circumstances of each case, and always in the context of relevant policy and guidance.

Neil Findlay: So, despite all the talk about an open Parliament discussing and debating the issues of the day, we are now to get a political fix that prevents us from discussing the issues that all the people in the public gallery want to discuss.

Derek Mackay: That is quite an unfortunate intervention, when what I am trying to do is uphold the integrity of the planning system, which should work in a way that inspires confidence in the system. If we indulge in quasi-judicial debates in the chamber, that risks the rights of objectors within the planning system as well.

To his credit, Murdo Fraser has raised issues of concern and due parliamentary process in terms of the committees studying national planning framework 3 and Scottish planning policy. Neil Findlay has not taken the same approach in terms of supporting the changes to SPP and NPF3. I suggest that, if Neil Findlay objects to Scottish planning policies, he should do so on the basis of policy objections in the right place, as opposed to trying to use mechanisms that might be counterproductive to the people he seeks to represent.

Michael McMahon: Will the minister give way?

Derek Mackay: I need to make progress on the issues that have been raised. If Michael McMahon wants to come in later, when I have made further progress, I will be happy to take his intervention then.

I want to emphasise the clear position that I set out when I published national planning framework 3 and the Scottish planning policy in June. On all matters, I appeared before Parliament and offered to return to the committees of Parliament on any matter of policy. NPF3 is quite clear. It says:

“National Scenic Areas and National Parks attract many visitors and reinforce our international image. We also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes—wild land is a nationally important asset ...

The pressing challenge of climate change means that our action on the environment must continue to evolve, strengthening our longer-term resilience. A planned approach to development helps to strike the right balance between safeguarding assets which are irreplaceable, and facilitating change in a sustainable way. We must work with, not against, our environment to maintain and further strengthen its contribution to society.”

In setting that out in NPF3, supporting delivery of a low-carbon place, the new Scottish planning policy provides clear guidance on the preparation of spatial frameworks for onshore wind energy development. Parliament did not comment on the detail in that policy, but called for greater clarity. Therefore, I will clearly state again that the Scottish Government has stated that wind farms will not be acceptable in national parks and national scenic areas. That is our policy.

I also set out in the Scottish planning policy that I expect significant protection to be given to national and international designations such as Natura 2000 sites; other nationally important mapped environmental interests, such as wild land; and an area around settlements in which visual impacts need to be considered. That is our policy.

Proposals outside national scenic areas still have to be assessed for their impacts on landscape, including effects on wild land. Not only do those new policies provide certainty about our natural heritage interests and parity for our communities, they set out a clear approach to planning for onshore wind that I expect to see in development plans across the country. It is an approach that is appropriate to the scale of development.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the minister for setting out all of that on the record. Could he specifically address the point that I made towards the end of my speech and tell us in what circumstances he could see a renewable energy project being permitted in an area that is designated as wild land?

Derek Mackay: I am being careful to avoid reference to any live application, but I believe that the detail is set out in NPF3 and SPP. All those considerations have to be taken into account and a judgment made.

I reinforce the point that one decision is not a precedent for another. Every case must be judged on its merits, with all the relevant material considerations to hand. It would, therefore, be wrong for me to pick a live application or a hypothetical situation to make the policy point, when I believe that the policy guidance is much stronger and supportive of the environment than it was before—a point on which a number of organisations, including the John Muir Trust, agree.

On a related point, it is the responsibility of planning authorities to prepare spatial frameworks. Since the publication of SPP, many such frameworks are in preparation and my officials are working closely with planning authorities as they come through our development plan gateway, and as proposed plans head towards examination. We are working closely with our environment agencies, industry representative bodies and planning practitioners and all others across Scotland, either face to face, in gatherings, at events, or by conducting research on the impacts of onshore wind developments. We will continue to draw on verifiable evidence in order to implement those policies in such a way as to ensure that we steer development to the right places, so that benefits are not outweighed by negative impacts.

In relation to climate change and decarbonising our electricity production, the Scottish Government has made its energy policy a top priority and it has achieved great progress despite having limited responsibilities. The industry has expanded rapidly during the past decade, bringing millions of pounds of investment to areas throughout Scotland, and empowering often remote rural communities to the tune of £13.5 billion since 2010. The renewables sector now supports at least 11,695 jobs in Scotland, approximately 3,000 of which are in skilled engineering jobs. Some companies report rising tender activity during the past three months, which is showing scope to return to the same workload level as in 2013.

Reducing energy demand by 12 per cent by 2020 and focusing on energy efficiency are important elements of our efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions. We want to meet at least 30 per cent of overall energy demand from renewables by 2020.

I hope that members agree with me about the importance of the direction of travel in relation to renewables so that we can strike the right balance. Climate change is a huge challenge and we saw demonstrations across the globe just last week. Climate change mitigation is a European

obligation and our domestic climate change legislation needs to secure decarbonisation of the energy sector, underpinned by efforts to meet the range of targets that I have just mentioned.

I am by no means implying that all onshore wind proposals will gain planning permission. Of the 310 wind turbine related planning appeals that have come in since May 2007, 194 or 62 per cent were refused and 116, or 38 per cent, were allowed. Ministers refuse or modify inappropriately scaled wind farms routinely and, of course, ministers will consent to appropriately scaled and located wind farms, too. To demonstrate our balanced approach, Parliament need look no further than the policies that I supported when I published NPF3 and SPP. They are designed to secure the right development in the right places and to protect our natural and built heritage and communities in equal measure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes Murdo Fraser's members' business debate, but before I close this meeting of Parliament, I note the minister's intention to write to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee about the issues. That is a matter for the Scottish Government, but with regard to the debate this evening, parliamentary business, including members' business, was agreed by the Parliamentary Bureau and by the Parliament.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

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