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Official Report

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Thursday 30 October 2014

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 30 October 2014

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

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good morning. Question 1 is in the name of Michael McMahon. Michael has been unavoidably detained, so we will go right to question 2.

Revenge Pornography

2. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to protect people from the impact of revenge pornography. (S4O-03622)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Distributing and publishing revenge porn is a despicable crime, especially as it is often motivated by an intention to humiliate the victim. That is why the Scottish Government considers that there is a strong case for creating a specific offence to make it illegal to share explicit, intimate images without consent and we intend to seek views on the matter soon. A bespoke criminal offence would assist prosecutors and send a clear signal to society that such behaviour is criminal.

There are, however, existing laws that prosecutors can use when prosecuting the distribution of explicit images of another person without their consent. For example, offences of threatening and abusive behaviour or improper use of a public communications network may apply. Prosecutors are committed to ensuring that these criminal activities are effectively dealt with.

Christina McKelvie: The cabinet secretary will be aware that I have been campaigning against revenge porn for a number of years. Scottish Women's Aid has recently restarted its stop revenge porn Scotland campaign, with the tagline:

"It is not your fault, we are here for you."

The cabinet secretary talked about a bespoke criminal offence, which is something that I am very interested in. I hope that he will look at that very carefully. He also mentioned existing laws. I am concerned whether prosecutors are using the existing laws. What education is being put in place to ensure that prosecutors are using the laws that are at their disposal now? Will he commit to work with Scottish Women's Aid on the bespoke criminal offence, to ensure that we stamp this thing out for good?

Kenny MacAskill: I am aware of Christina McKelvie's campaigning on the issue and of her debate in Parliament on it. She has been prescient in leading on the requirement for action. We have entered into discussions with Scottish Women's Aid and the Lord Advocate has been pivotal in leading on the issue.

I assure Christina McKelvie that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is aware of the complexity of the issue. It understands the great harm that revenge porn causes, because Scottish Women's Aid liaises with it. For that reason, prosecutors are advised, schooled and trained on the current laws that are available. However, the Lord Advocate believes that a bespoke offence would be better, as it would make things simpler and more straightforward for prosecutors.

I assure Christina McKelvie that we will work on all these areas. We will use the appropriate laws that we have at present to the best of our abilities and ensure that people in the police and the Crown are properly apprised of them and properly trained and schooled. I also give the assurance that we are seeking to consult on a bespoke offence. The devil is always in the detail, but we are aware that other jurisdictions are proceeding to bring in such legislation. It is something that we must consider and we will do so positively.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

3. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government in relation to the transatlantic trade and investment partnership. (S4O-03623)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Scottish ministers have discussed the TTIP with the UK Government at meetings of the joint ministerial committee in March and October this year. In addition, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has been in correspondence with the UK Secretary of State for Health regarding concerns about the impact of TTIP on the Scottish national health service. Officials are actively engaging with UK Government officials about the progress of the negotiations and any potential implications for Scotland.

Roderick Campbell: I have seen a copy of the letter from Vince Cable, at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, to members of Parliament at the House of Commons, dated 22 September. I do not know whether the minister has had the opportunity to consider that letter, but is he happy with the UK Government's assurances on, in particular, the substance of the interstate dispute settlement provisions? Does the Scottish

Government have a view on the transparency of the negotiations that are taking place?

Fergus Ewing: As Mr Campbell is aware, my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing is primarily dealing with this. My understanding is that assurances have been sought from the European Commission and the UK Government. The response from the European Commission has been encouraging; the response from the UK Government lacks an unequivocal assurance that the NHS will remain as it is and will not potentially be open to being sued for not going down the privatisation route. That is something on which we are still seeking cast-iron assurances from the UK Government.

Wild Fisheries Review

4. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it will take forward the recommendations of the wild fisheries review. (S4O-03624)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): The independent wild fisheries review, which was chaired by Andrew Thin, submitted its thorough and wide-ranging report to me on 8 October.

This Government takes seriously the conservation status of our wild fisheries and is determined to ensure that the management of our fisheries is fit for purpose for the 21st century. I have committed to considering the review's report and recommendations in depth and to consulting on proposals for a new management system for our wild fisheries in due course, to ensure a sustainable future for the sector.

Jamie McGrigor: I am encouraged by the minister's answer.

One of the recommendations of the review is that we halt the decline in Atlantic salmon stocks. Recent reports from the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization point to a decline in Atlantic salmon numbers at sea from 10 million to 3.6 million, and the percentage of salmon smolts that return to Scottish rivers has dropped alarmingly in recent years. What will the Scottish Government do to improve the situation and fulfil its international obligations to conserve salmon stocks? Should it follow the example of Ireland, which in 2007 brought its drift-netting regulations into line with scientific advice and evidence? Will the Scottish Government do the same with net harvesting of mixed-stock fisheries? Can the minister inform me about a timetable for progress on the review's recommendations?

Paul Wheelhouse: The member asked a few questions there, Presiding Officer. I hope that your patience will be on display as I answer.

Conservation of salmon stocks is important. We have announced a preliminary move on the close season, putting measures that have been adopted on a voluntary basis on a mandatory footing. The member will be aware that we are taking that forward across Scotland for the period to 1 April; we will consult on the issue shortly.

We have also had conversations with colleagues in Norway, Iceland and Chile, which face similar challenges with high mortality rates for salmon. It is fair to say that there is a degree of uncertainty about the causes of mortality. Suggestions have been made and we need to do more research collectively. I am looking forward to collaborating with the Governments in Chile and Norway on how we take forward a common agenda on research into the conservation status of the species.

Issues such as netting were considered in the review. Andrew Thin has made recommendations, which we are considering, about the future management of netting activity. I merely say to Mr McGrigor that the circumstances in Ireland and England are different from those in Scotland in that we must take into consideration the fact that there are heritable rights to netting in Scotland. We take very seriously our obligations on the conservation of salmon and other species.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson, you may have a supplementary if you promise to ask one question.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. My question is a short one. Given that we should welcome demand for more beats among young anglers and in the wider angling community, how will the Scottish Government develop the proposals in the wild fisheries review for an angling for all programme?

Paul Wheelhouse: That is an important aspect of Andrew Thin's review. We are keen that the sport of angling should have a viable future. It is a popular sport, but we are aware that there are difficulties for young people in accessing opportunities to enter the sport and difficulties in ensuring that there is adequate provision for the general population to enjoy the sport sustainably, with conservation of species in mind. I assure the member that we are looking closely at such issues. I am aware of the proposal that he mentioned and we will make recommendations in due course.

Tata Steel (Sale of Long Products Division)

5. Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it has offered employees affected by Tata Steel's sale of its long products division, which has

operations in Dalzell and Clydebridge. (S4O-03625)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): This is a worrying time for the employees of Tata Steel and their families. On learning of the announcement by Tata Steel, Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment, spoke with John Park, strategy and policy director at the Community trade union, which represents the majority of the Scottish workforce. Yesterday, I spoke with John to maintain our close links with the workforce and to discuss the emerging situation, and I have agreed to meet him for further discussions.

I have also spoken to David Mundell MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, regarding the concerns of the workforce in Scotland, and I have followed that up with a letter to Vince Cable, underlining our commitment to working together with the United Kingdom Government to safeguard jobs and investment in Scotland. Finally, Scottish Enterprise has maintained its dialogue with Tata Steel and is engaging with the Klesch Group. At present, there has been no announcement of any impact on jobs. However, we continue to closely monitor developments and stand ready to support the workforce.

Clare Adamson: What assurances can be obtained that, if the Klesch Group successfully buys the Tata Scottish operations, jobs will be maintained in the Scottish sites?

Fergus Ewing: I am not sure that I picked up the precise wording of the question, but I assure the member that we will leave no stone unturned and will do everything possible to preserve and protect jobs in Scotland—that is a priority for us. Across the Scottish Government, we will do everything within our power to maintain steel production in Scotland.

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): I appreciate the minister's involvement in the issue so far, but I think that everybody would agree that any takeover raises concerns and that on this occasion those concerns could well be justified because Klesch has a reputation for asset stripping and dumping companies, which poses a threat to steelworkers in Motherwell and Cambuslang, and to Scottish manufacturing in the wider economy. Although the minister has had consultations, has he directly asked for a meeting with both Tata and Klesch to try to remove the concerns of the people I represent in Motherwell and Wishaw?

Fergus Ewing: I had discussions with Tata when I visited the Scottish sites, and we of course continue to engage closely with the companies.

However, the primary responsibility and need at the moment is for Scottish Enterprise through Lena Wilson, its chief executive, to pursue discussions directly with both Tata and the Klesch Group. I can assure Mr Pentland, first, that we will keep him fully informed of all developments, as Angela Constance made clear at the outset; and, secondly, that I will personally liaise extremely closely with Lena Wilson on the work that Scottish Enterprise will do. It is essential that we do everything that we can to maintain steel production in Scotland. We of course rely on the UK Government to work closely and fully co-operate with us, and we will make sure, within our power, that that happens as well.

Dog Ownership (Consultation)

6. Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what control measures it is considering following its recent consultation on promoting responsible dog ownership. (S4O-03626)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): As the member will know, the consultation focused on a range of issues to promote responsible dog ownership, including compulsory microchipping, licensing, muzzling and dog fouling. It also provided an opportunity to suggest alternative measures to foster responsible dog ownership. There was a good response to the consultation, with over 2,000 responses submitted. Analysis of the responses is now complete and we will publish the analysis report on the Scottish Government website tomorrow.

I am sure that the member will wish to read the report in due course, but what I can say now is that there appears to be wide support for compulsory microchipping, little support for compulsory muzzling and mixed views on some of the other measures in the consultation. The Government will now of course carefully consider those views and we will seek to announce our response and next steps in the near future.

Paul Martin: As the minister is aware, I want to work with the Government, as I am sure all members in the chamber do, to ensure that we take this issue forward. However, it has been over a year since Broagan McCuaig was attacked in my constituency. What action will the minister take so that we in the chamber can take forward proposals that will allow us to make an everlasting commitment to give our communities maximum protection from irresponsible dog owners and dangerous dogs?

Richard Lochhead: Of course, it is exactly in response to the horrific incidents in the member's constituency and elsewhere in Scotland that we are taking these issues very seriously and have

conducted a wide-ranging consultation on a number of measures that could make a real difference. We have to balance the interests of animal welfare with public safety and we will give careful consideration to the measures, but I assure the member and the rest of the Parliament that the Government is taking the issues very seriously indeed and we will bring forward measures as quickly as we can.

Rail Services (Kilmarnock to Edinburgh)

7. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in introducing a direct rail service from Kilmarnock to Edinburgh. (S4O-03627)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): Through the next ScotRail franchise, Kilmarnock will benefit from the extension of the new two-hourly services from Stranraer, which will provide eight services a day in each direction, enabling connection to Glasgow via Barrhead.

In addition, the extension of the Stranraer to Ayr services to Kilmarnock offers increased connection via Dumfries to Carlisle. This route will further benefit from more services from December 2017, catering provision from December 2015, scenic trains, new platform waiting shelters, increased cycle storage and rolling stock refresh, including the fitting of auto door closing and wi-fi, plus the more general roll-out of smart card and fares initiatives.

Throughout the life of the franchise, we will continue to work closely with the franchisee in the review of current service levels and demand as we seek to identify even more improvements for passengers.

Willie Coffey: The minister is fully aware that a direct service with reduced journey times to the capital would create employment opportunities for my constituents and that it might not require much investment in the existing rail infrastructure. Will he agree to meet me to discuss the matter further and see how we might take it forward?

Keith Brown: The member has been a staunch champion of improvements to the services, some of which I have outlined, and I am sure that that was noticed by the franchise bidders during the process. Some of the longer-term improvements involve infrastructure and also timetabling, but I am more than happy to meet him to discuss the matter.

Transvaginal Mesh Implants

8. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has suspended

the use of transvaginal mesh implants. (S4O-03628)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): In line with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's announcement on 17 June, the acting chief medical officer wrote to all health boards on 20 June requesting that they consider suspending transvaginal mesh implant procedures.

Neil Findlay: Since 17 June, when indeed that letter was sent and mesh was supposed to be suspended, one health board alone, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, has implanted a further 29 women with these tainted products, and we know that the deputy chief medical officer wrote to health boards asking them to "encourage" women to take part in clinical trials. Was the cabinet secretary's call to suspend mesh genuine or is he being undermined by his senior officials and some within the medical profession who have a vested interest in continuing to implant mesh?

Michael Matheson: I do not think that it is appropriate to question whether the cabinet secretary's request to suspend the use of this particular mesh is genuine. The cabinet secretary spoke in the strongest possible terms about the potential for suspending these types of procedures. However, the member will also be aware that there will be individual circumstances where clinicians, in consultation with the women involved, will consider all the potential risk factors and potential complications and the women themselves may choose to go ahead with the procedure. We should allow women who wish to make that decision to do so.

The deputy chief medical officer's letter was in relation to a different procedure. It came about as a result of a request from clinicians about a new procedure that they were looking to undertake, and about encouraging women to take part in clinical trials in order to improve that procedure for the women concerned.

It is rather disingenuous of the member to try to suggest that the cabinet secretary has been other than committed to trying to address this dreadful issue.

Local Authorities (Equal Pay Claims)

9. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government what progress local authorities have made in settling equal pay claims. (S4O-03629)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): Local authority equal pay claims are the responsibility of the local authorities concerned and therefore the Scottish Government does not hold data on them. However, the Scottish Government is keen to see

a resolution to all local authority equal pay claims and will continue to encourage councils to resolve all such issues as quickly as possible.

John Wilson: What assurances can the minister give to the many thousands of low-paid female workers who were affected by the failure of local authorities to settle equal pay claims timeously that those claims will now be settled much more quickly and that they will receive the full compensation that should have been paid out many years ago?

Derek Mackay: That is, of course, a matter for local authorities, but the Scottish Government has tried to be helpful in encouraging them along. Where there is a financial pressure to bring closure to this issue, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney, has agreed to the request from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to provide more financial flexibility to deal with equal pay claims. We hope that, within that set-up and that response, the outstanding local authorities that remain to conclude these matters will do so as quickly as possible.

First Minister's Question Time

11:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We now move to First Minister's questions. I call Jackie Baillie to ask question 1.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. With your permission, I would like first to pay tribute to Johann Lamont.

I know that members right across this chamber recognise Johann's passion and commitment to making Scotland a better place. Indeed, all her life she has been motivated by the desire to achieve social justice and tackle inequality, and I know that she will continue to work towards that goal with her many friends and colleagues across the chamber. I also thank her for her notable achievements as Labour leader. Among them is one of my personal highlights, which was securing the control of Glasgow City Council against expectations—and, of course, the most recent is the very successful referendum campaign result. I wish her well for the future. [*Applause.*]

Engagements

1. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-02338)

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

As this is my first parliamentary opportunity to do so, I would like to pay tribute to Johann Lamont following her stepping down as leader of the Labour Party at the weekend.

I have always found Johann Lamont to be a spirited opponent in the Scottish Parliament, strongly dedicated to her party but in particular to championing key issues such as the eradication of child poverty and providing support for carers. I have absolutely no doubt that she will continue to play an active role in Scottish public life and I wish her well for the future. [*Applause.*]

Jackie Baillie: I thank the First Minister for his kind comments.

We all care passionately about our national health service and we value the work that our NHS staff do every single day, so today's Audit Scotland report makes grim reading: progress has been slow; significant change is needed; there is little planning in evidence; services are at risk; targets are being missed; and budgets are being squeezed. Does the First Minister have a plan—any plan at all—to deal with the growing crisis in the NHS?

The First Minister: We should start by looking at the Audit Scotland report, and at where it identified substantial progress

“in a number of areas, including improving outcomes for people with cancer or heart disease and reducing healthcare-associated infections.”

It continues:

“Patient satisfaction with hospital inpatient services has ... increased since 2012 ... Waiting time targets have reduced over the past ten years and the length of time that people wait has decreased considerably ... Between 2003 and 2012, the death rate for all forms of heart disease fell by 38 per cent”,

and on the report goes to identify where the national health service has made substantial progress.

Of course it is true that Audit Scotland, quite rightly, draws attention to the fact that despite the success of our NHS in terms of managing its finances—success that has not been replicated elsewhere in either England or Wales—the Scottish national health service faces challenges for the future. How could it be otherwise in the current situation?

Perhaps Jackie Baillie should have paid close attention to page 32 of the Audit Scotland report, which states:

“Reductions in spending at a UK level will affect the level of funding available in Scotland. The Scottish Government will need to plan for health spending within an overall reducing budget.”

The very heart of the financial challenge facing our national health service is the retrenchment and austerity at the United Kingdom level and the financial pressures that that imposes on our national health service in Scotland.

Jackie Baillie: The First Minister is consistent in his fondness for selective quoting, but I say to him that the report overall makes extremely grim reading. We know that the answer that we have just received is not the answer of a First Minister in control; it is the answer of a First Minister in absolute denial. Anybody watching who works in the NHS knows the pressures on the health service. They will not be convinced by his bluff and bluster.

Let us look at the reality of the NHS under the Scottish National Party: almost half a million hospital days lost to delayed discharge; one in four patients in hospital does not need to be there; 325 consultant vacancies—a figure that has gone up 60 per cent in the last year alone; and the Scottish Ambulance Service facing cuts equivalent to 433 paramedics just not being there when we need them or 70 ambulances being taken off the road. Yet the First Minister comes to the chamber today and claims that everything is fine with the NHS. Whether we are talking about his own patch or

across Scotland, why is he in denial about the growing crisis in the NHS?

The First Minister: Every statement that I read out earlier to Jackie Baillie was from the Audit Scotland report. For that matter, I can quote Caroline Gardner from Audit Scotland, who said in a very reasonable and considered interview on Radio Scotland this morning:

“I think it’s important to say that the times that the patients are waiting on average now are much shorter than they have been in the past ... The Government has managed to protect the”

national health service

“budget, certainly the revenue budget, in real terms up until the current budget period.”

We know, of course, what happened in the current budget period. To pass on the consequential from Westminster, the national health service would have required an additional £202 million in its revenue budget. I agree that Mr Swinney did not do that—he put forward £288 million. That means that, in the current year, we are exceeding in terms of passing on the consequential.

All the facts that I have stated are from the Audit Scotland report, and that guarantee of an increase in real-terms funding for the national health service has helped it withstand the financial pressures that are undoubtedly there. No such guarantee was in place from the Labour Party in 2007, and no such guarantee was in place from Iain Gray in the run-up to the 2007 election.

Jackie Baillie should really try to consider this. Yes, there are, of course, pressures on our national health service. How could it be otherwise? We are in the maw of financial control from Westminster. How much greater would the pressures have been if we had had the disaster of a continuation of a Labour Administration in Scotland? We might even have had a national health service in Scotland facing the same almighty pressures that are prevalent in Wales under Labour control.

Jackie Baillie: It is evident that the First Minister has read neither the rest of the Audit Scotland report nor Labour’s manifesto, which very clearly talked about

“protecting the NHS budget in Scotland and passing on all Barnett consequential for health.”

After that answer, it is clear that the First Minister is, indeed, in denial. In his world, everything is wonderful and rosy. However, while we wait on answers, people in Scotland’s hospitals are waiting on trolleys, waiting for an ambulance to turn up and waiting for an NHS that Scotland needs and which people deserve.

Let us look at what the experts say. Last year, the British Medical Association warned that the situation was not sustainable. Today, the Royal College of Nursing said:

“When patient care suffers because health boards are trying to make ends meet, it’s obvious something is ... wrong.”

Moreover, this week, a paramedic said:

“We can’t keep ... up. It’s just a matter of time before something goes seriously wrong.”

Why does the First Minister think that the people who work in the NHS every single day are wrong about the cuts that are facing our health service and that only he is right?

The First Minister: Jackie Baillie mentioned that delayed discharges were increasing in the national health service, but they are much less than they were when the SNP came to power. She also said that there were vacancies among consultants, but the number of consultants is much greater than it was when the SNP came to power, as indeed is the number of nurses and doctors. The number of NHS staff has increased by 6.9 per cent since the SNP came to power. Those things have been achieved against the austerity from the Westminster Government.

I repeat that quote from the Audit Scotland report:

“Reductions in spending at a UK level will affect the level of funding available in Scotland. The Scottish Government will need to plan for health spending within an overall reducing budget.”

Is that not exactly the kernel of the debate that we had in the recent referendum campaign, in which Jackie Baillie and the Labour Party were in denial about the impact of Westminster funding cuts on the Scottish national health service? If we take the Audit Scotland report as a very considered and objective analysis, will Jackie Baillie accept Audit Scotland’s pointing out the reality that a 7 per cent decline in revenue budgets in Scotland will have a severe impact across the public sector? That makes it all the more laudable that the SNP in government has managed to protect our national health service.

As far as the Labour Party is concerned, it goes without argument that, in 2007, Jack McConnell said that the NHS would have to “cut its cloth” and would get no additional consequentials. As for Iain Gray, on 8 September 2010, he said on “Newsnight Scotland”:

“We wouldn’t ring fence the health budget.”

Only when Labour was on the run during the election campaign did it start to change its tune.

The Presiding Officer: I would appreciate a brief question and a brief answer. We have a lot to get through today.

Jackie Baillie: I remind the First Minister, who still remains in denial, that, from 2007 to 2010, the Labour Government at the United Kingdom level gave the Scottish Government more money for the health service than he actually applied to the health service.

We detect a pattern. Audit Scotland is wrong. The ambulance drivers are wrong. Doctors are wrong. Nurses are wrong. Everybody is wrong apart from Alex Salmond. However, the facts are clear.

The NHS is completely devolved. We make all the decisions about it in Scotland, and the SNP has been in charge for more than seven years. In that time, bed numbers have been slashed, budgets have been cut, staffing has been cut, waiting times have grown and delayed discharge has been on the rise.

Does the First Minister recognise that the people of Scotland want a long-term plan for their health service, not sticking-plaster solutions? They want a focus on the NHS, not endless discussions about the constitution. Will he deliver, or is he simply in denial?

The First Minister: NHS staff have increased by 6.9 per cent. That is an increase of 8,818 between September 2006 and June 2014. As we pledged to do, the Scottish National Party has protected the national health service revenue budget in real terms and has added to that this year.

Yes, of course there are pressures on our national health service. How could it be otherwise, given that we are imprisoned in UK Government austerity? However, with regard to being in denial, I point out that I quoted exactly from the Audit Scotland report about the financial pressures that are bearing down on the health service.

That was exactly the argument that took place in the referendum campaign. I took a screengrab of a picture on the BBC website that showed Jackie Baillie against a background of signs saying “SNP NHS LIES”. The caption under the picture reads:

“MSP Baillie denies Labour disunity—A Holyrood politician denies there are rifts between Labour MSPs and MPs and insists they are ‘joined at the hip’”.

Any politician with the gall to make that argument cannot be trusted on the Labour Party or, indeed, the finances of the national health service.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): Johann Lamont and I come from different political

backgrounds, but I recognise her as a woman of principle and substance, and she has always put her commitment to serve above public ambition. For me, she is the sort of public servant that we need more of in Scottish politics. I have great cause to be grateful to her for the leadership role that she took in the better together campaign.

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-02336)

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

Ruth Davidson: Last year, the Scottish Government won plaudits when it stepped in to bring Prestwick airport into public ownership. It bought it for £1 and has since pledged £25 million to keep it afloat.

However, there has since then been a string of broken promises in outlining Prestwick's commercial future. First, in February, a French consultant was brought in, on a three-month contract, to map out where the Government should go, and we were promised that there would be a report in the summer. In June, Nicola Sturgeon appeared before a parliamentary committee and said that a business plan would be published

"in the next couple of months."—[*Official Report, Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee*, 18 June 2014; c 3272.]

Then, a couple of months later, when the plan should have been published, Transport Scotland said that a strategic vision document outlining the future of the airport would

"be published in October."

October has one day left. Will we finally hear that plan tomorrow? Can the First Minister tell us how the plan will provide a clear path back to private ownership?

The First Minister: That strategic vision will be published within the next few days. I promise Ruth Davidson that it will be published within my remaining term of office, which means that there is an extremely urgent and immediate commitment on that.

This issue is about the future of a substantial part of the Scottish economy, as well as the Ayrshire economy. I ask Ruth Davidson to think about this as—apart from anything else—one of the local members who has been most adamant about, and supportive of, the Government's intervention regarding Prestwick airport.

The alternative course was closure of the airport—I hope that Ruth Davidson understands that—and the Government stepped in because the last private sector bidder was unable to move forward. The significant thing that broke the deal

and that made that private sector bidder unable to go forward was the impact of air passenger duty on flights from Prestwick. [*Interruption.*] Ruth Davidson looks perplexed, but I know that she has studied the issue. APD was identified by that bidder as the straw that broke the camel's back in the takeover of Prestwick airport.

Let us not underrate the challenges in building a strategic vision to keep Prestwick airport as an important part of the Scottish economy. Nevertheless, I reassure Ruth Davidson that that vision will be published in the next few days. It will set out an exciting future for Prestwick airport that would be considerably assisted if Prestwick airport did not have its hands tied behind its back by the imposition of the outrageous air passenger duty and its impact on the carriers at Prestwick airport.

Ruth Davidson: I am glad to hear that the report will finally be published. I point out to the First Minister that we have long backed a plan to return the airport to private ownership, and that my colleague John Scott has rightly been working with people on the ground to make that happen. What we need from the report, which we are told will be published in the next few days, is a proper route map so that workers at Prestwick airport and the people who rely on it see that it has a proper future. We will not get that from a fudge that, once again, sees the Government kicking the can down the road.

After more than a year of uncertainty, we need the matter to be sorted now, for the long term. In his short remaining term of office—in his final weeks in post—will the First Minister ensure that he and his deputy, who is also the cabinet secretary responsible for infrastructure, come back to Parliament with clear and unambiguous plans?

The First Minister: I thought that Ruth Davidson would have known that the Deputy First Minister will appear before a parliamentary committee on the 12th of next month to talk about exactly this issue. That is an important consideration.

I do not understand Ruth Davidson's attitude. If there had not been a private market failure, and we had not been unable to secure a private sector bid, the airport would have closed, thousands of people would have been out of work and the highly successful aerospace industry around Prestwick would have been placed in substantial jeopardy.

I had a conversation with Howard Davies, the Tory appointee who is considering whether to spend £40 billion, £50 billion or £60 billion on another runway for Heathrow or Gatwick, or on building Boris's airport somewhere in the River Thames. I put it to him that if the UK Government were to reduce air passenger duty for the north of

England or give the Scottish Parliament the power to do something about it in order to increase competition for direct international flights, that would immediately relieve some of the pressure on the London airports. Howard Davies looked at me and said that that would be a distortion of competition. Unfortunately, Ruth Davidson and her party live in a world where spending £40 billion, £50 billion or £60 billion on infrastructure in the south of England is not a distortion of competition, but allowing airports such as Prestwick to survive and prosper by having a competitive rate of air passenger duty somehow is. That is the topsyturvy world of London bias that the Conservative Party has imposed on Scotland. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. I have a number of constituency questions that are very important to the members. I ask that questions and answers be brief in order to allow me to get through as many as possible.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): As the First Minister may be aware, John M Henderson & Co, the long-established Arbroath-based engineering company, has gone into administration with the immediate loss of 89 jobs. What action is the Scottish Government taking in response to that major blow to the economy and the affected employees? In particular, how might it help the tremendous efforts that are being made by Angus Training Group to assist apprentices who are caught up in the situation to find alternative opportunities to pursue their planned careers?

The First Minister: I share Graeme Dey's concern regarding the developments at John M Henderson and the impact that they will have on the affected employees, their families and the surrounding economy. Through the partnership action for continuing employment initiative, we have been liaising closely with the administrators. A redundancy support event was held yesterday, which provided an opportunity for employees to speak with local agencies. The event was attended by 67 employees and 17 modern apprentices. I am pleased to report that three of the MAs have found jobs following their discussions at the event.

I assure Graeme Dey that Scottish Enterprise and the industry secretary will be fully engaged, as will PACE, to try to ensure that as many as possible of the highly skilled workforce follow the three apprentices into secure employment as quickly as possible.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The water supply to more than 50 homes in the Tummel Bridge area of Perthshire has been found to be contaminated with E coli and Salmonella, which presents clear health risks to the local population. Will the First Minister undertake to

speak to Scottish Water and ask it to take urgent action to ensure that the long-awaited replacement water supply can be put in place without further delay, so that my constituents no longer have to rely on bottled water for drinking and cooking?

The First Minister: I will, today, secure from Scottish Water a further update on its efforts to secure the water supply in Murdo Fraser's area. I will communicate that update to him as quickly as possible.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I associate the Green and independent group of MSPs with colleagues' comments on Johann Lamont's important contribution to public life.

I am sure that the First Minister will share my serious concern about the loss of up to 45 jobs from *The Scotsman* newspaper titles, which is a huge loss to Scottish journalism and to this city. What reassurance can the First Minister provide that the Government places a high value on a thriving journalism sector, and what support can the Government provide to local titles such as the *Evening News* and to the people who look likely to lose their jobs?

The First Minister: Government officials yesterday met Paul Holleran from the National Union of Journalists in the context of meeting the Scottish Trades Union Congress and media-based trade unions on possible submissions to the Smith commission. That provided us with the opportunity to discuss the redundancies at Johnston Press.

Each and every one of us, as public servants, has a substantial interest in there being a vibrant and successful written press. We hope that the redundancies that have been announced can be mitigated, and we hope and believe that those talented journalists will find secure employment elsewhere, if that is not possible.

On the position of the Scottish press and the pressure that it is under, I hope that the owners and titles understand that there is only so far a journalistic complement can be reduced while maintaining quality and the ability of journalists to reflect Scotland's vibrant political life.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): The First Minister will be as upset as I am to hear that Henderson Travel in my constituency ceased trading without warning to its customers or its 150 staff. With potential job losses and no trade union representation at the company, what action will the Scottish Government take to support the staff and the customers of that important company?

The First Minister: The Scottish Government will implement the PACE initiative as quickly as possible. I assure Christian McKelvie that I am happy and willing to arrange a meeting with the

relevant minister to discuss how her constituency can be protected from that unfortunate development.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I, too, pay tribute to Johann Lamont. There is no doubting her commitment to social justice, and she can be proud of her many achievements. I wish her well.

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-02337)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): A range of issues to carry forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Alison McInnes: Last week, the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland raised concerns about the rise in the emergency detention of young people. It also highlighted the problems caused by the admission of children to general hospital wards. The Scottish Government has a policy to reduce the number of children sent to hospital wards that do not specialise in the care that they need, so why did the number of children needing mental health care who were admitted to non-specialist wards rise last year to more than 200?

The First Minister: The member raises an important point. I had a meeting yesterday that touched on that exact issue. Perhaps I can arrange a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, so that the member can develop the point and see what the plans and the vision are for the national health service to get back on track in reducing the number of children with mental health problems admitted to general wards.

Alison McInnes: There are growing calls for mental health to be given the same priority as physical health. When people are taken into emergency detention, the action is supposed to be signed off by a mental health officer. Last week, however, the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland expressed concern that that does not always happen. That means that we cannot be sure that children are taken into emergency detention only with that safeguard in place.

I do not know whether the First Minister will leave a note for his successor. If he does, will he ensure that mental health services for young people are on the list of things to put right?

The First Minister: Happily, I do not have to leave a note. My successor is sitting alongside me, and her compassion, interest in and commitment to the national health service are well known and well established.

The member has raised a serious issue, and it should be taken and developed in that fashion. I will arrange the meeting that I have discussed so that it can be pursued in all its detail to ensure that there is an adequate reply that satisfies Alison McInnes on the future direction of that highly important matter.

Road Accidents and Casualties

4. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to reduce road accidents and casualties. (S4F-02345)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): One life lost on Scotland's roads is one too many. The effects of drink driving can be shattering to families and communities, which is why we are introducing legislation to Parliament to reduce Scotland's drink-driving alcohol limit from 80mg to 50mg for every 100ml of blood to bring Scotland into line with most other European countries.

Jim Eadie: Although the proposal to reduce the drink-driving limit has been widely welcomed, does the First Minister agree that Scotland now has the opportunity to lead the way across the United Kingdom not just in reducing the drink-driving limit but through additional measures, such as lower limits for newly qualified and professional drivers, and that in order for that to happen the Parliament must have the further powers that are necessary so that we can save even more lives and prevent even more injuries in Scotland?

The First Minister: The member makes a serious and important point. We welcome the fact that we now have the power, which we propose to use, for the Parliament to make Scotland's roads safer through a lower alcohol limit. However, that was a very limited transfer of powers. There are major other aspects that could be part of a package of measures to bear down on the matter—for example, differential drink-driving limits, which the member mentioned, and deciding whether it would be appropriate to give the police the power to undertake the random breath testing of drivers.

I was quite interested in the reaction to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice's initiative earlier this week. I think that the public mood is ripe and ready for a further initiative to bear down on an aspect of conduct in society that is still disastrous in its impact on victims, communities and, indeed, perpetrators and their families. Therefore, I hope that members will support the cabinet secretary's initiatives and that we will have a considered debate and discussion about the further area of powers that could be secured in order to go further on that highly important matter.

Scottish Qualifications Authority Exam Marking Reviews (Charging)

5. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on concerns regarding the impact that charging for Scottish Qualifications Authority exam marking reviews could have on students. (S4F-02351)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Neil Bibby will be aware that SQA charges, including for the results services, are not paid by pupils or parents in state schools; they are quite properly paid by the local council. The new system is fairer than the old appeals process, as it allows a wider range of evidence to be considered for candidates who have missed an exam through illness or other exceptional circumstances. In both independent and public sector schools, a request should be made only if there is a legitimate query about a pupil's result based on the professional judgment of the teacher.

Neil Bibby: The First Minister will be aware that charges introduced this year mean that pupils from private schools can pay up to £39.75 to appeal any exam result. However, in the state sector, there is not only variation from council to council in whether the school or local authority will pay for such appeals; there is concern from parents and anecdotal evidence that those charges are acting as a disincentive to appealing for our pupils.

This week, the Educational Institute of Scotland said:

"pupils from private schools have an unfair advantage and that is not something that should be allowed."

The Scottish Parent Teacher Council has said that it is an "uncomfortable situation".

Given those concerns, will the First Minister agree to contact the SQA and ask for an investigation and review of the fairness and the charges that relate to the new system?

The First Minister: I am sorry, but Neil Bibby should understand that the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland made it clear in a statement on 10 February 2014 that

"Local authorities finance the costs of SQA entries."

In state schools, the payment of SQA fees is met by the local authority. It would be entirely wrong to pass on that charge to hard-pressed families. That is the position, and it should remain the position under the new system, which in many aspects has a substantial advantage over the previous one.

Service Personnel (Afghanistan Conflict)

6. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what resources the Scottish

Government has in place to assist service personnel and their families who have been affected by the conflict in Afghanistan. (S4F-02343)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Responsibility for supporting service personnel lies with the Ministry of Defence. Despite that, the Scottish Government—as has been acknowledged by military and veterans organisations—has a record of delivering first-class initiatives for veterans, including those who have served in Afghanistan. That includes the recent appointment of the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, which is the first appointment of its kind in the UK, and the now well-established Scottish veterans fund, delivered with our partners in Veterans Scotland, which has provided more than £600,000 of funding to veterans organisations since 2008.

Christine Grahame: Reports this week state that the UK Government is failing to abide by its pledge in its armed forces covenant to give injured British soldiers priority for medical treatment in the years after their service. That comes at a time when Help for Heroes has estimated that 75,000 service personnel could suffer mentally and physically as a result of operations in Afghanistan. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that our veterans receive the best possible care from our national health service?

The First Minister: It is right and proper that the armed forces and veterans receive world-class service through the NHS. We have a strong record of delivering high-quality care to the armed forces and veterans, as has been detailed in our commitments paper. Significant advances have been made in Scotland for our veterans. A wide range of specialist services are already available—for example, there is a dedicated pathway and the national state-of-the-art prosthetics service, which this year has been provided with funding of £1.5 million, as well as priority treatment for a number of service-related conditions.

In addition, the national mental health strategy is delivering a range of commitments that will benefit veterans, including faster access to psychological therapies and the continued provision, in partnership with NHS Scotland and Combat Stress, of £1.2 million of funding per year for specialist mental health services for veterans.

I saw an answer in the House of Commons yesterday when some doubt was expressed about the identification of veterans in the armed forces. I hope and believe that that is not a significant problem in Scotland, but we will check to make sure that that is the case, because all members of the Parliament want to share a joint pride in the redemption of our obligation and commitment to the veterans. I hope that the whole Parliament is

proud of our track record in supporting veterans and veterans organisations.

Neilston & Uplawmoor First Responders

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-10898, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on Neilston & Uplawmoor First Responders reaching their 100th emergency call-out. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Neilston and Uplawmoor First Responders on dealing with their 100th emergency call since becoming operational on 4 January 2014; notes that a Community First Responder is a member of the public who volunteers to help their community by responding to medical emergencies while an ambulance is on its way; pays tribute to the leadership of Stuart McLellan and Ross Nelson in growing Neilston and Uplawmoor First Responders from an idea to an active organisation providing frontline medical care; pays further tribute to the over 30 volunteers who ensure that this vital organisation remains fully staffed; considers that they have further benefited from, among others, the support of Arnold Clark Car and Van Rental, which has loaned them a 4x4 vehicle to respond to calls, and St John Scotland (Glasgow), which has provided financial support for training and set-up costs, and looks forward to seeing Neilston and Uplawmoor First Responders continuing to serve their community above and beyond this 100th call milestone.

12:34

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): It is a genuine pleasure to propose and speak to the motion in my name. I am delighted to be able to do so, because the work to which it pays tribute is vital and the support of other organisations for that work has been generous, spontaneous and heartfelt, and especially because the volunteers who have made possible all that has been achieved represent the very best of Scotland.

I know that there will be members who will equally be familiar with community first responder groups in their areas—indeed, some 100 schemes operate throughout Scotland, with some 1,200 volunteer responders—but for those who are not, let me explain that community first responders are asked to attend serious and life-threatening emergencies, such as when a person has breathing difficulties or chest pains, experiences cardiac arrest or becomes unconscious. It should be noted that they are not sent to road traffic collisions, traumatic injuries or anything outwith their training. They are trained by the Scottish Ambulance Service in basic first aid and life-saving skills so that they can deliver a speedy, reassuring response to patients while an ambulance is on the way. They are deployed to appropriate calls by the Scottish Ambulance Service control centre. An emergency ambulance is always dispatched first, and the role of the

responder is to support the patient while the ambulance is on its way, providing an important service that benefits the community and that the community recognises and appreciates is of benefit.

I am afraid that my motion is already somewhat out of date. It recognises the 100th call-out of Neilston & Uplawmoor First Responders, as was the case when I lodged the motion on 1 September. However, by Tuesday this week, that figure had increased dramatically to 147 call-outs. Perhaps, with the assistance of any willing member suitably overcome by excitement at remarks during the next few minutes, we might even push it over the 150 mark during the course of the debate.

That is all quite remarkable. However, the success of voluntary projects and initiatives is never guaranteed. It depends on leadership and the commitment and support of a great many people. In the case of Neilston and Uplawmoor, that leadership has been ably provided by Stuart McLellan and Ross Nelson, both of whom are in the Parliament again today. I say again, as I had the pleasure earlier this year of welcoming and thanking personally a more extended team from the group here at Holyrood.

Stuart McLellan gave the spark of life to the responder group in April last year when, like others across Scotland, he approached the Scottish Ambulance Service. The service then convened a meeting to test public interest and support, to which 15 people turned up, willing to participate. Stuart recruited constantly throughout the year and, by November, a team was being trained. In January, with the appropriate approval secured, the group went live.

I have mentioned the support of others in the community, which includes the local hotel in Uplawmoor, which cheerfully allowed meetings to take place free of charge on its premises; St John Scotland, which has supported the project in a number of ways, to which I will return; and Arnold Clark, which has given such a boost to the responders with the donation of a vehicle at the start, since renewed, and an even more appropriate vehicle last month. I am grateful to the managing director of Arnold Clark, Eddie Hawthorne, for his support and engagement.

I pay tribute to Sir Arnold Clark himself, and I am happy that that will find its place in the *Official Report*. I have known Sir Arnold for many years. Such is his reach, depth and length of service to the retail motor industry in Scotland and the UK over several generations that I can add that I know him, as my father and my grandfather did before. He has built one of Scotland's most successful businesses and has been content not to posture on the wider stage. However, I know that many

community groups throughout Scotland are indebted to him for the generous support that he has offered personally and for the assistance that has been offered by his organisation, a branch of which cannot now be far removed from any Scottish community.

I mentioned a moment ago the support of St John Scotland. Less well known generally in Scotland than it deserves, St John Scotland was formed in 1947 and has, as one of its main objects, the encouragement and promotion of all work of humanity and charity for the relief of people in sickness, distress, suffering or danger. It is a perfect fit with the first responders. What I have most enjoyed about St John Scotland's involvement is the enthusiasm that the project has generated among its members—an infectious enthusiasm achieved by Stuart McLellan and Ross Nelson on the now several visits made to secure further funding, which has, to date, paid for a defibrillator, extensive training equipment and, most recently, the refurbishment of the former police station in Neilston as a permanent base after the group grew out of the generous provision of space offered by the Neilston Development Trust—yet another successful locally based project.

I should note that that facility will be lost as a consequence of a change of ownership but I am in no doubt that Stuart McLellan and his team will identify and set about securing and equipping an alternative base—that is, if the acquisition cost of £55,000 can be raised. Knowing Stuart, I will not rule it out.

It is easy to talk in abstract terms about the mechanics of a voluntary group. What can sometimes get lost is the character, dynamic and public worth. When I have met up with the responders, as I have done on several occasions, they have been full of buzz, fizz and enthusiasm, which is there for everyone to see—all the more so now, as the group has gone from being a theoretical organisation to attending call-outs throughout the community and helping to save lives. We can see the response of the community itself, as it begins to understand just what an advantage the group represents.

The initiative does not in any way seek to ameliorate ambulance arrival delays—far from it. It is a recognition that, for most people, basic life-saving skills are simply not understood or practised. None of the individuals and families who have experienced it will forget the support of someone who can act immediately and ensure that the attendance of the Scottish Ambulance Service is all the more effective, efficient and successful.

In Neilston and Uplawmoor, the appreciation of the public is palpable. Throughout Scotland, that

will also be true. I also hope that, elsewhere, communities will be fortunate enough to identify and enlist committed individuals and leadership and establish a first responder group with similar success.

I am sure that the Government and members of all parties will join me in congratulating the Neilston & Uplawmoor First Responders, which is one of several first responder groups in the West Scotland region that I represent, and the groups that are established elsewhere in Scotland. All equally deserve our congratulations and support.

12:41

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Jackson Carlaw on securing this important debate on an important subject.

I had a look at the website of the Neilston & Uplawmoor First Responders and was very impressed with the numbers involved. That was all the more the case after hearing from Jackson Carlaw that the group has been in place for a relatively short time and has clearly achieved a great deal in that period, as have the more than 100 schemes that have been established throughout Scotland. As Jackson Carlaw said, they involve 1,200 volunteers, which is extremely impressive.

I understand that Dr Richard Cummins from Seattle in the USA discovered in 1990 that, if a series of interventions took place in a set sequence, a patient suffering from a heart attack stood a greater chance of survival. Those events are now known as the chain of survival.

Community first responders are an integral and valued link in the chain of survival in areas where journey times are extended, as they can provide essential simple treatments in those crucial first few moments. The sequence of interventions is: early recognition and the call for help; early cardiopulmonary resuscitation; early defibrillation; and early advanced care.

That might sound daunting, but full training is given. All first responders undergo institute of health care development training for first persons on the scene. That course has been devised in association with the Royal College of Surgeons. The volunteers must also pass exams and get through a rigorous selection process as well as pass the protection of vulnerable groups checks.

First responders must also update their skills continually with monthly training. They are also advised to sign up for at least one on-call shift every week to ensure that the skills that they acquire are put to practical use and do not atrophy.

It is obvious that first responders require a great deal of commitment. The fact that they are volunteers makes that all more admirable.

First responders work as part of a team. They are not intended to replace ambulances or paramedics but they buy vital time. When a person has a sudden cardiac arrest, their heart's regular rhythm becomes chaotic or arrhythmic. Every minute that the heart is not beating lowers the odds of survival by 7 to 10 per cent. After 10 minutes without defibrillation, few people survive.

I am pleased to note that mortality due to heart attacks has declined significantly throughout the world since the 1970s. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development attributes that in part to the introduction of treatments that are aimed at rapidly restoring coronary blood flow and points out that processes of care, such as timely medical interventions, play a big part in determining whether a person will live or die.

Comparative figures show that the countries with the highest heart attack survival rates include Denmark, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. It is no coincidence that most of those countries have highly organised and long-standing networks of community first responders.

I am pleased that, for some time now, Scotland has been putting the experience of those other countries into effect with great success. First responders are in the front line of the community resilience plan that the Scottish Ambulance Service has put in place, which covers the period 2011 to 2015. Even if we achieve the best ambulance response times in the world, with conditions such as cardiac arrest and hyperacute stroke, every second counts.

The Scottish Ambulance Service website lists the places where more first responder volunteers are needed. The list is quite long, and certainly far too long for me to read out, so I will simply say that 49 communities in my South Scotland region require volunteer first responders. They range from smaller places such as Newcastleton and Port William to relatively large rural population centres such as Peebles, Moffat and Dalbeattie. Moffat has a big group that I believe has provided 24/7 cover, which is quite something, but even that group is still looking for additional volunteers. I represent a rural area, but the benefits of first responders can be seen everywhere. It is notable that Glasgow airport and the Braehead shopping centre are listed as looking for additional volunteers.

I again congratulate Jackson Carlaw on securing the debate and I congratulate the first responder group in his area and all such groups working across Scotland.

12:46

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I thank Jackson Carlaw for giving the Parliament the opportunity to put on record our recognition of and thanks for the work of the first responders scheme in Neilston and Uplawmoor, which is in my constituency of Renfrewshire South. All too often, we know that volunteers do tremendous work, but we sometimes do not take sufficient time to put that on record. The work of Ross Nelson and Stuart McLellan and the team of volunteers in Neilston and Uplawmoor is making a significant contribution to the lives of individuals in the community. I do not think that they or anyone else would suggest for a moment that the scheme is a substitute for an effective and efficient ambulance service, but it can complement the work of our excellent ambulance service and it can make a difference by saving lives.

I want to put the issue in the context of the communities of Neilston and Uplawmoor, which are two distinct but closely linked communities, with Neilston being the larger of the two. There is a long and proud tradition of community identification and a determination to work together for the benefit of all. Just last night, I attended an event in Neilston to celebrate the work of Pauline Gallacher of the Neilston Development Trust, who has made a fantastic contribution to the village, not just through the trust but through the community wind farm, which is an example to communities across Scotland.

Many people are working hard to have a war memorial established in Neilston. Last year, John McGuire of Phoenix Honda and an old classmate of mine, Jimmy Higgins, walked to France to raise money for a memorial. We are talking about two communities in which people are determined to do everything that they can to help each other.

Jackson Carlaw eloquently outlined the increasing role that first responder organisations play not just in Scotland but in Britain and internationally. I know that we can point to success from such schemes. I talked to the two Labour councillors who represent Neilston, who have told me about the fantastic work that is being done and the very human response. Councillor Elaine Green's daughter Jennifer is a volunteer with the first responders. My other councillor colleague, Paul O'Kane, told me that, one Sunday at mass at St Thomas's in Neilston, an elderly parishioner was taken unwell, but because of the rapid response from the team of volunteers, the person's condition was stabilised in advance of the ambulance service arriving.

We have here a scheme, with a team of volunteers, that is making its mark on the local community. It evidently has the community's support, given that 30 or more people are already

prepared to give their time to a scheme that they view as being of immediate benefit to themselves, their families and their neighbours and friends.

Stuart McLellan and his team have had to work really hard to get the money; Jackson Carlaw indicated some of the support that they have received. They are now in temporary premises, and hoping that they might just be able to get the finance to make that arrangement permanent. It would be a real shame if the lack of a small amount of money was to prevent the skill base that has been developed from being able to continue contributing to Neilston and Uplawmoor.

I know from speaking to local people that they already value the service. They know that it has made a difference, and they can point to the individuals whose lives have been helped by the volunteers. I hope that, collectively, we are all able not just to offer our warm words of support, but identify ways in which we can help that fantastic service to continue.

Once again, I thank not only Jackson Carlaw for enabling us to debate the subject, but the team of terrific and tremendous volunteers who are making their mark in Neilston and Uplawmoor.

12:51

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I, like other members, congratulate Jackson Carlaw on bringing the debate to the chamber and offer my congratulations to the first responder team in Neilston and Uplawmoor for their tremendous work.

As Jackson Carlaw said, the team has significantly surpassed its 100th emergency call-out and is now at 147 call-outs, which is remarkable given that it has been operating in the area only for a relatively short time, since January this year.

As members have acknowledged, there is a range of medical conditions in which time is absolutely of the essence in responding to an individual in the community in order to provide them with the best possible care. With conditions such as cardiac arrest, as we heard from Joan McAlpine, every second counts, which is exactly why community first responder schemes are so important.

I am sure that members recognise that community first responder schemes send out a strong message about the level of community resilience in individual communities in their desire to do the right thing for their own community's wellbeing. It is important that we support them in undertaking that work.

At present there are more than 127 first responder schemes throughout the country, and

more than 1,000 volunteers participating in the programme. There is always an opportunity to introduce more of those teams, and I encourage any community that is considering participating in the programme to do so in the same way that the Neilston and Uplawmoor community has in the past year. If communities are interested in doing that, the Scottish Ambulance Service will be happy to assist them by providing the necessary support to set up a first responder scheme in their local area.

As members will know, the increasing number of community first responder programmes sit within a range of other work that we have undertaken in order to improve community resilience in meeting the healthcare needs of local communities.

Community resuscitation development officers recruit and train community members to provide care. There are public access defibrillators in a range of locations, the provision of which is supported by local training and awareness-raising programmes. We provide first-aid awareness and training through schools and in the community at large. Of course, there is also the community first responder programme itself. That all sits within the wider context of ensuring that we improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland.

Members may have noticed that last week I announced that next year we will take forward a strategy to cut the number of deaths from out-of-hospital cardiac arrests, which Joan McAlpine referred to in her speech. We know that survival of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests depends on the chain of survival. We need to make sure that that is as complete as possible, to ensure that people receive resuscitation and defibrillation when a cardiac arrest occurs. Our community first responder teams are an important part of that chain in our local communities and are helping us continue to reduce the number of people who die as a result of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests.

That sits in the wider work that we have been doing to increase the number of publicly available defibrillators. Earlier this year the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing provided a further £100,000 to increase the number of publicly available defibrillators and in August I launched the roll-out of defibrillators to independent dental practices across Scotland. Defibrillators are a crucial piece of kit that quite literally save lives and they are being mapped on the Scottish Ambulance Service's control system. That means that if an emergency occurs near a dental practice, a work place, a local shop or—as increasingly is the case—a supermarket, people can be tasked to deploy that piece of kit. That has involved some £600,000 of investment and 815 dental practices have signed up to the programme.

That funding sits alongside the work that we are doing with the British Heart Foundation's heartstart programme in our schools. Almost 62 per cent of our secondary schools have now registered with the heartstart programme and 150 teachers are being trained as heartstart instructors. The heartstart programme is about building resilience in our communities and the community first responder scheme is an important element of that.

I do not underestimate the value of the community first responder schemes. As Hugh Henry rightly said, it is not a replacement for paramedics in our ambulance service; it is an additional support to ensure that individuals who require assistance and care can receive it as early as possible. As a Government we intend to build on that work in the coming years and again I offer my sincere thanks and on-going support to those in the community first responder scheme in Neilston and Uplawmoor.

12:57

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Supported Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Good afternoon. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-11332, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on supported businesses.

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): On 27 November 2012, the Parliament debated the imminent sale or closure of Remploy's enterprises in Scotland. At the time, that involved nine factories, employing more than 250 disabled people, and three closed-circuit television contracts with a further 29 staff.

During that debate, members spoke of their concern for the staff involved and their disagreement with the United Kingdom Government over a process that threatened all those jobs. Few spoke more passionately than our much-missed colleague Helen Eadie, representing her constituents in the Cowdenbeath factory. In addressing Parliament, Helen asked that we think about what we could do to help not just Remploy but the other supported businesses in Scotland.

On that day, Helen Eadie was right to encourage us to look more widely than the immediate threat to Remploy jobs and businesses. Today, I want to update Parliament on that very matter—the work of the Scottish Government since 2012 to encourage and enable the development of the remaining supported businesses in Scotland.

We must first ask ourselves why supported businesses are so important. Earlier this week, I had the pleasure of visiting Haven in Inverness. I understand that David Whyte from Haven is here in the gallery for the debate, along with a number of colleagues from the sector. Inverness is one of a number of Haven sites throughout Scotland. Over the past two years, I have visited many of Scotland's supported businesses and, prior to their closure, I visited a number of the Remploy factories.

What I found in Inverness this week was what I find in all those sites—dedicated staff, working hard to deliver high-quality products. Indeed, it is my reflection that often people with a disability work even harder than those without a disability and, in many cases, have a far lower absentee rate through sickness or illness from work, such is their determination and pride in what they do. When I undertake those visits, I struggle with the perception that some observers have, or have had in the past, that these are no more than sheltered workshops that bear little resemblance to real working conditions. That is plainly not the case, as

I think members understand. I challenge anyone feeling that way to visit Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries in Glasgow or Dovetail Enterprises in Dundee to see for themselves how the businesses function.

There are 20 supported businesses in Scotland. There are 900 employees; more than 700 have a disability. We all have a duty and a desire to do everything that we can to support those businesses. They are an important part of the landscape of support available to help disabled people to find sustained and fulfilling work opportunities. I am delighted that my colleague Michael Matheson will close the debate, because he has of course responsibility for the wider issue of disability and supported employment for people with a disability. However, we all want to work together to sustain supported businesses and help them to expand in a way that is commercially viable.

What have we done since the debate in 2012? I have been clear from the outset that the ambition of the Scottish Government is that a commercially viable range of supported businesses should operate across Scotland. Since 2012, Scottish Government staff, in partnership with the businesses and a range of external organisations, have undertaken a significant range of work to assist the businesses to become more sustainable. It is important to understand that these are successful businesses that are turning over £33 million a year. These are not hobby businesses. These are not amateur businesses. These are professional high-quality businesses that we are all determined to support. Changing perceptions within the public and private sectors is part of our task.

I have taken a strong personal interest in developments and felt that it would be useful for the Parliament to have an opportunity to debate these matters. I convened the supported business advisory group, which met on several occasions. It included representatives from trade unions. I add my thanks to Lyn Turner and Phil Brannan from the trade unions, who played an excellent part in the proceedings and regularly brought us back down to earth about the reality that the people who work in supported businesses face. Also represented were the just enterprise consortium, Scottish Enterprise and the British Association for Supported Employment—whose representative, Alistair Kerr, is also in the gallery witnessing the debate, I am informed—along with representatives of the third sector and local government.

That group's work has been instrumental in shaping the Scottish Government's actions. We have decided, together with those who are closest to the people who are involved in supported

businesses, what best we can do in a practical sense.

Procurement is plainly extremely important and, in 2012, Parliament was clear in demanding action to enable supported businesses to access more public contracts. Since then, we have begun to transform the way that buyers perceive supported businesses via a number of proactive steps with a view to increasing the commitment of public bodies to buy from them.

I lack the time to go through every action taken, but we have taken key steps to raise awareness and to make it easier for public bodies to procure from supported businesses.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): It is my understanding that, since we debated the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill earlier this year, public authorities have awarded only four additional contracts to supported businesses in Scotland. I believe that there are still scores of public authorities that are yet to award even one contract to a supported business. What is the Government doing to encourage that?

Fergus Ewing: There are two parts to that intervention. I do not accept the premise of the first part and I will come on to address the second part.

In October 2012, Nicola Sturgeon, the Deputy First Minister, launched the new national framework agreement for supported businesses, making it easier for public bodies to access the goods and services that Scottish supported businesses can offer. The framework agreement and other Scottish Government initiatives within the public sector in the past year have provided around £2.7 million of contracts for supported businesses. That is promising, but we accept that we need to do more. With the support of other Scottish Government ministers and to ensure that we do more, I have met a number of public bodies, including the national health service, the Scottish Prison Service, Police Scotland and the Scottish Futures Trust.

Alex Neil and I launched a new supported business directory in January this year—I have a copy of it here; of course, it is online as well. The directory gives details of the 20 supported businesses in Scotland and means that those who are involved in procurement in public bodies have ready access to what is available.

To respond to one of the points in the Labour amendment, which I regret that we cannot accept, it is plain that to impose a duty on 118 public bodies to purchase goods or services that they may not need—supported businesses supply a limited range of goods and services—is not a practical suggestion.

Jenny Marra: The minister is misleading the chamber slightly with that comment. He knows as well as I do that there is a supported business in Bruce Crawford's constituency that manufactures workwear uniforms and that every council in Scotland has to buy workwear uniforms. Therefore, to say that supported businesses are producing things that public authorities may not need is simply not the case. Will the minister clarify that for us?

Fergus Ewing: Ms Marra makes an entirely different point. My point was that her amendment says that there are 118 public bodies and they must all issue one contract. There are 20 supported businesses and they operate in a variety of fields, but there will be some public bodies that do not need some of the goods. I was not talking about local authorities—I was making the point that there are 118 public bodies and Ms Marra's amendment says that they must all procure from supported businesses. However, some of those bodies will not need any of the goods or services that the businesses provide. Of course, many individuals will require workwear, but that is an entirely different point.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Just as a matter of fact, out of the 118 public bodies, how many currently do not have or have not had a contract with a supported business?

Fergus Ewing: The vast number of public bodies provide procurement to the supported employment sector. I hope that members will accept that it is not unreasonable but practical and sensible for the priority to be that we focus on the major public bodies that have the major procurement, such as the national health service.

For example, thanks to the work of Alex Neil, Michael Matheson and others in the Scottish Government, we persuaded the NHS that it should procure from the sector nurses uniforms up to an annual value of £1.5 million. That was a major decision, and we are extremely grateful to all those in the NHS who were involved in it. It took a lot of time and consideration, because the issues are not simple—they are matters of business. It is terrific that, through the substantial efforts of Mr Neil, and working with procurement officials in the NHS, we have delivered a contract that has helped to secure the future of many of the ex-Remploy workers. I hope that members will acknowledge that that example and the many other examples that we can provide represent solid progress since 2012.

In addition to the supported business directory, we have produced a promotional DVD, which has been distributed to buyers and the businesses themselves. The benefit of that is that it shows every procurement individual exactly what supported businesses are.

Jenny Marra: Will the member take an intervention?

Fergus Ewing: No, I will not.

One benefit of this debate is that it gives us an opportunity to explain and get across to the public sector what supported businesses offer. We have also done that through the excellent document and DVD. I recently attended a meeting of the SFT hub managers at which one of the hub managers, from the Morayshire area, told me that the DVD “said it all”. It has been extremely useful.

We have run two meet-the-buyers events this year—one was in the Stirling management centre and another was run by the Scottish Prison Service—and there was an event at the Procurex conference last week, with John Swinney.

The success of Haven PTS—the new company that was formed following the sale of the stage 2 Remploy businesses—in securing the said agreement to become part of the supply chain for NHS Scotland’s nurses uniforms is truly significant. It has enabled 22 staff to retain their jobs. I had the pleasure of attending, with my colleague Alex Neil, the occasion on which we made the announcement on that particular public procurement. It was one of the happiest of the several hundred engagements that I have attended as a minister.

Supported businesses were successful in securing contracts relating to the Commonwealth games to the value of £914,000. Although winning new contracts is important, we need to provide business support to supported businesses. I am pleased that Scottish Enterprise, the business gateway and local authorities and just enterprise have stepped up to the plate and have offered business support to all 20 BASE members in Scotland.

What will we do in future? The work to support increased procurement and business development will continue. Supported businesses need a concerted approach and a long-term relationship with the Government and public sector authorities. That is not about winning one contract per public body or one-off contracts; it is about ensuring a steady flow of work that sustains those businesses over the long term. That is the Scottish Government’s approach.

I will continue to press the Department for Work and Pensions for a discussion about its intentions regarding the financial support that is given to supported businesses through the work choice programme in the form of a payment of £4,800 per supported employee with a disability. It is essential that that support is not withdrawn, and yet it is under threat from the UK Government. I have written on four occasions so far to DWP ministers requesting a discussion on the matter. The letters

date back to November last year and March this year, but there has so far been no discussion, no response and no assurance. Without that payment, the future of supported businesses is, I think, in serious question. I hope that we can today unite behind the proposition that it is surely only fair to the 900 employees in those businesses that they receive that support.

Since 2010, disabled people have suffered at the hands of the UK Government through the introduction of a series of welfare reforms that have reduced their income and made some of the most vulnerable in our society feel vilified. Lord Freud’s comments at the recent Conservative conference simply served to reinforce the view of disabled workers that the current UK Government holds.

The Scottish Government does not share Lord Freud’s views, which we regard as morally execrable. We believe that we should recognise the varied employment support needs of disabled people and ensure that a variety of services and options, including supported business, is available to help as many disabled people as possible into work.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the economic and social value of supported businesses in Scotland; welcomes the recent success of many of these businesses in enhancing their commercial viability through business support and action to increase public and private sector procurement; commends the work of the new third sector supported business, Haven Protective Technology Solutions (Haven PTS Ltd), which has been developed in response to the enforced closure of the five Stage Two Remploy factories, and agrees the importance of continuing to support these businesses.

14:47

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I was pleased to see the debate on the Government’s agenda this afternoon, but I am not pleased or impressed—indeed, I am disappointed—with the minister’s opening speech. Although I entirely and whole-heartedly agree with his condemnation of Lord Freud’s comments at the Tory party conference just a couple of weeks ago, I believe that the minister is guilty of passing the buck on this issue.

I outlined to the minister in my interventions some of the figures and the sluggish progress that the Government is making on awarding public procurement contracts to supported businesses in Scotland, and yet he is not prepared to put his money where his mouth is and legislate to make those public authorities spend taxpayers’ money on supporting sheltered workplaces.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: I will take your intervention in a minute, Mr Crawford, if that is okay.

The minister said that we could not legislate to require public authorities to award one contract to a supported business because they may not need to do so. There are 118 public authorities in Scotland, including local authorities—of which there are 32, as the minister knows—as well as health boards and quangos. I do not think that it is beyond the minister's wit to pass an amendment to the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 to mandate that local authorities and health boards, which all, as he knows, have to buy work uniforms—perhaps not the quangos but all the local authorities and health boards—buy them from a supported business.

The minister has put the nursing contracts out to a supported business in Bruce Crawford's constituency, and there is no good reason why he cannot put out other contracts in the same way.

Bruce Crawford: I respect the intention behind what Jenny Marra is trying to achieve, but I ask her to reflect on one point. If all those 118 public bodies were awarded such contracts, would the existing 20 supported businesses have the capacity to pick up that work? I do not think that they would.

I also point Jenny Marra to the fact that Labour-led councils such as Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and Aberdeen, and seven other Labour councils in Scotland, have said that there should be no such requirement in the procurement legislation.

Jenny Marra: We should have the ambition to make those businesses have the capacity. I am sure that Bruce Crawford would agree that, if it is good enough for disabled workers in his constituency, it is good enough for disabled workers across the country. I will go on to outline the figures, but he knows as well as I do the number of workers with mental health issues and disabilities who would benefit from work in a sheltered workplace, supported by a public contract.

It has always struck me as a bit sad and quite ironic that the Victorians had the foresight to open these businesses and yet in our sophisticated modern world we fail to find a way to make them sustainable and keep them open. This Government let the Royal Blindcraft factory in Edinburgh close just a couple of years ago, after 200 years in operation. Just weeks ago, the Engine Shed in Edinburgh—a cherished social enterprise and supported business—announced its closure. For the past 25 years, the Engine Shed has provided work-based training placements for young adults with learning difficulties and supported trainees. Its model is transformative, it has a well-documented success rate, and it

provides people with the skills and confidence to overcome barriers to work.

Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries is another example of what can be achieved by supported employment business. RSBI is successfully diversifying its business into areas such as archiving and records management. It has more than 200 employees, of whom more than 50 per cent are disabled people. It gives work experience and training in furniture manufacturing to school pupils from additionally supported learning schools in Glasgow every week during the school term. It has also ring fenced posts for returning disabled ex-servicemen and women. I say to Bruce Crawford that those are good examples of how we can be ambitious and innovative and create the capacity for work in these areas.

Many years ago, Community, the union, worked with RSBI management through a difficult period of change on the funding and restructuring of the business. At the heart of Community's work on supported businesses has been Robert Mooney, who joins us in the public gallery today with his colleagues from RSBI. A disabled worker from Glasgow; a champion of sheltered workplaces; a long-serving member of Community and, I hope I can say, a friend of mine, Robert has selflessly championed the cause of supported employment all his life, ensuring that opportunities for good work and fulfilling careers are available to disabled people.

Disabled people are at least 30 per cent less likely to be in employment than those without a disability. There is a moral imperative for Government intervention to support disabled workers and there is—I say to Bruce Crawford—an equally strong economic case. We on the Labour benches believe that other supported employment businesses could be just as successful and profitable as RSBI. However, it is clear that effective Government action through procurement and proper legislative backing for that procurement is needed for that to happen.

Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions, learning disabilities or mental health issues face pronounced and complex barriers to sustaining employment in the mainstream jobs market. Many people who have worked in sheltered workplaces such as Remploy, which closed recently, have been directed to supermarket work or similar jobs. However, there were 8,000 applications for 350 jobs at an Asda store that opened recently in Dundee, which gives a picture of just how difficult that job market is.

How do we turn the situation around? How do we provide sustainable employment for the disabled and those who need more support? I believe and Labour believes that the answer is

modern sheltered workplaces, supported by public contracts. When the coalition Government announced the closure of Remploy factories, I came up with a solution for the Dundee plant, which manufactured uniforms: a business structure of a social enterprise, supported by local authority, NHS, police and fire service uniform contracts. I moved amendments to that effect, which were voted down in this chamber by the SNP Government.

Article 19 of the European Union public sector procurement directive allows councils, Governments and all the public authorities that we have been talking about to bypass the commercial tender process and reserve contracts for sheltered workplaces. At the stroke of a pen, the Scottish Government could place its contracts for uniforms with sheltered workplaces all over Scotland. The Scottish National Party took that idea and made it happen in Stirling, but for some reason there was not the political will in the SNP to make it happen in Dundee.

Labour's amendment revisits a debate that we had during the passage of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill, because the issue is vital. We propose that each public authority in Scotland—all 118 of them; local authorities, health boards and quangos—awards at least one public contract to a supported business. During the passage of the bill, the SNP did not think that that was a good idea. The Deputy First Minister argued against the proposal, suggesting that public authorities would be confused and would think that they could award only one contract to a supported business and not more—not the strongest argument that I have heard, but an argument nonetheless.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: I am running out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You may take the intervention if you want to do so.

Jenny Marra: Okay.

Fergus Ewing: The Deputy First Minister's argument was entirely different. She asked why only one contract should be awarded.

Jenny Marra: The minister knows as well as I do that the amendment would not have made it mandatory to award just one contract. It was about awarding at least one contract. I ask him to consider amending the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 to provide that local authorities and health boards must award at least one contract to a supported business.

When I was putting together the plan for Remploy in Dundee, I got in touch with private uniform buyers to encourage them to place contracts with supported businesses. I wonder

what private firms make of the fact that under this Scottish Government there is no imperative for local authorities to use public procurement to support sheltered workplaces. Private companies told me that they were looking for a lead from Government before placing contracts themselves.

A Scottish Labour Government would amend the 2014 act to require each public authority to place at least one contract with a supported business. However, disabled workers throughout Scotland should not have to wait until 2016, so I ask the Scottish Government to support the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S4M-11332.2, to insert at end:

“; notes the importance of public procurement in sustaining supported businesses; notes the slow progress of public authorities to award contracts to supported businesses, and requests an amendment to the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 requiring all 118 public authorities in Scotland to award at least one contract to a supported business”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Gavin Brown. Mr Brown, I can give you a generous six minutes.

14:57

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I have to say that I agree strongly with parts of Fergus Ewing's speech. I agree with what he said about dedicated staff, high-quality products and the lower absentee rates of disabled people, not just in supported businesses but wherever they work in the economy. He made fair points and put his case well, in parts. However, I disagree equally strongly with some of what he said. I will come on to that.

Let me first talk about where we agree. We agree on the economic and social value of supported businesses, and we agree that staff work hard and produce quality products. We certainly welcome the idea of a supported business enhancing its commercial viability so that it is sustainable not just in the short to medium term but in the long term.

I am even happy to praise the Scottish Government for some of its work on the area—indeed, I am happy to praise the minister himself. He said that he has taken a strong personal interest in the subject, which I think is true. A number of his actions are commendable and we can happily support them. In particular, we support steps to raise awareness, to create a framework for supported factories and businesses, and to establish a directory of supported businesses in Scotland.

However, we should not be complacent. The Scottish Government needs to answer some of the questions that have been posed and think seriously about policies that it espouses. First of those is the one-contract policy—the idea that every public body in Scotland should have at least one contract with a supported business.

The policy was originally set in 2009 and it was meant to be achieved by the end of 2010. At the time, the Government was giving a year and a half for the wheels to turn and for public bodies to grasp the policy and award a contract. The reason I asked the question in my earlier intervention was to find out exactly how many public bodies currently do not have or have never had a contract with a supported business. I think that that is a perfectly fair and important question to ask, and I was a little disappointed that the minister was not able to give a direct answer. I would happily hear the answer from him or from any other speaker from the Government later in the debate.

I asked the question because, according to a Scottish Parliament information centre briefing in advance of this debate, there was a freedom of information request earlier this year—I am not clear on which month—and the answer given for it was that 44 public bodies out of 118 did not meet the policy aim at that point. What I was trying to establish through my question was whether that is the current position or whether things have moved on, rapidly or at all, since.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): We of course expect to work towards the outcome of 118 public bodies meeting the policy aim. Does the member accept that in commercial practice 118 businesses cannot be suddenly switched on? The figure of 44 represents one step along the way to what I believe is an achievable objective.

Gavin Brown: I was asking a far simpler question than that. Five years into the policy, I was simply asking: what is the actual number of public bodies today that have not endorsed the policy? We hear from the minister that some of them might not need it. If we have public bodies that genuinely do not need the services concerned, why is the policy there? I would challenge that point.

I looked in the Government's "Framework for Supported Factories and Businesses" at what are described as the "Lots", and there cannot be many public bodies in Scotland that do not need "Furniture", "Document management", "Textiles" or "Signage". There might be one or two, but I would be surprised if there are dozens of public bodies that do not need any of those services.

Fergus Ewing: I am sure that Mr Brown will be aware of the exchange between the Deputy First Minister and, I think, Mr Griffin at committee in

relation to the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill. It is important just to restate that for the record.

The Deputy First Minister said—this is now part of the procurement legislation—that every public body must consider whether it is able to use supported businesses and report in its annual report what the outcome of the consideration was. The onus is not an arbitrary imposition that every body must purchase goods or services whether or not they need them, because every public body is different, varying from the national health service to very small public bodies that have limited procurement options.

The obligation is on public bodies to consider whether they have the need for supported businesses' goods and services and to demonstrate on an annual basis that they have considered that. That seems to me the important thing, and I hope that Mr Brown will recognise that that is the sensible and correct approach to take.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Given your generosity with your time, Mr Brown, I will give you a little more time.

Gavin Brown: I am grateful, Presiding Officer.

In a way, the minister makes my point for me, because among all the points that he has made he should easily and simply be able to answer the question: how many public bodies do not have contracts with supported businesses? That is a simple question. He intervened for about a minute but not once did he mention a number. I was happy to praise the Scottish Government in my opening remarks, but I think that it should answer the important question of whether it is tracking the number of companies with those contracts.

In addition, does the Government note the value of the contracts? One or two of the contracts that Mr Ewing mentioned are pretty big contracts, but are they outliers? Are other supported businesses getting minuscule contracts, or are they all getting reasonable-sized contracts? Does the Scottish Government look specifically at which bodies could do more? What approach does the Government take to those that do not have a contract? Is that talked about? Do they get a slap on the wrist? Is there any kind of discussion about it at all? Is it not mentioned in communications between supported businesses and the Scottish Government?

I turn to the other area on which I disagree strongly with the minister and which I will certainly return to in my closing speech. The minister said that he wants to help as many disabled people as possible get into work. I agree with him about that, and we should all aspire to doing that. I believe that the coalition Government is also trying to do that. The Sayce review, which was a serious piece of work, came up with the conclusion that the UK

Government approach ought to allow the funding to follow the individual, as opposed to directly funding institutions, in order to give the individual greater flexibility and choice and, ultimately, to help far more people to get into work. I will return to that issue in my closing speech.

I move amendment S4M-11332.1, to leave out from “which has been developed” to end and insert:

“and supports the central theme of the 2011 review by Liz Sayce that disability employment funding by government should follow the individual so that they have the freedom to select the support that best meets their needs.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches should be six minutes or thereby.

15:05

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Just to reiterate what Mr Brown said, we are here to help those with disabilities.

I am delighted to speak in this debate, as I was to speak in the 2012 debate on the subject, and I support the motion. I also take the opportunity to recognise the role that the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism has played not just in brokering the post-Remploy deals but in his attendance to the matter in general.

As inventory and purchasing manager at NCR in Dundee many years ago—a company that had a real community ethos as one of its founding principles under Nelson Carne, who was a joy to work with—I was directly and indirectly involved with Remploy in Dundee. At that time, it made cable assemblies for electronic accounting machines, which dates the involvement, and computers. It was never seen as a company of the disabled, but rather was seen as a productive company whose employees had varied disabilities.

My colleague Dennis Robertson was so right when, in the debate that we had just before the recess about accessible tourism, he called for a change in the terminology that defines disabled people. They are not that; they are people with a disability.

In the most recent tranche of Remploy closures, my colleague Gordon MacDonald and I met management and employees of Remploy in the Gyle to see what could be done to save the organisation and to lend what expertise we could to it. We also met those who had achieved the security of building a similar company in Wigan and saved the Remploy organisation there.

In going round the factory—in fact, it was not a factory; it was a community and a social enterprise in the real meaning of that term, in both name and

practice—we were stopped by Dan, who asked us and pleaded with us to save his job and his work community, which he knew were threatened with closure.

We left the factory consumed with an anger that was only further fuelled by our meeting with the Tory employment minister of the time Esther McVey, who came to Holyrood. Her aspirations for betterment seemed to be for herself alone and not for the people with disabilities whom she claimed she had come to speak to. I often wonder what begets these Tory ministers who suggest an icy lack of caring and compassion and who promise to help people when, in fact, the promise seems to be, “Me first, Jack.”

As has been said, there are 20 supported businesses in Scotland and, with sensible intervention, they can and will play a role in the public and indeed the private sector, being profitable, sustainable and desirable.

There is no reason on earth why the documentation archiving capabilities that the Remploy site in the Gyle had at the point of closure could not have been the foundation of work with national health service boards, the police, Transport Scotland, local authorities or libraries. It was already successfully doing digitised archiving. The cost saving would have been immense and there would have been benefits in terms of data protection because of the reduction in communication links, but no—the site was closed. Happily, Redrock, in transferring that activity to Hillington, has at least saved some jobs in that area, if not in Edinburgh.

There are 20 supported businesses employing 900 people, of whom 700 have some form of disability, with a turnover of £33 million per year. In all cases they are producing high-quality products and are married to customer service. It is not just about creating more of them, but we should look at and support the role of the minister’s supported business advisory group, which embraces the trade unions, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the private sector and many others. Given the timescales of involvement and engagement by the public and private sectors, the group can help us create more such businesses and develop those that are already in existence.

We should consider the creation and further development of social enterprises in which those with a disability have a stake—not just a jobs stake but an income and earnings stake. We should encourage them, with appropriate business support, to engage profitably, with the public sector bias, to secure contracts under the public procurement provision, the sustainable procurement action plan and article 19 of the EU procurement directive.

Jenny Marra: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: I am sorry, but I am almost finished.

We must never subscribe to the Freudian McVey principle that those with a disability who have lost their jobs will find another within the wider jobs market at the level required. They did not and they have not. It is a nonsense. The employment rate for those with a disability in Scotland in the second quarter of this year was 43.3 per cent, compared with 80.6 per cent for those who are not disabled.

I say to the Labour Party, which is in turmoil, that when those of our countrymen and women with a disability—those lucky enough to get some employment and those without employment—sit at home and watch the news, what do they see? A replacement of the disability living allowance with the dreaded personal independence payment, which will reduce the aggregate disability benefit expenditure in Scotland by £300 million per annum by 2017-18—or 100,000 people of working age with disabilities losing some or all of their disability benefits by 2018, with a loss of £1,120 per year.

I have to ask, is this what we have come to? Is this what the UK Government has come to? Instead of helping those with disabilities to climb the ladder with the hope of a job and security, what we have is Freud, McVey and their predecessors and successors using the Tory principle of, "Pull up the ladder, Jack, I'm all right." Not in our name—we will help those with disabilities—[*Interruption.*] The Labour Party will retain the welfare cuts at Westminster.

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

Chic Brodie: We will help those with disabilities on a journey that makes them valued in the factories, in the offices and in the commercial marketplace. They should know that, at least in this place, they are highly valued.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a limited amount of time to take interventions, should members so wish. I call Hanzala Malik.

15:13

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Thank you very much and good afternoon, Presiding Officer. It gives me pleasure to speak on the topic of supported businesses, as many disabled persons face practical and complex barriers to keeping sustained employment. Stigma, discrimination and lack of confidence and skills result in a low level of employment. Why should it be that only 46 per cent of working-age disabled people are employed, compared with 76 per cent of the general working-age population? In addition, 10

per cent of unemployed disabled people have been out of work for five years or more, compared with 3 per cent of non-disabled people. The question that must be asked is why.

I whole-heartedly agree with the principle of supported employment. It supports disabled people entering employment. Jobs should be integrated in a work environment and the job holder should always be paid the full rate for their work. I am keen to see the future development of more flexible policies that go beyond the basic framework.

Sadly, however, the Scottish National Party Government's commitment to supported business has not come up to the mark. In 2012, Remploi was forced to close a factory in the north of Glasgow after the Scottish Government failed to step in and support it, despite calls for help. As a result, Springburn lost a factory that helped disabled people, and 49 workers lost their jobs into the bargain.

I accept that some efforts have been made in respect of the enforced closure of the five stage 2 Remploi factories, and the work of Haven protective technology solutions has gone some way to salvaging the devastation caused by those closures. That said, it is a bit late in the day to claim such benefits after the damage that was done in the first instance.

The impact of supported business should not be calculated only in terms of pounds and pennies. If public bodies do not give such businesses a chance in procurement, who will? The fact that, to date, 40 public bodies in Scotland have yet to award a single contract to a supported business is, quite frankly, shocking. I accept the minister's comments that more needs to be done and I genuinely believe that he means that. However, if that is the case, he should accept our amendment, which will go some way towards tackling the difficult situation that disabled people find themselves in.

I also highlight to the minister the issue of how the minority communities are faring in all of this. I do not understand why figures in this area are not available, and I would appreciate it if some work could be carried out to allow us to tackle this issue.

The current framework holds together a system for supported business that is no longer fit for purpose, and a fresh look is required. We need to highlight initiatives such as specialist social enterprises, and a review of the field of supported business is now overdue and would be welcome.

I believe that the solution lies in understanding our own communities, the needs of people who have disabilities and the challenges that they face. It is very easy to publish glossy reports that do not

deal with day-to-day difficulties that people face. For many families, life is becoming intolerable because people are not getting the simplest opportunities, and Jenny Marra's amendment gives some small hope—a light at the end of the tunnel—that something can be done to support our disabled communities and, indeed, the organisations that seek to support them.

The fact is that, much of the time, many simply do not understand the needs of people who suffer from disabilities. They do not understand the apprehension that these people feel or the barriers that they face in coming out to work in the first instance. People need to be handled and supported, and it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that we provide that kind of supportive mechanism if private industry, local authorities or other agencies fail to do so.

Our amendment goes some way towards doing that, and I ask the minister to give serious thought to it. I believe that his heart is in the right place and that everyone in the chamber has the right feeling about what we are trying to achieve but, if we are to be realistic and really mean what we say, we need to take on Jenny Marra's amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Maureen Watt. Ms Watt, you may have a generous six minutes.

15:19

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

I am pleased to be taking part in this debate not only as a member with a supported business in her constituency but as convener of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, which scrutinised the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill. It is apt that we are having this debate in the week of the launch of the poppy appeal, given that one of the most high-profile supported businesses is the Lady Haig Poppy Factory.

In an ideal world, it would be great if everyone with a disability who was able to work was able to find work in a mainstream environment. However, we know that that just does not happen, regardless of how well qualified or highly skilled they may be, and the stark employment rates bear that out, with the employment rate for people with disabilities being 43.3 per cent, compared with a rate for non-disabled people of 80.6 per cent. Putting that in a more startling way, the unemployment rate for disabled people in Scotland is 14.6 per cent, compared with a rate for non-disabled people of 5.5 per cent. That is why, like Chic Brodie, I was angry over successive

Westminster Governments' decisions to close Remploy factories without a care or a heed for what was happening to people who, in many cases, are left on declining benefits, stripped of their dignity and wellbeing.

I am proud of what this Government has done to step into the breach to help as many people as possible and to promote the sector. I know that the minister has been extremely involved in that and that he has the complete support of the First Minister, who himself became involved in helping Glencraft, in my constituency.

In anticipation of today's debate, I popped into Glencraft to get an update on how things are with it. I know that the employees are pleased that their enterprise has won a string of awards in recent months. Most recently, a few weeks ago, I watched it pick up an award at the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce business awards. Glencraft is, at last, looking forward to moving into new premises, having reached an agreement with the Reg Vardy company to move into refurbished premises in the Lang Stracht in Aberdeen. Regrettably, the move takes it out of my constituency and into Mark McDonald's, but I am sure that I will keep my links with it. The company is currently looking for money to fund the move, so if the minister is aware of any sources of funding that could help with that, I would be glad if he could let me know.

Carl Hodgson of Glencraft was at the Procurex exhibition recently. The first thing that he wanted to make clear to me was that the Government and civil servants absolutely understand and encourage supported businesses, and he welcomed the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014. We have already seen the new Caledonian sleeper franchisee commit to procuring the mattresses for the beds from Glencraft.

However, that support from the top has yet to be replicated throughout other public bodies. It is well to reiterate Bruce Crawford's intervention that the consultation on the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill showed that a number of Labour-led councils did not want us to legislate to help supported businesses.

Glencraft is well supported by the oil and gas industry and privately owned local hotels, as well as by the general public. However, there is no doubt that a contract with a public body would help.

The requirements of the procurement legislation are still new to a lot of people in the procurement business, and many public bodies are still coming to grips with it. It requires a change of mindset. It is easy for procurers to go to large businesses that can provide a range of products, and it is difficult for supported businesses to engage with those

businesses, which are looking for the cheapest goods so that they can increase their profit margins. When looking for sustainable procurement of goods, procurers will have to start breaking up those large contracts into smaller contracts. I am sure that that will help supported businesses.

Jenny Marra: Does the member think that it would be reasonable for all 32 local authorities and all the health boards to place at least one contract with a sheltered workplace? We know that there are sheltered workplaces that manufacture things such as beds and uniforms, which they all buy.

Maureen Watt: I wish that it was as simple as Jenny Marra tries to make it out to be. Of course, at the moment, there is nothing preventing councils from doing that, but we have seen no lead on it from any of the councils. Indeed, as I have just said, Labour councils did not want it in the bill. She cannot just stand up and keep repeating the same mantra all the time. She has to face reality.

Supported businesses cannot compete on what is an uneven playing field. For example, Glencraft's advertising budget is £18,000 whereas a major bed provider seems to be advertising on the television all the time and spends a whopping £22 million. Nevertheless, I am impressed with what Glencraft has done and is doing. Eighty per cent of its workforce have disabilities. As the minister said, they are very good at turning up to work and have lower absentee rates, although the situation is not without its challenges. The management are constantly looking for new avenues for their products and are even getting on the mail order sites of some major companies. I hope that that comes off. They also have local schoolchildren in for work experience.

I am glad that the approach of the Scottish Government is different from that of Westminster. The future for supported businesses in Scotland is bright.

15:26

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I was disappointed with Jenny Marra's speech. Not once did she even attempt to place the blame for the Remploy closures where it properly belongs—with the Tory-Lib Dem coalition at Westminster.

It is not possible to tackle the subject properly without placing it in the context of the UK Government's austerity agenda. We know that it is about ideology rather than finance, because austerity is clearly not working. The only financial test that is worth applying is that George Osborne has missed every one of his borrowing targets.

The approach is not about finance; it is about ideology.

We heard much during the referendum campaign about the UK's broad shoulders, with the implicit suggestion that the big, the rich and the powerful would help to carry the burden on behalf of those who are less fortunate. Where are those broad shoulders when it comes to supporting people with disabilities? The closure of the Remploy factories was about nothing more than the vicious cutting from the failed austerity agenda, with the cuts falling as usual on those who are least able to bear them. There has been no evidence whatever of the broad shoulders that we heard so much about.

All of that has been done to make savings that look infinitesimally small in comparison with the UK Government's borrowing, which is now about £1.4 trillion.

Gavin Brown: If the member were in charge, would he take the money away from individuals and channel it towards institutions?

Mike MacKenzie: I will come to that a wee bit later.

This goes beyond the ideologically driven finances of austerity. We know that from Lord Freud's recent Freudian slip, in which he suggested that people with disabilities should qualify for a lower minimum wage. We should not forget that it was the same Lord Freud who oversaw the Remploy closures. He suggests—that this answers Mr Brown's point—that his true agenda is benign and that he is merely trying to integrate those with disabilities into the mainstream workforce. However, he surely realises—as Mr Brown surely realises—that not all people with disabilities can integrate into the mainstream workforce. What is to become of them?

Gavin Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike MacKenzie: I have already taken one intervention.

What is to become of those who lost their jobs in the Remploy closures? What is to become of the people who have lost their dignity and their confidence, who might never find another job? What is to become of those same people who face the perfect storm of welfare reform, which is once again falling disproportionately on the shoulders of those who can least bear it?

Just as damaging as the decision to shut down Remploy was the haste in which that was done, which allowed no decent opportunity for business models to be adapted or for the Scottish Government to mitigate fully the damage done. I know that the minister's efforts in working to mitigate the damage have been unstinting and

produced significant success. Given more time and a decent interval by the UK Government, even more jobs could have been saved.

I commend the Scottish Government's approach in encouraging procurement, which aims to set a level playing field for supported businesses. I am astonished by the Labour Party's proposals. It seems to want the Scottish Government to impose centralised control on local authorities although it almost always argues that the opposite should be the case.

It has been argued that supported businesses cannot compete on price. I am not sure that that is valid, but I am sure that they can compete on quality, community benefit and the public good.

The issue indicates clearly the difference between the two Governments—our Government in Scotland and that other one down the road. The Scottish Government has provided assistance to Remploy employees and to supported businesses not because it wants to swell the Scottish treasury's coffers or to reduce the cost of Scottish welfare but because that is the right thing to do. It does so with moral purpose and with humanity, knowing that there is a value beyond any that can be captured on a balance sheet. Those are our Scottish values. That is perhaps the most important reason why this Parliament and this Government should hold and exercise more powers, as suggested in our submission to the Smith commission.

15:32

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in the debate. As the minister knows, the subject is close to my heart. Many of us in the chamber campaigned against the closure of the Remploy factories only a short time ago. We did so because we recognised the factories' importance not only to the disabled people they employed but to the wider economy. Our country is poorer as a result of the loss of such factories.

One of the people who campaigned most against the closures and who was a champion of supported business throughout her time in politics was Helen Eadie. On 9 November, it will be one year since she passed away. Many of us feel her loss daily, but it is during debates such as these that we feel her loss all the more. I am sure that, were she here, she would have delivered the most passionate and articulate speech to ask the Government to amend the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 to require all 118 public authorities to award at least one contract to a supported business. Although I do not have the same skills as she had, I ask the minister to amend the act so that we in the Parliament can

demonstrate practically our commitment to supported business throughout Scotland.

It is not only for the Scottish Government to commit to helping supported business; it is for our local authorities to do so as well. I am therefore immensely proud of North Lanarkshire Council, which has invested more than £500,000 in forming NL Industries to take over at the Remploy factory at Netherton. That has allowed the expansion of Beltane Products—a furniture and refurbishing service. Beltane Products previously employed 21 disabled people but, with the council's investment, it has been able to expand that number and add seven former Remploy workers and three people from the council's supported employment service. The business plans to add to that number as it expands. As the council leader, Jim McCabe, has said:

"It's an amazing thing to see people who thought they had no future working so hard to produce a fantastic standard of product."

I am glad that the council has shown true leadership to supported business, but it is deeply regrettable that 40 other public bodies have yet to award one single contract to a supported business. We needed the Scottish Government to support Mark Griffin's amendments to make a minimum threshold compulsory and ensure that all public bodies issue at least one supported business contract. I urge the Government to rectify that mistake now and amend the 2014 act.

We know that supported business is not the only way to provide employment to disabled people. It is shameful that only 46 per cent of working-age disabled people are employed, in comparison with 76 per cent of the general working-age population. We also know that disabled people are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled people are.

The Scottish Government's framework for supported business is a good start, but it should address the wider employment issues that disabled people face. Inclusion Scotland stated in its briefing for the debate that it would prefer disabled workers to be fully integrated into all employers' workforces by being given the support that they need and by having the barriers that they face removed, including the attitudes of employers and society towards disabled people's capabilities. I could not agree more. Many employers see disabled people as a potential problem in the workplace rather than focusing on the positives that they can bring.

I recently talked to a constituent who has autism and obsessive compulsive disorder. He told me that his disability means that, when he begins a project, he stays with it until the very end and works hard to achieve everything that was required of him at the beginning. That dedication

to one's workplace is priceless and should be viewed as such.

The Scottish Government has missed several opportunities to address the problems that many disabled people face when it comes to employment. I have spoken in the chamber many times about the lack of vision in the youth employment strategy for disabled people and particularly those with learning disabilities.

I have also spoken about the complete lack of opportunities for disabled people in the modern apprenticeship programme. We can see from the 2012-13 figures that just 63 out of 25,691 modern apprenticeships went to young disabled people. That is 0.2 per cent of them. When we take account of all disabled people, the figure rises to 0.5 per cent. That is a national embarrassment, but I have heard absolutely nothing about how the Government wishes to tackle that inequality in its system.

On behalf of charities and organisations that work with young disabled people, I lodged several amendments to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill on the need for support for young people who are leaving school and transitioning into further education or employment. I argued that a mentoring system should be put in place to help young people in times of transition.

All my amendments were defeated, but I agree with Inclusion Scotland, which says that the Scottish Government could lead by example by establishing internships and apprenticeships for young disabled people in every Government directorate. Every health board and local authority in Scotland could do likewise. That is an achievable ask, which I ask the Scottish Government to consider seriously.

As I have said, supported businesses have a crucial role to play in disabled people's employment prospects, but they are only one part of the solution. Of course we should support them as much as we can—that is why the role of procurement is so important—but I urge the minister to take on board Inclusion Scotland's suggestions, as they, too, would make a huge difference to disabled people's employment opportunities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stewart Stevenson, who has a very generous six minutes.

15:37

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The word "very" is duly noted, Presiding Officer.

It is clear from the debate thus far that there is a pretty broad consensus—it may stop at the aisle to my right, beyond which the Conservatives sit—that

the issue of supported business is important and is one on which we have shared objectives. If we differ, I think that we do so on means, not objectives.

Let me commend two speeches, which have best illustrated that consensus and the nature of the challenge. One is the most recent speech by Siobhan McMahon, who has taken a close interest in the subject over a period. Although I do not necessarily agree with everything that she said, no one who listened to her could doubt her commitment. Mike MacKenzie made an outstanding speech from the Scottish National Party benches that captured the essence of the debate.

The Government's motion quite properly talks about

"enhancing commercial viability through business support and action to increase public and private sector procurement".

We have talked about the quality of the products that supported businesses can produce, and what has been said is correct. Very early in my married life—I have been married for 45 years—the first bed that we bought was from Blindcraft. It was an excellent product at an excellent price, and it was delivered to us. I am sure that many of us have had very good interactions with supported businesses at various stages in our lives.

Why did I go to Blindcraft? I did so first because I knew about the business and wanted to support it, but also because it made sense economically and I would buy a good product. It is disappointing to hear, as we have done, that comparatively little money is available to help supported businesses to market themselves, which we might all want to ponder from here on in.

Let us talk about what profit actually is. In its briefing for the debate, Inclusion Scotland highlights that, for every £1 that the Treasury spends on the DWP's access to work scheme, it receives £1.60 in additional tax, so the intervention makes a profit. That leads us from the particular to the general. When we support people who require a supported environment in which to work, the odds are that the economics of that will make sense, but if we have people who have dropped out of the system and who, because of a lack of social contact, a lack of income and a lack of integration into the wider community, require more economic and social support, the cost rises. In other words, a profit is involved in supporting supported businesses. We do not have to be moral about it, as it almost certainly makes economic sense.

The trouble is that the position of people who work for supported businesses is being conflated with the position of all people who require any

money from the state, who are being portrayed as leeches on the state for whom funding must be cut to the bone. The reality is that a proper economic examination of the issue would come up with a very different view.

Some interesting activities go on in supported industries. I looked into supported industries around the world and found that some of them are keeping old crafts alive. For example, in the town of Sorède in France, there is what is thought to be the last manufacturer of whips—I know that we could all think of uses for whips in this debate and many others—which is a supported business that uses local materials. We often find that supported businesses operate in little niches that are of value and interest. Such activities are going on all around the world.

An article from the *New Statesman* in 2013 made a few interesting observations on the subject. The first point to note is that we need to be slightly careful about when the reduction in the number of people employed in the supported business sector started. The first round of closures started under the Labour Government in 2008, when 1,600 workers were given the boot. Five years later, the DWP found that only 200 of those 1,600 people had been successful in finding jobs. Therefore, it is a long-run problem, and we should not point at any single individual or any single Government, although what is being done now will certainly not be helpful.

On 4 March 2013, Jim Sheridan asked a question in the House of Commons about the £8 million that was supposed to be made available to former Remploy people to find work or access benefits. It appears from Esther McVey's answer and, more fundamentally, from the work of *Private Eye*—a print publication for which I have the highest regard—that it is unclear whether anyone got anything out of that. Most of the money seems to have been spent on unpaid volunteering, work experience or coffee mornings. On that basis, even the money that has been made available to support people in that position seems not to have been wisely deployed.

We meet people with disabilities in our everyday lives. I regularly go to a local cafe where the majority of the staff are people with disabilities; they do not work in a supported enterprise but in a supported environment within an enterprise. There are many models that will suit many people.

The Government and its companies and agencies do very well. I remember meeting Eric Ruthven on a visit that I made as a minister to the CalMac Ferries office in Gourock. He started working there in the 1990s after coming out of a supported environment. He is now a valued member of staff—he is probably the best-known member of staff to people who get the ferry at

Gourock—and he received an MBE for the charitable work that he has done locally. We should never underestimate people with disabilities.

I close by thinking about big and small private companies—public companies. There is increasing pressure on them in a number of ways to behave morally. There is increasing adoption of the living wage without legislative requirements. That is good news. Corporate social responsibility is debated in many boardrooms across these islands. We should ensure that this is the next subject that is debated there. We could do what the Danes have just done in legislation on the environment—companies in Denmark now have to give an environmental statement as part of their annual reporting. Such a move could prove useful here.

Finally, I address the 118 public authorities that the Labour amendment mentions. I have looked at the list of the 20 supported businesses and racked my brains to see what exactly the Water Industry Commission for Scotland would be able to buy from any of them. I am sure that the commission is eager to use them, but it has a good complement of furniture that is relatively modern.

Jenny Marra: I think that I made it clear to the minister that I was suggesting a mandate of at least one public contract on local authorities and health boards, which we know buy uniforms and beds that are made by sheltered workplaces. If the minister would like to exclude quangos such as Scottish Water that he knows do not buy anything that supported businesses make, that would be a decision for the Government.

Stewart Stevenson: I am not sure whether I have been reinstated to a previous position, because I appear to have been addressed as the minister, but I will reply anyway. The Labour amendment says 118; I merely suggest in the kindest way that my colleagues in the chamber must proofread their amendments more carefully before lodging them, because the 118 certainly includes the Water Industry Commission for Scotland. I am not saying that it is impossible for it to purchase from a supported business at some future date but, if we were to make that a legal requirement, that would be a substantial difficulty.

Thank you for the extra time, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for your contribution.

I call Cameron Buchanan. A suitably and similarly generous time is available.

15:47

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): This afternoon, we have had a very informative

discussion about Scotland's supported businesses. We all have shared objectives, even if we, on this side of the aisle, differ as to the means of achieving them. We all agree on the important role that supported businesses can play in boosting disabled people's quality of life. However, it is also apparent that if the sector is to make as much of a contribution as possible to sustainable employment for disabled people, there must be a greater focus on boosting employability in the mainstream workforce.

I will first touch on some of the details of supported businesses in Scotland and the valuable role that they play. As we have heard, there are 20 such businesses in Scotland, which together provide sustainable employment for around 910 people. Of those, around 625 are people with a variety of disabilities—it is very difficult to categorise them.

Furthermore, supported businesses in Scotland still offer training opportunities for more than 400 other individuals every year. Sustainable employment where possible is the best means by which disabled people can live independently and have a good standard of living. As a result, the presence of training opportunities within the businesses in Scotland should be warmly welcomed.

However, recent figures put the employment rate for disabled people in Scotland at 44.3 per cent. Needless to say, we all agree that that is simply not good enough. In an ideal world, all disabled people who are willing and able to work would be able to find a job. However, this is not an ideal world—nor is it an idealistic one. Getting everybody who is disabled back into work is a highly challenging aim, yet all efforts to get closer to achieving it should be applauded.

In order to take larger steps, encouraging words need to be bolstered by concrete actions. In that respect, Scotland's supported businesses set an example to follow. However, to develop and expand the supported business model we must first recognise its limitations and the challenges that it faces. Without addressing all of them, it would be very difficult to achieve the progress that we desire.

An important point is that, in some cases, the solution may be to have less active intervention from Government rather than more. A case in point is the perceived lack of readiness in some supported businesses to compete commercially.

Commercial viability should be welcomed where it is genuinely achieved. It is apparent that, in some cases, high levels of subsidy have protected supported businesses from genuine market forces and the real world, which may have detracted attention from business operations such as

marketing, product development and innovation. As an entrepreneur, I understand that subsidies should not be relied on, and such business skills are vital in the supported business sector for two stunning reasons.

The first is that commercial skills are essential in the world of mainstream work—the world for which these jobs are meant to be preparing employees. Employment in the open market represents sustainable employment for disabled people in Scotland, a view that is shared by Remploy. Its chief executive, Bob Warner, said:

“There is now an acceptance that disabled people would prefer to work in mainstream employment alongside non-disabled people rather than in sheltered workshops”.

That is key. He also said that, for the cost of employing a person in a Remploy factory, Remploy employment services could help four disabled people into work. That is a telling indicator that the development of business skills must be treated as a priority.

Chic Brodie: If Cameron Buchanan's premise is right in relation to Mr Warner's comment, will he explain why the rate of employment for those with disabilities is almost half that of those with no disabilities? Where is the incentive to help them into normal—if I may use that word—workplace employment?

Cameron Buchanan: It depends on the disability. It is difficult to categorise disability because there are so many different types. That is the problem. Certain people in Remploy can do only certain, narrow jobs; other people can do wider jobs. Remploy employment services help people realistically. That is a telling indicator that the development of business skills—not just manufacturing skills—should be treated as a priority. With large subsidies dominating the planning and operation of supported businesses, those skills are not being used or taught as much as they should be.

The second reason why strong commercial skills must be developed is that it is not sustainable for supported businesses to depend wholly on subsidies in the long term because funding for specific supported businesses is not guaranteed to cover all costs going forward.

In some cases, programmes such as work choice currently provide a £4,800 subsidy per eligible supported employee, which highlights the fact that some programmes are critical to the financial sustainability of a number of supported businesses. As a result, it is apparent that those businesses need to add to their income if they are to continue to provide great help for disabled people in employment and skills development, which is essential.

To add to and diversify their income, supported businesses will need to increase their revenue from the business streams of products and services. That will be possible on a substantial scale only where employees have the skills and experience to operate in competitive market conditions. I sincerely hope that supported businesses will evolve to include working increasingly within market incentives.

Given that need, transitions will be required in affected businesses to ensure that their staff members are provided with skills development and wider business training. As a result, we must acknowledge that a significant challenge lies ahead for many supported businesses, and the Parliament should do all that it can to ensure that a smooth process evolves so that employees do not lose out.

I hope that Scotland continues to benefit from the contribution of supported businesses to its society and economy—the latest figures put their turnover at about £33 million per year. Furthermore, I hope that the debate and the attention that it brings will enable those businesses to make the changes that they require, and that the employees need, if they are to continue in a sustainable manner and prepare disabled people for the well-deserved security of a job in the wider open economy.

15:55

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate.

I say at the outset that it is important to recognise that the starting point in the promotion of opportunity for disabled people in the workplace must always be what best suits the individual. For many, mainstream employment, as it is termed, will be the best option but, for some, supported employment might be the only chance that they have of getting a job. Hence, there must always be a role for supported employment, otherwise we risk closing the door on dignity and hope for some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Given that, it was of course extremely disappointing that successive Westminster Governments have pulled the plug on Remploy. As was evident from the excellent contributions of many members during the two debates that we held on Remploy in 2012, the way in which the current Tory-Liberal Government at Westminster carried out the process left a lot to be desired. Indeed, a cynical person would suggest that there was from the outset a presumption in favour of closure with respect to all nine Remploy factories in Scotland, including those in Leven and Cowdenbeath.

Gavin Brown: Does the member therefore think that current expenditure should move away from the individual back towards supported workplaces?

Annabelle Ewing: I am grateful for the member's intervention, because, later in my speech, I was going to call on him and his colleagues to assist with lobbying his chums in Westminster to maintain funding for the work choice programme. If his argument is that the funding should follow the individual and not the institution, I am sure that he will be supportive of the calls to maintain funding for that programme.

It is important to note the significant actions that the Scottish Government has taken to mitigate the effects of the UK Government's closure policy. For example, as the minister outlined, in November 2012, the Government established the supported business advisory group, which the minister convened. As he was at pains to stress, the group provided practical input and advice on what actions could be taken to help supported businesses. As we heard, in 2012, the Government also established the national framework agreement, which makes it easier for public bodies to buy from supported businesses. We heard reference to the launch of the supported business directory, which showcases the range of capabilities of supported businesses in Scotland. Earlier this year, a supported business development event was held, which gave a platform to supported businesses to raise awareness of the products that they can supply. All those actions have been intended to provide a sustainable future for supported business. As the minister said, the key issue is that a steady flow of work is available over time. That is how we create a sustainable future.

On the important issue of procurement, I welcome the announcement earlier this year on the three-year contract that has been issued by the NHS for the supply of workforce uniforms from Haven PTS Ltd. It is important to note that that work has enabled the company to take on many former Remploy employees. I commend the efforts of all concerned.

Jenny Marra: The member welcomes the placing of that NHS contract for nurses' uniforms, so will she recommend to her Government that it should go further and do the same with uniforms for the police and fire services and for binmen and cleaners across the country?

Annabelle Ewing: I am grateful for that intervention, which is timely, as I was just about to move on to the Labour amendment. As my colleague Bruce Crawford has already pointed out to Ms Marra in an intervention, it is worth recalling that, during the consultation on the procurement legislation, respondents were asked whether the

current policy guideline of having at least one contract with a supported business should be made a statutory requirement. As we heard, the majority of respondents said no, including Labour-led Glasgow City Council, Labour-led North Lanarkshire Council and seven other Labour-led councils. I gently suggest to Ms Marra that she might be better placed if she had a chat with her Labour council colleagues to better understand their real-life experience on the front line on these matters.

In conclusion, I hope that my call for Gavin Brown to support the Government's funding of the work choice programme will be heard, and that the Tory members will assist the Scottish Government's efforts to promote the continuation of that funding.

At least some members from the senior UK coalition Government party are in the chamber today, unlike the junior members of the coalition, the Liberals, who have failed to turn up to any debate that we have had on supported employment in recent years. It is perhaps a sad reflection of where the Liberal party now finds itself in Scottish politics that its members do not believe that it is important for them to turn up to such debates.

Disabled people are keen to work and to make their contribution to society. They want the dignity of employment and the hope that it brings. For some people, as I said, supported employment is their only chance. We must recognise that and do all that we can to promote sustainable supported employment.

That is all the more important in these times of Westminster austerity and given the dismantling—before our very eyes—of the welfare system in which Westminster is currently engaged. This is indeed a tale of two Governments, and we in Scotland utterly reject the not-so-noble Lord Freud's truly contemptible suggestion that disabled people are second-class citizens in the workplace. What a disgrace that man is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Before we move on, I advise the remaining members who wish to speak that we have some time in hand.

16:01

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I am delighted to be able to speak in the debate. I will come on to the substance of the motion and the amendments, but first I will give some personal reasons for my desire to be involved in this particular debate.

Earlier in my career, in the civil service, I was an equal opportunities officer at the Scottish Office.

As part of that role, I was responsible for ensuring that managers across the Scottish Office understood what disabled people required in the workplace and that the aids and equipment to help people to perform were available to help individuals to give of their full potential and to be the best citizens that they could be in the workplace.

I found that job very rewarding. One of the most powerful early lessons that I learned was that, in order to create an equal opportunity for an individual, on many occasions one must ensure that they get an additional service, to enable them to compete at an equal level.

Later in my career, I became a council leader in Perth and Kinross Council, and one of my pleasures at that stage was helping to support the Dovetail Enterprises operation in Dundee. Dovetail is an amalgamation of two former companies: Royal Dundee Blindcraft Products and the Lord Roberts Workshop. During the period when I assisted, the company wanted to reinvest in plant and equipment to ensure that it could produce high-quality furniture and materials for businesses, offices and hotels.

When I visited Dovetail in Dundee, I was always very impressed by the high level of commitment and the quality of workmanship and of the products that were produced at the facility. From that moment on, I have always been persuaded that there is a role for supported business in society.

Jenny Marra seemed to suggest—I may have got this wrong—that Stirling had in some way been favoured over Dundee with regard to Remploy, and that Dundee was not getting its fair share from the Scottish National Party. I am sure that she is aware that, since October 2013, Dovetail has been delivering to Dundee City Council—which is SNP run—as a contracted supplier for bedroom, lounge and dining furniture plus ancillary items, bedding and kitchen parts. The SNP is doing a good job in Dundee with Dovetail.

Later in my career, I became the MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, and then the MSP for Stirling, and I got to know the Remploy operation well. Any time that I visited the Remploy factory in Stirling, I was, as when I visited the Dovetail operation in Dundee, always highly impressed by the quality of the goods that were being produced. The factory made products for the Army and the military in general and for the Scottish Ambulance Service, and I was impressed by the quality of the nurses' uniforms that were being produced. The factory was producing goods such as Kevlar vests for the military to use in front-line activity.

The people there did a fantastic job. Many of them had been there for many years and were highly skilled. If we think back to Scotland's more recent history in the textile industry, we see that we have lost a lot of those skills. They existed in places such as Remploy and now exist in places such as Haven. We should think about building on that, for the future of textiles skills in Scotland.

Many colleagues across the chamber will remember well the difficulties disabled people faced due to—I say this, with respect, particularly to Gavin Brown—the UK Government's decision to cease support for the Remploy factories. I was involved in efforts to find buyers for the Stirling Remploy factory and I was privileged to be included in the minister's working group, along with the late Helen Eadie, whom others have mentioned and who was such a champion of Remploy.

It is regrettable that the UK Government pursued its agenda in the way that it did when it removed support from the Remploy factories in Stirling and elsewhere. It showed a lack of care and respect given the impact that the sudden removal of the support would have. Insufficient flexibility was one of the issues, as Mike MacKenzie—who is not in the chamber—suggested. There was not enough time and space to allow bidders to come forward to take on the management of some of the factories in a successful way.

The factories were, in effect, being asked to compete, be involved and prove their worth with one hand tied behind their back. That is a classic method of ensuring downsizing and failure. It was pretty obvious to anyone outside the process, looking in, that only one agenda was on the cards: an agenda to ensure the closure of the facilities.

That had a human impact. During the referendum campaign, I came across a number of former Remploy workers who had not been able to secure new employment. Previously they could stand up tall, go to their work and feel good about themselves, have worth and dignity and feel good about the value that they brought to society. It was clear from the conversations that I had with those people that, since then, they had felt incredibly pushed down and depressed. They could not work through the benefits system in the way that they had hoped to and their lives had taken a turn for the worse. That is a shame and it did not have to happen that way. In Stirling's case I am pleased that Haven PTS was able to step in and take on the management of the former Remploy factory.

Gavin Brown: Bruce Crawford is making a thoughtful contribution. However, given where we are now, does he think that the money should be taken from individuals and put back into institutions and supported workplaces?

Bruce Crawford: Gavin Brown, with all due respect, you have that question the wrong way round. Had the UK Government not taken away the money in the first place, it would still be there. The question to you is this: if it is such a valuable way to go about business, should the Government not find the additional resources? You cannot suddenly reinvent it and take it back from these people. That is the problem and you know it is. You are being a wee bit mischievous when you do that.

Gavin Brown: Not at all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, please.

Bruce Crawford: Sorry. I apologise, Presiding Officer.

Haven opened for business in October 2013, following the closure of the Remploy business, with a staff headcount of 16. In its first year, it has been successful in establishing new business and growing sales, which has enabled it to expand the number of its employees to 32. Some of those people have 15 years' experience of manufacturing—very valuable experience that they can pass on to others.

Even more encouragingly, the company anticipates that the recently generated growth will require it to take on 20 more staff, and it is currently recruiting. It is hoped that, by Christmas, the staff will number 52, of whom 96 per cent will be classed as disabled or facing complex barriers to work. That is how Haven has expanded and grown.

During Haven PTS's first 12 months, because of the experience it has on site, it has started a work experience programme, supported by the local Jobcentre Plus, which has provided invaluable work experience for 30 unemployed individuals. I take my hat off to that organisation and the way it operates.

For me, as the MSP for Stirling, there is a minor downside to all of that—I can see Michael Matheson smiling, because he knows what is coming. Such is the success of Haven PTS that it needs to expand and find larger premises. As a result of the rapid and welcome growth that the business has experienced over the past year, it is shifting out of my constituency, to Larbert, in Michael Matheson's constituency, just a few miles out of Stirling.

It might not be great that the business will not be in the Stirling constituency, but it would be churlish of me not to accept that the expansion is a good thing and that the company will have more jobs on the new site. My constituents who are currently employed at Haven PTS will benefit from the company's undoubted success story.

All that demonstrates what can be achieved by a well-run, efficient supported business. The business enjoyed success recently when it was able to produce 17,000 laundry bags for the Commonwealth games. If businesses can get into new niches, they can open up new opportunities to expand their activity into other areas.

Thank you for giving me extra time, Presiding Officer.

16:11

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I apologise for missing the start of the minister's opening speech.

I agree with members that it is good that we are again debating the future of supported businesses in Scotland, not just because such businesses play an important role in many of our communities, as we have heard throughout the debate, but because supported businesses and their staff have experienced a traumatic few years, during which many people lost employment that was a big part of their lives.

In 2010, I led a members' business debate on supporting Scotland's supported workplaces. At the time, there was a threat to the future of Glencraft, in Aberdeen, which has provided employment for blind people in the city for more than 140 years. At that time it was clear that supported businesses already faced huge challenges—although I am pleased to say that Glencraft was saved—but I could not have envisaged that the situation would deteriorate so quickly as a result of the actions of the coalition Government and the closure of so many Remploy factories.

Many members were involved in campaigns to save the factories. Bruce Crawford talked about his involvement in campaigning on the future of the factory in Stirling. I and others were involved in the campaign to save the Remploy factory in Aberdeen, which was sadly unsuccessful, although Remploy's facilities and some of its employees were involved, along with Cornerstone, in the establishment of a new social enterprise, Bennachie, which is an upholstery business. Bennachie has been a success.

However, much was lost when Remploy in Aberdeen closed. We kept hearing from UK ministers that they would help people who lost their jobs at Remploy to find alternative employment, but I recently met a former manager at the Aberdeen factory and it was his experience that the great majority of workers had not found new jobs. Bruce Crawford talked about a similar conversation that he had during the referendum campaign. The theory that the money would follow the employees has not proved right at all, at least

in the case of workers at Remploy in Aberdeen—and I suspect in the case of workers in many other Remploy factories.

There is no doubt in my mind that the UK Government's policy on supported workplaces has been deeply damaging. However, we must consider what we can do. As we said in the Labour motion, and as Jenny Marra rightly said in her opening speech, there is more that public sector agencies and the Scottish Government can and should do.

It is right that we acknowledge the minister's personal involvement in the issue. He has spent a great deal of time on it. However, we are talking about delivery, and not enough is happening to secure public sector contracts for supported businesses. Yet again we turn to procurement, because it is a big weapon in the Scottish Government's armoury, which, if properly deployed, can make a real difference to important supported businesses.

The minister has told us that progress is being made, but I believe that more should have been done by the Scottish Government much earlier, back in 2010, when I raised the issues in my members' business debate. Jenny Marra, too, said in her earlier intervention that more needs to be done now. The minister said that the Scottish Government will make further progress on the issue, so we will hold him to that. However, for years we have debated promoting these contracts, whether through the use of article 19 in European legislation or through the legislation that we recently passed here on procurement reform. Jenny Marra is absolutely right to talk about the need for further amendment of that legislation. The issue has been debated a great deal and it is now time to deliver on what has been said.

Mike MacKenzie: I wonder whether Mr Baker feels that good government for Scotland is likely to be delivered when the UK Government punches holes in the roof and the Scottish Government runs around with buckets trying to catch the leaks. Does Mr Baker feel that Labour's submission to the Smith commission, proposing an extra half-bucket for the Scottish Government, is any use at all?

Richard Baker: That was a bit of a damp squib of a contribution from Mr MacKenzie. It does not focus on the real issue that is before us. However, it is absolutely right to acknowledge the difficulties caused by the position that the UK Government has taken on the issue, and I have made that point clearly in my speech.

It is wrong to minimise the impact that effective procurement policy can have on supported businesses, because winning contracts makes all the difference for such businesses. For example,

Remploy in Aberdeen had developed links with the University of Aberdeen through which it won contracts for work that was carried out to a very high standard and which the university was very pleased with. That work benefited not only the Remploy workers but the university. If there had been a flow of work from other contracts, there might have been a different story for Remploy Aberdeen or, indeed, for Blindcraft in Edinburgh.

The minister has been involved in this issue for a long time and he is right to praise the role of trade unions, with Lyn Turner and others. Bruce Crawford rightly mentioned the contribution of Helen Eadie to the issue. We will all remember the passion with which she spoke in the chamber about supported workplaces. She did a tremendous amount of work in the Parliament on the Remploy group, bringing all of us together to talk about the future of the factories in our areas. She worked closely with the Scottish Government on the issue to try and get the best results. She fought hard on behalf of the Remploy factory in Cowdenbeath and she spoke up again and again here in the chamber for the Remploy workers. She was passionate about what could be achieved for the workers by their being part of supported businesses and what could be achieved through the application of article 19 and procurement policy.

In the members' business debate in 2010 to which I referred earlier, Helen Eadie said:

"People who are disabled are not asking for handouts or grants; they are asking for the dignity of taking home a wage packet at the end of the week. That is what they want above all and that is what they should be able to get."—*[Official Report, 28 January 2010; c 23354.]*

That really hits the nail on the head about those people, because it is their future and their welfare that we are debating here today. If Helen was here today speaking in this debate, as I wish she was, she would be encouraging us to be more ambitious in the support that we give to the workers and the supported businesses, and I would agree with her that we can be more ambitious still.

16:18

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I am pleased to be speaking in this important debate. Before beginning my speech, though, I must declare a constituency interest, in that a business has recently—and significantly—opened in the town of Clydebank, in the factory that was formerly used by Remploy. That is a very positive development for the local area.

After being elected in 2007 to represent people in the Clydebank area, I worked very closely with the people who were involved in the Remploy factory, and visiting the factory regularly really

brought home to me the workforce's passion for what they did and the high quality of the goods that were produced at the site. A range of goods has been mentioned in the debate; I am sure that members will be quite surprised to note that the Clydebank factory manufactured goods for the automotive industry. I declare another interest, in that the business that I own is heavily involved in the automotive industry. Given the exacting standards that are required to deliver goods into that industry, with its high expectations and safety requirements, it is remarkable that the unit delivered into the industry on a commercial basis.

However, despite the high quality of the goods and the valuable experience for the people who were employed there, they lived with a black cloud constantly hanging over their operations, with staff numbers being cut over a considerable number of years. Then, in July 2013, staff received the news that they had been dreading: Remploy announced that it was closing a number of factories, including the Clydebank operation, in the second stage of cuts after the UK Government decided that

"Funding should be used to maximise employment for disabled people through individual support rather than subsidising organisations like Remploy."

I have just pointed out how good the operation was and the kind of work that it was achieving. It was quite revolutionary, having broken out of the public sector element of its operation and broken into a difficult commercial area. The announcement was a devastating blow for that great workforce, many of whom were extremely worried about whether they would ever again be able to secure employment in the future. It is quite a thing for someone to worry that they might never be employed again; unfortunately we are hearing that that is precisely what has happened, so far.

That is just another example of the UK Government's callous attitude to people who need support. Instead of giving them the necessary support, it dumped them on the scrap heap or offered them support in gaining employment in mainstream work. That is laudable, but it is not possible for everybody and it is not possible in certain circumstances. The UK Government's attitude completely failed to take into account the significant barriers that disabled people face in sustaining employment. The figures speak for themselves. Members have already mentioned that the employment rate for disabled people in Scotland in April to June 2014 was 43.3 per cent, compared with 80.6 per cent for non-disabled people. Disabled people do not want special treatment when they are seeking employment. They just want to have their complex situations recognised and taken into account.

At the time of the announcement of the closure of the Remploy factory in Clydebank, the Scottish

Government, which has consistently opposed the cuts agenda that is proposed by the UK Government, stepped in to the breach in an attempt to alleviate the impact of that callous decision, but the damage had already been done. However, I am pleased to say—this is why I believe that this is an important debate—that the former Remploy site in Clydebank has since been purchased by Haven Products. The site recently reopened after extensive renovations and is now a key component of that group's packaging operations.

That is an important news story not only for the local community but especially for those who will be employed in the factory. I congratulate all those who have been involved in securing the future of the site, from the Scottish Government to West Dunbartonshire Council's economic development team and the people at Haven. They have all proved that where there is a will, there is a way. Their approach, with local and national Government working together for the benefit of the people, should be commended.

I also praise and thank Fergus Ewing, the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, for all the hard work that he has put in in dealing with the situations. In my experience and witness of campaigning with people who have been affected by the Remploy closures, I saw at first hand the dedication that Fergus Ewing displayed in fighting for the rights of those workers and, indeed, for the factories.

However, there is only so much that our Government in Scotland can do to deal with such issues. How much easier it would be if we had full control over welfare. If we had full welfare powers, we could calculate how much it would cost to lay off disabled people, compared to how much it would cost to make a small contribution to their continued employment, which would make the vital work that they need viable. In fact, if I had my accountant hat on, I would say that giving support in some cases would be the cheaper option, while also being the best social option, as other members have pointed out.

Despite the limited powers that are available to it, I am pleased that the Scottish Government has introduced a policy to say that every public body should have at least one contract with a supported business. That shows a united approach throughout the Government agencies.

The national framework agreement that was published in 2012 ensures that it is easier for public bodies to buy from supported businesses. That approach will ensure the long-term feasibility of supported businesses. I commend the Scottish Government for looking for long-term solutions, rather than for a short-term fix.

There will be challenges ahead, but with the Scottish Government being committed to independent living and completely opposed to the welfare cuts that have been proposed by the Westminster Government, I am fully confident that supported businesses have a positive future for a long time ahead. I commend the motion to Parliament.

16:26

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):

This has been an interesting debate. I come at it from a slightly different angle to others, but very close to where my colleague Chic Brodie started.

Some 25 years ago, I was the technical manager for Unilever's detergents business in the UK. We bought production from one or two smaller manufacturers, but we had a requirement to get things packaged and sometimes repackaged, and sometimes washed and reworked, which was done largely by Remploy. That was along the M62 corridor; I was not in Scotland at the time and I am not talking about Scottish businesses, but I did see at first hand what Remploy did, so I endorse the view that was put forward by Bruce Crawford about quality. He was not the only one to mention it. That business developed extremely experienced people and was able to retain them.

The other thing that that Remploy business had was flexibility; it had a group of people who would turn their hands to pretty much anything. That was just the way the business operated; it meant that we could take to it a job that was more or less on the back of a lorry and be pretty sure that by the following week the work would have been turned around and the business would have done what we needed it to do. We had a long-term working relationship with Remploy, which worked very well.

Another thing that I saw—other members have mentioned this—is that the Remploy factory was not just a factory where people went to work. It quickly became a community, like any good work place would. For a group of people who are looking for a little bit more support than we need, what happens at work is enormously important. Security and continuity are of huge value. I simply make the point—it is not the first time that I have made it in the chamber this year—that for the bean counters, such work is a good thing to support. When we take people who need social support away from an environment in which they get it, we generate costs for our health service and our social services. Not only is there a cost in it, but we take away those limited resources from other activities. On balance, such things are worth doing in a simple economic sense—never mind the obvious social advantages.

I turn to the points that I think Jenny Marra has been trying to make. She would have got on rather better if, as my colleague Stewart Stevenson commented, she had proofread her amendment. If it had picked up the large point that she has been trying to make—about public bodies that could, reasonably, purchase from supported businesses doing so—the amendment might have been supportable. To say that absolutely everybody must have such a contract is to invite the criticisms that we have heard.

I also make the point that if we require an organisation to form a contract—which I remind Jenny Marra is something that requires agreement by two people who are starting from different places—we end up with the risk that supported businesses will just get nominal contracts that are of very little value to anybody, other than to let an organisation tick a box to say that it has a contract with a supported business.

Jenny Marra: The SNP seems to have reneged on its commitment on this issue. In the debate in 2010, the SNP minister Jim Mather said:

“We are working hard on our intention that every public sector body should have a contract with a supported employer, using article 19. We will bring forward a timetable for that.”—[*Official Report*, 7 October 2010; c 29426.]

Nigel Don: With respect, I think that that intention is reflected in the Government policy that we have heard. Whether that policy should be written down in a single line of statute is the question that I have just addressed. To be frank, I think that that runs the risk of supporting by a tick-box process rather than a sensible commercial process.

As for Gavin Brown’s comments about whether the money should follow the individual or should be put into the businesses, what we have heard this afternoon demonstrates the obvious answer: it should do both. Let us support businesses in which individuals get sensible support doing sensible commercial things, where subsidising such an approach is economically sensible. I take Cameron Buchanan’s point that subsidies are not necessarily sustainable for ever, but the fact is that our population is not suddenly going to run out of disabled people. I should correct myself; I mean people who have disabilities. Such businesses can be long-term; indeed, they were very long term and had long-term subsidies, and it was all very sensible.

The ideological decision to stop supporting those businesses and to ensure that everything must follow the individual into other businesses has not worked. In fact, I do not even have to disagree on the basis of ideology; having heard the comments from across the chamber, I now have the economic argument. I stood beside Richard Baker on a very cold morning in

November or December outside the factory in Aberdeen, and I distinctly remember the utter frustration over the fact that ideology was closing a factory that I know, being in Aberdeen at the time, could have worked into the future. As I have said, the answer to Gavin Brown’s question is that the money should do both things. We can see that, and we just need to strike a sensible balance.

My final point relates to the issue that was highlighted by one of my colleagues—I am sorry, but I cannot remember who it was—of the social responsibility in having, and contracting with, supported businesses. When I was a member of Dundee City Council, I sat on its pension funds committee, and we asked at least some of the businesses—in which we invested pretty large sums of money—about their social policies and their commitment to the environment. To be honest, I should say that those inquiries were pretty minimal in those days.

However, such issues are growing in importance and people are taking them more and more seriously, and there is an opportunity for our pension funds and large investment funds to ask those kinds of questions. The businesses that we are talking about need support where that is appropriate, and the organisations that could procure from them should be asked whether they are trying to do so. If they are not even trying, someone should be asking them to change their attitude.

I suspect, Presiding Officer, that my time is up, so I will leave it there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, indeed. Many thanks.

We now come to the closing speeches, and I call Gavin Brown. Mr Brown, you have up to seven minutes.

16:33

Gavin Brown: I want to focus my closing remarks in what has been a very good debate on two main issues: first, the one-contract policy; and, secondly, the conclusion of the Sayce review. I think that it was that review that underpinned the UK coalition Government’s action, rather than some of the incentives and suggestions that SNP members have put forward this afternoon.

With regard to the one-contract policy, I am a little disappointed that not a single SNP back bencher has been prepared to challenge the Government on the issue or, indeed, to comment on it, other than to tie themselves in knots about why, although it is a good policy, it does not matter that it is not being achieved. We have heard the minister’s excuse that some public bodies might

not need such contracts but, in that case, why has the Government had the policy since 2009?

We heard Bruce Crawford's excuse that if every public body had a contract, supported businesses simply could not cope. However, in his speech, Mr Crawford gave an excellent example of a supported business in his constituency that clearly was able to cope with an enormous contract, and there is no reason why other supported businesses could not cope if every public body decided to sign a contract with them.

We also heard Stewart Stevenson's rather facile excuse that, because he does not think that the Water Industry Commission for Scotland requires a lot of furniture, that suddenly excuses every other public body that does not have a contract.

It was disappointing that not one SNP member was prepared to challenge the front bench. Perhaps they can redeem themselves by calling on the minister, during his closing speech, to say how many public bodies have not yet signed a contract.

Stewart Stevenson: It is interesting to see the Tories again defending the Labour Party in the construction of their amendment.

The point about the WICS is the general one: we have to consider the individual circumstances of each and every body. It is perfectly proper that to mandate that a body considers the opportunities that it has for buying from supported businesses, but it is absolutely impossible to mandate that it must complete a contract, because it will have limited opportunities, whether we are talking about the WICS or any other body.

Gavin Brown: I simply ask the member, in return, whether there is conclusive proof that every public body that has not yet signed a contract does not need any of the items that are produced by supported businesses. I am sure that that is not the case, and that the Scottish Government has not done its homework and simply does not know. The minister was not able to answer the basic question.

On the point about defending the Labour Party, we do not agree with the Labour Party on this issue. We do not think that there should be a requirement in statute. However, we think that the Government ought to be doing a bit more. Given that the policy has been in place for five years, I think that at least it ought to be able to tell us what the position is on the ground and what it will do to try to improve the situation.

The second issue that I want to address concerns the idea that has been suggested by a number of members that the decision to close the Remploy factories and to try to transfer funding to the individual showed an icy lack of compassion,

was taken without care and was all about making cuts and being callous. I refute that absolutely, and I ask the members who expressed those views to go and read the Sayce review, which underpinned the coalition Government's reforms. It is a thoughtful and far-reaching piece of work. Of course, it is also a painful piece of work, in parts. It acknowledges some of the pain that would be caused by the reforms, but it took its approach for principled and pragmatic reasons.

The conclusion that was reached in the Sayce report was that the model of employment support needs to change so that it meets disabled people's aspirations, is based on evidence, is fit for the future and serves far more people than it does today. The approach was based on the principle of those with disabilities getting into work, staying in work and, ultimately, getting on in work. It was based on the pragmatic view that Government funding should be spent where it can have the most impact. It concluded that there was significant scope to increase the number of people who could benefit from the funding.

The budget for this area was £330 million, of which £63 million—about a fifth of the budget—was going on Remploy factories. However, it was the cost per head that was proving to be a challenge. The cost per head in Remploy factories was £25,000. As Cameron Buchanan noted in his speech, another division of Remploy believed that, if that money were to be transferred to the individual, it could help three or four people instead of one. The issue is about raising the appalling level of the employment statistics for people with disabilities, which everyone in this chamber wants to do something about. By focusing the efforts on the individual, we can get far more people into work.

Bruce Crawford: I genuinely believe that Gavin Brown believes that that is what was hoped would be achieved. However, on 15 October, the UK Minister of State for Disabled People confirmed that, of the people who had previously been employed by Remploy, 1,507 were still looking for another job. Despite the argument that the money should be following the people, all those people were still looking for another job and only 774 had been able to find work. That proves that, while the theory might fine, the policy has not worked in practice for those people. They are facing misery because of those decisions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must come to a close, Mr Brown.

Gavin Brown: I accept that the policy has not worked for some people; that is absolutely right. However, I make two comments in response to Mr Crawford. The first is that Remploy employment services have found jobs for 35,000 people in the

past two years, whereas the factories employed approximately 2,400 people.

Secondly, the Government never said that every person would get a new job overnight. This is a series of reforms in which it will take time to achieve everything. Ultimately, if we want to increase dramatically the number of people with a disability who are in work, the idea of funding flowing towards the individual makes economic and practical sense.

The policy was also based on principle to a degree; it was not just about the bean counters. Liz Sayce spoke to thousands of stakeholders—people with disabilities—across the country, and they said this:

“I want the same choices as anyone else—to have the career I want.”

Again and again, disabled people—especially young people—said that they wanted the same chance as everyone else of filling the full range of roles in the economy. Ultimately, it was about the types of support that can help today’s young disabled people and the types of support that they will want in tomorrow’s economy. That is why, although the principles were painful for some, in practice and in the long term we think that it was the right decision.

16:40

Jenny Marra: It has been a good and interesting debate, but it has been somewhat lacking in ambition and innovation. A framework for supported businesses does not really go far enough to meet the needs and aspirations of both young and experienced workers in Scotland who live with disability and want, as Gavin Brown said, to have fulfilling careers.

Labour’s vision is of modern sheltered workplaces where workers who have worked for years can share their skills not just with disabled workers but with young people. From our youth employment statistics and from all our visits to youth employment projects throughout the country, we know that some young people who have had chaotic, difficult childhoods and are far from the labour market could do with starting their careers in a modern sheltered workplace before moving on, having learned their skills, to a mainstream workplace. Our vision for the future is of modern sheltered workplaces with innovative solutions that blend the talents and experience of disabled workers with those of workers who need nurture and support. It is a vision that I hope we will get the chance to implement in 2016. Given this afternoon’s debate, I feel that the Scottish Government is lacking in ambition to make that happen.

The motion focuses on the Government’s framework. As I said in my intervention on Nigel Don, and as Gavin Brown pointed out, we have been here before. Members were here four years ago, before I became an MSP, debating the same issue of the SNP’s framework. Not nearly enough progress has been made.

Gavin Brown pointed out to the Scottish Government that it does not seem to be on top of the figures concerning the number of public authorities in Scotland that have not awarded a contract. I can tell the Scottish Government that the number is at least 40. Certainly, 40 public bodies had that information and were able to tell the Scottish Parliament information centre that they have not awarded a single contract under the framework for supported businesses.

Jim Mather said:

“We are working hard on our intention that every public sector body should have a contract with a supported employer, using article 19. We will bring forward a timetable for that.”—[*Official Report*, 7 October 2010; c 29426.]

I ask the minister to tell us, in closing, exactly how hard the Government is working on that.

Since the April 2014 freedom of information request that many members have cited, only four additional public bodies have placed a contract with a supported business. Progress is slow, it is sluggish and it does not really reflect the Government’s warm words this afternoon.

I am baffled that the SNP Government, which spent the referendum campaign promising the earth, cannot even say to public authorities in Scotland that they should place one contract with a supported business. We have heard a number of arguments from SNP members this afternoon about why public authorities should not be compelled to place contracts with supported businesses, and I think that the minister’s problem relates to legislating to make it happen.

Mike MacKenzie said that the Scottish Government should not tell local authorities what to do, because that would be centralisation. He might want to reflect on the fact that, every year, the Scottish Government tells local authorities to freeze their council tax, yet it is not prepared to tell them to place a contract with a sheltered workplace. Frankly, that is baffling.

Mike MacKenzie: I was pointing out that the Labour Party accuses the SNP Government of centralisation whenever we try to use legislation or other powers to insist that local authorities do certain things. Generally speaking, the Labour Party argues against that approach. Why, in this situation, is it arguing for it? The member might care to reflect on that.

Jenny Marra: We are doing so because disabled workers deserve it. On this issue, we are prepared to argue for that and to put the requirement on to the statute books, to make sure that public procurement is working for the benefit of disabled workers across the country.

The Labour Party has been criticised this afternoon for the fact that some of our councils have said that my amendment is not necessary. Many councils, including Glasgow and North Lanarkshire, are making substantial investment in supported business, so they know that they are doing what the amendment calls for anyway. I will commit to winning the debate in my party with those local authority council leaders for an amendment to the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 if the minister will commit to enacting it. I would be very surprised if this SNP Government would let Labour councils prevent it from doing something that it really wants to do and believes in.

Stewart Stevenson said that Scottish Water does not buy anything that supported businesses make.

Stewart Stevenson: No, no.

Jenny Marra: Stewart Stevenson can clarify his point.

Stewart Stevenson: I make a factual correction: I spoke about the Water Industry Commission for Scotland, not Scottish Water.

Jenny Marra: I am absolutely convinced that the chairman has a desk—

Stewart Stevenson: Correct, but he does not need a new one.

Jenny Marra: —and drawers that he puts his papers in, as well as other office furniture. Supported businesses make such furniture. He could place the contract for his future office furniture with them.

Stewart Stevenson makes a spurious point. Quite frankly, the splitting-hair arguments that the SNP has come up with against legislating for a wholly morally justified policy are baffling.

Mike MacKenzie: Would Jenny Marra consider that the terms of her amendment would be fulfilled if a public authority bought one paperclip from a supported business? What she is suggesting is not workable in real terms.

Jenny Marra: That is a most ridiculous point—it is embarrassing for this Government.

We are saying that every public authority should place at least one contract with a supported business to support disabled workers. Jim Mather, a previous SNP minister, said that that was a good thing to do. It is wholly and morally justifiable; it

would support sheltered workplaces across the country; and it would put more disabled and young people who are far from the labour market into work. I am very surprised that the SNP shows such resistance to a progressive policy.

I thank members for the good debate.

16:49

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): This has been a useful debate with a number of thoughtful and considered speeches not only on supported business but on the whole issue of employment for disabled people. I do not want to lose sight of the fact that there were more points of agreement than were probably recognised. We need to build on the areas of agreement, but we must also recognise that there are different views on the policy.

I recognise Jenny Marra's point about making it mandatory for all local authorities to place at least one contract with a supported workshop environment, but we should always be careful in thinking that identifying a simplistic single solution will in some way address the much more fundamental issue of supported employment and workplaces. Although I recognise that she wishes, with the best of intentions, to achieve the best for supported workplaces, we need to proceed in a way that will allow us to create a sustainable approach for successful disabled workplaces. We as a Government have set out why we wish to take the approach that we are taking.

A number of members who have contributed to the debate, such as Bruce Crawford, have highlighted the difficulties that there would be in taking the approach that Jenny Marra outlined. However, I agree with her on her ambition to see modern supported workplaces for disabled people.

Gavin Brown raised the issue of placing contracts with supported employment businesses. That involves a number of complexities, because not all contracts go through the public procurement portal system. Some of them are subcontracts, and there is a range of complexity in monitoring and measuring the contracts that are placed. However, I assure him that we are determined to look at how we can get much greater detail on how and when those contracts are placed and who they are placed by.

I do not want to give the impression that that can be easily achieved, because some of the subcontracting in the process creates complexity, but we and our procurement team intend to look at what can be done through the information technology system to monitor the issue much more effectively. If that monitoring demonstrates to the Government the need for further intervention to work with public contracts and encourage

people to place more contracts with supported employers, we will be prepared to do that, as we have done for the past couple of years.

Gavin Brown: I am grateful for the minister's remarks, but are things as complex as he makes out? When an FOI request was put in, the clear answer was that 44 out of 118 public bodies had not signed contracts. If that information was possible to get via FOI in 21 days or whatever, surely the situation is not quite as complex as he has made out.

Michael Matheson: Not all those contracts were placed through article 19 of the EU procurement directive, for example. Other issues have to be considered to get a proper and fuller picture of the detail.

There is a danger that we are looking at the issue from the wrong perspective. The focus should not be just on awarding public sector contracts to supported employers; it should be on ensuring that supported employers succeed in gaining contracts not just from the public sector but from the private sector in a way that allows them to be ambitious and to produce goods that they can take to market, so that they can be sustainable businesses. We as a Government are determined to take that approach.

I will give an example of how we are taking that approach forward. My colleague Bruce Crawford referred to the changes that have happened in Stirling. The Remploy business there is moving to Larbert in my constituency in order to take on new work in a modern and sophisticated environment. Some £1.7 million of Scottish Government investment has been put into it to support it to become a successful business, market its goods successfully and train people who work with it in a way that will allow them to remain in employment there or to move on in employment.

That partnership in Larbert demonstrates the approach that allows the issue to be taken forward in a sustainable and successful way. The partnership involves the Scottish Government, Haven Products, Scottish Enterprise and Falkirk Council. I have no doubt that that will continue to be a success and that it will build on the £1.5 million per annum contract that it has with the NHS in Scotland.

Maureen Watt described how Blindcraft in her constituency has moved on from the difficulty that it was in several years ago and how it has turned the business around to make it sustainable and potentially successful.

Gavin Brown and other members asked whether the money should be taken away from individuals and put back into supported businesses, but that is not how we should look at the matter. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Business

support for disabled people is just as important as supported employment is.

The problem with the UK Government's approach was that the support that was provided had to go to supported employment with an employer, but supported workplaces were not of value. It was a case of one or the other. As Bruce Crawford rightly highlighted, we now find ourselves in a situation in which 1,500 people who were employed by Remploy are no longer in employment and are receiving benefit to support them because of the difficulties that they face.

Had the UK Government taken a different approach that recognised that supported employment is important but that business employment support for disabled people is of equal value, we could have found ourselves in an entirely different situation. The problem is that the UK Government has taken a one-size-fits-all approach, which does not work in this area.

Gavin Brown: Does the minister not accept the conclusions of the Sayce review, which demonstrated that an approach based on the individual would result in three or four people being helped for the same amount of money as was spent on one person? That must be looked at, because it must be the way forward.

Michael Matheson: The Sayce review was not about doing one thing and ruling out the other, but that is the problem with the UK Government's approach. It has chosen to interpret the Sayce review in such a way that it has decided that it does not value supported work placements. That is why it has run into such difficulty, and it is why two thirds of those who were previously employed by Remploy now find themselves unemployed.

It is important that we put the issue in some context, as Maureen Watt did. From April to June this year, the employment rate for disabled people in Scotland was 43.3 per cent, whereas it was 80.6 per cent for non-disabled people. In the same period, the unemployment rate was 14.6 per cent for disabled people and 5.5 per cent for non-disabled people. The lack of employment opportunity causes the gap in people's relative income and that gap causes the inequality that so many disabled people experience. They suffer a loss of self-esteem and confidence and find themselves caught in the benefits trap. That is why we need to take a balanced approach that involves supporting not only individuals who want supported employment but businesses that can help to support disabled people who seek employment.

I want to highlight other issues. The Government's approach is much more ambitious than the approach that Jenny Marra proposes, whereby each public body would place one

contract with a supported business. Our approach is to create equality of opportunity for disabled people so that they can get employment regardless of their circumstances. Siobhan McMahon made an extremely good speech in which she highlighted a number of those issues. Some of the points that she raised are being taken forward by the Scottish Government in our youth support strategy. Skills Development Scotland is looking at how we can increase the number of young people with a disability who can participate in our apprenticeship scheme. In addition, Remploy employment services and Barnardo's are working with Skills Development Scotland to look at how we can enable more disabled people to engage in employment.

Beyond that, we have set out a range of measures to help people with a disability into employment through our national learning disability strategy "The keys to life", our mental health strategy and our autism strategy, and we will continue to develop positive policies to support disabled people. The debate has been useful and I assure Parliament that, as a Government, we will continue to do everything that we can to support disabled people to have an equal opportunity to gain employment in Scotland.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is decision time. The first question is, that amendment S4M-11332.2, in the name of Jenny Marra, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11332, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on supported business, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 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)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

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

Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 74, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-11332.1, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11332, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on supported business, 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)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (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)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 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 90, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-11332, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on supported business, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

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

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (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)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 90, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the economic and social value of supported businesses in Scotland; welcomes the recent success of many of these businesses in enhancing their commercial viability through business support and action to increase public and private sector procurement; commends the work of the new third sector supported business, Haven Protective Technology Solutions (Haven PTS Ltd), which has been developed in response to the enforced closure of the five Stage Two Remploy factories, and agrees the importance of continuing to support these businesses.

Meeting closed at 17:03.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

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